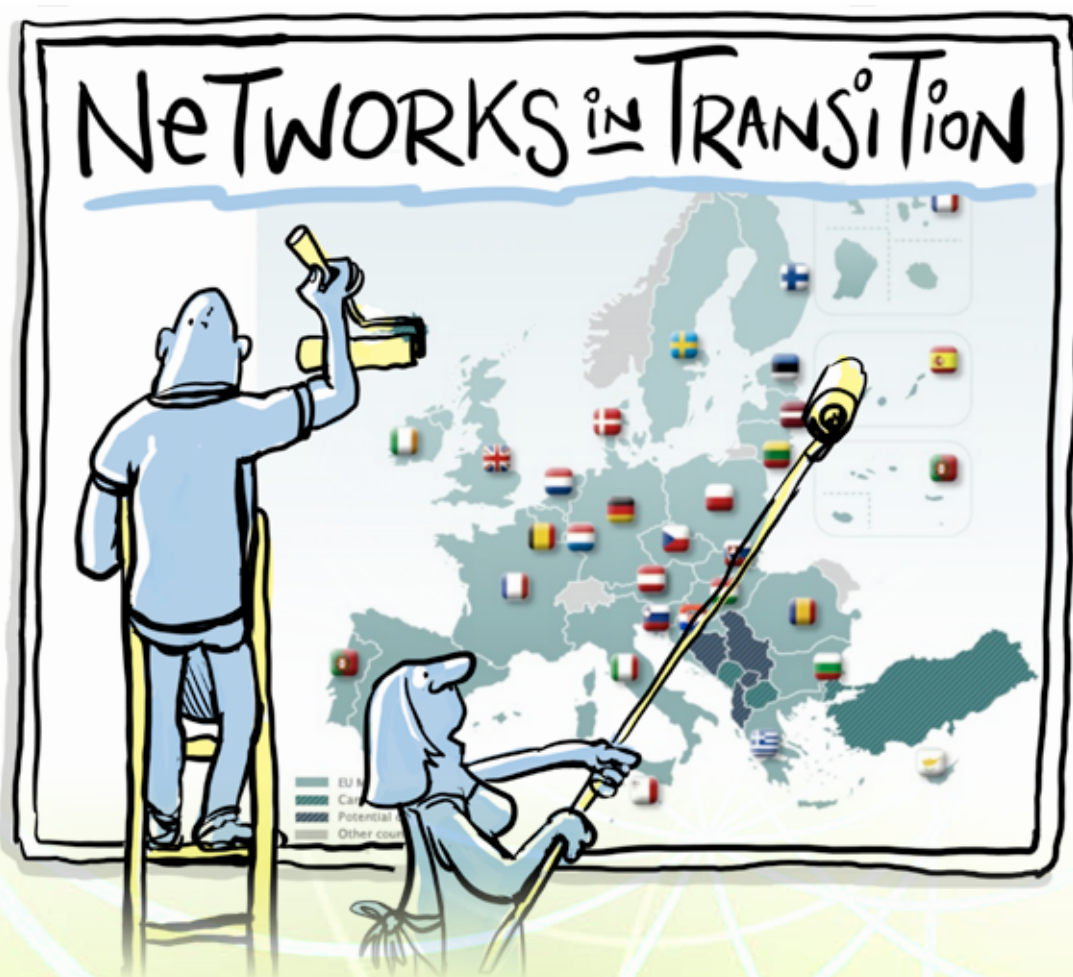# **NRN** GUIDEBOOK

ENRD Connecting Rural Europe...

WWW.ENRD.EU

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) contributes to the efficient implementation of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) throughout the European Union (EU).

Each Member State has established a National Rural Network (NRN), which brings together the organisations and administrations involved in rural development.

At EU level, the ENRD ensures the networking of these NRNs, national administrations and European organisations: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en/en-rd-presentation.cfm*

Information exchange is an important aspect of the NRN and ENRD operations.

Find out more on the ENRD website: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu*

Foreword

This Guidebook is written for You if you work with rural networks in or outside of the European Union or if you are just interested in their work. It is for you if you are faced with the challenge of engaging stakeholders in rural areas, make them work and cooperate with each other, make them interested and involved in shaping the future of their rural area(s) through rural projects and policies. This book is for you if you are tasked to improve the implementation of rural development policies by networking, or to explain what it is about. You may have worked with rural development policy, programmes or networks for years and just would like to get new inspiration for the work ahead; or you may have just started your work in the field and still unsure about your next steps. If you have been a member of a rural network or a Network Support Unit (NSU), this book is not only written for you, it is also written by you.

'Networks' and 'networking' are widely recognised and adopted as key tools for supporting and promoting sustainable rural development around the world. Both academic research and practical experience indicate that the main added value of networking is its ability to produce solutions and results that otherwise would not have occurred. A problem shared is a problem halved; as the saying goes.

Over the years, the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) has been providing support to networks and networking in rural areas through different activities, methods and tools. These have been developed in close cooperation with various stakeholders and especially with the members of National Rural Networks (NRNs) and their NSUs. Without this joint working none of the outputs would have been realised.

The ENRD's cooperation with networks has evolved continuously over the years and the results of this work are shared through the ENRD's website. The results are diverse and rich, including the outcomes of twenty-one joint NRN meetings, seven peer-to-peer training modules, over one hundred and seventy stories on the added value of networking (AVN) provided by networks in different areas of networking, the NRN Toolkit that has been enhanced step-by-step based on networking interests and needs, the NRN Self-assessment Toolkit and the work of several thematic and geographical NRN Clusters.

The purpose of this Guidebook is to bring together in a 'one-stop-shop' all the resources that the ENRD together with national and regional rural networks and their stakeholders developed over the years. In particular the Guidebook aims to help networks in the preparation and transition for the 2014-2020 programming period.

...In a way, this Guidebook resembles a 'Cookbook'. Surely many of you have been in a situation when you wanted to prepare a good meal or a nice cake but did not know where to find the right recipe, where to get good ingredients and then how to make the recipe work to get what you see on the photo. During the years of joint 'networking', rural networks across Europe, through their experience, provided us with the 'ingredients'. These have been brought together in this Guidebook with the aim of providing you with some recipes for future networking. We hope you will find them useful and an inspiration to create your own recipies. This NRN Guidebook is for You, by You...
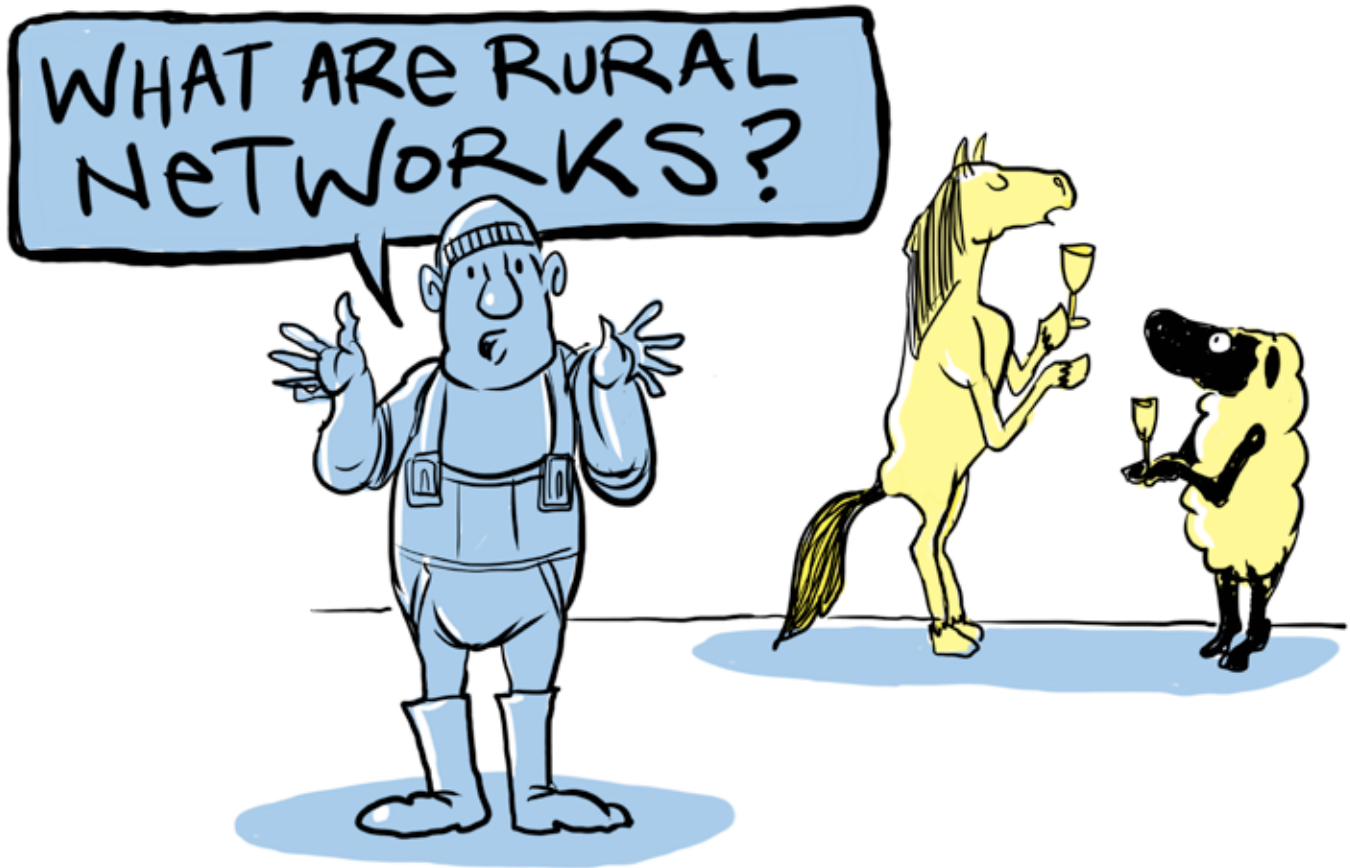
The ENRD Contact Point, June 2014

Table of Contents

I. Introduction

1.1 What are rural networks and networking?

'Networks' and 'networking' play an increasingly important role in social, political and economic life. *"Whether in academic research, the popular press, government policies, corporate strategies, blogs or just day-to-day conversation, the term seems unavoidable."*[1]

Policy networks are set up in order to support the delivery of a policy (or several interrelated policies) by directly involving stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of that policy. These formally constructed policy networks are increasingly important for policy-making and governance and are recognised as powerful tools for helping to tackle many of the challenges faced by modern public policies. For example, it is thought that policy networks:

- deal rapidly and in a flexible way with complex issues, including those with an international dimension;

- involve a wide range of stakeholders in policy debates, increasing the quality and the acceptability of these policies;

- take advantage of information and communication technologies to extend the reach of policy-makers into the community.

Policy Networks

---

1   Ramalingam, B. (2011) *Mind the network gaps*. London: Overseas Development Institute: *http://www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/7110.pdf*

Policy networks are widely used by the European Union (EU) and its Member States in many policy areas. They are considered to be particularly important for providing the flexibility required to deal with the wide diversity, and sometimes very fundamental differences that exist between administrative cultures and structures in the EU-28[2].

Rural Networks

Experience shows that networks are an effective means of informing, inspiring, and empowering local people in rural communities. By encouraging and promoting interaction between different rural stakeholders, rural networks facilitate and inspire learning, innovation, and the building of both human and social capacity based on the experience of others in the network.

"...involvement with rural networks provided users with a feeling of confidence when tackling a range of issues within their communities"

Carnegie Trust

According to the findings from Carnegie Trust research[3], *"rural development networks exist in order to improve the well-being, capacity and resilience of rural communities."* They do this by promoting interaction between, and action by, different rural stakeholders that facilitates the flow of information, the exchange of know-how, and the sharing of resources, all in the pursuit of rural development. This is a very important function that is described in academic terms as *"...the mobilisation of intangible intellectual assets through learning, innovation and the building of human and social capital."*

The Carnegie Trust study identified that the most important reasons for local people to access rural networks were to:

- receive advice and information;

- share local learning and experiences;

- develop creative ways to address local problems and needs;

- and identify sources of funding.

"...rural development is moving from a dependency culture to one that is about building on the strengths of local people and places. Networking is at the heart of this."

Nick Wilding, Carnegie Trust

Networks, networking & network support

All networks are built upon a **web of interactions** consisting of 'nodes' and 'linkages' where:

    i)   the 'nodes' are the stakeholders (individuals / organisations) that form the membership of the network, and

    ii)   the 'linkages' are the connections / relationships that exist between them. Some linkages can be stronger, others may be weaker.

It is less commonly understood that networks are **only structures that exist to support the process of networking** - where the process of 'networking' is clearly defined as *"...the sharing, exchange or flow of ideas, information, knowledge, practice, experience (and sometimes resources) between people and around a common interest, or opportunity, to create value"*.* Consequently it is often emphasised that it is not networks themselves that are important, but the information and inter-relationships that flow through them – the networking.

Network support secretariats/units are often in place to support the work of network members and the process of networking. By facilitating the flow of information, ideas etc. (in other words by networking), these secretariats help the creation of new 'linkages' or relationships between stakeholders, as well as the improvement of existing ones.

   *   Gilchrist, A. (2009) *The Well-Connected Community: A Networking Approach to Community Development*. The Policy Press, Bristol, UK

2   ENRD (2012) *What do we know about Networking as a Rural Development Policy Tool (2007-2013)? A Discussion Paper*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-toolkit/01-DiscussionPaperonNetworking12_06_2012.pdf*

3   Miller, M., Wallace, J. (2012) *Rural Development Networks – A Mapping Exercise*. Dunfermline: Carnegie UK Trust: *http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/2012/rural-development-networks---full-report*

Part of the challenge of developing a single definition of what a 'network' means in the context of rural development is that rural networks commonly vary in terms of:

- their **focus** – geographical reach, specific rural focus and specialist areas of expertise;

- the **nature of the work** that they engage in – including practical advice, support and lobbying functions;

- the **nature of their members** – individuals, communities, practitioners, organisations etc.;

- their **membership structure** – formal or informal membership, and;

- their reliance on **private / public funding** to cover operational costs.

This diversity means networking in the domain of rural development policy becomes particularly challenging because of the huge number of rural actors and stakeholders, operating at different levels, from a multitude of different socio-economic contexts, and with a broad spectrum of needs, priorities, interests and expectations.

Furthermore, there is something at the heart of rural networks that lies beyond a technical definition. Rural networks add value through the development of social capital; they have a strong sense of place, a shared culture and identity. Rural networks are built around this sense of belonging. They enable the creation and development of territorial and individual identity with the desire to improve the area that stakeholders are connected to, driving their involvement in rural networking[4].

Networking is a policy instrument within the framework of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) – known as Pillar 2 of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Networks and networking, as well-established policy tools, have intensively supported the EU rural development policies implementation and their use has significantly increased since 2007.

Prior to 2007, networks were primarily established to support the delivery of the LEADER approach. Two complementary levels of formal networking were established under both LEADER II and LEADER+ with national networking units (NNUs) established at Member State level, and a European networking unit – the LEADER Observatory – established at EU level.

""The successful implementation of rural development policy depends very much on the involvement of all the actors. Networking provides this opportunity for all the actors to be involved on a continual basis."

Rob Peters, DG AGRI

...beyond the technical definition of rural networking

Networking as a policy instrument for EAFRD

Do's and Don'ts

DON'T confuse or use as synonyms *Network Support Unit* (NSU) (that is a network secretariat) and *National Rural Network* (NRN) (that involves a wide group of stakeholders and relations among them).

"There is rarely a clear enough distinction between the network and its supporting entity. [...] Too often the term 'network' is used to identify the mechanisms that support a network or link its members."

Source: Ramalingam, 2011
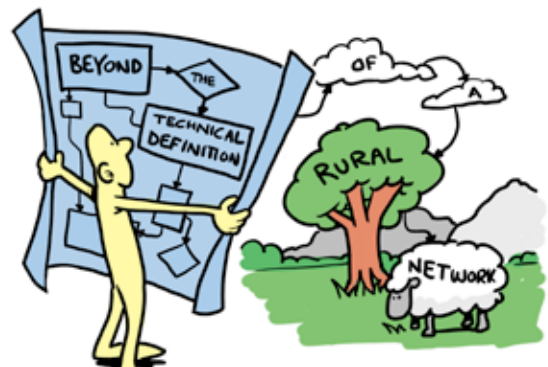
---

4   Castelloe, P., Watson, T., Allen, K. (2011) *Rural Networks for Wealth Creation: Impacts and Lessons learned from US Communities.* Asheville: Rural Support Partners:
http://www.ruralsupportpartners.com/docs/RuralNetworksforWealthCreation.pdf

Experiences of networking through LEADER were very positive, with networking playing a useful role in stimulating new ideas and sharing the growing body of rural development knowledge and practice, whilst also contributing to the governance of the LEADER programmes. It was therefore decided to introduce networking as an obligatory activity into Pillar 2 of the CAP for the 2007–2013 programming period.

Did you know that...

...a total of over €515 million was committed to the operation of NRNs and the ENRD during the 2007-2013 programming period of which an estimated €268 million came from the EAFRD (less than 0.3% of total EAFRD funding) and €247 million from national co-financing.

Source: ENRD (2012) Rural Review No 14

According to Article 67 of the EAFRD Regulation for 2007-2013 *"Each Member State shall establish a **national rural network**, which groups the organisations and administrations involved in rural development."*[5] The regulation identified the need for structures to run the National Rural Networks (NRNs). Therefore **Network Support Units** (NSUs), formal top-down structures, were established in each Member State in order to act as network secretariats supporting the NRN members and facilitating networking.

With the aim of connecting even more stakeholders across Europe and *"networking of national networks, organisations and administrations active in the field of rural development at Community level"*, Article 68 of the EAFRD Regulation also identified the need to establish a **European Network for Rural Development** (ENRD).

In addition to the ENRD, there are several other examples of policy networks initiated by the European Commission. Apart from the formal top-down structures identified as necessary by the regulations, there are many different types of rural networks driven by a great variety of goals and objectives which are improving the well-being, capacity and resilience of rural communities around Europe by informing, inspiring and empowering local people on a daily basis. Section 1.2 provides further details about European and other rural networks.

1.2 Rural networks in the 2007 – 2013 programming period

During the 2007-2013 programme period networks at a European, national and regional level were established to support the delivery of rural development policy.

Networking at European Union level

There are several networks that operated during the 2007-2013 programming period at a European level with the three most relevant to the delivery of rural development policy being:

• The European Network for Rural Development

• The European Evaluation Network for Rural Development (Evaluation Expert Network), and

• The *European Innovation Partnership on Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability* (EIP-AGRI)[6] (from the end of the period).

The European Network for Rural Development

The core mandate of the *ENRD*[7] has been to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of EU rural development policy. Over the six years of its operation the ENRD has evolved from an initial top-down initiative, gradually maturing to engage a wider range of stakeholder interests, issues, needs and (changing) priorities. This evolutionary path can be described as a 'learning-by-doing' process involving various stages of development, with each stage building on the previous.

A *Contact Point*[8] (CP) was put in place in order to provide the European Commission's Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI) with technical assistance in the framework for the ENRD. The CP is the support unit of ENRD. The main areas of CP activities have been:

---

5   Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005:
     http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF
6   European Innovation Partnership 'Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability':
     http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/index_en.htm
7   ENRD: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/*
8   ENRD Contact Point:
     http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/general-info/faq/about-the-enrd-contact-point/en/about-the-enrd-contact-point_en.cfm

- **Knowledge development** with the aim to provide deeper insight into rural development policy and programmes, including ENRD Coordination Committee and LEADER Subcommittee meetings, thematic working groups and focus groups, analysis of monitoring indicators and collection and sharing of relevant experiences;

- **Exchange and cooperation** with the aim to facilitate exchanges and cooperation between rural networks and actors across the EU, including support to LEADER and transnational cooperation, information exchange and coordination with NRNs and NSUs, promotion and representation;

- **Knowledge sharing** with the aim to ensure access to and dissemination of useful information on EU rural development policy, including the operation of the ENRD website, seminars and conferences and publications.

The European Evaluation Network for Rural Development (abbreviated to '*Evaluation Expert Network*[9]') was first launched to provide support for improving the quality and efficiency of evaluation of rural development programmes (RDPs) in EU Member States during the period 2007-2013. This network is dealing specifically with the exchange of expertise and the establishment of best practice on evaluation of rural development policy. The Evaluation Helpdesk serves as a central information point (support unit) that has assisted in the establishment and the management of the Evaluation Expert Network and supported the evaluation of RDPs.

The EIP-AGRI is one of the five European Innovation Partnerships[10] created with the aim to bring together all relevant stakeholders from the entire research and innovation chain. EIP-AGRI aims to foster innovation by: stepping up research; identifying and anticipating any need for specific regulation or standard; coordinating investments in demonstration and pilots; and ensuring that any breakthroughs are quickly brought to market. The EIP-AGRI in particular *"works to foster competitive and sustainable farming and forestry that 'achieves more and better from less'."*[11]

> **Did you know that...**
>
> ...a dedicated set of technical support services and tools is provided by the Evaluation Expert Helpdesk. This includes a trilingual website, an electronic newsletter, a question and answer service, a glossary of terms, a good practice section and a collection of key literature.
>
> *Source: Evaluation Expert Network*

The Evaluation Expert Network

The European Innovation Partnership

"The key challenge for agriculture in the future is not only to produce more, but also to do this in a sustainable manner."

EIP-AGRI

In order to ensure an effective flow of information and knowledge across all levels, from the EU to the local level, and vice-versa, the work of the EIP-AGRI will be underpinned by the EIP-AGRI network. This network will guarantee that the achievements of EIP-AGRI and its Operational Groups efficiently contribute to advancing and mainstreaming innovative approaches beyond the local and regional level. The EIP-AGRI network was formally established in April 2013 with the creation of its support unit, the EIP-AGRI Service Point.

The EIP-AGRI Service Point, based in Brussels, *"acts as a mediator within the EIP Network, enhancing communication and cooperation between all innovation actors, including farmers, advisors, agri-business, civil society, and researchers, working at EU, national and regional level."*[12] The main areas of EIP-AGRI Service Point activities are:

> **Did you know that...**
>
> ... during 2013 a Steering Committee was established in the EIP-AGRI in order to create the partnership, including representatives from universities, consumers associations, nature protection associations, research institutes, European institutions, formal European Networks and agricultural organisations?
>
> *Source: European Commission website, High Level Steering Board*

---

9   Evaluation Expert Network: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/en/*
10   European Innovation Partnerships: *http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm?pg=eip*
11   EIP Network and EIP-AGRI Service Point: *http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/service-point/index_en.htm*
12   As above.

- **Sharing knowledge** by collecting and sharing information on innovation-related policy measures, and by interacting with different groups and networks. Stakeholders, including also the research world, are engaged through multiple communication channels such as seminars, conferences, publications, website and social media.

- **Tackling challenges** by bridging relations with the research world: focus groups bring together experts with the aim of engaging in sharing knowledge and suggesting practical innovative solutions to key challenges. In this way the focus groups also drive the research attention on specific questions.

- **Connecting people** by involving farmers, advisors, agri-business, civil society, researchers and administrations. The Service Point's main networking tools include face-to-face meetings within the focus groups, workshops, seminars, social media and its own website.

Two EU policies are central to the EIP-AGRI Network's implementation: the post-2013 CAP, in particular the Rural Development Policy, and EU Research and Innovation Policy or 'Horizon 2020'.

National & regional networks: key networking elements

In addition to European-level networks, national and regional-level rural networks were operating during the 2007-13 programming period across Europe. As introduced in section 1.1 (and the *NRN Guidance Fiche*[13] of the Commission) the Network Support Unit (NSU) is the structure needed for running the NRN.

NSUs are responsible for animating NRNs. There are many important and useful lessons to be learnt from the experiences of the NRNs and NSUs during the 2007-2013 programming period. Six key elements have been identified in the on-going evolution of NRNs as effective rural development policy tools:

Did you know that...

... the ENRD collected over 170 networking stories that are grouped under the six key 'networking elements'.

Source: ENRD website, AVN Stories: Networking elements

1. Effective stakeholder engagement;
2. Building a common understanding of common policies;
3. Collection, analysis and dissemination of good practices;
4. Exchange of relevant experience and know-how amongst rural stakeholders and actors;
5. Capacity building and training, and;
6. Cooperation and joint actions, including specific attention to promoting cooperation between LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs).

Networks evolve and mature over time. Although networks are diverse, and therefore there is no single common path for networking, some patterns can be identified in the way networks mature and evolve.

The process of networking often begins with the networks engaging with their stakeholder groups. During the 2007-2013 programming period this engagement used a broad approach for all stakeholders, complemented with specific activities targeted at harder-to-reach groups or those with specific needs.

As a result of the continuous networking and information-sharing activities, stakeholders could develop a better and common understanding of policies they were involved in. This shared understanding, among others, enabled the networks to facilitate the collection of good practice examples that were further analysed and disseminated to support rural development policy implementation.

13 European Commission (20/01/2014). *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm*

As understanding and experience of the network stakeholders grew they also looked for networking vehicles to exchange information and experience within the network, or with other networks. This exchange of good practice and know-how also enabled stakeholders to identify their training needs more easily. Based on continuously emerging training needs, NSUs increasingly delivered networking support and training activities. As NRNs' networking actions developed knowledge amongst stakeholders over time, this increased their members' confidence who started to seek support to identify potential partners to deliver joint, cooperative projects and initiatives.

During the 2007–2013 programming period, NRNs were allowed to choose structures that fitted their networking needs the best. This has led to a diverse range of approaches with regard to the setting-up of NSUs.

According to the *2013 NRN Mapping exercise*[14] (that covered the situation up until the end of 2012) most Member States chose to establish support units at national level to develop and support their NRNs and implement their respective Annual Work Plans (AWPs). However, the way these NSUs operated varied greatly, with 39% (12 out of 31 support units) operating within national authorities/managing authorities; 32% (10 out of 31 support units) being delegated to other public sector agencies or to administrations or institutions affiliated to the administration (e.g. national agricultural advisory services), whilst 29% (9 out of 31 support units) were run by external service providers (i.e. outsourced NSUs).

As the *NRN Guidance Fiche*[15] for 2014-20 programming period states: *"There is no evidence about one structure or model of NSU being more efficient and effective than others, as it depends on the particular context and practices"*. Hence, there can be advantages and disadvantages to both approaches that are influenced by national/regional context, the NSUs financial allocation and the way that public administrations are set up and managed.[16]

In a number of cases, support units have been set up at a regional level (such as in the United Kingdom and Belgium) in order to support the implementation of regional RDPs. In addition, NSUs have been complemented and supported by 'regional structures'. These regional structures vary greatly from one Member State to another. For instance, in France the national NSU had an extensive portfolio of networking tasks during the 2007-2013 programming period, at the same time it cooperated continuously with the animation teams of 26 regional networks – each of which implemented its own AWP. Similarly, Poland has maintained regional secretariats in each of its 16 regions to support the work of the NSU.
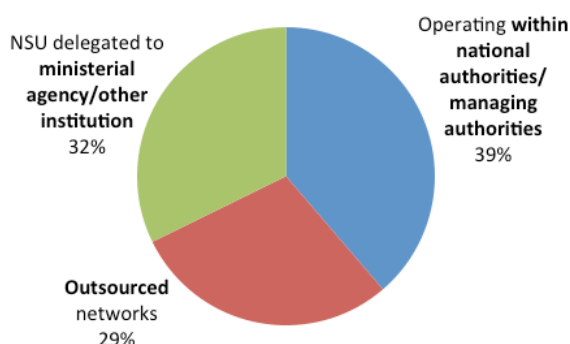
NRN structures

Did you know that…

…National Support Units budgets for supporting the network and delivering networking activity vary significantly. When analysed, the different budget sizes do not relate to any specific elements such as activities, size of territory or population.

Source: ENRD (2013) Findings of the 2012 NRN Mapping exercise

NRN / NSU operational structure (2012)

NSU delegated to ministerial agency/other institution 32%

Operating **within national authorities/ managing authorities** 39%

Outsourced networks 29%

*Source: ENRD (2013) Findings of the 2012 NRN Mapping exercise*

---

14 ENRD (2013) *Findings of the 2012 NRN Mapping exercise: Final synthesis report***:** *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=9956D73B-C54A-0D7C-A772-D02B98E1EA1B*. Percentages calculated on 31 responses of all 31 NSUs relative to the 27 EU 2012 MSs (Belgium and UK count in total 6 NSUs).

15 European Commission (20/01/2014). *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm*

16 ENRD (2014) *Findings of the 2014 NRN mapping exercise: Final synthesis report: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=9956D73B-C54A-0D7C-A772-D02B98E1EA1B*

1.3 Rural networks in the 2014–2020 programming period

Strengthened role of rural networks

Both the role of networking and the reach of the NRNs are being strengthened for the 2014-2020 programming period. The *Rural Development Regulation (RDR)*[17] for the 2014-2020 programming period includes specifications for the networks' aims and the key elements of the action plans/tasks they should deliver. The compulsory elements of network action plans include a number of new activities such as a communication plan and related activities, networking for advisors and innovation support services, and sharing and dissemination of monitoring and evaluation findings. While networks will need to deliver a larger range of activities, a greater focus has also been placed on the evaluation of networks and networking to understand more about the impact of these activities (network evaluation is covered in Part IV of this Guidebook).

New NRN tasks for 2014-20
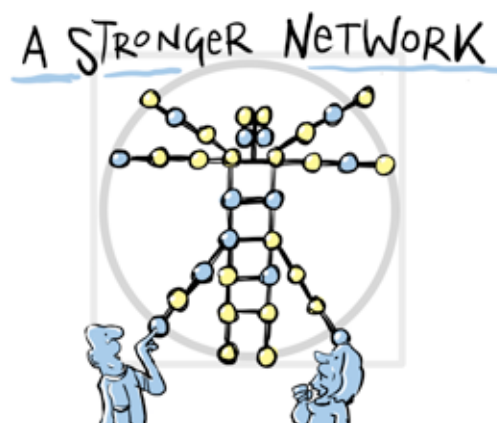
A comparison of the NSU tasks during the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 programming periods is provided below:

NRN Tasks 2007–2013*	NRN Tasks 2014–2020**
Network management	Network management
Identification and analysis of good transferable practices and the provision of information about them	Collection of examples of projects covering all RDP priorities
Organisation of exchanges of experience and know-how	Facilitation of thematic and analytical exchanges between rural development stakeholders, sharing and dissemination of findings
Preparation of training activities for LAGs in the process of formation	Training and networking activities for LAGs
Technical assistance for inter-territorial and transnational cooperation	Technical assistance for inter-territorial and transnational cooperation, facilitation of cooperation among LAGs and the search of partners
	Provision of networking for advisors and innovation support services
	Sharing and disseminating monitoring and evaluation findings
	Communication plan including publicity and information concerning the RDP in agreement with the managing authorities and information and communication activities aimed at a broader public
	Participate in / contribute to ENRD activities

*   Art. 67 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005:
    http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32005R1698:en:NOT
** Art. 54.2 and Art. 54.3.(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013:
    http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF

In the *2014 NSU Mapping Survey*[18] conducted by ENRD CP, NSUs were asked if they thought there would be any changes to their activities for the 2014-2020 programming period. Some 24 NSUs responded, seven of which felt there would be no or little change, with the remaining 17 identifying potential variations, which reflect the changing emphasis in the roles that NRNs and NSUs play in the 2014-2020 programming period.

17   Art. 54.2 and Art. 54.3.(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013:
    http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF
18   ENRD (2014) *Findings of the 2014 NRN mapping exercise: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_
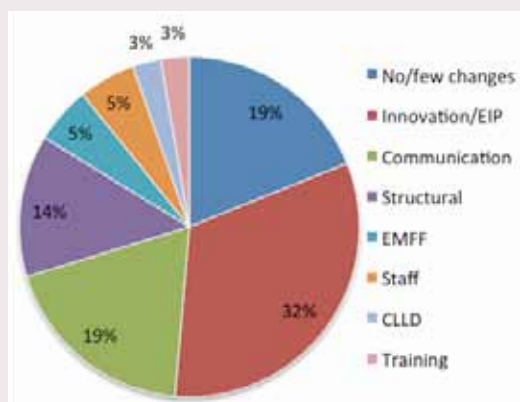   assets/pdf/added-value/networking-statistics-and-studies/NRN_Mapping_Report_Final_260314.pdf*

Potential changes in NSU activities

According to the 2014 NRN Mapping Survey, 12 of the networks anticipated a greater focus on innovation, including involvement with EIP-AGRI. Others anticipated increases and improvements in communication tasks to cover the whole RDP or engage more effectively with stakeholders. Other potential changes mentioned were structural modifications including increases in staff, greater involvement with Fisheries LAGs and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), the inclusion of more Community Led Local Development activity and the use of external experts to support training.

Source: ENRD (2014) Findings of the 2014 NRN mapping exercise – NRNs in transition

The percentage of respondent NSUs that indicated a given area of change

- No/few changes — 19%
- Innovation/EIP — 32%
- Communication — 19%
- Structural — 14%
- EMFF — 5%
- Staff — 5%
- CLLD — 3%
- Training — 3%

As in the 2007-2013 programming period, during the 2014-2020 programming period NSUs can be set up in a number of different organisational contexts. As specified in the *NRN Guidance Fiche*[19]; NSUs may be established either within the national or regional authority or outsourced to an external entity. A 'mixed NSU' is also possible, where both the national administration and a selected external entity cooperate to animate the network. Which of these organisational structures are most effective depends on the context in which networks will operate within each Member State.

The organisational set-up of NSUs in 2014-20

Managing Authority support to NSUs

*The lessons learnt from the ENRD** (presented in an analysis of the NRN Toolkit) from European and national networking approaches have identified some of the structural and operational issues that help managing authorities to get the best out of their NSUs. The experience gained suggests that NSUs work most effectively when their managing organisation supports the development of a **more inclusive and open network structure** that gradually reaches out and engages with a broader range of stakeholders. Managing authorities should recognise the **network as an active partner** both 'connected' to but also sufficiently 'separate and distinct' from the policy formulation and implementation process and allow the **network time and space** to learn, experiment, engage and find its own identity.
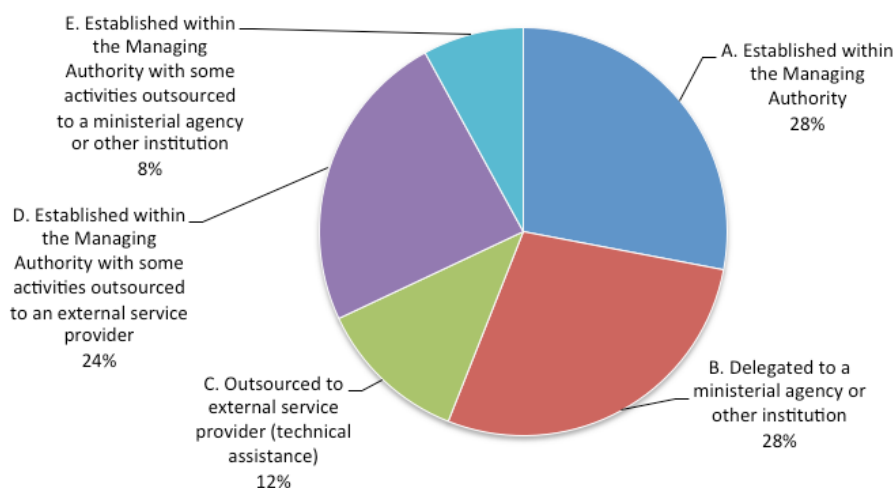
Administratively the Managing Authority must ensure that the **network is accountable** for the resources it uses, and also establish a working relationship that is less about control and more about partnership. **Work plans need to be flexible** to ensure that there are resources and capacity available to react and respond to evolving needs and circumstances. It is also important that the **difference between the NSU and the network itself** is recognised and there is a commitment to sustain a **sufficient level of financial support** to allow the building of core competencies within the NSU team.

* ENRD website, NRN Toolkit, Principles and Practices of Networking, Lessons from the ENRD:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/building-on-lessons-learnt/lessons-from-the-enrd/en/lessons-from-the-enrd_en.cfm

---

19   European Commission (20/01/2014) *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks:* http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm

The *2014 NRN Mapping Survey*[20] also aimed to identify potential operational changes for NSUs in the 2014-2020 programme period. The responses that were received from 24 NSUs suggest that just over half (60%) of the NSUs will be established within the Managing Authority, with a significant proportion of them (24% of all respondent NSUs) outsourcing certain activities to external providers. Overall, only 12% of NSUs are expected to be wholly outsourced, while 28% of NSUs will be delegated to a ministerial agency or other institution.
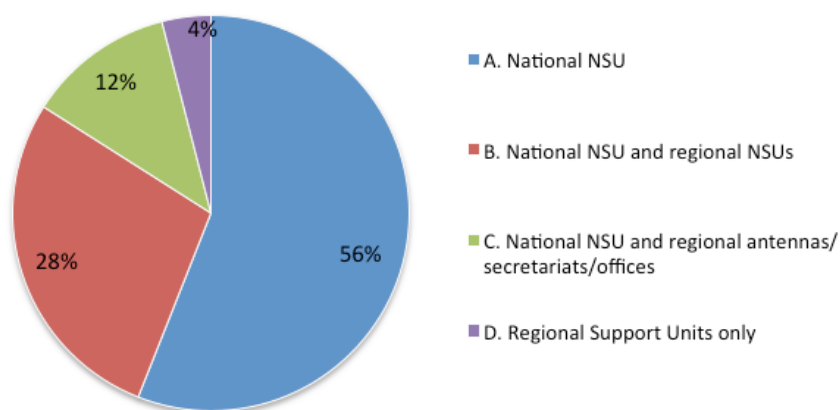
Anticipated operational setup for the 2014-2020 NSUs

E. Established within the Managing Authority with some activities outsourced to a ministerial agency or other institution 8%

D. Established within the Managing Authority with some activities outsourced to an external service provider 24%

C. Outsourced to external service provider (technical assistance) 12%

A. Established within the Managing Authority 28%

B. Delegated to a ministerial agency or other institution 28%

Source: ENRD (2014) Findings of the 2014 NRN mapping exercise

Regional networks & antennas

During the 2014-2020 programming period rural networks can once again be established at both a national and regional level. The continued use of regional rural networks has been high-lighted by the *2014 NRN Mapping Survey*[21]. Results of the survey suggest that nearly half of the networks established by NSUs will include or be wholly made up of regional networks or antennas.

How will the support for policy rural networks in your Member State be organised from 2014?

4%

12%

28%

56%

- A. National NSU
- B. National NSU and regional NSUs
- C. National NSU and regional antennas/secretariats/offices
- D. Regional Support Units only

Source: ENRD (2014) Findings of the 2014 NRN mapping exercise

20   ENRD (2014) *Findings of the 2014 NRN mapping exercise*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/added-value/networking-statistics-and-studies/NRN_Mapping_Report_Final_260314.pdf*
21   As above.

Within these national and regional structures, NRN membership is most often open to all organisations and administrations involved in rural development including public authorities, economic and social partners, and civil society organisations. According to the *NRN Guidance Fiche*[22] for the 2014-2020 programming period, wide NRN membership is recommended. Furthermore, for network activities, it is suggested that networks open these also for non-NRN members.

Knowledge and understanding of networks, their support units and the role of networking as a policy tool continues to grow across the European Union. The successes achieved and challenges met over the 2007-2013 period have led to a broader, deeper role being provided to rural networks to increase the benefits of RDP delivery in each member state. There are several changes anticipated within NRNs to meet this new agenda, most of which focus on consolidating existing activity and expanding networking activity into new areas of policy interest. Both the experienced and newer NSUs are well placed to meet these new challenges and ensure networks and the networking support they deliver are increasingly seen as an indispensable rural development mechanism.

Looking ahead...

Useful resources developed by the ENRD

ENRD Contact Point: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/general-info/faq/about-the-enrd-contact-point/en/about-the-enrd-contact-point_en.cfm*

ENRD website: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/*

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Toolkit, Principles and practice of networking, Network Definitions and Diversity*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/principles-and-practice-of-networking/network-definitions-and-diversity/en/rural-networks-and-networking_en.cfm*

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRNs information page*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-information/en/nrn-information_en.cfm*

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Toolkit, Principles and Practices of Networking: Lessons from the ENRD*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/building-on-lessons-learnt/lessons-from-the-enrd/en/lessons-from-the-enrd_en.cfm*

ENRD (2012) *Rural Review No 14, Networks and Networking in Rural Development Policy, Winter 2012*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=6A46DFCB-F0A5-2010-F339-D5859C4C6F04*

ENRD (2012) *What do we know about Networking as a Rural Development Policy Tool (2007-2013)? A Discussion Paper*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-toolkit/01-DiscussionPaperonNetworking12_06_2012.pdf*

ENRD (2012) *Demonstrating the 'Added Value' of Networking, Literature Screening, Nov 2012*: *https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/myenrd/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E9F1BE-E99B-8E03-D0FF-381BE85AE888*

ENRD (2014) *Findings of the 2014 NRN mapping exercise – NRNs in transition (preparation for the 2014-2020 programming period): Final report*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/networking-statistics-and-studies_en.cfm*

---

22   European Commission (20/01/2014) Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm*

Other relevant resources

Castelloe, P., Watson, T., Allen, K. (2011) *Rural Networks for Wealth Creation: Impacts and Lessons learned from US Communities*. Asheville: Rural Support Partners: *http://www.ruralsupportpartners.com/docs/RuralNetworksforWealthCreation.pdf (Last accessed on 01/05/2014)*

Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD): *http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32005R1698:en:NOT (Last accessed on 01/05/2014)*

European Commission website, *Agriculture and Rural Development, European Innovation Partnership, Network and Service Point, EIP-AGRI Service Point***:** *http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/service-point/index_en.htm (Last accessed on 01/05/2014)*

European Commission website, *Agriculture and Rural Development, European Innovation Partnership:* *http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/index_en.htm (Last accessed on 01/05/2014)*

European Commission website, I*nnovation Union, European Innovation Partnerships:* *http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm?pg=eip (Last accessed on 01/05/2014)*

European Commission (20/01/2014). *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks:* *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm (Last accessed on 01/05/2014)*

*Evaluation Expert Network***:** *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/en/ (Last accessed on 01/05/2014)*

Gilchrist, A. (2009) *The Well-Connected Community: A Networking Approach to Community Development.* Bristol, UK: The Policy Press

Miller, M., Wallace, J. (2012) *Rural Development Networks – A Mapping Exercise.* Dunfermline: Carnegie UK Trust: *http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/2012/rural-development-networks---full-report (Last accessed on 01/05/2014)*

Ramalingam, B. (2011) *Mind the network gaps.* London: Overseas Development Institute: *http://www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/7110.pdf (Last accessed on 01/05/2014)*

Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the European Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005: *http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF (Last accessed on 01/05/2014)*
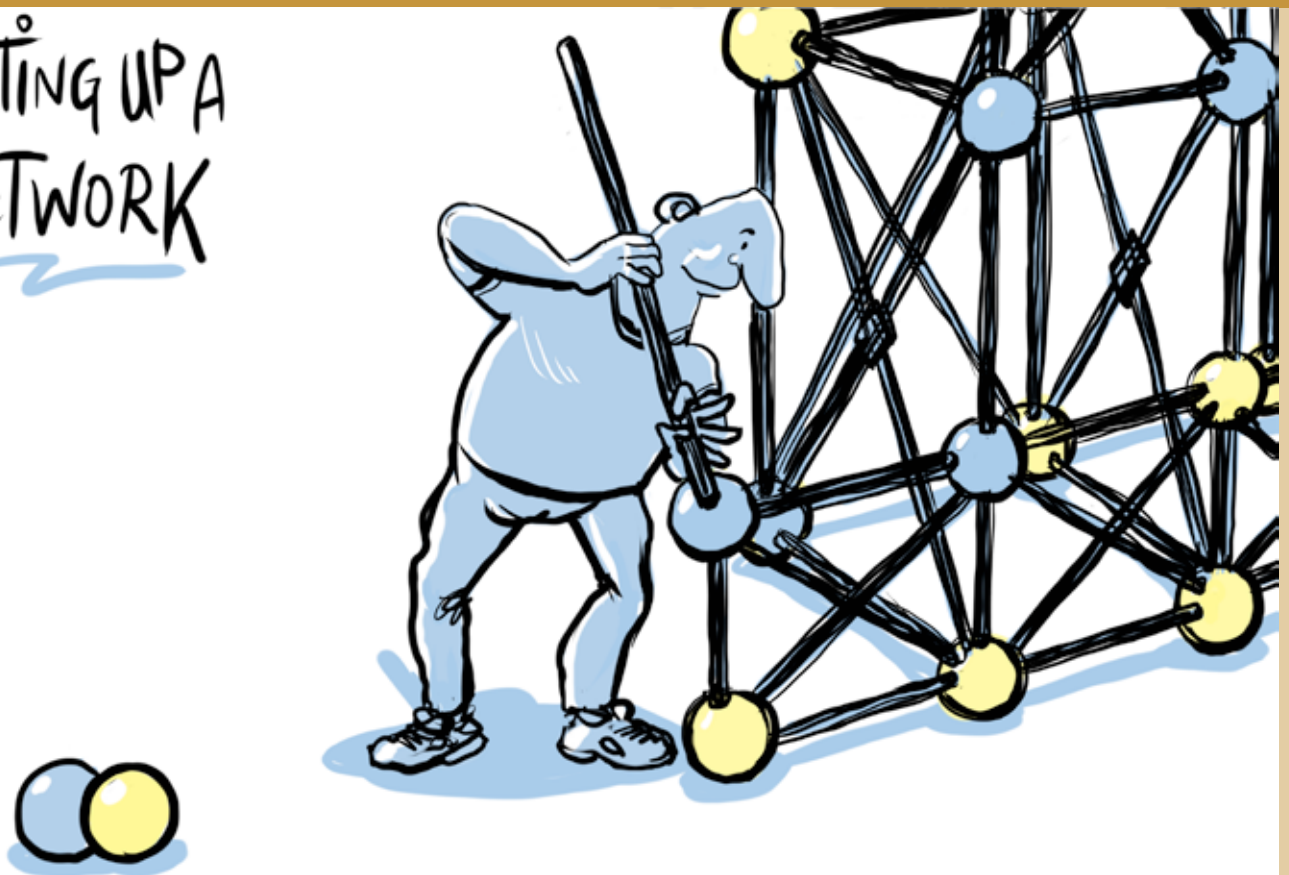
2.1 Planning the network and getting started

The role of policy networks is strengthened for the 2014-2020 programming period. Managing Authorities (MAs) and Network Support Units (NSUs) can use the experience gained during the 2007-2013 programming period to set up rural networks that serve the needs of network members, and rural development policy implementation in general. The development of the NSU and National Rural Networks (NRNs) should ideally be carried out in parallel with the development of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) so that the necessary planning has taken place well before the RDP is approved. This gives time to clarify the specific role of the NSU and plan its activities with input from stakeholders. It also helps to ensure that the NSU will be properly resourced and that adequate time is allocated to start to build the capacity of staff and network users. Furthermore, timely planning makes sure that the network is up and running, ready for when the RDP stakeholders need it the most. The NSU and its network are vital elements in improving the efficient and effective delivery of the RDP.

"Motivate the stakeholders – they need to feel empowered!
Encourage bottom-up processes and freedom of expression.
They need to understand that networking only works, if they
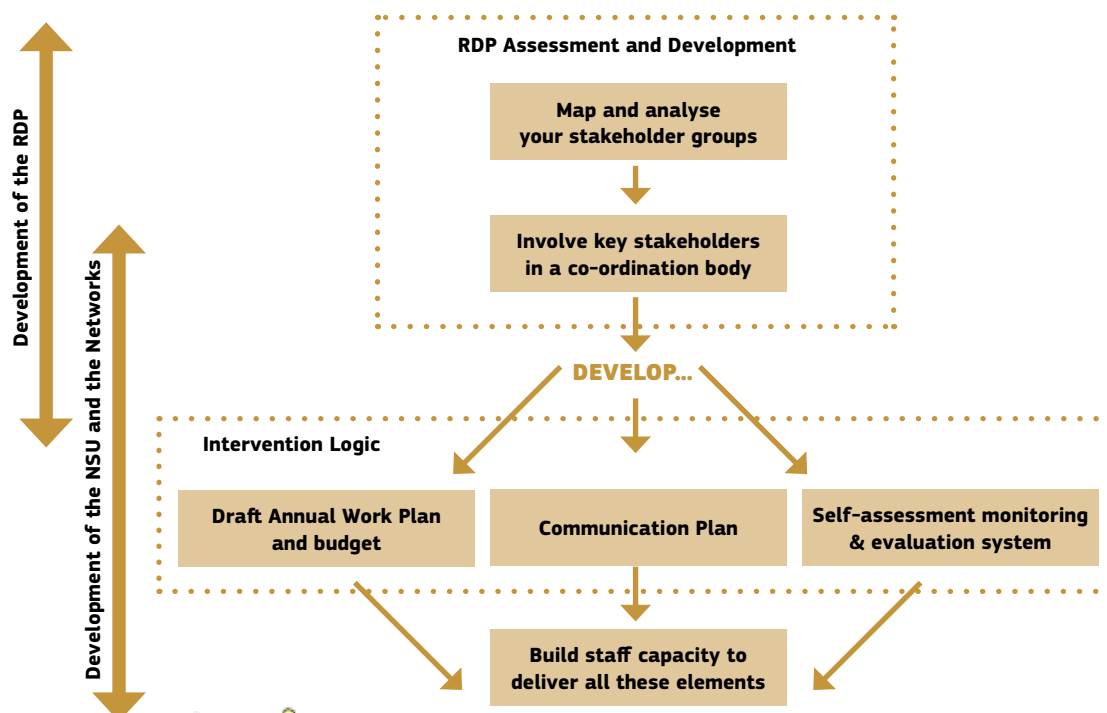*are working at networking!"*

Participant, Peer-to-Peer Training, Budapest

Planning NSU and NRN set-up parallel to the RDP planning...

Setting up a Network

Stakeholder involvement during the early stages of setting up the NSU and NRN is vital. Many Member States achieve this by establishing a co-ordination body such as a Working Group within the MA as soon as possible – with clear and agreed terms of reference and a work plan. At the *NRN Peer-to-Peer training (Module 4)*[23] on Network Resource Planning, held in Poland in 2013, NSUs identified that the key tasks of such a Working Group should include the elements presented in the figure below.

Do's and Don'ts...

DO encourage Managing Authorities to be patient and flexible with their colleagues or contractors responsible for managing the NRN – setting up the network support unit and putting in place the necessary networking mechanisms take time.

Development of the RDP

Development of the NSU and the Networks

RDP Assessment and Development

Map and analyse your stakeholder groups

Involve key stakeholders in a co-ordination body

DEVELOP...

Intervention Logic

Draft Annual Work Plan and budget

Communication Plan

Self-assessment monitoring & evaluation system

Build staff capacity to deliver all these elements

Do's and Don'ts

DO encourage network members to ask themselves what they expect from the network and by when – and then talk about these needs and expectations so they can be taken into account in the planning and delivery of network activities.

DON'T expect networking to work without them, so make sure they are willing to participate in the activities as the quality of networking is dependent on the contributions and commitments of its members.

Source: ENRD (2013) ENRD Network Support Unit (NSU), Peer – to – Peer Training Programme, MODULE 4: Network Resource Planning, Gdansk, Poland, 13 September 2013

Completing these tasks ensures that the main building blocks of any network and its support unit are in place. The resources required for the NSU and delivery of the network, both human and financial, can then be assessed in relation to the Action Plan and Communication Plan developed, and the internal resource needs of the NSU itself (see Section 2.2).

23   ENRD (2013) *ENRD Network Support Unit (NSU), Peer – to – Peer Training Programme, MODULE 4: Network Resource Planning, Gdansk, Poland, 13 September 2013*: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/pilot-nsu-training/module04/P2P_Training-Module-4-notes-and-conclusions.pdf

One of the key planning tools is a logical framework or 'Intervention Logic'. This approach is used to build a logical model of the relationships between the needs that the network aims to address; the network objectives; the planned activities to achieve them; and the expected achievements (outputs & results) of the network.

Developing an intervention logic for the NRN makes it easier to define work programmes (Action Plans) and measure their success, and helps to focus on the longer term outcomes rather than just the short-term outputs. Developing an intervention logic helps to:

• Clarify the objectives and use them to identify the expected results so that they can be evaluated.

• Define evaluation questions about the results expected.

• Assess whether the activities selected are suitable for delivering the outputs and outcomes that the NSU aims to achieve – or in other words, assess the internal logic of a network's activities[24].

The development of an intervention logic for the network not only clarifies the linkages between objectives and activities but also helps to plan how these are going to be achieved, including the resources required, as well as the expected outputs and results.
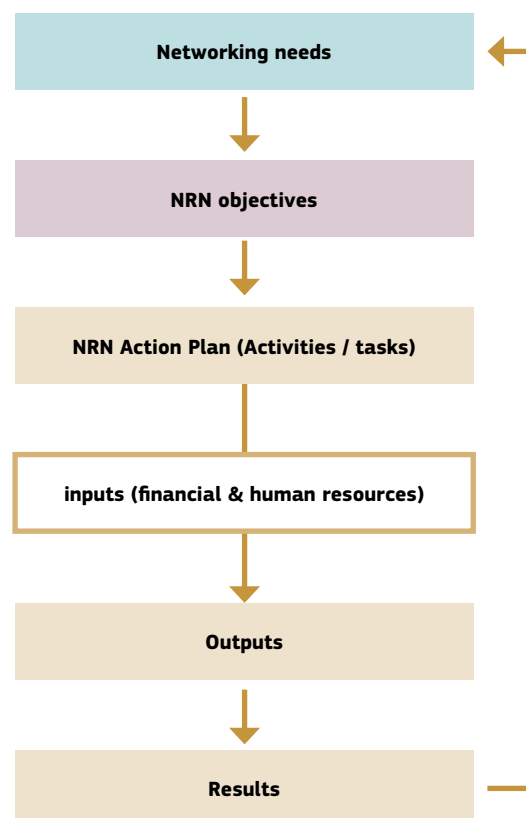
Did you know that...

Intervention logic frameworks were introduced in the 1960's in the USA because:

• Planning was too vague, without clear objectives that could be used to monitor and evaluate a project;

• Management responsibilities were unclear;

• Evaluation was challenging as there was no common agreement as to what the project was trying to achieve.

Source: Government of the Republic of Serbia, EU Integration Office (2011)
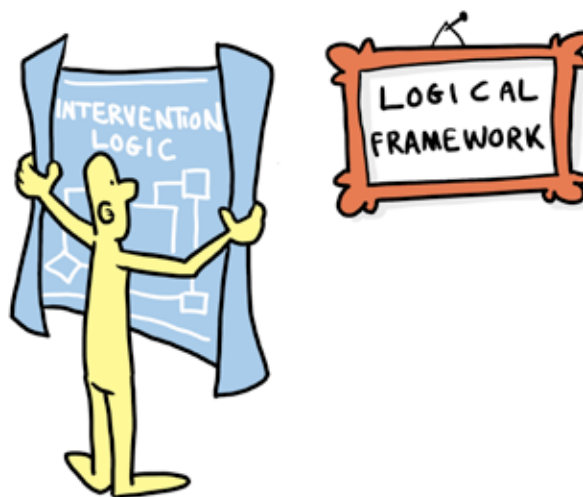*Guide to the Logical Framework Approach*

Key elements of the Network intervention logic

```
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│     Networking needs        │◄───┐
└─────────────────────────────┘    │
              │                     │
              ▼                     │
┌─────────────────────────────┐    │
│        NRN objectives       │    │
└─────────────────────────────┘    │
              │                     │
              ▼                     │
┌─────────────────────────────┐    │
│ NRN Action Plan             │    │
│ (Activities / tasks)        │    │
└─────────────────────────────┘    │
              │                     │
              ▼                     │
┌─────────────────────────────┐    │
│ inputs (financial & human   │    │
│ resources)                  │    │
└─────────────────────────────┘    │
              │                     │
              ▼                     │
┌─────────────────────────────┐    │
│          Outputs            │    │
└─────────────────────────────┘    │
              │                     │
              ▼                     │
┌─────────────────────────────┐    │
│          Results            │────┘
└─────────────────────────────┘
```

---

24 European Commission website, Evaluation, Methodological bases, Evaluation process (How ?), Intervention strategy, Intervention logic: *http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/evaluation/methodology/methods/mth_log_en.htm#04*

Framework for EAFRD network intervention logic: 2014-2020

The starting point for the development of the network intervention logic is the assessment of 'networking needs' (that are often identified based on a needs assessment). However, in the context of networks operating in the EAFRD framework, Article 54 of *Rural Development Regulation (RDR) No 1305/2013*[25] for the 2014-2020 programming period 'pre-defines' the overall objectives as well as the key activities (key elements of the Action Plan) of NRNs. One of the most challenging tasks of NSUs and NRNs is to identify network-specific objectives and how these can be best achieved, i.e. which activities contribute to the achievement of the various objectives the most. The *NRN Guidance Fiche*[26] developed by the European Commission identifies some of the main linkages between the overall objectives and tasks defined by the RDR as it applies to NRNs (as presented in the table below).

Aims/Tasks	Involve stakeholders	Improve the quality of RDP implementation	Inform the public & potential beneficiaries	Foster innovation
Collection of examples of projects covering all RDP priorities		✓	✓	
Facilitate thematic and analytical exchanges between stakeholders, sharing and dissemination of findings	✓	✓	✓	✓
Training and networking activities for LAGs: inter-territorial and transnational co-operation, co-operation among LAGs, search of partners for Art. 35 measure	✓	✓		✓
Networking activities for advisors and innovation support services		✓		✓
Share and disseminate monitoring and evaluation findings		✓		
Publicity and information concerning the RDP, information and communication activities aimed at a broader public		✓	✓	✓
Participate in and contribute to the European Networks' activities	✓	✓	✓	✓

---

25 Regulation (EU) 1305/2013. *http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF*
26 European Commission (20/01/2014). Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm*

How each NSU chooses to deliver the tasks set out by the RDR will vary based on its national and regional context and the needs of its stakeholders. Several of these tasks have been delivered by NSUs previously and much of this experience can be shared and built upon during the 2014-2020 programming period. A large library of resources has been collected by the ENRD, which can help networks to learn about the activities of NSUs and NRNs from the 2007-2013 programming period. These include the latest collection of *Added Value of Networking (AVN) stories*[27], which have focused on the seven tasks defined in the RDR.

When building its intervention logic, the NSU identifies all the activities it needs to deliver to achieve its goals. These activities now form the basis of the NSU's Annual Work Plan (AWP), describing what the NSU is going to do, how it's going to do it, what resources (financial, human, etc.) it intends to use, and when specific activities are carried out. As with the structure and processes of the NSU, the details of the AWP also vary depending on the needs of stakeholders and the decisions of the Working Group tasked with setting it up.

> **Turning the 'logic' into a plan**

As Managing Authorities are ultimately responsible for NRNs they have to agree to the NSU's AWP. How this is agreed and, consequently, how they authorise the work of their NSU varies. Some agree a multi-annual work plan and then generally leave the NSU to implement the planned activities, whereas in other cases, the AWP agreed for the NSU is continually assessed and updated by the Managing Authority.

Two important points to remember when preparing a NRN Action Plan are:

1. It should be set-up in a way to facilitate a) continuity of activities throughout the whole programming period, and; b) flexibility to respond to changing needs during the course of RDP implementation. The development of rolling action plans (e.g. covering two to three years with periodical review at least once a year) is one approach used by some NRNs and has the advantage of being flexible, whilst setting-up clear targets for the short- to medium-term.

2. The active engagement of network members and stakeholders during the preparation, implementation and follow-up stages of the NRN Action Plan will greatly help to embed ownership of the NRN and its activities.

Member State authorities use different mechanisms to approve the AWP, assign responsibility to the NSU or NRN members for the implementation of the AWP, and to review the progress made. Three distinct types of mechanisms for NRN decision making were identified in the 2007-2013 programme period:

• Formal (classical) steering committee-type structures;

• Formal committee-type structures involving varying degrees of active consultation;

• Less formal decision-making processes, which mainly rely on consultation and mutual agreement, and where the NSUs very often play a moderator or facilitator role.

---

27   ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories:* NRN Tasks:
      http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-nrn-tasks_en.cfm

The intervention logic as a basis of the network monitoring & evaluation and self-assessment framework

Being able to monitor the successes and challenges of the network helps to modify and improve delivery of the AWPs throughout the programming period. There are several monitoring, network self-assessment and evaluation tools that could be used, some of which have already been put in practice by NSUs (this topic is explored further in Part IV of this Guidebook). The system established should be one that the NSU has both the time and the financial resources to manage. How the results of these evaluations are shared with the Managing Authority and other network members also needs to be considered within the Communication Plan.

Did you know that...

...it is much easier to establish a monitoring and evaluation system when the network is being set up than to put one in place after it has started operating!

Source: 15th NRN Meeting, 8-9 May 2012, Ähtäri, Finland

Focus on engaging and training stakeholders

Keep people, capacity and skills - and develop them

Create an agile NRN and an adaptable AWP

Top tips for a successful NSU

NSU members who participated in *Pilot Module 1 of the NSU Peer–to–Peer training in Hungary** on Strategic Planning Issues for NRNs identified the following critical success factors for NSUs:

- Develop and use a clear intervention logic';

- Define the specific role of the NSU;

- Map stakeholders and target network activities;

- Set-up the NRN at least a year before RDP implementation starts;

- Divide the resources between 'preparation' and 'delivery';

- Connect with all interests.

  * ENRD, Pilot NSU Training Module 1, Hungary 19-20 Feb 2013: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/pilot-nsu-training-programme/en/pilot-nsu-training-module-1_en.cfm*

Work at good and efficient communication

Plan, plan and plan some more

2.2   NSU Resource Planning

There is a large amount of experience in resource planning in existing NSUs, which the ENRD has sought to capture. There are many different factors that underpin success including the relationship that the NSU has with its Managing Authority, stakeholder engagement, and the set of skills

"...the most interesting networking initiatives linked to contacts with wider rural development networks, research institutes, resource centres, etc. are most often carried out by those NSUs that have a secure and sound financial allocation."

ENRD (2012), What do we know about networking as a Rural Development Policy Tool (2007-2013)

among the NSU staff. However, a key element for enabling the success of the NSU, its network or the networking activity delivered is securing necessary financial and human resources. Once the intervention logic of the NSU is built, and the AWP carefully constructed, the next step is to identify and secure the resources needed to deliver the AWP successfully.

Careful planning of resources needed to operate the network

The ability of an NSU to achieve its commitments, provide information to stakeholders about its activities and actively serve the needs of the wider community of rural stakeholders will depend upon it having an appropriate budget.

Financial resources

During the 2007-2013 programming period four Member States had speparate NRN Programmes (NRNPs) with their own allocated budget, while most NRNs were funded through their RDP's Technical Assistance (TA) budget. This section on NSU resource planning is discussed without reference to the case of a separate NRNP. The reason for this is that principles remain the same for both cases.

A clear distinction was made in the budget between the structure needed to run the network (normally the NSU), and the cost of delivering the networking activity itself, as laid out in the AWPs. Without any specific provisions, Member States could decide how much of their TA budget to allocate to the operation of their rural network(s). For Member States without a separate NRNP, the average EAFRD co-financing rate was 52%, varying from 80% in Bulgaria and Romania to 0% in Luxembourg and Northern Ireland. In some cases the lack of financial provision resulted in an absence of appropriate planning, with many NSU and network budgets suffering because of this. Some NRNs have not been able to deliver effectively because of a lack of resources or due to cuts in their budget and constraints imposed on their planned expenditure.

The same budgetary principles are in place for the 2014-2020 programme period, with NSU and NRN activities again being co-financed, if required, through the EAFRD TA budget as set out in *Article 51 of the RDR*[28]. These financial resources should be made available for networking activities throughout the full programming period, covering activities which are clearly linked with:

a) the objectives listed in *Article 54(2) of the RDR*[29];

b) the activities included in the Action Plan of the NRN.

Critical is that the resources available for the NRN through the Member States TA budget are apportioned according to needs, so the importance of networking has to be well understood as the NSU as its AWP will be competing against other demands for the TA budget.

Securing the necessary resources can be helped by integrating the elements of the Regulation that obliges Managing Authorities to incorporate provisions for networking in the preparation of their National Strategic Plan. This will help to ensure that in the drafting of the RDPs, Managing Authorities also include a list of key actions that will be undertaken by the network which must then be taken into account when calculating the networks' 'share' of financial support from the TA budget.

---

28   Regulation (EU) 1305/2013: *http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF*
29   As above.

Human resources

For many NSUs, staff costs represent the major component of their budget, followed by other significant costs such as events, publications and the network website. These staff resources often also include external expertise; and the possibility that internal NSU skills may need to be complemented with the support of external technical experts should always be considered. An attempt should be made to strike a balance between the work done by internal staff, and that done by external resources.

Do's and Don'ts

DON'T forget that network members are also a useful resource and bring a range of knowledge, skills and expertise which can be harnessed by the NSU. So **DO** consider using an open, informal membership approach, which offers more potential and motivation for rural stakeholders to engage with the network and get fully involved with networking activities.

The challenge of NSU resource-planning

The fact that NSUs often struggle with insufficient human resources is well reflected by an email from an NSU member to the ENRD:

"We will try to come to the meeting next week, but we don´t have yet signatures, tickets and accommodation booked. Yesterday we had the Annual RDP Examination Meeting with DG AGRI and today the RDP Monitoring Committee meeting. Saturday and Sunday I have two speeches to prepare- one on rural entrepreneurship, and the other on quality products-. I´m also responsible for a three-day event for all RDP Directors of the 28 MS in few days. Still, I think it is important to make the effort and participate to the next ENRD meeting, so I will let you know more."

EXTENDING THE NETWORK
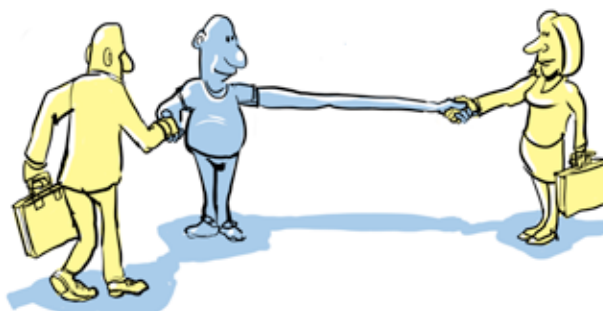
NSU representatives who attended the *15th NRN Meeting in Finland*[30] identified some key roles required for an NSU team, possible roles for complementary experts and the key skills required in order to deliver the AWP efficiently. These are illustrated in the diagram below:

Core skills and roles within an NSU

Complementary roles

Core roles

Head / Manager

Administrator

Public relations and promotion

Procurement

Core Skills
- Organisational skills
- Rural Development, Common Agricultural Policy and EU Policy knowledge
- Experience of working with stakeholders
- Knowledge of communication tools and dissemination activities
- Diplomacy / Facilitation / Liaison competencies
- Animation
- Presentation and communication
- Event management
- Foreign languages
- Computer literacy

Researcher

Communication coordinator

IT and web support

NRN Facilitator

Network Events Coordinator

Legal support

Accounting and contract management

---

30   15th NRN meeting, 8-9 May 2012, Finland:
      http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/meetings/en/15th-nrn-meeting_en.cfm

When assessing human resource needs, the team as a whole rather than the individuals should be evaluated as far as possible. This helps to ensure a good blend of experience within the team. It involves getting the right balance of experience and knowledge, hard and soft skills, dynamism and reliability. NSU teams are often highly diverse and there is also a large variation in the number of staff engaged in each NSU to deliver these core services and important roles.

Attracting and retaining a core group of NSU experts with the appropriate skills and experience to deliver basic services to the network, helps to ensure the NSU achieves a minimum level of activity in the 'core areas of network competency'. Achieving this minimum level helps the network to build its credibility, grow over time, and deliver more long-term benefits in support of policy or programme objectives.

Do's and Don'ts

DO remember that new faces and new talent are also important resources. **DON'T** always work with the same set of stakeholders; make sure that new perspectives enter the process through involving new stakeholders or new members of the same stakeholder groups.

Good coordination & transparency in decision-making is crucial

Good coordination, versatility and flexibility are required to ensure the optimum use of the resources available – as well as transparency in all decision-making and management actions regarding their use. Developing an intervention logic framework enables proper planning and can act as a good communication tool with the Managing Authority, co-ordination committee (where it exists) and the network members, building a shared understanding of what the network is trying to achieve with its resources and how.

Did you know that...

... Successful rural networks are fuelled by trust. Do not undervalue this important resource. Work to build and maintain trust at all levels of network operation.

Useful resources developed by ENRD

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Toolkit, NSU training programme, Pilot NSU Training Module 1: "Strategic Planning Issues for NRNs"*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/pilot-nsu-training-programme/en/pilot-nsu-training-module-1_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Toolkit, NSU training programme, NSU Training Module 4: "Network Resource Planning"*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/pilot-nsu-training-programme/en/pilot-nsu-training-module-4_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Self-assessment Toolkit, Practical Tools for NRN Self-assessment, Existing Tools Used by NRNs for Self-assessment*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/practical-tools-for-nrn-self-assessment/en/existing-tools-used-by-nrns-for-self-assessment_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Toolkit, Principles and Practice of Networking, Setting-up the Network*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/principles-and-practice-of-networking/setting-up-the-network/en/network-management-and-operational-mandate_en.cfm*

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Toolkit, Building on Lessons Learnt, Lessons from the ENRD*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/building-on-lessons-learnt/lessons-from-the-enrd/en/making-a-success-of-networking_en.cfm*

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking Stories, AVN Stories: NRN Tasks*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-nrn-tasks_en.cfm

ENRD, 15th NRN Meeting, 8-9 May 2012, Ähtäri, Finland:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/meetings/en/15th-nrn-meeting_en.cfm

ENRD, 16th NRN Meeting, 18-19 October 2012, Nicosia, Cyprus:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/meetings/en/16th-nrn-meeting_en.cfm

ENRD (2012) *What do we know about Networking as a Rural Development Policy Tool (2007-2013)?, A Discussion Paper from the ENRD, May 2012*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=837D98FA-C1BC-8182-E67A-93D2B2B70528

ENRD (2013) *ENRD Network Support Unit (NSU), Peer–to-Peer Training Programme, MODULE 4: Network Resource Planning, Gdansk, Poland, 13 September 2013*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/pilot-nsu-training/module04/P2P_Training-Module-4-notes-and-conclusions.pdf

Other relevant resources:

European Commission website, *Evaluation, Methodological bases, Evaluation process (How ?), Intervention strategy, Intervention logic*:
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/evaluation/methodology/methods/mth_log_en.htm#04 (Last accessed on 01/05/2014)

European Commission (20/01/2014). *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm (Last accessed on 01/05/2014)

Government of the Republic of Serbia, EU Integration Office (2011) *Guide to the Logical Framework Approach, Second edition,* Belgrade : Global Print :
http://www.evropa.gov.rs/Evropa/ShowDocument.aspx?Type=Home&Id=525 (Last accessed on 01/05/2014)

Ramalingam, B. (2011) *Mind the network gaps. London: Overseas Development Institute:*
http://www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/7110.pdf (Last accessed on 01/05/2014)

Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the European Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005*:*
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF (Last accessed on 01/05/2014)

In accordance with Article 54(3) of the *Rural Development Regulation (RDR) No 1305/2013*[31] National Rural Networks (NRNs) are obliged to include certain activities in their 2014-2020 Action Plans, namely:

- the collection of examples of projects covering all priorities of the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs);

- the facilitation of thematic and analytical exchanges between rural development stake-holders, sharing and dissemination of findings;

- the provision of training and networking for Local Action Groups (LAGs) and in particular technical assistance for inter-territorial and transnational co-operation, facilitation of co-operation among LAGs and the search of partners for the measure referred to in Article 35;

- the provision of networking for advisors and innovation support services;

- the sharing and dissemination of monitoring and evaluation findings;

- a communication plan including publicity and information concerning the RDP in agreement with the Managing Authorities (MAs) and information and communication activities aimed at a broader public;

- the participation in and contribution to the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD).

In order to support Network Support Units (NSUs), as well as network members and other inter-ested stakeholders, with their work during the 2014-2020 programming period, this part of the NRN Guidebook is structured according to the tasks specified for NRNs by the RDR. The various sub-sections aim to bring together the experience accumulated to date by the ENRD and NRNs in the given area, including added value of networking stories, outcomes of various training events and NRN meetings, network analyses and reports, findings from the NRN Toolkit and NRN self-assessment Toolkit. Several other resources that the ENRD, NRNs and other rural development stakeholders developed over the years are also referenced.

3.1   Collection and dissemination of project examples

Legal framework

In accordance with Article 54(3) of the *Rural Development Regulation (RDR) No 1305/2013*[32] National Rural Networks (NRNs) are expected to include *activities regarding the collection of examples of projects covering all priorities of the Rural development Programmes (RDPs)* in their 2014-2020 Action Plans. The collection and dissemination of project examples by NRNs is expected to particularly contribute to the NRN objectives on 'improving the implementation of RDP' and 'informing the broader public and potential beneficiaries' (as per Article 54(2) of the RDR).

The collection of project examples is not a new task for NRNs and Network Support Units (NSUs), and considerable experience has already been accumulated in this field. During the 2007-2013 programming period "*the identification and analysis of good transferable practices and the provision of information about them*" was one of the main tasks assigned to NRNs[33], as well as to the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD)[34]. Project collection and dissemination has also been an important activity for other networks at EU level, such as ELARD[35], and other organisations involved in the implementation of EU rural development policy.

Purposes of project collection

In practical terms there are two main purposes for the collection and dissemination of project examples:

• to improve the implementation of the RDPs, and

• to communicate to the wider public information about the actions the RDPs are supporting.

Project examples can improve the implementation of the RDPs in several ways. Firstly, they can act directly as 'good transferable practices'. They can also be used in supporting thematic anal-yses, which in turn inform improvement to policy implementation or future policy. Regarding the wider communication role that the dissemination of projects fulfils, project examples provide the possibility for any interested stakeholders, to learn more about the content of publicly funded rural development projects. Furthermore, project information improves the knowledge and the understanding of potential beneficiaries about funding opportunities. Project examples also demonstrate how public money is spent, and thus help contribute to transparent use of EU funds.

Project examples provide the opportunity to share and disseminate knowledge, experiences and ideas. It is a body of knowledge that improves RDP implementation by maximising the use of the knowledge gained by rural actors across the EU to address various rural development issues, including challenges as well as success factors and lessons learnt. Sharing information on project examples also contributes to transferring useful practices between various actors and territories.

What to collect?

The collection, sharing and dissemination of 'good', 'best' and/or 'relevant', practices are methods widely used in public policy. However, gaps can exist in understanding the distinction between these different terms.

---

32   Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013:
     http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF
33   Art.68.2 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005:
     http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32005R1698:en:NOT
34   Art 67 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005. (as above).
35   European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD): *http://www.elard.eu/*

The terms 'good practice', 'best practice', 'smart practice' and 'relevant experience' are often used in the public policy context as alternative ways of expressing almost the same thing, i.e. useful project examples. In fact, the term 'best practice' is used less and less with regard to public programmes and projects. This acknowledges the fact that different approaches yield different results depending on the specific context. Hence, the term 'best practice' or even 'good practice' may be redundant in situations where something works well in one context but not so well in another. Therefore, policy analysts often use more neutral terms such as 'relevant experience'. This approach has been favoured by the ENRD in relation to the collection of project examples – as articulated below.

Good practice or relevant experience?

Understanding what constitutes good practice is important for people working in the field of rural development. In the context of the implementation of the 2007-2013 RDPs, this issue became particularly pertinent when sufficient experience was accumulated and a critical mass of projects was supported and could be assessed and disseminated. One of the most relevant questions raised during debates has been: whether it is possible to create a common set of criteria on what a good practice is. In other words: If, for instance, a group of rural development practitioners were given the same batch of projects to assess and rate, would they assess them (more or less) the same way – and if so, would the assessment be sound? Could a set of criteria be defined that would help all the practitioners to provide a consistent and objective assessment of each project's strengths (and weaknesses)?

Certain criteria exist that are commonly used when assessing the added value or relevance of projects. These include: demonstrable results and (potential) impact that projects may bring to local communities; the project's innovative character (i.e. how far did the project produce something 'new' in a given context, or used a method not used before); and/or the project's 'transferability' to other areas and projects. No common set of criteria has been developed, principally because what will work best is primarily dependent on the context that the practice, method or technology will be employed in, in the future – not on the context that it originated in. Nevertheless, a lot of useful experience has been developed by the NRNs and this can be drawn on when considering criteria for assessing a project's performance.

In October 2013 the Finnish NRN organised a workshop called '*Towards Best Practices 2.0*'* aiming at creating a shared vision on how future good practices on rural development can be collected, analysed, disseminated and transferred. Some of the key conclusions from the workshop were as follows:

- The concept of 'good practice' is contextual. The relevance of a practice needs to be evaluated within the context that it is implemented in, and importantly, the context(s) that it is potentially being considered for. This makes it challenging to define specific criteria for 'good practice'.

- Given the importance of context, an important starting point (but arguably not the only one), should be the identification of needs. These needs may be local. The identification of key themes/ 'hot topics' at regional or national level can also form the basis of the identification of good practices.

- The identification of key themes/ 'hot topics' at regional, national and also European level can inform decisions on identifying a specific targeted set of 'good transferable practices'. The development of criteria is likely to be more practicable and useful in relation to specific themes. Good practices identified on this basis will also then be more useful in the context of thematic work.

- The development of innovative projects using new solutions to common issues often implies a relatively higher risk of failure. In cases where failure may occur, the collection of practices should involve learning from under-achievements. The learning process associated with the dissemination of good practices in fact can help rural practitioners from repeating the same mistakes.

* Towards Best Practices 2.0, 8-9 October 2013, Helsinki, Finland: *http://www.maaseutu.fi/en/index/RuralNetwork/news/6LJq0N4f5.html* (Last accessed on 01/05/14)

The ENRD RDP Database

The collection and dissemination of examples of RDP-funded projects from all EU member States has been one of the key tasks of the ENRD Contact Point (CP) in 2007-2013. The main tool used to support this task was a web-based RDP Projects Database, which now[36] contains over 600 project examples. Development of this database was a 'step-by-step' process. In the first year, discussions focused on finding an appropriate approach for collecting project examples with a particular emphasis upon identifying 'good practice'. In the second year, the emphasis shifted to a consideration of 'relevant experience', thereby avoiding the need to make value judgments about individual projects. This simplified the process and a pilot database and project collection phase was started involving a core group of NRNs. Finally, a full database and enhanced data collection template was designed, which was rolled out in all EU-27 Member States during subsequent years.

Did you know that...

The 'Towards Best Practices 2.0' expert workshop in Finland (Oct 2013) concluded that processes as well as projects should be taken into consideration. The identification and description of approaches and methods can contribute directly to improving the implementation of rural development policies.

Source: Towards Best Practices 2.0, 8-9 Oct 2013 Helsinki, Finland

The ENRD's RDP Projects Database now provides a critical mass of project examples, which can help many stakeholders to better understand and appreciate how the EAFRD and national co-finance has been used across the Member States across all four axes of the EAFRD 2007-2013. Examples from all Member States are included and there is a separate sub-section for transnational cooperation projects. This database has been an important resource for supporting other ENRD activities and a range of more elaborated case studies have been disseminated[37] in the *EAFRD Project Brochures, ENRD Magazine*, the *EU Rural Review*, *ENRD video library*, and ENRD social media channels (*Twitter* and *Facebook*) as well as feeded into various seminars and workshops.

Findings from an internal ENRD self-assessment exercise highlighted some useful points about the project database. These are summarised in the box below.

ENRD experience of collecting project practices and developing a database of RDP examples.

The main purpose of the RDP project database was to demonstrate what RDPs have achieved. The database's projects needed to provide a representative coverage of all RDP measures and all Member States.

The ENRD self-evaluation highlighted that the collection of examples has followed a 'natural cycle'. As one of the interviewees of the self-evaluatoin stated: *"We needed to throw the net wider initially, to collect 'relevant' examples; then we moved to 'interesting' and 'useful' and also 'representative'; and the next step is 'qualitative' or some kind of value judgment on 'good' or 'best'."*

Source: ENRD Self-assessment Report (2013, unpublished)

---

36   Data until April 2014.
37   ENRD website, *Publications & Media:*
       http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications-and-media/en/publications-and-media_en.cfm

The collection of 'relevant experiences' should go beyond the collection of project examples. Useful experiences can not only be demonstrated through project examples, but also through presenting relevant rural development methods, processes, and practices. For example, the ENRD prepared a *series of informative fiches*[38] aiming to present, examples of not only projects, but also useful practices and approaches, in terms of delivery mechanisms, that Member States and regions have employed to implement their RDPs. These examples aimed to contribute to a better understanding of what worked well, and less well, during the delivery of the 2007-2013 RDPs and as far as possible, draw lessons to inform future improvement of the programmes.

Looking beyond the collection of project examples: Relevant methods and processes

The collection of examples requires strong cooperation between different parties, including beneficiaries, Managing Authorities (MAs) and European-level stakeholders. This kind of coordination to develop project examples in a meaningful and structured way requires time and human resources. At the European level, the ENRD needed to rely on NSUs to provide project examples from the Member States. According to the *ENRD Self-assessment Report*[39], ensuring the engagement of NSUs proved to be a challenging and resource-intensive task. The main challenges in this regard were: (i) the lack of commitment on behalf of certain NSUs, mostly due to lack of time and resources; (ii) the lack of detailed information and weak quality of information in some cases (i.e. often stakeholders provide too short descriptions of projects examples that do not allow readers to understand the details of the projects); and (iii) language issues (i.e. challenges to provide project information in English)[40].

Challenges of projects collection

Innovative ways have been developed by NRNs to champion project example collection. 'Awards' and 'good project competitions' for instance are incentives for stakeholders to provide information about 'good practice' project examples. The dissemination of project examples through awards, not only represents a great opportunity to spread valuable knowledge and experiences, but is also an opportunity for stakeholders to gain better visibility through the NRNs.

Did you know that...

… According to the results of the ENRD 2014 NRN statistics reports, in the 2007-2013 programming period NSUs collected, analysed and disseminated 17,118 examples from across the RDPs, which corresponds to over 100 examples per NSU per year.

Source: ENRD (2014), 2014 NRN statistics report. Data from 23 NSUs that answered the 2014 NRN statistics survey.

---

38   ENRD website, *Rural Development Gateway 2014-2010, RDP Implementation, Current practices across the EU 27*:
      http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/cap-towards-2020/rdp-programming-2014-2020/rdp-implementation/en/rdp-implementation_en.cfm
39   ENRD (2013, unpublished) *ENRD Self-assessment Report and ENRD (2014)* "Not everything that connects is a network"
40   As above.

Examples of project examples collection: awarding and communicating

From 1999 to 2009 the Austrian NRN organised the **"Agricultural Innovation Award"**. The aim of the awards was to motivate farmers to develop new methods, new products or new activities and demonstrate these through successful best practice examples. "Successful" was defined as financially proven, strategic, with a clear concept and combining economic success with quality of life.

Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E8EE1C-F023-0B97-6AA1-73CD85AB4CD2

In 2012 the Estonian NRN launched the competition **"Notice innovative agriculture"** that focused on RDP Axis 1 – competitiveness of agriculture. The competition was announced through the NRN's e-newsletter, a press release, advertisements and letters. The competition was organised with the help of three experts who prepared the application forms and other required documents. The project examples of the finalists were presented in a brochure distributed in Estonian and in English.

Source: ENRD website, AVN Story: Networking elements:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=5A454F97-D7DB-633E-CC18-23FAC15393AC

Every year since 2009, Poland's NRN has organised the **'Friendly village' competition**. The competition aims at promoting the best rural infrastructure projects. These are defined as projects that remove barriers in access to cultural values and education, eliminate social inequalities and at the same time protect environment and Polish cultural heritage.

Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E9C1A2-C7AC-A6C8-20A9-86C19A605ECF

From April 2011 to November 2011 the Italian NRN participated to the Fiuggi Family Festival with a number of **videos telling the stories of rural families**, made by a professional film maker. Thanks to the participation at the film festival, the Italian NRN was able to communicate rural development to the general public, and not only to rural development 'professionals'.

Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E98C97-D706-505C-2E7E-25B6875A084A

Presentation of project examples

The format and content of project examples matter. It is important to present projects in a clear and easily understandable manner, including key elements. As a general 'rule', the description of projects should include (i) some basic details about the project (including project promoter, budget, location, etc.); (ii) the description should follow a form of 'intervention logic', including information on the background and context (key issues that the project would like to address), purpose, activities, inputs (e.g. stakeholders involved), outputs and results; and (iii) if possible information on 'success factors' (i.e. what made the project successful) as well as 'main challenges', 'lessons learnt', and some visuals (e.g. photos and/or video if available).

Did you know that...

... the ENRD website statistics indicate that practical and easily accessible information and tools, such as the RDP project database, have been the most widely used sections of the ENRD website.

Source: ENRD (2013, unpublished) ENRD Self-assessment Report

As indicated above, a wealth of experience was also accumulated about the dissemination of project examples at both the national and European levels by the NSUs. The way and form of dissemination of project examples will very much depend on the purpose and target of dissemination.

According to the results of the *ENRD 2014 NRN statistics report*[41] (based on 2007-2013 data) the dissemination of project examples via websites was by far the most frequently used form to communicate individual best practice examples, success stories and relevant experiences. Many NRN websites include project examples databases with interactive features or website sections specifically dedicated to the dissemination of project 'stories' or examples. The second most commonly used tool to disseminate project examples was conferences, followed by publications and e-newsletters.

Besides the more traditional forms of project example dissemination, some of the NSUs experimented with more innovative and creative ways of sharing the projects examples collected. The ENRD 2014 NRN statistics report showed that project examples have also been presented through social media such as YouTube, through short films distributed via DVD and through NRN road shows.

Project examples dissemination

Do's and Don'ts

DO consider who are the target group(s) for dissemination at the beginning of designing a 'good practices' methodology.

DON'T fall into the trap of thinking that it is all about the database of good practice examples. It is about the *use* that the information is put to.

DO consider implementation methods and procedures as well as projects.

Did you know that...

... from 2007 to 2013 out of the (more than) 17,000 examples collected by NRNs:

- 10,365 projects examples were disseminated through the NRNs websites,

- 2,468 were distributed through conferences,

- 1,588 were distributed through publications,

- 1,304 were distributed through e-newsletters, and

- 707 were prepared in relation to the conduct of study visits.

Source: ENRD (2014), 2014 NRN statistics report. Data from 23 NSUs that answered the 2014 NRN statistics survey.

---

41   ENRD (2014) *2013 Common Network Statistics Report*:
       http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/networking-statistics-and-studies_en.cfm

Examples of project examples dissemination: databases, newsletters and publications

The Italian NRN created an **interactive database of project examples** providing the opportunity to search according to different filters including themes and regions. Videos and pictures are available for each of the examples, as well as a detailed interview with the project implementers.
Source: Italian NRN website, Eccellenze rurali:
http://www.reterurale.it/downloads/eccellenzerurali/ (Last accessed on 1/05/14)

The Dutch NRN produced a **publication** called **'Pearls of the Dutch Countryside'** presenting a collection of project examples related to measures belonging to all RDP Axes. Attention was given to the selection of projects focusing on innovative solutions. The publication was produced in Dutch language and translated to English for international dissemination.
Source: ENRD (2013) Dutch NRN – Pearls of the Dutch Countryside':
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-information/nl/nrn_nl_pearls_of_the_dutch_countryside.pdf

The Czech NRN created a **database of videos on project examples** that included 146 films. This dissemination method presented successful RDP projects and their partners. It helped to attract visitors to the NSU sub-portal 'Rural Areas', and increased awareness of the specific activities and outputs of the network's partners in the regions.
Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=D0182A74-AD2C-00FF-95C2-212A52CE9D19

Ireland's NSU produces a 12-page newsletter, written and designed to a high standard, that is published once a quarter in both hard and soft-copy. The **newsletter** is used to disseminate **project examples and actions from all Axes and it targets** rural development actors across a wide range of activities. A journalist with an excellent background in rural development is hired to interview RDP project stakeholders, write the articles and source appropriate photographs.
Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E96FC3-9F7A-1F80-0DB8-7658BED34A89

The English NSU created a **project examples database that was purposely designed to be open for anyone** to upload projects. No log-in procedures or complicated forms were required . By the end of 2013 the database contained more than 1600 projects. Evidence has demonstrated that people have used the information provided in the database to develop their own projects by contacting existing project managers and sharing application forms enabling them to save considerable time when completing their own applications.
Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E9F446-E836-6FD6-BA55-4A6F08060ADA

Useful resources developed by ENRD

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Toolkit, Building on Lessons Learnt, Lessons from the ENRD:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/building-on-lessons-learnt/lessons-from-the-nrns/en/lessons-from-the-nrns_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, Networking Statistics and Studies:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/networking-statistics-and-studies_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: Networking elements:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-networking-elements_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: NRN Tasks:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-nrn-tasks_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Publications and Media, EU Rural Review:*
 http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications-and-media/eu-rural-review/en/eu-rural-review_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Publications and Media, ENRD Magazine:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications-and-media/enrd-magazine/en/enrd-magazine_en.cfm

ENRD website*, Publications and Media, EAFRD Project Brochures:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications-and-media/eafrd-project-brochures/en/eafrd-projects-brochure_en.cfm

ENRD website*, Rural Development Gateway 2014-2010, RDP Implementation,*
Current practices across the EU 27:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/cap-towards-2020/rdp-programming-2014-2020/rdp-implementation/en/rdp-implementation_en.cfm

ENRD website*, Rural Development Gateway 2014-2020:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/cap-towards-2020/rdp-programming-2014-2020/rdp-implementation/en/rdp-implementation_en.cfm

ENRD (2010) *The PIKSE pilot results and potential ways forward:* *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.*
cfm?id=ACD5DE47-AEA6-0D8F-9EEC-D2D4C0F1F895

ENRD (2013, unpublished), *ENRD Self-assessment Report*

ENRD (2014) Self-assessment of the European Network for Rural Development: "Not everything that 'connects' is a network": *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-self-assessment/final_disseminationmaterial_enrd.pdf*

ENRD (2014) *2013 Common Network Statistics Report*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/networking-statistics-and-studies_en.cfm

ENRD (2014) *Findings of the 2014 NRN mapping exercise – NRNs in transition (preparation for the 2014-2020 programming period): Final report:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/networking-statistics-and-studies_en.cfm

Other relevant resources

Dutch NRN (2013) *'Pearls of the Dutch Countryside':*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-information/nl/nrn_nl_pearls_of_the_dutch_countryside.pdf

European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD):
http://www.elard.eu/ (Last accessed on 01/05/2014)

Italian NRN website, Eccellenze rurali:
http://www.reterurale.it/downloads/eccellenzerurali/ (Last accessed on 01/05/14)

Regulation (EU) No 1305/2 013 of the European Parliament and of the European Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No *1698/2005: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF (Last accessed on 01/05/14)*

Towards Best Practices 2.0, 8-9 October 2013, Helsinki, Finland:
http://www.maaseutu.fi/en/index/RuralNetwork/news/6LJq0N4f5.html (Last accessed on 01/05/14)

3.2 Facilitating thematic and analytical exchanges between rural development stakeholders

Legal framework

In accordance with Article 54(3)(b)(ii) of the *Rural Development Regulation (RDR) 1305/2013*[42], National Rural Networks (NRNs) have to include thematic and analytical exchanges as a part of their 2014-2020 Action Plans.

Thematic and analytical exchanges are expected to primarily contribute to the objective of improving the quality of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) implementation (as per Article 54(2) of the RDR).[43] Thematic and analytical exchanges can increase knowledge on specific topics, such as innovation. They are also therefore expected to contribute 'to foster innovation' as noted in the *NRN Guidance Fiche*[44].

Did you know that...

...one of the indicators defined for networks by the draft Implementing Act is the '*Number of thematic and analytical exchanges set up with the support of NRNs*', defined as the total number of thematic and analytical exchanges, broken down by type and by 'focus area'.

Source: Commission Draft Implementing Regulation (Not yet adopted at the time of finalising this Guidebook)

In addition, the NRN Guidance Fiche specifies that NRNs, as part of their own monitoring and self-assessment exercise, should monitor the thematic and analytical exchange activities through the collection of data to inform basic indicators such as *"the number of thematic and analytical exchanges set up with the support of NRN"*.

---

42   See Article 54(3)(b)(ii) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013:
     http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF
43   As above.
44   European Commission (20/01/2014). *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm*; Article 5 of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013 [CPR]; Art. 51, 52, 54 and 66i Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013:
     http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF

Thematic and analytical exchanges are important for gaining knowledge on relevant rural development topics and understanding how rural development is implemented in different contexts. These activities also contribute to raising awareness about key policy issues and to elaborating ideas for the design, implementation and improvement of rural development strategies and programmes.

The usefulness of thematic and analytical exchanges

"People need to talk to each other and share experiences, this is not theory, it is practice. This has been the most powerful element of the working groups."

ENRD (2014) Case Study 2 of the ENRD Self-assessment

Exchanges can be promoted by NRNs in different forms. The most common form of thematic exchanges developed by NRNs, has been permanent or *ad hoc* Thematic Working Groups (TWGs). NRN TWGs bring together diverse stakeholders to discuss, analyse and share information on common topics, often resulting in recommendations related to RDP implementation and programming. NRNs have organised permanent TWGs in relation to each RDP Axis during the 2007-2013 period.

Different kinds of thematic and analytical exchanges

Furthermore, NRN representatives often benefitted from exchange and thematic analyses through participation within the ENRD TWGs, Focus Groups (FGs) and other **thematic initiatives**. As a follow up, NSUs have and will need in the future to plan for and organise dissemination of findings and recommendations from the ENRD's thematic work.

Thematic and analytical exchanges in the 2007-2013 period covered a large range of themes from climate change to rural entrepreneurship, and from social inclusion to innovation. NRNs have formulated topics for their thematic work based on evidence of analyses and needs assessments of the RDPs.

Common themes of thematic and analytical exchanges

The *2013 ENRD Mapping exercise*[45] classified the NRN TWGs by clusters of themes and individual themes. The following themes have been the subject of thematic exchanges within NRNs, in order of frequency: (a) cooperation and LEADER, (b) economic diversification, (c) rural policy, (c) sustainable use of agriculture and forestry land, (d) quality of life, (e) agriculture, (f) social issues and demography, and (g) planning and territorial development.

Within these clusters, some individual themes have been more frequently the subject of TWGs, namely:

✓ LEADER, including the future of LEADER;

✓ The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post 2013, future of the countryside, preparation of the 2014-2020 RDPs;

✓ Rural entrepreneurship, including farm enterprise, farm partnership, small farm cooperation and diversification;

✓ Local products, short supply-chains, including food, tourism/leisure, and rural-urban linkages;

✓ Forestry, forest and the environment, including flood/erosion challenges, and integrated nature protection.

---

45   ENRD (2013) *Findings of the 2012 NRN Mapping Exercise, Final synthesis report*

Women in Rural Development Thematic Working Group, Northern Ireland

In an attempt to increase the involvement of women in the life of rural areas, the National Support Unit of the Northern Ireland Rural Network established a **'Women in Rural Development'** TWG. Launched in January 2012, the TWG explored a range of issues affecting rural women. The group brought together representatives from Local Action Groups (LAGs), the Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster (YFCU), Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) and the Countryside Agri-Rural Partnership Ltd. The TWG put in place a series of activities and events aimed at, firstly showcasing women who had taken advantage of RDP opportunities, and secondly encouraging others to do so similarly.

The TWG was a success as it brought together those with a specific interest in the subject to discuss challenges and opportunities for the future. The group members made new contacts which they have maintained since the formal work of the group has been completed. Initially the work of the group was to identify and examine levels of female participation in the RDP implementation and identify good practice examples. The outcomes have been significantly more as the TWG engaged with stakeholders across all RDP axes. The series of thematic events coordinated by the NSU, attracted more than 200 women participants. It provided women who had created, diversified or developed their own business with a voice to encourage others and to showcase their products and build networks.

Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=D0362BFE-A13D-223B-CC55-C39D884CF525*

Exchange of thematic expertise is also an important part of the ENRD's remit. Its tasks have included "...*the setup of thematic groups and/or workshops with a view to facilitating the exchange of expertise and to supporting the implementation, monitoring and further development of rural development policy*". The ENRD has focused on a variety of themes reflecting the diversity of rural development challenges at EU level. These covered the following topics:

- Targeting territorial specificities and needs in RDPs;

- Links between agriculture and the wider rural economy;

- Public goods and public intervention;

- Delivery mechanisms of EU Rural Development (RD) policy;

- Delivery of environmental services;

- Knowledge transfer and innovation;

- Youth and young farmers in rural areas;

- LEADER: implementation of the bottom-up approach; implementation of the co-operation measure; preserving its innovative/experimental character; better Local Development Strategies.

Some EU-level thematic groups have been led by NRNs and coordinated by the ENRD. These have included:

- Rural entrepreneurship;

- Local food and short-supply chains;

- Forestry;

- Financial instruments;

- Social aspects, including social farming and social inclusion and rural poverty;

- Community-Led Local Development.

Finally, specialist topics have also been addressed by the ENRD including semi-subsistence farming and RDP support to mountainous areas.

NRNs have indicated that thematic and analytical exchanges are useful for:

- discovering how the themes are addressed by different groups/stakeholders;

- enabling participants to discover important aspects of RD policy they were not aware of;

- informing different levels and stakeholders in a clear and transparent way of the challenges for the implementation of the RDPs;

- finding common challenges and exchange on solutions to those challenges;

- developing closer links and personal contacts, especially when participatory working methods are used (voluntary participation, a wide mix of participants, frequent meetings using participatory approaches).

The thematic events of the Scottish NRN

The Scottish NRN developed a series of themed events to help to improve the implementation of development support for rural Scotland's priority sectors. The work also aimed to raise awareness about the opportunities available to individuals and rural communities. Over 600 participants took part in the events from across the country ranging from local voluntary practitioners to university researchers.

Seven themed events (ranging from community services, to green tourism and renewable energy) were run between 2011 and 2012. Each event covered a distinct thematic area and was delivered with the support of specialist partners. They involved presentations, workshops and networking opportunities, which inspired lively debate.

The events provided a successful forum for networking between a wide range of organisations and people, enabling them to meet, share experiences, hear information relevant to their work and interests and establish lasting connections. The events have also enabled research activities and their results to be presented directly to rural practitioners and local communities. This has brought together two groups of stakeholders who usually have few opportunities to communicate and network directly. It is hoped that this approach has encouraged the practical application of much of this research work.

Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=F9CDD70B-EDBE-1154-BD58-F391286A2154

Thematic and analytical exchanges can successfully contribute to improve the quality of RDP implementation processes provided that:

The success factors of thematic and analytical exchanges

- The chosen topic reflects rural development challenges and needs identified and recognised by relevant stakeholders;

- The right mix of stakeholders participate; for instance, for local level exchanges, grass-root level organisations should participate;

- Stakeholders/participants have the relevant knowledge and experience on the chosen topic;

- Participation is voluntary to ensure stakeholders/participants have a genuine interest in the topic;

- Participatory methods are applied so as to encourage the active involvement of all participants;

- Stakeholders/participants knowledge and experience on the topic is taken into consideration when preparing the exchange activity;

- There are agreed basic rules for the participation, communication, process, timeframe and final expected outputs of the group's work;

- There is technical support and follow-up provided from the NSU;

- Dissemination is planned beforehand and sufficient dissemination takes place to communicate the results of thematic exchanges to other relevant stakeholders, policy makers and practitioners in charge of implementing rural development policy.

> **Keep in mind that…**
>
> … thematic working groups must be
>
> ✓ Relevant
> ✓ Participatory
> ✓ Flexible
> ✓ Inclusive
> ✓ Transparent

The results of the ENRD assessment of its TWGs and FGs

The participatory approach of the ENRD FGs proved to be highly successful and very pertinent. The groups brought together different stakeholders from different administrative and geographic levels, including MAs, NRNs, LAGs, research institutes and universities and other stakeholders such as representatives of beneficiaries, cooperatives and NGOs. This variety of stakeholders worked together closely and contributed to the exchange of experience and common understanding on practical issues. The methodologies used by the FGs have been highly valued by a large majority of the participants.

Outcomes from the groups were useful for learning how different MS/regions implement rural development policy and the problems they face, for developing long-lasting contacts with counterparts in other countries and for identifying "what works well, where and why". Useful examples were identified by the Groups that can be used as benchmarks.

Evidence indicates that replication of such benchmarks have already started as Member States adapt what they learned through the ENRD to their own circumstances (e.g. results-oriented agri-environment action, collective and territorial approaches to nature conservation of farms, packaging of RDP measures, promotion of short supply-chains, social farms, Financial Instruments, Community Led Local Development, etc.).

Source: ENRD (2013, unpublished) Case study 2 of the ENRD Self-assessment Report: Understanding the use of Thematic Working Group (TWG) and Focus Group (FG) outcomes; Annex 2 of ENRD (2014) "Not everything that 'connects' is a network"

Useful resources developed by ENRD

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN information (Note: for each Member State a page providing information on the NRN's profile and activities is available)*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-information/en/nrn-information_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: Networking elements, Facilitating exchange of practice and experience*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/facilitating-exchange_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: Networking elements, Exchange of experience and know-how*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/exchange-of-experience_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: Networking elements, Capacity building and training*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/capacity-building_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Self-Assessment Toolkit, ENRD Self-assessment*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/en/index_en.cfm

ENRD (2011) *Seminar "delivery mechanisms" – Focus groups*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/8thmeeting/367C67DD-D27D-0657-0050-D189667F335F.pdf

ENRD (2013) *Findings of the 2012 NRN Mapping Exercise, Final synthesis report*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=9956D73B-C54A-0D7C-A772-D02B98E1EA1B

ENRD (2013, unpublished), *ENRD Self-assessment Report*

ENRD (2014) Self-assessment of the European Network for Rural Development: "Not everything that 'connects' is a network": *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-self-assessment/final_disseminationmaterial_enrd.pdf*

ENRD (2014) *2013 Common Network Statistics Report*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/networking-statistics-and-studies_en.cfm

ENRD (2013, unpublished) *Case study 2 of the ENRD Self-assessment Report: Understanding the use of Thematic Working Group (TWG) and Focus Group (FG) outcomes (See also* ENRD (2014) *Annex 2 of the Self-assessment of the European Network for Rural Development: "Not everything that 'connects' is a network"*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-self-assessment/final_disseminationmaterial_enrd.pdf)

ENRD, *Scottish National Rural Network (2013), Exchanging experience through thematic events*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=995FE23D-AC58-59F7-BAD9-43CBBDB64834

Useful resources developed elsewhere

European Commission (20/01/2014) *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm* (Last accessed: 01/05/14)

Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the European Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005: *http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF* (Last accessed: 01/05/14)

Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the European Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, The Cohesion Fund, The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund covered by the Common Strategic Framework [CPR] repealing Regulation (EC) № 1083/2006: *http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0320:0469:EN:PDF* (Last accessed: 01/05/14)

3.3 Provision of training and network activities for Local Action Groups

Legal framework

Providing capacity building and training activities for Local Action Groups (LAGs) and facilitating their networking has been part of the activities and focus of many Network Support Units (NSUs) during the 2007-2013 programming period. This area of support has been specifically identified in the *Rural Development Regulation (RDR) 1305/2013*[46] as a key National Rural Network (NRN) task for the 2014-2020 period. The *NRN Guidance Fiche*[47] expects *'training and networking activities for LAGs'* to be particularly contributing to three of the key objectives set for NRNs, namely: (i) involving stakeholders; (ii) improving the quality of RDP implementation; (iii) fostering innovation. The inclusion of training and networking for LAGs as a core activity of NRNs recognises that LAGs have a vital role in the effective delivery of the LEADER approach and contribute to Rural Development Programme (RDP) implementation as a whole.

The importance of training and networking for LAGs

In the 2007-2013 programming period the performance of LAGs varied as far as developing, implementing and monitoring the Local Development Strategies (LDS) is concerned. The capacity building of LAG members, staff and stakeholders will be a condition for effective implementation of LEADER and of Community-led Local Development (CLLD) even more in the future; when complexity is likely to increase with the possibility of engaging multiple funds to support the LDSs. Need for support for capacity building increases further with the inclusion of new requirements towards the LAGs in the 2014-2020 period.

Did you know that…

… LAGs are now also obliged to deliver evaluation as part of their role and consequently training and capacity building support will be required in this area.

Source: Art. 34.3(g) Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

---

46   Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013:
      http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF
47   European Commission (20/01/2014) *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm*

It has been recognised that LAGs' training needs change during the programming period (according to the programme life-cycle): for instance, while during the early phases training needs may arise with regard to the development (and refinement) of LDSs, the focus will likely to shift towards specific implementation issues (e.g. financial management and control of small innovative projects, procurement procedures) and assessment and monitoring of LDS performance during later stages of the programme. Furthermore, the level of expertise of different LAGs also varies, e.g. the needs of newly established LAGs differ from those who have been functioning for some time.

Regular needs assessment of LAGs is the basis for the development of training content and format. LAGs should be active participants in the definition of topics and training-development. For instance, in the 2007-2013 programming period the Austrian NRN had an established permanent group of LAG Managers who advised on capacity building needs.

During the 2007-2013 programming period NSUs gained considerable experience in the area of planning and supporting LAG training and capacity-building, and diverse forms of capacity-building and training have been developed in order to enhance knowledge and skills, inspire and motivate for action:

✓ **Training modules** – 'Stand-alone' training modules, workshops and activities on specific topics/themes for LAG members and potential beneficiaries were implemented. These training activities aimed to help stakeholders better understand the rural development programme and how to identify and make use of the available opportunities for improvement in their communities[48].

✓ **Study Visits –** NRNs have used field trips and study tours at national and European levels as a way of building skills and capacity within LAGs through demonstrating existing good practices.[49] These focused on particular topics relevant for specific territories and enabled LAGs and their members to learn directly from project managers in a networking environment.

✓ **Transnational & inter-territorial exchanges** – Exchanges between LAGs and their stakeholders to support peer-to-peer learning and transfer of relevant practices were promoted , which further fostered the creation of transnational cooperation projects.

> ## Did you know that…
>
> … According to the 2013 Network Statistics Report, respondent NSUs delivered 4,139 training activities, out of which 14% covered Axis 4.
>
> *Source: ENRD (2013) Findings of the 2012 NRN Mapping Exercise: Final synthesis report*

Main forms of training delivery

> ## Did you know that…
>
> …The Slovakian NRN organised its **3rd International Conference** in 2011, which explored the mid-term evaluation of the Rural Development Programme specifically involving LAGs representatives; and a seminar on the **'Creation and Maintenance of Public Areas'** for LAGs and local actors providing expert information on village renewal, development and reconstruction seeking to preserve traditional values and the uniqueness of the countryside.
>
> *Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements, Seminar "Creation and Maintenance of Public Areas": http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=D04A102C-B7E8-9A9E-B7E6-72174D3A7C23*

---

48   See for instance ENRD website, *AVN story: Networking elements, Training for LAGs on homemade food production:*
      http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-toolkit/LVSuccessStory-LEADERhomemadefoodproduction.pdf

49   See for instance ENRD website, *AVN story: Networking elements, Dairy and Beef Farmers study tour:*
      http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E9C964-DB46-4736-9D50-719E077F7E95;
      ENRD website, *AVN story: Networking elements,* Sustainable Energy Field Trip:
      http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E9B703-BE8F-AC25-6388-2FB2E74F74A7

✓ **Seminars and conferences –** Conferences and seminars were also used extensively to support skills development and learning. For example, the Slovakian NRN organised a conference exploring LEADER approach and new challenges for the development of EU rural areas after 2013 [50].

✓ **Comprehensive training programmes** – In several Member States training programmes were carried out for LAG Managers and Board Members that focused on the roles and responsibilities; the management and implementation of LDS; the application process for project calls, including the establishment of selection criteria and the evaluation of projects, and; the principles and practice of monitoring and evaluation for LAGs[51].

Peer-to-peer learning through transnational exchange

The Flemish Rural Network travelled with 15 interested LEADER and Axis 3 stakeholders to the Eastern Plateau LAG in England. The aim was to explore LEADER delivery outside of Flanders and to enable exchanges with an English LAG. Several projects were visited and a workshop session delivered to build understanding of each other's areas and the LEADER approach used.

Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements, LAG exchanges from Flanders to England:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E902DF-B258-AA98-703B-29C3F34265E3

The Hungarian NRN organised a summit for LAGs operating in the countries of the Carpathian Basin, the aim of which was to share good practice, strengthen cooperation and support their partner search activities. During the event participants received support to reinforce cross-border cooperation in the Carpathian Basin and explore social and cultural connections through workshops and other forms of knowledge transfer.

Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements, Sharing experience in the Carpathian Basin:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=5A51C367-C1C9-A5ED-D425-245DB8E3F06B

Further NSU activities in support of LAGs

LAG members and staff have been some of the most active stakeholder groups of NRNs, and this is one of the reasons that many networking activities developed by NSUs focused on LAGs. NRNs have facilitated networking opportunities for LAGs not only through capacity-building and training, but also through a range of other support activities, including:

• **Establishing permanent working groups on LEADER** – working groups have been established to steer the work of the NRNs in support to LEADER and contribute to the analysis of evaluation results.

• **Online exchange platforms** – Many NSUs have established and animated online discussion groups on topics of interest to LAGs and other relevant stakeholders.

• **LEADER Fairs** – Fairs have been a common activity with national and often international participation, allowing for a mixture of interactive discussions, displaying projects and local food products.

Source: ENRD (2014), 2013 Common Network Statistics Report: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/
en/networking-statistics-and-studies_en.cfm

---

50   ENRD website, *AVN story: Networking elements,The Future of LEADER post 2013*:
     http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E9C4A3-DC18-DAF4-C4F9-F1F902C2DF47
51   ENRD website, *AVN story: Networking elements, LAG Training on LEADER:*
     http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-toolkit/MTSuccessStory-TrainingtotheLAGsonLEADER.pdf

A number of common lessons can be drawn from the *Added Value of Networking (AVN) stories*[52] collected by the ENRD on the provision of training for LAGs, including:

- Needs assessment and constant feedback from LAG stakeholders are needed to best target capacity-building activities;

- The provision of training support should come at the right time, i.e. the training topics should be timely and effectively assist the delivery of LDSs;

- Training activities should include time for networking and discussion, because much can be learnt through sharing experiences and peer-to-peer exchange;

- Innovative and participative training methods and formats, such as the use of 'good practice' examples and study trips, are proven to help trainees' learning and understanding, thus improving the effectiveness of the training activities;

- In order to create partnership relations and a common understanding of the themes addressed during training, it is important to involve other stakeholders as well as LAG representatives, in particular the Managing Authority (MA) and Paying Agency (PA).

Common lessons

Did you know that…

… almost one-third of the 'Added value of networking stories' collected by ENRD from NSUs focused on 'capacity-building and training activities for LAGs', reflecting an extensive source of relevant experience.

Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements; ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements

Joint organisation of LAG training in Slovakia by the NRN, Managing Authority and Paying Agency

During the 2007-2013 programming period 29 LAGs were established in Slovakia. LAGs were asked to begin the implementation of their LDSs soon after their selection. The Slovakian NRN, working in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Paying Agency, delivered a training programme for the managers of these new LAGs. The aim of the training was to provide comprehensive information on how to assess grant applications. The information provided enabled LAG Managers to assess and select objectively and transparently the most appropriate applications in support of their LDS. The training also provided opportunities for LAGs to network with Managing Authority and Paying Agency representatives, which helped to establish working relationships that improved the quality of their activities.

Source: ENRD website, Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: Networking elements, Training for LAG managers: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E9ECF2-901F-D0AE-6A5B-E4F5E44A490F

---

52 ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value Of Networking, AVN Stories: Networking elements:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-networking-elements_en.cfm;
ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: NRN Tasks:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-nrn-tasks_en.cfm

Need for a complex capacity-building strategy

The ENRD '*LEADER Subcommittee Focus Group on the Implementation of the bottom-up approach*'[53] (Focus Group 1) identified a potential weakness, namely that many training activities provided by NSUs could be considered as being *ad hoc,* i.e. not based on a capacity building strategy. The report suggested that a strategic approach should be adopted, based upon a robust identification of training needs. To be effective and efficient, all training programmes must start with a needs assessment. The strategy should include the 'who', 'what', 'when' and 'why' of training.

Do's and Don'ts

NSUs and Managing Authorities **DO** need to think about LAG training as part of a more comprehensive capacity-building strategy (rather than as single, stand-alone events).

Useful resources developed by ENRD

ENRD website, *LEADER, LEADER Gateway: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader/en/leader_en.cfm*

ENRD website, *LEADER , LEADER analyses, FG1 – Implementation of the bottom-up approach of LEADER: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader/leader/focus-groups/en/focus-group-1_en.cfm*

ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: Networking elements: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-networking-elements_en.cfm*

ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: NRN Tasks: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-nrn-tasks_en.cfm*

ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: NRN Tasks, Training, networking & cooperation support for LAGs: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/training-networking-cooperation-support-for-lags_en.cfm*

ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: Networking elements, Capacity building and training: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/capacity-building_en.cfm*

ENRD website, *Themes, Community-led Local Development (CLLD): http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/themes/clld/en/clld_en.cfm*

ENRD (2010) *Leader subcommittee Focus Group on the Implementation of the bottom-up approach – Extended Report: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=B66F1BB9-BE4C-5C73-E1F3-B9FE448D0A18#*

ENRD (2013) *Findings of the 2012 NRN Mapping Exercise: Final synthesis report: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/networking-statistics-and-studies_en.cfm*

ENRD (2014), *2013 Common Network Statistics Report: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/networking-statistics-and-studies_en.cfm*

53   ENRD website, *LEADER , LEADER analyses, FG1 – Implementation of the bottom-up approach of LEADER : http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader/leader/focus-groups/en/focus-group-1_en.cfm*

Other relevant resources

European Commission (20/01/2014) *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm (Last accessed: 01/05/14)*

Miller J. A., Osinski D. M., (2002) *Training needs assessment,* ISPI:
http://www.ispi.org/pdf/suggestedReading/Miller_Osinski.pdf (Last accessed: 01/05/14)

Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the European Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF (Last accessed: 01/05/14)

Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the European Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, The Cohesion Fund, The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund covered by the Common Strategic Framework [CPR] repealing Regulation (EC) № 1083/2006: *http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0320:0469:EN:PDF (Last accessed: 01/05/14)*

3.4 Provision of networking for advisors and innovation support services

Article 54(3) of *Rural Development Regulation (RDR) 1305/2013*[54] sets out as a strategic task for National Rural Networks (NRNs) to envisage 'networking activities targeted to advisors and innovation support services'. Fostering innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas is one of the main objectives of rural networking for the 2014-2020 programming period. Innovation is a cross-cutting objective across the whole EU rural development policy, and explicitly mentioned in the first priority – *Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas* (Article 5 of the RDR) and two of its focus areas, namely: (a) fostering innovation and the knowledge base in rural areas; and (b) strengthening the links between agriculture & forestry and research & innovation.

Legal framework

Did you know that…

…Innovation in rural development is a broad subject, but in general terms can be defined as *'the introduction of something new (a novel change) to economic or social life in rural areas, which adds new economic or social value to rural life'* (see *NESTA, 2007*).

Source: Mahroum S; & all. (2007) Rural Innovation, NESTA

NRNs, as technical assistance mechanisms devoted to accompany and support policy implementation, are not only directly called to contribute to the cross-cutting objective of innovation but also to work in synergy with other rural development innovation actors such LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs), and the major EU policy tool established to support the innovation priority, namely the *European Innovation Partnership for agricultural productivity and sustainability* (EIP-AGRI)[55].

**The EIP-AGRI and its network**

54 Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013:
    http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF
55 European Commission website, *European Innovation Partnership, 'Agriculture and Sustainability':*
    http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/index_en.htm

The EIP-AGRI is a new structure established by Article 53 of the RDR for boosting innovation in European agriculture and forestry. It aims to build bridges between research and practice, in particular through practical innovation projects, carried out by *Operational Groups (OGs)*[56] funded under the rural development policy, through practice-oriented research projects and through networking activities. The EIP-AGRI focuses on forming partnerships, across the whole supply chain and from the scientific community. It uses bottom-up approaches linking all actors together in a network for sharing their ideas and experiences in order to develop innovative solutions and research results ready for application.
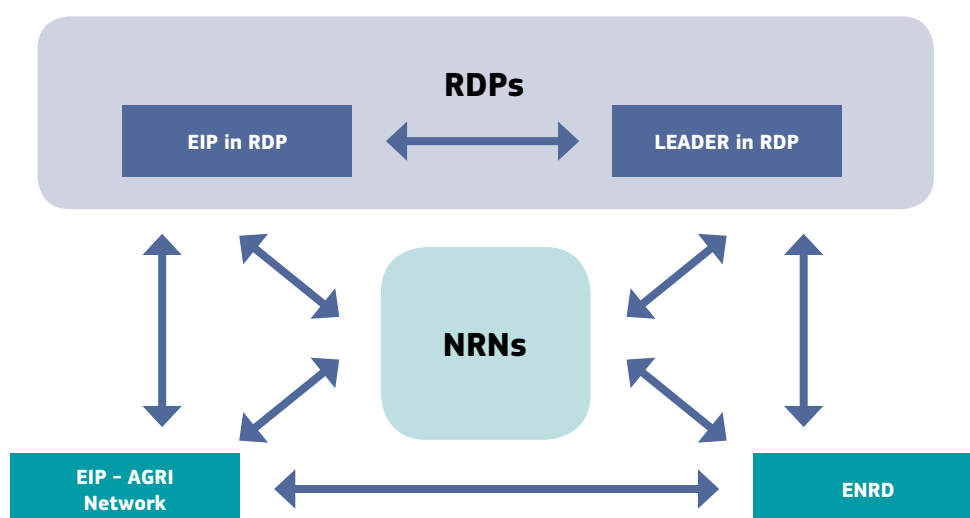
Source: NSU Training Module 6, Presentation on 'Innovation and National Rural Networks', DG AGRI

Managing links and tasks with EIP-AGRI

In the context of Rural Development Programme (RDP) implementation, multiple links exist between EU and national networks and amongst rural innovation actors. Because of their mission and tasks NRNs have a pivotal role in this context. National Support Units (NSUs) should therefore foresee the capacity to work with all innovation actors and networks in order to effectively contribute to the exchanges and provide contributions to different activities at the EU level.

As far as working with the EIP-AGRI network is concerned, the *NRN Guidance Fiche*[57] suggests that there is no obligation for the Member State to create a specialised innovation network or Support Unit (EIP network partner on the national level). This role can be assumed by the NRN, which would help to create synergies and avoid duplication. However, working with the EIP-AGRI network will require specific knowledge and expertise and entail the need to involve 'new categories of stakeholders' such as researchers, advisors and other actors actively involved in innovation. NRNs should therefore assess the need and the possibility to create e.g. a dedicated Task Force or Expert Pool specifically for engaging in network activities on innovation.

---

56 EIP-AGRI Service Point (2014) *Fact sheet EIP-AGRI Operational Groups – EIP Operational Groups, Turning your idea into innovation:* http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/pdf/fact-sheet-operational-groups_en.pdf

57 European Commission (20/01/2014) *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks:* http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm

Through ensuring capacity to work with the EIP-AGRI Network – notably through its *Service Point*[58] – and the exchange of information at the EU level, NRNs will not only have the possibility to feed the European EIP-AGRI network with relevant information but also to get access to information available at the EU level (e.g. databases, results of focus groups, workshops and seminars).

Networking for innovation with the EIP-AGRI

More specifically, the NRNs can actively contribute to the implementation of the EIP-AGRI (and to the work of its network) through:

• The provision of information about: i) RDP measures and actions targeting innovation and knowledge transfer (such as on training and investments); ii) examples of projects and good practices;

• Awareness raising by organising meetings, workshops, acting as 'multipliers';

Did you know that…

.. Innovation Support Services (ISS) and innovation brokers play a key role in discovering grassroots ideas and helping to develop concrete projects. The broker plays the role of 'matchmaker', helping partners to find each other and facilitating the start-up of Operational Groups with specific aims.

Source: EIP-AGRI Service Point (2014) Fact sheet - Innovation Support Services

• Networking at the national level of rural development innovation actors, namely LAGs and OGs;

• The cross-border exchange of information, for instance about projects, research initiatives, thematic networks and funding possibilities (notably under the *Horizon 2020 research programme*[59]);

• Acting as or supporting **Innovation Support Services** (ISS) for animating innovative actions and establishing OGs at the *national level*[60].

Crucially, NRNs can assume an active role in the setting-up of EIP-AGRI OGs that link farmers, LAGs, researchers and advisers together to implement projects for the development and testing of new products and processes in agriculture, food, and forestry. Networks can do this by connecting innovation actors (farmers, researchers, NGOs, LAGs etc.), collecting information, animating bottom-up initiatives, helping to refine innovative ideas and providing support for finding partners and funding[61].

Innovation brokering and operational groups

58 European Commission website, *EIP Network and EIP-AGRI Service Point:*
    http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/service-point/index_en.htm
59 EIP-AGRI Service Point (2013) *Fact sheet - Funding opportunities under Horizon 2020:*
    http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/pdf/fact-sheet-horizon-2020_en.pdf
60 European Commission (06/2013) *Draft Guidelines on Programming for Innovation and the Implementation of the EIP for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability:*
    http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/pdf/draft-eip-guidelines_en.pdf
61 For more information the role of Innovation support services see the following publications and report from the EIP-AGRI and the ENRD:
    EIP-AGRI Service Point (2014) *Fact sheet on Innovation Support Services:*
    http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/pdf/fact-sheet-innovation-support-services_en.pdf;
    Presentation by the European Commission (2013) on *Innovation brokering and links between Rural Development and the Research policy (Horizon 2020):*
    http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/events/madrid-06-2013/van-oost_en.pdf
    ENRD (2013) CC FG - Knowledge Transfer & Innovation - Executive Summary of Phase 2 Report towards successful Innovation Brokerage:
    http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/research-and-innovation/FG-KTI-Summary-Phase-2-report-IB_en.pdf

The Portuguese NRN's answer to innovation brokering

As well as disseminating information about the EIP-AGRI through the NRN website and other media, the Portuguese NSU has integrated the tasks of their innovation working group. This group has agreed that the NSU would develop and deliver an Initiatives Centre where stakeholders who want to form an OG can contribute their ideas and initiatives, as well as identify what they would like to do, and set out their objectives with a summary of their action plan.

This approach aims to allow potential partners to meet and new stakeholders to join an existing OG. For those who are not yet involved in an OG, but have identified a problem or an opportunity, the Initiatives Centre will disseminate the project idea and bring partners together as well as signpost them to innovation brokers.

The Initiatives Centre can be used to enable:

- Stakeholders and potential partners to register through a form available at the NRN website;

- Partners' contacts and a description of the initiative that they wish to develop to be made public;

- Promotion of information and capacity-building actions for registered partners.

Registering an innovation proposal in the Initiatives Centre will be a prerequisite to the submission of applications for OGs under the RDP. Accordingly, two of the eligibility criteria to support applications for an OG are:

- Partners in the application have to be registered as members of the NRN (a specific area for Innovation within the NRN website will be actuated);

- The partnership and the action plan need to result from an initiative previously included in the NRN Initiatives Centre.

Source: NSU Training Programme 6: "Networking for Innovation in the 2014-2020 RDPs",
18-19 March 2014, Ghent, Belgium

Networking and innovation beyond agriculture

The NRN objective regarding **fostering innovation is not limited to agriculture but encompasses rural areas in their entirety.** NRNs can be active in many different ways to foster innovation – whether this is technological, social, market-oriented, organisational, or in some other form. Typically, NRNs can bring 'something new' to rural communities by:

- Working directly with rural organisations and businesses to generate new ideas and approaches to tackle common needs;

- Promoting the exchange of information, ideas and knowhow across regional and national borders;

- Capitalising upon good / best practices by linking rural development practitioners with relevant experts, research institutions, academia, experimental centres;

- Providing training on specific innovation related topics;

- Helping LAGs and LEADER stakeholders to embrace support for innovation as a key principle in implementing their local development strategies and 'incubate' innovative new ideas and approaches.

Encouraging new ideas and approaches in rural areas: the Finnish Innovation Camps

In 2012, Managing Authority of the Mainland Finland RDP focused on innovation to encourage the development of new ideas, products and services and also different ways of working in rural areas. In co-ordination with this, the Finnish NSU, working with a range of partners, developed and delivered an Innovation Camp bringing together specialists and entrepreneurs to develop innovative solutions to the threats and opportunities apparent in Finnish rural areas.

An open call was put out for innovative ideas that were suited to a rural context, and a total of 47 different concepts were received. Eight of these were selected to be explored further at the Innovation Camp. Over three days, the Camp brought together eight teams of six experts to develop one of these ideas each and then compete to create the best, new innovative product or service. At the end of the process each team delivered their sales pitch to a jury who rewarded the most promising innovations.

The Innovation Camp was hugely successful identifying almost 50 new ideas for rural innovation and raising awareness of the potential of rural areas as a location for innovative product and service development. Networking enabled the Innovation Camp to achieve its objectives with a range of new actors taking part and contributions received from across the country. Based on the success of the first 'camp', the initiative has been extended and several more camps were run in 2013, with further camps being planned.

Source: ENRD website, Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: Networking elements, Innovation Camp: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=995D4548-F1E-506F-9E1F-83135487E60F

Key elements for networking activities supporting innovation were identified during the NRN peer-to peer *training workshop*[62]; namely:

Keys for effective innovation networking

- Recognise the specificity of the context and the fact that innovations are an expression of the place in which they are generated; therefore **know the specific innovation environment and actors**;

- Focus on **identifying what the main rural development issues** are before looking for potentially innovative ideas and solutions;

- **Embrace a wide range of rural stakeholders** and create the most appropriate inter-face between them. This includes not only farmers but also businesses and research and academics working on rural development issues (involving the latter will require clear and focused efforts);

- Avoid duplication of efforts and **rely on existing networks where possible;**

- **Use the local knowledge** and local 'champions' in order to generate momentum and promote the generation / dissemination of new ideas.

---

62   NSU Training Programme Module 6: "Networking for Innovation in the 2014-2020 RDPs",
     18-19 March 2014, Ghent, Belgium:
     http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/pilot-nsu-training-programme/en/pilot-nsu-training-module-6_en.cfm

Identifying 'good problems for good solutions': 24-hour races in Sweden

The Swedish NRN established a Supporting Entrepreneurs thematic working group, having identified a need to better assist rural entrepreneurs, and delivered six regional '24-hour race' workshops.

A total of 181 people were involved across the six events, which brought the participants together in facilitated workshops to think creatively about how entrepreneurial support in rural areas could be improved with a focus on practical ideas. The 24-hour race workshops used the *RICA** method, a four stage interactive process which develops actions and results. Outcomes included 38 identified proposals for innovative projects; and some of these solutions were developed further and delivered at a regional level.

The Swedish Network Unit has since supported three of these concepts. The first is in Örebro County where small fairs have been established for entrepreneurs and where coaches and consultants came together to provide most of the information and support contractors may need – all 'under one roof' at the same time. The 'Enterprising Bolme Countryside' project is funded by three LAGs and is a collaboration between government, industry, and volunteers across four municipalities.

As part of this project, eleven contractors and nine experts gathered in Gislaved in a 'Dragons Den' where entrepreneurs presented their ideas and received immediate feedback. In Norrbotten five meetings were arranged where best practice examples, speakers, advisors and financiers gathered for an afternoon to inspire people to realise the opportunities that exist in their county.

At a national level, the 24-hour races also identified an action to develop www.verksamt.se, a national website which is a collaboration between several Swedish Government Agencies to improve the information available to entrepreneurs.

Source: ENRD website, Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: NRN Tasks, 24hr races in Sweden: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/added-value/networking/SE-24-hour-races.pdf

*   See also the Pilot NSU Training Programme Module 2: 'Increasing Stakeholder Involvement', 14 March 2013, Åre, Sweden

---

Networking activities and tools in support of innovation

Discussions among NRN and MA representatives during a *peer-to-peer training session on innovation*[63] and networking, identified a number of practical actions and tools that can be considered for **NRN Action Plans** in order to agree, develop, and plan networking actvities for supporting innovation as a cross-cutting theme. Such actions include:

· **Knowing who you are targeting and what their needs are – needs assessment.** The preliminary step is to understand the context: who the innovation stakeholders are, how they are organised (including looking at the existence of groups, structures, networks) and how they can be reached. In order for NRNs to effectively succeed as innovation support services or innovation brokers it is vital to map out the existing innovation actors and understand the links between them, develop complementarity and coordination mechanisms. This will then highlight where the NRNs can add value, fill gaps, and make connections (i.e. NRN SWOT analysis).

Did you know that…

…The 7th Framework Programme project PROAKIS (*www.proakis.eu*) aims to compile an inventory of all organisations and institutions providing advisory services in the EU-27 and their linkages. This is a useful tool for mapping out who the potential key innovation actors are and support services in your country.

63   NSU Training Programme 6: "Networking for Innovation in the 2014-2020 RDPs", 18-19 March 2014, Ghent, Belgium: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/pilot-nsu-training-programme/en/pilot-nsu-training-module-6_en.cfm*

- **Building inventories and databases** of projects, initiatives, contact list of innovation actors and experts. Ensuring complementarity and synergies with actors established at the EU level. A strong focus on mapping out and establishing contacts with existing networks and organisations active in the area of fostering innovation should be envisaged.

- **Disseminating information** through a wide range of communication tools and media, such as newsletters, magazines, TV, social media, such as NRN Facebook pages and YouTube channels and interactive websites. **Sharing experience and practices**, e.g. through meetings, best practices, peer-to-peer exchange sessions, can facilitate discussion and improve understanding about rural development issues. **Demonstrating and showcasing** practical innovation experiences can also help stakeholders to develop motivation and confidence in embarking on new activities and models of work, e.g. through demonstration projects, showrooms and field visits.

- **Connecting and engaging key actors** to generate more interactions, exchanges, and mutual learning can promote the identification of 'key issues' and the emergence of solutions. New ideas can be tested through establishing focus groups, online exchange platforms, thematic workshops at the local level, facilitating peer-exchange, and 'match-making' (i.e. identifying specific groups or organisations which would benefit from mutual exchange, link them and /or offer them support for their exchange).

LEADER has been at the forefront of encouraging and supporting innovation in rural areas for more than two decades. LAGs have traditionally supported rural innovation and they work on a strategy that covers an entire territory. In this respect they differ from EIP-AGRI OGs, which do not have such pre-determined territorial dimensions. Rather OGs work on a specific topic/project with specific tasks and timeframe. Individual actors from LAGs can be part of an OG and contribute with their knowledge. Furthermore LAGs can contribute by providing innovation support services and by helping to overcome any difficulties experienced by potential OG stakeholders, thereby further animating the creation of OGs.

This makes LEADER a vital tool in continuing to foster innovation and LAGs can be supported by NRNs in a number of ways through a key facilitating role, namely through:

- Including innovation within LEADER in the NRNs action plans as a specific priority or objective with clear reference made to fostering innovation through LEADER;

- Developing LAG capacity, as LAGs are a key source of expertise in the promotion of innovation, and can therefore, act as innovation partners and interact with EIP-AGRI OGs. Developing and delivering an innovation training programme to support the development and management of the different dimensions of innovation would ensure these skills are harnessed;

- Assessing LDS opportunities for common themes that will facilitate exchanges between LAGs with similar objectives;

- Organising 'Ideas laboratories' between different LAGs before the OG project application phase and work on idea development;

- Disseminating examples of innovation projects at the local level;

- Enabling twinning of expertise between countries at the EU level.

Networking for innovation and LEADER

Useful resources developed by ENRD

ENRD website, *Themes, Knowledge Transfer & Innovation Gateway*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/themes/research-and-innovation-gateway-development/en/research-and-innovation-gateway-development_en.cfm

ENRD website, N*etworks & Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: Networking elements*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-networking-elements_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: NRN Tasks*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-nrn-tasks_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: NRN Tasks, Networking activities for advisors and innovation support services*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/networking_en.cfm

NSU Training Programme Module 6: *"Networking for Innovation in the 2014-2020 RDPs"*, 18-19 March 2014, Ghent, Belgium:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/pilot-nsu-training-programme/en/pilot-nsu-training-module-6_en.cfm

Pilot NSU Training Programme Module 2: *'Increasing Stakeholder Involvement'*, 14 March 2013, Åre, Sweden:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/pilot-nsu-training-programme/en/pilot-nsu-training-module-2_en.cfm

ENRD (2013) *CC FG – Knowledge Transfer & Innovation – Executive Summary of Phase 2 Report towards successful Innovation Brokerage*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/research-and-innovation/FG-KTI-Summary-Phase-2-report-IB_en.pdf

Other relevant resources

EIP-AGRI Service Point (2013) *Fact sheet – Funding opportunities under Horizon 2020*:
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/pdf/fact-sheet-horizon-2020_en.pdf

EIP-AGRI Service Point (2014) *Fact sheet – EIP Operational Groups, Turning your idea into innovation:*
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/pdf/fact-sheet-operational-groups_en.pdf

EIP-AGRI Service Point (2014) *Fact sheet – Innovation Support Services*:
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/pdf/fact-sheet-innovation-support-services_en.pdf

European Commission (06/2013) *Draft Guidelines on Programming for Innovation and the Implementation of the EIP for Agriculture Productivity and Sustainability:*
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/pdf/draft-eip-guidelines_en.pdf (Last accessed: 05/05/14)

European Commission (20/01/2014) *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm

European Commission website, *European Innovation Partnership, 'Agriculture and Sustainability':*
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/index_en.htm (Last accessed: 01/05/14)

European Commission website, *EIP Network and EIP-AGRI Service Point:*
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/service-point/index_en.htm (Last accessed: 01/05/14)

European Commission (2013) *Innovation brokering and links between Rural Development and the Research policy (Horizon 2020)*:
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/events/madrid-06-2013/van-oost_en.pdf (Last accessed: 01/05/14)

Mahroum S et al. (2007) *Rural Innovation,* NESTA:
http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/rural_innovation.pdf (Last accessed: 01/05/14)

Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the European Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF (Last accessed: 01/05/14)

3.5 Sharing and disseminating Rural Development Programme monitoring and evaluation findings

In accordance with Article 54(3) of the *Rural Development Regulation (RDR) No 1305/2013*[64,] all National Rural Networks (NRNs) are expected to include *'activities regarding the sharing and dissemination of monitoring and evaluation findings'* in their 2014-2020 Action Plans. This NRN requirement reflects the increased emphasis on the monitoring and evaluation aspects of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) (including the monitoring and evaluation of rural networks) during the 2014-2020 programming period (see also Part IV on 'NRN evaluation and self-assessment').

Legal framework

A number of challenges can occur for NRNs during the sharing and disseminating of monitoring and evaluation findings. Hence, as with any other communication activity of NRNs (see also section 3.7 of this Guidebook), it is very important to keep in mind the basic steps of communication planning. In particular, one should consider what the objectives of the communication are, who the target audience is, and what the key messages and the most suitable forms to achieve the objectives of communication are. At the same time, one should not forget the assessment (monitoring and evaluation) of the communication activity itself.

The challenges of 'communication'

---

64   Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013:
      http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF

NRNs operate in the rural development policy context. Therefore, the dissemination of monitoring and evaluation results is expected to particularly contribute to the NRN objectives of 'improving the quality of implementation of RDPs' and of 'informing the broader public and potential beneficiaries on rural development policy and funding opportunities' *(as per Article 54(2) of the RDR).*[65]

Questions that NRNs need to ask when identifying the target groups, formulating the messages and the most efficient tools and channels for the dissemination include: '*How the dissemination of 'monitoring and evaluation' results can contribute to the improvement of rural development policy delivery?*' and '*How can it improve the awareness of the broader public and potential beneficiaries on rural development policy and funding opportunities?*'

There are no straightforward answers to such questions. However, some initial lessons can be drawn from experience of networking during the 2007-2013 programming period at European and national levels.

Why and to whom?

The **scope and purpose of the activity** and expected results need to be clarified from the beginning (at the same time as trying to map out possible risks, constraints and threats that are external to the NSUs). If, for instance, the purpose is to inform the public about the results of certain thematic areas of RDP monitoring and evaluation, one would need to define what is the main message to deliver through this activity, what is the specific target group and what the most efficient form of communication is.

Participants of the open space discussions during the *20th NRN meeting in Dijon*[66] on '*how to communicate monitoring and evaluation findings*'[67] noted that one of the NSUs' main roles involves facilitating discussions about evaluation results. In some cases this may require NSUs to take a more pro-active role through transferring information about RDP implementation to key network stakeholders. Participants of the discussion thought that one of the main target groups of NSU dissemination of monitoring and evaluation findings are policy-makers, with the aim to provide clarification of evaluation results (e.g. avoid misinterpretation, provide further factual information and data) for a better informed policy-making process. Furthermore, NRNs may consider providing monitoring and evaluation information (including evidence and recommendations) for national and regional bodies as soon as these become available in order for them to use the information to steer and improve their RDPs' activities.

In fact, dissemination of monitoring and evaluation findings is not limited to awareness-raising and information provision, but may go beyond communication and include, among others, training activities for relevant stakeholders. For instance, the Welsh Rural Network (in cooperation with programme evaluators) targeted, with its training, partners that were responsible for the delivery of Axes 3 and Axes 4 during the 2007-2013 period in all local authority areas (see 'Glancing back to look ahead' example below[68]). On the one hand, the activity aimed to disseminate information about monitoring and evaluation to Axes 3 and 4 groups ('glancing back'); on the other hand, it aimed to draw lessons for the future and provide information on new programme proposals ('plan ahead'). In Sweden, NRN members participated and contributed with feedback during a seminar on the mid-term evaluation; the Swedish NSU also organised web-based discussions (called 'virtual think tanks') for NRN members to reflect on RDP indicators (and annual reports)[69].

---

65   European Commission (20/01/2014) *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm*

66   20th NRN Meeting, 28 November 2013, Dijon, France:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/meetings/en/20th-nrn-meeting_en.cfm

67   ENRD (2013) *20th NRN Meeting - Open Space Discussion Group No 6 Communicating Monitoring and Evaluation Findings:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-meeting/20thNRNmeeting/9_Communicating-Monitoring-and-Evaluation-Findings_en.pdf*

68   A presentation about the 'Glancing back to plan ahead' was also delivered during the Module 7 Peer-to-peer training of ENRD on 'NRN self-assessment and evaluation', Workshop B: NRN's contribution to a more efficient RDP evaluation (8 May 2014, Kendal, England): *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/pilot-nsu-training-programme/en/pilot-nsu-training-module-7_en.cfm*

69   ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Toolkit, NSU Training Programme, NSU Training Module 7 (Workshop B): http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/pilot-nsu-training-programme/en/pilot-nsu-training-module-7_en.cfm*

'Glancing back to plan ahead' – Example from the Welsh NRN

In August 2013 the Wales Rural Network hosted a training workshop on monitoring and evaluation. The workshop provided the opportunity for the Welsh Government, the Axes 3 and 4 groups and the programme evaluators to discuss various aspects of monitoring and evaluation. The event was designed with the aim to (i) provide information about monitoring and evaluation to the Axes 3 and 4 groups; (ii) to provide information on emerging themes from evaluation;

'We all realise the importance of monitoring and evaluating projects, yet many deliverers may be worried by evaluation because they see it as a test or a challenge.'

Welsh NRN

(iii) to learn lessons for the future; and (iv) to provide information on new programming proposals. A major aspect which emerged from the event was a call for a training programme (particularly targeted at Local Action Groups) to be put in place for monitoring and evaluation from the outset of the 2014-2020 RDP.

Source: ENRD website, Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: NRN Tasks, Glancing back to plan ahead: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/added-value/UK-wales-glancing-back-to-plan-ahead.pdf

Experience gained by the ENRD on the dissemination of RDP monitoring and evaluation results

The ENRD has carried out a range of activities that help to provide information on RDPs, with specific focus on 'monitoring and evaluation', including:

- ✓ **Fiches and guidance tables and charts** produced for each of the 88 RDPs (from the 2007–2013 period) that include key issues, advice for correction of errors, as well as the list of errors identified.

- ✓ **A compendium of all RDPs** including eight summary reports for Member States with regional programmes were prepared. In addition factsheets illustrating the modifications to RDPs following the adoption of the Common Agricultural Policy Health Check and the European Economy Recovery Plan were also prepared.

The mountain areas screening exercise covered 17 National Strategic Plans (NSPs) and 63 RDPs, and resulted in a *Mountain Farming Report** that summarised main findings on mountain areas based on available indicators and data.

Other ENRD thematic reviews included the screening of 'climate change' issues and the work on eight thematic information sheets.

The initial purpose of this ENRD activity was to have an overview on RDP progress at national level, and aggregate information at an EU level. However, the scope and purpose of the activity changed and has been adjusted over time. The activity first focused on the 'analysis of existing monitoring data and provision of summaries'. However, it soon turned out that in order to analyse data, the inconsistencies and anomalies in data collection at Member State level would needed to be addressed. As a result, the focus of the ENRD activity shifted towards identifying anomalies and providing feedback to MAs. Finally, during the later phases, the service focused more on producing thematic overviews on RDPs (primarily in the form of thematic info sheets).

* ENRD website, Themes, Agriculture, Mountain farming:
    http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/themes/agriculture/mountain-farming/en/mountain-farming_en.cfm

Source: ENRD (2013, unpublished) ENRD Self-assessment Report

Dissemination of monitoring and evaluation findings **has to be seen in the framework of the policy cycle**. This means that the needs of target stakeholders are often different at the start of the programme than towards the end. For instance, during the early stages, NRNs may want to consider informing the wider rural public about the results of the 'ex-ante evaluation of programmes'. During the programming they may want to think about providing information concerning 'monitoring' issues that beneficiaries would also need to be engaged with (in order to improve monitoring practices).

Whereas later on 'ex-post evaluation' (of the previous programme) may become more pertinent and of interest for both the programme management and beneficiaries.

Disseminating monitoring and evaluation findings has to be seen in the policy cycle. Initial interest of people lies in 'what has been programmed'; once this is understood information needs to be structured more thematically, that can help people understand 'what has been implemented' in the framework of rural development.

ENRD self-evaluation focus group, DG AGRI

Be aware that…

…the timing of evaluations has an important impact on the purpose and target of the dissemination activity. For instance mid-term or on-going evaluations may have potential impact on the design and planning of the policy for the subsequent programming period and can possibly be used to explain and justify to the public of the reallocation of resources.

Source: ENRD website, 20th NRN meeting, 28 November, 2013, Dijon, France, *Open Space Discussion*

Rural Development Policy in Figures – The ENRD experience

The *'Rural Development Policy in Figures'* section of the ENRD website provides specific information based on the monitoring results of RDPs. This includes (i) Thematic information sheets; (ii) RDP information sheets; (iii) Measure information sheets; and (iv) RDP monitoring and indicator tables.

ENRD thematic information sheets provide a clear picture of rural policy interventions by theme, highlighting linkages between the policy's priorities, the implementing measures and their actual outcomes on the ground. They also provide an indication of the potential beneficiaries, target groups and areas; give information on the overall budgetary allocation and expenditure at EU-27 level; and indicate the outputs achieved. Furthermore, they include specific examples of these interventions through the description of projects coming from the *ENRD's database of RDP projects*.

Sources: ENRD website, Policy in Action, Rural Development Policy in Figures:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/rural-development-policy-in-figures/en/rdp-figures_en.cfm;

ENRD website, Policy in Action, RDP projects database:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/rdp_view/en/view_projects_en.cfm

Cooperation with various authorities is particularly important with regard to carrying out the dissemination of monitoring and evaluation findings. It should be kept in mind that MAs have the responsibility for both managing the RDP evaluation, as well as for taking the lead for the overall RDP communication process. According to the *NRN Guidance Fiche*[70] the *'information and publicity strategy drawn up by the MA should form the basis for the NRN's communication plan.'* This cooperation aspect should be thought of when planning the appropriate human resources for the task.

---

70   European Commission (20/01/2014) *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm*

'The publicity and information strategy should aim at setting the clear division of labour (MA-NRN) and the degree of integration, according to the needs of each Member State.'

NRN Guidance Fiche, DG AGRI

The specific financial and human resources required to produce and disseminate relevant monitoring and evaluation information is also an important factor, as certain forms of communication to the wider public, such as publications, can be particular costly.

In addition to the dissemination of monitoring and evaluation results, NSUs can take a pro-active role in the RDP evaluation, through raising awareness about the importance of evaluation in general (e.g. through training events and programmes, such as the Italian NRN's *E-VALPROG programme*[71]) or through carrying out analysis that can be used in the context of the RDP evaluation (such as the case of *LEADER evaluation carried out by the Danish Network*[72]). You can find further aspects on NRN and RDP evaluation and self-assessment in Part IV of this Guidebook.

Looking beyond the dissemination of RDP evaluation results

Useful resources developed by ENRD

ENRD website, *Themes, Agriculture, Mountain farming*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/themes/agriculture/mountain-farming/en/mountain-farming_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: Networking elements*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-networking-elements_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: NRN Tasks*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-nrn-tasks_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN stories: NRN tasks, Sharing and disseminating monitoring and evaluation findings*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/sharing_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Toolkit, NSU Training Programme, NSU Training Module 7 – NRN Self-assessment and evaluation*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/pilot-nsu-training-programme/en/pilot-nsu-training-module-7_en.cfm*

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Toolkit, Building on Lessons Learnt, Lessons from ENRD*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/building-on-lessons-learnt/lessons-from-the-nrns/en/lessons-from-the-nrns_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Self-assessment Toolkit*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/en/index_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Policy in Action, Rural Development Policy in Figures:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/rural-development-policy-in-figures/en/rdp-figures_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Policy in Action, RDP projects database:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/rdp_view/en/view_projects_en.cfm

20th NRN Meeting, 28 November 2013, Dijon, France:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/meetings/en/20th-nrn-meeting_en.cfm

21st NRN Meeting, 6-7 May 2014, Kendal, England:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/meetings/en/21th-nrn-meeting_en.cfm

NSU Peer-to-Peer Training Module 7, 8 May 2014, Kendal, England: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/pilot-nsu-training-programme/en/pilot-nsu-training-module-7_en.cfm*

---

71   ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: NRN Tasks, Online evaluation training: E-VALPROG*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/added-value/IT-e-valprog.pdf*

72   ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: NRN Tasks, Added value of LEADER*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/added-value/DK-added-value-of-leader.pdf*

ENRD (2013) *20th NRN Meeting – Open Space Discussion Group No 6 Communicating Monitoring and Evaluation Findings*: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-meeting/20thNRNmeeting/9_Communicating-Monitoring-and-Evaluation-Findings_en.pdf

ENRD (2013, unpublished), *ENRD Self-assessment Report*

ENRD (2014) *Self-assessment of the European Network for Rural Development: "Not everything that 'connects' is a network"*: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-self-assessment/final_disseminationmaterial_enrd.pdf

ENRD (2013) *Findings of the 2012 NRN Mapping Exercise: Final synthesis report*: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/networking-statistics-and-studies_en.cfm

ENRD (2013) *NSU Peer to Peer Training Program – Pilot Module 3 – "Communications and Networking" – Communications planning guidelines*: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/pilot-nsu-training/module03/P2P_Module-3-Communications-guidelines-handout.pdf

Other relevant resources

European Commission (20/01/2014) *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks*: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm *(Last accessed on: 01/05/14)*

Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the European Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF *(Last accessed on: 01/05/14)*

3.6 Technical assistance for Transnational Cooperation (TNC) and inter–territorial cooperation

In accordance with Article 54(3) of the *Rural Development Regulation (RDR) No 1305/2013*[73] National Rural Networks (NRNs) are required to provide technical assistance to Local Action Groups (LAGs) for inter-territorial and transnational cooperation. The scope of technical assistance required has been extended compared to 2007-2013 period, and now includes assistance for partner-search according to Article 35 (on co-operation) within the same regulation.

The RDR stresses the effectiveness of the LEADER bottom-up approach in promoting the development of rural areas taking into account multi-sectoral needs for endogenous development. The application of the LEADER/Community-led Local Development (CLLD) method will therefore remain compulsory for Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) in the 2014-2020 programming period. According to Article 44 of the RDR, LEADER support should also cover inter-territorial cooperation projects (and preparatory technical support) between groups within a Member State, as well as TNC between groups in different Member States or between groups in Member States and third countries.

Cooperation among LEADER LAGs is not the only form of cooperation supported by rural development policy. Article 35(1)(a) of the RDR states that support will be granted to promote cooperation approaches among various stakeholders within the agriculture and forestry sector, and food chains. Article 35(7) addresses transnational and inter-regional cooperation by stating that eligibility for support under the cooperation measure covers also actors located in different regions or Member States.

According to the *NRN Guidance Fiche*[74], technical assistance for inter-territorial and transnational cooperation is expected to particularly contribute to the NRNs objectives set by the RDR on: (i) improvement of stakeholder involvement; (ii) improvement of the quality of RDP implementation; and (iv) fostering of innovation.

Experience from the 2007-2013 programming period demonstrates that setting-up cooperation projects, especially TNC actions, is not always easy. There are several challenges to overcome, including differences in regulatory frameworks between Member States, different languages and cultures, differences in experiences (with some countries or LAGs being more experienced than others) and identifying the right partners. It has been particularly challenging to identify partners who share similar needs, aspire to the same goals, have relevant competences/experience for working on the chosen cooperation topic and have the necessary experience to engage in transnational cooperation. It is also very important to ensure that the projects focus on using the cooperation to help each partner to gain added value from the project, in terms of achieving development outcomes that they could not have achieved by working just on their own. Eventually, the cooperation needs to produce synergy.

Legal framework

The challenges of cooperation

Did you know that…

The main challenges for setting up a transnational cooperation project include:

✓ Overcoming differences in rules and procedures
✓ Overcoming the language and cultural barriers
✓ Identifying common goals (with an 'added value' stemming from cooperation)
✓ Finding the right partners

Source: ENRD (2014) The State-of-play of Rural Development Programme Measure 421 in EU-27

73   Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013: *http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF*
74   European Commission (20/01/2014). *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm*.

Experience from the current programming period shows that preparatory technical support provided to LAGs can help to overcome some of these difficulties (e.g. making the first contacts and discussing common interests vis-à-vis added value outcomes).

In order to support LAGs with regard to transnational and inter-territorial cooperation, the Network Support Units (NSUs) need to have specific skills and capacities. The *NRN Guidance Fiche*[75] specifies that NRN's staff must have sufficient skills and qualifications for facilitating rural networking, including language skills to work on an international level, with the ENRD and with other rural networks and to help rural development actors facilitate TNC.

NSUs can provide different forms of support to LAGs at the different stages of transnational and inter-territorial cooperation development: starting from the search for partners, through the planning, implementation and monitoring of projects. Support may include:

✓ *Online assistance with partner search*

Online and interactive tools offer multiple possibilities and access to a wide range of information. These may include:

- Online guides for cooperation, especially for TNC, providing both practical and administrative information to LAGs and project holders;

- Thematic internet discussion forums on cooperation-related topics, accessible to LAGs;

- A database of Cooperation Offers and TNC & inter-territorial projects, where LAGs can register their project ideas (seeking to identify partners from other countries) and approved projects.

Did you know that...

...In 2007-2013 the ENRD designed a cooperation offers database that registered more than 400 offers, many of which culminated in joint projects.

Source: ENRD Cooperation offers database

✓ *Study or exchange visits*

Study and exchange visits can include staff exchanges between LAGs for peer-to-peer discussions and information-exchange and visits to other transnational projects. Through exchange visits, LAGs are able to create better links with each other, develop closer working relationships, get to know each other and their respective territories and identify common challenges and possible joint solutions.

75 European Commission (20/01/2014). *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm*

European LAG Exchange Programme

In 2007-2013, ELARD (European Leader Association for Rural Development) launched an initiative to foster peer-learning. The initiative offered European LAGs the possibility for international staff exchange, and to cooperate and network on an international level without necessarily having to create their own TNC project yet. The international staff exchange involved educational visits (of some three weeks), arranged between two participating LAGs. The exchange was reciprocal, meaning that the same LAG sent and received a visitor. In order to learn about the exchange of experiences, the participants in the LAG´s Staff Exchange Programme submitted "Exchange diaries".

Source: ELARD website, European LAG Exchange programme: http://www.elard.eu/en_GB/exchange-experiences

✓ *Organisation of events*

Cooperation events can be organised at various levels. During the 2007-2013 programming period a range of events (including ENRD LEADER events, NRN events and other cooperation events) were organised for LAGs. Cooperation events can give LAGs the opportunity to find potential partners with similar interests and projects ideas for TNC. The most appreciated elements of international cooperation events from the 2007-2013 period were the dynamic and participative tools and working methods, such as 'cooperation market' and 'thematic cooperation corners'. During these events, LAG participants could establish face-to-face contacts and this particularly allowed potential partners to discuss common challenges and possible cooperation opportunities more efficiently.

Awareness raising events are also useful for informing Managing Authorities (MAs) and less experienced LAGs of the benefits of cooperation for local rural development and territorial cohesion through the presentation of good practice examples and testimonies from successful cooperation experiences.

Did you know that...

In 2007-2013 the ENRD organised a series of LEADER events, including one targeted specifically on cooperation: *"Local development strategies and cooperation: key approaches to local development".* Many new contacts and project ideas emerged from these events.

Source: ENRD website, Events and Meetings, Seminars and Conferences.

The LEADER Fest: Czech TNC support

During the 2007-2013 programming period the Czech NRN recognised that the improvement of cooperation activities between LAGs was one of the most important areas of work for the NSU. Consequently, rural development actors from all over Europe were invited to an international meeting of LAGs, titled the 'LeaderFEST', with the aim to support the development of cooperation projects.

The festival included a full day of short presentations and workshops on the topic of LEADER, including examples of good practice. The festival also included a rural fair highlighting traditional crafts and products, cultural performances, short audio-visual programmes on the topic of rural areas, field workshops and an optional excursion. The event supported the exchange of information among actors involved in rural areas, highlighted the strengths of rural areas and the growth of rural tourism, supported the collection of good practice examples within the LEADER approach and encouraged new cooperation projects.

Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=5A51C118-9BDA-D372-1044-0A99EA5C665B

✓ *Guidance documents, studies and publications*

Cooperation guides and studies have been developed during the different generations of the LEADER programme, from the initiation of LEADER as a (pilot) Community Initiative Programme to its mainstreaming into the EAFRD. One of these studies was undertaken by the ENRD and it focused on the RDPs' TNC Measure (421)[76]. Conclusions contributed to a better understanding on the state-of-play of TNC measure and the scale and scope of cooperation projects supported through RDPs during the 2007-2013 programming period. The ENRD also developed a *Leader Transnational Cooperation Guide*[77], in addition to the European Commission's administrative cooperation guide. These guides and reports can be made accessible through the NRN and LAG websites in the 2014-2020 programming period. They can complement and enrich the publication of new examples as cooperation progresses during 2014-2020.

✓ *Cooperation coordinators*

The preparation of TNC projects can be very demanding for LAG managers, especially if they lack cooperation experience or more concrete skills such as language skills. In order to overcome this difficulty, during the 2007-2013 programming period, NSUs and LAGs appointed cooperation project coordinators (with the relevant language skills) in order to support exchange and development of TNC projects.

Do's and Don'ts

DON'T forget that preparatory meetings enable partners to get to know each other, and to talk in more depth about the project idea. It is like a warm up – "does the chemistry work; are we at the same level with regards to the project's content and ambitions?"

Source: ENRD (2014) The State-of-play of the Implementation of Rural Development Programme Measure 421 in the EU-27

✓ *Facilitating exchanges, technical meetings and trainings*

Exchange of experience, information and discussion among key stakeholders about the challenges of TNC and inter-territorial cooperation can help to overcome some of the difficulties (especially those related to national administrative rules). During the 2007-2013 programming period NSUs often facilitated the exchange of technical information among MAs, LAGs and Paying Agencies (PAs). These exchanges took place in different formats (e.g. formal trainings, peer-to-peer trainings, technical meetings, etc.) and have focused on different themes (e.g. application process for open calls, establishment of selection criteria, evaluating projects, principles of monitoring and evaluation, project management and implementation of Local Development Strategies, etc.)

---

76   ENRD (2014) *The State-of-play of the Implementation of Rural Development Programme Measure 421 in the EU-27*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader/leader/en/transnational-cooperation_en.cfm*

77   ENRD (2011) *Leader Transnational Cooperation Guide*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=2A9A7348-B2CD-A9FB-620D-67CE880700D6*

Bringing together LAGs and Managing Authorities around the same table

Having noticed some difficulties in implementing inter-territorial cooperation projects, the Cypriot NSU decided to organise the '1st LAG meeting of Cyprus for the preparation of a National Cooperation Project' in 2011. During the meeting the MA held a presentation on the 'Implementation Guide for Cooperation Projects'. As a result of this LAG meeting, the National Cooperation Project was approved, and a letter of commitment and an agreement between the four Cypriot LAGs were signed.

Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E911AF-CBD2-362D-273F-5731C4CC1D53

Useful resources developed by ENRD

ENRD website, *LEADER, Transnational Cooperation (TNC)*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader/leader/en/transnational-cooperation_en.cfm

ENRD website, *LEADER, Transnational Cooperation (TNC), Cooperation offers database*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader/cooperation-platform/leader-cooperation-offers/en/leader-cooperation-offers_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: Networking elements*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-networking-elements_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: NRN Tasks*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-nrn-tasks_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Events and Meetings, Seminars and Conferences*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/seminars-and-conferences/en/seminars-and-conferences_en.cfm

ENRD (2011) *Leader Transnational Cooperation Guide* :
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=2A9A7348-B2CD-A9FB-620D-67CE880700D6

ENRD (2014) T*he State-of-play of the Implementation of Rural Development Programme Measure 421 in the EU-27*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader/leader/en/transnational-cooperation_en.cfm*

Other relevant resources

ELARD Website, *European LAG Exchange programme: http://www.elard.eu/en_GB/exchange-experiences*
(Last accessed on: 01/05/14)

European Commission (20/01/2014). *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm (Last accessed on: 01/05/14)*

Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the European Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF (Last accessed on: 01/05/14)

3.7 Preparation and implementation of a communication plan

Article 54(3) of the *Rural Development Regulation (RDR) No 1305/2013*[78] obliges all National Rural Networks (NRNs) to set-up a communication plan as a part of their 2014-2020 Action Plan. The expectations for the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) are ambitious and Network Support Units (NSUs) are required to have the capacity to implement (in agreement with their Managing Authority [MA]) a comprehensive **communication plan**, which (according to the regulation) as a minimum delivers:

• publicity and information concerning the RDP in agreement with the MA(s); and

• information and communication activities aimed at the broader public.

Targeting communication activities at the broader public may be a new and quite specific task for some NSUs. Hence this requires careful thinking about appropriate tools and ways of communication.

Communication plans are expected to particularly contribute to the objective of 'informing the broader public and potential beneficiaries on rural development policy and funding opportunities' (as per Article 54(2) of the RDR).[79] Arguably, given that communication is a cross-cutting task, it may contribute to all four objectives set for NRNs by the RDR.

The *NRN Guidance Fiche*[80] specifies that "*NRN has the obligation to set up a communication plan, as a part of its action plan*" and that the MAs "*have the responsibility to lead the overall RDP communication process and to involve the NRN*". MAs are, therefore, recommended to develop a communication strategy together with the NRN as a basis for the general information and communication actions around the RDP. The strategy should (according to the needs of each Member State) aim at setting clear division of labour between the MA and NRN tasks, as well as the degree of integration between the tasks.

The challenge of coordination

In addition to the coordination of communication planning with the MA, Member States with **regionalised NSUs** face an additional challenge of coordinating between the national and regional levels. NSUs and MAs should note that 'going local' is a guiding principle governing EU communication objectives. Member States also see this as a fundamental factor behind successful approaches for communicating on policy-related messages. For RDP communicators, going local means using methods and techniques to ensure that communication strategy messages and materials reach intended audiences in their homes or at their places of work, etc. It also means making sure that the strategic messages and materials are adapted to be relevant at the local level so that target audiences can relate directly, positively and quickly to the communication work.

---

78 Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013: *http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF*
79 According to the Annex of the NRN Guidance Fiche the communication plans are also expected to contribute to the objectives of 'fostering of innovation' and 'improvement of the quality of RDP'.
80 European Commission (20/01/2014) *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm*

Coordination of communication activities

Participants of the *open space discussion on 'How to coordinate all levels of stakeholders in the new NRN Communication Strategy'* during the *20th NRN Meeting in Dijon* identified that the presence of too many sources of information (e.g. separate publications, websites, etc. developed by regional NSUs) may confuse the receiver of communication. Therefore, it was suggested that a 'one-stop website' with information coming from all levels, particularly best practice stories and project examples, should be set up in order to avoid information overload.

In order to be able to perform the task of coordinator, the national NSU should have a complete understanding of all the bodies participating in the strategy, their priorities, their needs and their roles. Information and news might be coming from different levels (EU, other Member States, national, regional and local level), therefore, in order to ensure that this information reaches all relevant stakeholders in various regions there may be the need for a common information collection.

It was also suggested that in order to ensure a smooth, effective and quality-oriented collection and sharing of information at different levels, each network should have at least one technical expert dealing with communication tasks on a regular basis. A good coordination between networks would also prevent duplication of efforts and reduce the communication workload of each individual network.

Source: 20th NRN Meeting, 28 November 2013, Dijon, France:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/meetings/en/20th-nrn-meeting_en.cfm
ENRD (2013) *20th NRN Meeting, Open Session: Group 5 – "How to coordinate all levels of stakeholders in the new NRN communications strategy.": http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/ nrn-meeting/20thNRNmeeting/14_How-to-coordinate-all-evels-of-stakeholders-in-the-new-NRN-communications-strategy_en.pdf*

The European Commission's *NRN Guidance Fiche* suggests that a good communication plan includes links to the wider policy objectives, task description (with clear division of those responsible) and timeline, and clear definition of target groups of different actions. Communication objectives, tools and style should be diversified and adapted to the different target groups (potential beneficiaries or broader public). The Fiche also recommends that NRN communication plans include a specific section focusing on dissemination of both ENRD and NRN activities.

> *Key elements of a communication plan*

Did you know that…

… The **Communications Planning Guidelines** identified six key steps for developing a communication plan, namely:

• Setting the objectives;
• Identifying the target audience;
• Creating key messages;
• Identifying main tools & channels;
• Setting up management & resources;
• Carrying out monitoring and evaluation.

Source: ENRD (2013) NSU Peer to Peer Training Programme – Communications planning guidelines

In addition to the NRN Guidance Fiche of DG AGRI, a complementary set of *'Communications Planning Guidelines'*[81] was developed by the ENRD. This built on earlier ENRD capacity-building support for RDP communication stakeholders (such as the *'Communicating EU rural development policy'* publication[82] and the other tools on the ENRD *Communication Gateway*[83]) and was delivered during the *NSU peer-to-peer training held in Tomar*[84].

As *'Communications Planning Guidelines'* highlights *"the preparation and implementation of the communication plan ensures there is a consistent and coordinated approach to getting the right messages out, to the right people, in the right way, at the right time."* The Guidelines go further and emphasise that communication does not "just happen", but effective communication requires a strategy, commitment and management support to ensure it is delivered successfully. The Communications Planning Guidelines identified six key communications planning steps, as follows:

The six steps of communication planning

Step 1: Clearly set the objectives

As a first step, it is important to identify and define the strategic (long-term) objective of the NRN communication, and explore the operational (or short-term) objectives, which are necessary to achieve these. Objectives can be broadly grouped as follows:

Did you know that...

... Intervention logic and evaluation frameworks most often define a 'hierarchy of objectives': (i) the overall objective(s) (assessed through the 'impact' of programmes), (ii) specific objectives (assessed through the 'result' of programmes), and (iii) operational objectives (assessed through the 'outputs' of programmes).

Source: DG AGRI (2006) Handbook on Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, Guidance Document

- **Inform** – transmit information to the selected target audience

- **Promote** – raise awareness and provoke a reaction

- **Engage** – establish a two-way or multi-directional relationship/dialogue where the audience takes active part and creates value. This is often the most significant communication function in networking.

Step 2: Identify the target audience and their needs

Almost parallel to defining the goal it is also of central importance to identify and define the specific audience that is to be targeted through the communication activity. Target audiences may include potential or existing RDP beneficiaries, the general public, media, policy-makers and other organisations or stakeholders.

The communication plan may have a highly diverse mix of target groups and it would need to address an equal variety of communication needs. These must be planned carefully to ensure the joint NSU-MA communication actions are as successful as possible.

Reaching local people and their communities is often a very important task, so NSUs and MAs need to clearly understand who this 'wider audience' is and what their needs are. It is essential to use the media in an intelligent way to engage with this broader group, however, this can require specialist skills.

81   ENRD (2013) *NSU Peer to Peer Training Program – Pilot Module 3 – "Communications and Networking" – Communications planning guidelines:*
     http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/pilot-nsu-training/module03/P2P_Module-3-Communications-guidelines-handout.pdf

82   ENRD (2011) *Communicating EU rural development policy:*
     http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=B528A9A0-0828-EB03-4415-AB051A70BC8D

83   ENRD website, *Policy in Action, Communicating Rural Development Gateway*:
     http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/communicating-rural-development/eafrd/en/eafrd_en.cfm

84   Pilot NSU Training Programme Module 3: Communications and Networking, 7 June 2013, Tomar, Portugal: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/pilot-nsu-training-programme/en/pilot-nsu-training-module-3_en.cfm*

Step 3: Choose the message to communicate

It is important to identify the right message to be communicated to the specific target group. The communication approach needs to be adapted to fit with the needs and interests of the different target audiences.

The use of complex jargon or acronyms should be avoided as much as possible, i.e. one should use of the 'language' of the target audience being communicated with. A uniform linguistic style and tone should be used within all communication tools, and these tools should reinforce and reiterate common core messages and maintain a coherent visual identity. It makes communication more effective if messages are visual, interesting and memorable to ensure the message gets to the target groups. It is important to use creative or innovative approaches to engage more effectively with target groups.

"The most effective strategies are those which utilise a participatory approach and place people at the centre of their actions."

ENRD (2013) Communications planning guidelines

Keep in mind that...

...communication messages should be:

- Relevant
- Consistent
- Clear
- Simple
- Meaningful

Source: ENRD (2013) Communications planning guidelines

It is equally important to create a common vision about the key communication subjects and messages across all organisations delivering RDP communication (NRNs, MAs, LAGs, etc). This may involve creating new ways and links among key stakeholders to achieve a common understanding about the messages that are important to communicate. The most important factor to develop smooth communication is to share the same values and the same objectives among key stakeholders. This can be achieved by clarifying the key terms used and agreeing the right tools for communication, for instance, 'moving meetings out of the board rooms', developing 'one-stop-shops' which can contribute greater clarity on some of the key RDP concepts and disseminating good practices that can also help to develop a common vision.

Step 4: Choose the right mix of communication tools

There are many communication tools to choose from and they come in different shapes, sizes, formats, languages, and costs. Choosing a communication tool depends on the purpose of the communication, on the message to communicate, and on the intended target audience. It is vital to match the right communication tool to the right audience. For example, consider making communications accessible to a target group by 'going mobile' via smartphones and tablets or using other electronic media. Remember that you need to know the target audience's capacity for, and interest in, using any specific communication technology tools. Using participatory tools can bring different stakeholders closer together and visual tools, such as videos can be particularly useful tools for accessing the wider public.

Did you know that...

...one of the indicators defined for networks by the Draft Implementing Act is the *'Number of NRN communication tools'*, defined as the number of different communication tools, such as events organised (broken down by thematic areas), publications and other NRN communication tools.

Source: Commission Draft Implementing Regulation (not yet adopted at the time of finalising this Guidebook)

Helpful advice and guidance about using video, social media, and more traditional communication tools to communicate RDP activity can be found in the ENRD's thematic publication on '*Communicating EU rural development policy*'[85], and the other tools from the ENRD website's *Communication Gateway*[86].

The table below lays out the main elements of the most popular types of communication tools[87]:

Tools	To INFORM	To PROMOTE	To ENGAGE	Info capacity	Notes
Posters	✓	✓		Low	To raise awareness, to remind or build an image. Can have powerful images.
On site e.g. signs		✓		Low	To raise awareness or to remind. For simple messages particularly about behaviour or news.
Leaflets	✓	✓		Low	Best used for responding to an existing demand or interest rather than for creating the interest in the first place. Can contain complex messages.
Magazines	✓	✓	✓	Medium	For news or more complicated messages for specific audiences
Other Publications	✓	✓		High	Own publications and those for professional audiences can carry complicated messages
Local Newspapers	✓	✓		Medium	For stories of local relevance, and local/regional stories with major impact
National Newspapers	✓	✓		Medium	For stories of national relevance, or local/regional stories with major impact
Local Radio	✓	✓		Low	For news items. Interviews/ chat shows for more complicated messages
National Radio	✓	✓		Low	To deliver specific messages to targeted audiences
Television (regional and national)	✓	✓		Low	For awareness. Need relevant locations and/or charismatic individuals. Danger of losing the message in the presentation.
Films/video	✓	✓		High	To explain, educate or create awareness of a complicated subject
Internet	✓	✓	✓	High	Content unlimited. Allow users to use at superficial and in depth way for maximum effect
Social media	✓	✓	✓	High	To exchange information and create user-generated content/dialogue
Events + exhibitions	✓	✓	✓	High	Platform to distribute messages and literature, also speak to people. To support other communications activity
Training and conferences	✓	✓	✓	High	To deliver detailed information to an interested audience
Direct mail		✓	✓	Medium	To create awareness, encourage participation. Opportunity to trigger a response and to develop and manage a database of professional or consumer contacts
Personal contact	✓	✓	✓	High	Most effectively form of communication, also expensive. Use selectively

85 ENRD (2011) *Communicating EU rural development policy*:
    http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=B528A9A0-0828-EB03-4415-AB051A70BC8D
86 ENRD website, P*olicy in Action, Communicating Rural Development Gateway*:
    http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/communicating-rural-development/eafrd/en/eafrd_en.cfm
87 Adapted from: The Countryside Agency, *Communicating With the Public – Monitoring Report*,
    referenced in Ministry of Public Administration and Reform, Bulgaria (date unspecified), Guidelines
    for the Drawing up Communication Plans for 2007-2013 programming period of Structural Funds,
    Phare Twinning Programme: *http://www.nweurope.eu/nwefiles/file/salvi_communication_plan_guidelines.pdf*

Step 5: Identify and manage communication resources

Human and financial resources, as well as sufficient time, need to be assigned to the communication plan in order to efficiently and effectively manage its implementation. It is important to keep in mind that some communication techniques require extensive financial and human resources. Cooperation with network members and building on their enthusiasm can help to disseminate messages further. Special attention needs to be given to the following aspects:

- Work plan

- Budget

- Internal communication

- Division of roles and responsibilities

- Coordination with other stakeholders (i.e. authorities).

"PAs, MAs and NRNs need to be in the same boat and row in the same direction."

NRN Peer-to-Peer training participant

Did you know that...

...there should be strong internal communication links between all actors involved in implementing the communication plan, particularly between regional and national levels.

Source: ENRD (2013) Communications planning guidelines

Step 6: Monitor progress and evaluate the impact of the plan

Evaluating the communication tools used is essential to know if the messages communicated have been meaningful and understood. Evaluation can improve the effectiveness of the communication plan and a carefully planned evaluation will help to identify which tools are working well, which activities might need fine-tuning, if any, and/or if new approaches might be needed. Evaluation is an important part of the lifecycle of the communication plan as it provides feedback on past actions and this way supports the development of future activities. It can also encourage the development of more innovative communication tools, which build on past successes. Evaluating communication activities can be a challenge, particularly when targeted at a broader audience.

It is important to consider the cost-benefit ratio of communication actions. Polls or surveys can help to set the baseline, with information gained serving as relevant indicators. Social media such as Facebook, Linkedin, Twitter, and other blogs etc. can also contribute to receiving feedback as they offer a two-way communication option for facilitating dialogues [88].

Did you know that...

...the ENRD seminar on Communicating Rural Development was organised in March 2014 focusing on the contribution of communications to improving rural development policy implementation.

Source: Communicating Rural Development ENRD Seminar

---

88   ENRD (2013) *Peer-to-peer Module 5 - Communication as a Horizontal NSU Activity – Final report:*
       http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-toolkit/Peer_to_peer_Dijon_Feedback_report_FINAL.pdf

Key messages from the NRNs

During the *NRN Peer-to-Peer Pilot Training Module held in Tomar in Portugal** the NSUs' representatives identified some key elements they consider when developing a communication plan:

- Planning, team work and cooperation are essential;

- Communication plans should **inspire** stakeholders, **motivate** them to act and then **support** their continued engagement;

- Focus communications and choose the tools wisely;

- Don't be scared to use stakeholders' success stories to build credibility and reinforce the message.

  *   Pilot NSU Training Programme Module 3, 7 June 2013, Tomar, Portugal:
       http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/pilot-nsu-training-programme/en/pilot-nsu-training-module-3_en.cfm

---

Looking beyond formal communication plans

Efficient and effective communication is a vitally important topic for rural networking. Communication is a cross-cutting/horizontal aspect of networking, with an impact on almost all of the activities that NRNs and NSUs are carrying out. Considerable expertise has been accumulated in this regard during the 2007-2013 programming period and communication will become even more significant in the 2014-2020 programming period.

The different 'faces' of communication for networking

There is a **vertical** dimension – often functioning from the **top-down** with dissemination of information about RDPs and other technical information through the network to targeted stakeholders groups and wider public interest groups. There is also increasing scope for **bottom-up** communication processes with the opening of consultation procedures and other mechanisms for creating more dialogue with, and direct feedback from grass-roots practitioners.

There is a **horizontal** dimension that **links rural stakeholders and actors directly** – these communication processes are fundamental to the concept of networking, but involve interactions and information flows which need to be facilitated and organised in a very different way to those communication processes working in the vertical dimension.

There is communication which is one-way involving **linear** flows of ideas, knowledge and experience using more classical information actions and advisory / training models. And there are complex **interactive** flows based upon **cooperation and dialogue** leading to the mutual sharing of knowledge and the incubation and fostering of innovation via the inter-connection of stakeholders and cross-fertilisation of new ideas.

All of this is conducted in an **increasingly complex communications environment,** which not only embraces rapidly evolving new technologies, but also a sophisticated set of narrative and policy messages from a variety of public authorities on key cross-sectoral issues, such as climate change.

Source: ENRD website, Networks & Networking, NRN Toolkit, Principles and Practice of Networking, Managing the Network: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/principles-and-practice-of-networking/managing-the-network/en/managing-the-network_en.cfm

Although there was no specific requirement for NSUs to produce a communication plan during the 2007-2013 programming period, communication plans were prepared by several NSUs. During this period the networks faced diverse communication challenges, *some of which were also highlighted at the 20th NRN meeting in Dijon, France*[89]:

• Engaging with and involving the public at different levels and across different age groups.

• Recognising that it takes time to build the trust that enables the development of powerful communications.

• Acknowledging that NRNs' communication has to be customer-focused.

• Aiming to connect desk-based work with actions carried out with the reality of rural areas.

• Understanding that value for money assessment should also consider the long-term effect of the communication campaign.

The messages, target groups and communication tools used by NSUs in the past have been highly diverse. Different NSUs adapted their communication strategy to the needs of their various stakeholders and tailored their commnication strategy to these needs and available budgets.

Did you know that...

....during the NSU peer-to-peer training in Dijon on 'Communication as a horizontal NSU activity', a number of key communication challenges, possible solutions (based on practical NSU experience accumulated to date) and the applicability (strength and limitations) of solutions were discussed.

Source: Challenges and solutions cards on: Pilot NSU Training Programme Module 5: Communication as a Horizontal NSU Activity, 29 November 2013, Dijon, France

This diversity is reflected in the myriad of *communication postcards captured on the ENRD website*[90], which provide useful and interesting examples of network communication. These examples along with those explored in more depth as '*Added Value of Networking Stories*'[91] highlight the ingredients, which have made NRN communications successful.

This experience also demonstrates how communication has been used as a cross-cutting activity to deliver a range of NSU objectives. Many of the 'Added Value of Networking Stories' demonstrate how communication tools have supported the successful achievement of a range of broader core networking tasks. Among others, communication has been used as a tool to effectively engage with stakeholders.

Did you know that...

....in 2012 only 45% of NSUs had a communication plan. Despite this, 97% of all rural networks consider publications and websites as their principal communication tools with 71% highlighting events.

Source: ENRD (2013) Findings of the 2012 NRN Mapping Exercise: Final synthesis report

---

89 ENRD (2013) *Summary of outcomes 20th NRN Meeting 28th November, 2013 Dijon, France*: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-meeting/20thNRNmeeting/Summary-of-outcomes-20th-NRN-meeting-FINAL_en.pdf

90 ENRD website, *Policy in Action, Communicating Rural Development Gateway*: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/communicating-rural-development/eafrd/en/eafrd_en.cfm

91 ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: Networking elements*: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-networking-elements_en.cfm;
ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: NRN Tasks*: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-nrn-tasks_en.cfm

Communication tools to engage various stakeholder groups

Innovative communication initiatives are spreading in Europe, and are strongly contributing to better engagement with specific target groups (e.g. hard to reach target groups that often work in isolation or have limited direct contact). Participatory forms of communication have worked particularly effectively when they have brought together stakeholders:

- In Finland, the NSU developed and **toured a 'Rural Van'** around rural areas to engage with young people. It promoted RDP opportunities and communicated a positive image about quality of life opportunities in rural Finland.
  Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements, Rural Van Tour:
  http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E94E80-0B97-D9C5-8323-3D58A05ECD8E

- The Flemish NRN developed an **interactive exhibition stand** that included innovative children's games. These increased understanding of the CAP's benefits, activities of Flemish farmers, and the foods they produce.

  Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements, Well Farmed – A Portion of Agriculture on Your Plate: http://enrd. ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=D002EE1F-C23D-7430-5B6B-128AB0B51B18

- The Estonian NRN has used communication to improve their stakeholders shared understanding of common policies. The Estonian NRN developed a **series of study tours** for policy-makers and rural specialists **to LAGs** in order to make them engage with the LEADER methodology and understand more about its grass roots successes.
  Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements, Idea Trips Learning About LEADER in Estonia:
  http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=F9B40A9F-BC1F-5BA5-9CB7-BB4B5A2DEA85

- The Dutch NRN was one of the first to use **social media to support the exchange of experience** and know-how. By using social media to encourage bottom-up communication, rather than simply a form of disseminating top-down information, they have developed a thriving and growing stakeholder community on-line.
  Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements, Using Social Media in the Dutch NRN:
  http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E9B3A5-AA82-0F01-6809-2F10DA5A16BC

- The German NSU chose to bring **stakeholders together at a conference to discuss specific RDP measures** and develop solutions to overcome implementation issues.
  Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements, Conference Participants Develop a Shared Resolution:
  http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E92DED-A95C-11BC-0839-C0A86ED780E0

Communication tools were also extensively used during the 2007-2013 programming period to facilitate the exchange of relevant practices. In particular, many NSUs established a database of RDP projects.

Video library of projects in the Czech Republic

- The Czech Republic's NSU collected RDP project stories in short video format and have a **video library of over 140 projects available via YouTube.** This format has been particularly accessible for stakeholders and helped to ensure that the database is well used.

  Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements, Database of LAG Best Practice Projects:
  http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=D0182A74-AD2C-00FF-95C2-212A52CE9D19

- The Italian NSU has also used **films to communicate rural issues** focusing on three farming families and the foundation of their success.

  Source: ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements, Rural Families Today:
  http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E98C97-D706-505C-2E7E-25B6875A084A)

Useful resources developed by ENRD

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Toolkit, Principles and Practice of Networking, Managing the Network*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/principles-and-practice-of-networking/managing-the-network/en/managing-the-network_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: Networking elements*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-networking-elements_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: NRN Tasks*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-nrn-tasks_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Policy in Action, Communicating Rural Development Gateway*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/communicating-rural-development/eafrd/en/eafrd_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Policy in Action, Communicating Rural Development*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/communicating-rural-development/en/communicating-rural-development_en.cfm

Communicating Rural Development, 3-4 March 2014, Vilnius, Lithuania: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/seminars-and-conferences/seminar-on-communicating-rural-development/en/seminar-on-communicating-rural-development_en.cfm*

20th NRN Meeting, 28 November 2013, Dijon, France:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/meetings/en/20th-nrn-meeting_en.cfm

Pilot NSU Training Programme Module 3: Communications and Networking, 7 June 2013, Tomar, Portugal:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/pilot-nsu-training-programme/en/pilot-nsu-training-module-3_en.cfm

Pilot NSU Training Programme Module 5: Communication as a Horizontal NSU Activity, 29 November 2013, Dijon, France: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/pilot-nsu-training-programme/en/pilot-nsu-training-module-5_en.cfm*

ENRD (2011) *Communicating EU rural development policy*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=B528A9A0-0828-EB03-4415-AB051A70BC8D

ENRD (2013) *20th NRN Meeting Open Session: Group 5 – "How to coordinate all levels of stake-holders in the new NRN communications strategy."*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-meeting/20thNRNmeeting/14_How-to-coordinate-all-evels-of-stakeholders-in-the-new-NRN-communications-strategy_en.pdf*

ENRD (2013) *Findings of the 2012 NRN Mapping Exercise: Final synthesis report*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/networking-statistics-and-studies_en.cfm

ENRD (2013) *NSU Peer to Peer Training Program – Pilot Module 3 – "Communications and Networking" – Communications planning guidelines*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/pilot-nsu-training/module03/P2P_Module-3-Communications-guidelines-handout.pdf*

ENRD (2013) *Peer-to-peer Module 5 – Communication as a Horizontal NSU Activity – Final report*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-toolkit/Peer_to_peer_Dijon_Feedback_report_FINAL.pdf

ENRD (2013) *Summary of outcomes 20th NRN Meeting 28th November, 2013 Dijon, France*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-meeting/20thNRNmeeting/Summary-of-outcomes-20th-NRN-meeting-FINAL_en.pdf

Other relevant resources

European Commission (20/01/2014). *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm* (Last accessed on: 01/05/14)

The Countryside Agency (date unspecified) *Communicating With the Public – Monitoring Report,* referenced in *Ministry of Public Administration and Reform in Bulgaria (date unspecified), Guidelines for the Drawing up Communication Plans for 2007-2013 programming period of Structural Funds, Phare* Twinning Programme: *http://www.nweurope.eu/nwefiles/file/salvi_communication_plan_guidelines.pdf* (last accessed: 01/05/14)

DG AGRI (2006) *Handbook on Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, Guidance Document*: *http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/eval/guidance/document_en.pdf* (Last accessed on: 01/05/14)

Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the European Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005: *http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF* (Last accessed on: 01/05/14)

Schalenbourg C. (2010) *NRN Wallonia – Activities*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=9D6B06AD-074E-3C7F-8506-BB0904C697F0* (Last accessed on: 01/05/14)

3.8 Cooperation with the ENRD, European Networks and other rural networks

In accordance with Article 54(3) of the *Rural Development Regulation (RDR) No 1305/2013*[92] National Rural Networks (NRNs) need to plan and implement their activities in cooperation with the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD). According to the *NRN Guidance Fiche*[93], participation and cooperation between NRNs and the ENRD is expected to contribute to all four objectives set for NRNs by the RDR, namely (i) involving stakeholders; (ii) improving the quality of Rural Development Programme (RDP) implementation; (iii) informing the broader public and potential beneficiaries; and (iv) fostering innovation.

Legal framework

This recognises that participation and cooperation at European level and between national networks add value and help the NRNs to deliver their other key tasks more effectively and efficiently. Value is added at European level too. 'Supporting the networking of networks' is one of the key roles of the ENRD, but its success relies greatly upon the contributions from, and cooperation with, the NRNs at national and regional levels.

Mutual benefits from NRN – ENRD cooperation

Did you know that…

…one of the indicators defined for networks by the Draft Implementing Act is the *'Number of ENRD activities in which the NRN has participated'*.

Source: Commission Draft Implementing Regulation (not yet adopted at the time of finalising this Guidebook)

NSUs are instrumental in multiplying the information and opportunities generated by the ENRD and ensuring the information produced is disseminated to their NRN members. Although the main contact for the ENRD is the Network Support Unit (NSU) staff, participation and cooperation with the ENRD requires targeting also key NRN members and stakeholders depending on their mandate, function and capacity.

Looking beyond ENRD – NSU cooperation…

Furthermore, in most cases the ENRD is only in direct contact with the national NSUs[94] and it does not address its work directly at regional networks. This can be a barrier to the uptake of available ENRD information and resources at the regional level. Activities and resources should be considered when planning cooperation initiatives to ensure the activities and information provided at a European level benefit as many rural stakeholders and communities as possible.

"Networks have an important multiplier function at national level. Among other activities, it is recommended to foresee some translation capacity for disseminating anything relevant which is developed at EU level or together with other networks."

NRN Guidance Fiche

---

92 Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF

93 European Commission (20/01/2014) *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks*: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm

94 With the exception of regional networks in Belgium and the United Kingdom.

What are the main benefits of cooperation with the ENRD for both national and European levels?

- **Access to new ideas, approaches and practices** – The implementation of individual RDPs can benefit significantly from exchange and networking at EU level. New ideas and approaches are fed into proposals for new activities and projects under the different measures available in the RDPs. For example, *the expansion of social farming in Estonia in 2010-2012*[1] was directly linked to the participation of the Estonian Rural Network in the *ENRD Thematic Initiative on Social Farming*[2] that was launched in 2009.

- **Multiplication of ENRD's outcomes –** NRNs have an important multiplier function at national level. They play a particularly important role in the further dissemination of results from activities undertaken by the ENRD. The ENRD self-assessment[3] showed that there have been some weaknesses in terms of the multiplication of various ENRD outcomes at the national and regional levels, and there is scope for improvement in this regard.

- **Targeted support based on specific needs** - Support provided by the ENRD can add significant value to the work of the NSUs and their NRNs, particularly when it is targeted at the areas and themes of strong interest for the national and regional programmes and stakeholders.

- **Shaping the work of the ENRD** – All NRNs continue to be represented in the *ENRD Coordination Committee*[4]. Participation in the ENRD decision-making processes offers the possibility to influence and drive the ENRD's agenda, thereby allowing NRNs to advocate more targeted contributions, analyses and exchanges that have value at EU level (and thus would benefit other NRNs).

- **Support to the regular updating of NRN information** – An *interactive map*[5] on the ENRD website provides information on the structure and activities of NRNs in all Member States. It has been a useful networking tool at EU level.

- **Visibility** – Participating at the European level allows NRNs to share achievements and also transfer lessons from their work. Often this brings visibility to their work and further engagement of stakeholders at the national level.

- **Inspiration** – Meeting people and colleagues from the EU-28 and other countries and engaging in exploring each other's experience and learning can generate a lot of enthusiasm, motivation, inspiration and innovation for the network members and their activities.

(1)   ENRD website, AVN story: Networking elements, *Social farming info days and study tours*:
       http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=9A428876-0BB8-9426-E7AC-E2A74D94E6A4
(2)   ENRD website, *Themes, Social farming*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/themes/social-aspects/social-farming/en/social-farming_en.cfm*
(3)   ENRD (2013, unpublished) *ENRD Self-assessment Report; ENRD (2014) "Not everything that connects is a network"*:
       http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-self-assessment/final_disseminationmaterial_enrd.pdf
(4)   ENRD website, *Events & meetings, ENRD meetings, Coordination Committee meetings*:
       http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/meetings/en/cc-meetings-list_en.cfm
(5)   ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, NRN information*:
       http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-information/en/nrn-information_en.cfm

Do's and Don'ts…

DO ensure that NRNs have sufficient capacity and resources to engage both with the ENRD, other European Networks and with other NRNs. This includes planning for resources like translation, travel for NRN stakeholders and NSU staff, dissemination activities, preparation and collection of good practices to share at European level, resources to organise and host meetings with participation of European stakeholders, resources to organise and support study visits and participation in training activities.

Resources required for cooperation

The resources available to NSUs to engage with the ENRD can often be limited and may reduce the impact of ENRD support to the wider rural community. All NRNs should have sufficient capacity and resources to engage both with the ENRD and with other NRNs at the EU level. This includes ensuring that staff in the NSUs have good language skills, and that there are resources available for translation. Adequate capacity is also useful to ensure that the activities for disseminating and sharing relevant information and tools can be developed at EU level, or together with other networks. In addition, NSUs should consider possibilities to support participation in European meetings and cooperation activities by not only NSU staff but also members and stakeholders of the NRNs.

Specific examples of NRN engagement at EU level during the 2007-2013 programming period included:

Main forms of ENRD – NRN cooperation in 2007-2013

✓ **Participation at meetings and exchanges at EU level**

NRN representatives from all Member States are regularly invited to participate in meetings and events organised at a European level to share experiences and information. Among others, NRN representatives have participated in, and contributed to, ENRD meetings and events including:

Did you know that…

…the NRN Guidance Fiche of the European Commission specified a number of key areas for cooperation with ENRD, namely:

✓ Participation at meetings and exchanges at EU level
✓ Input into planning at EU level
✓ Providing examples of RDP projects and good practices (relevant experiences)
✓ Providing information for network statistics
✓ Contribution to thematic work

Source: DG AGRI, NRN Guidance Fiche

- *NRN meetings*[95]

- ENRD *Coordination Committee*[96] and *LEADER Subcommittee*[97] meetings

- *LEADER events*[98]

- *Focus Groups* [99] and thematic work

In the 2007-2013 programming period, NRNs had 21 regular *meetings*[100]. Most of the NRN meetings were hosted and supported by NRNs from different Member States. Several of these also included capacity building activities and *training elements to allow for 'Peer-to-Peer' learning*[101] (see also below) and transfer. In addition, targeted events with NRN participation focused on the development of transnational and inter-territorial cooperation projects. These supported NRNs and their members to identify potential cooperation partners and explore project ideas. Network members are encouraged to actively participate in these meetings, contributing their expertise and supporting the dissemination of information within their own stakeholder groups and across the network. As well as participation in meetings, NRN stakeholders and NSU staff are encouraged and invited to share and participate actively in online discussions and forums.

✓ **Collecting and Sharing of information**

In order to generate and analyse information, and support knowledge transfer, the ENRD needs and requests regular updates about NRN activities. This information might include for example statistics, examples of projects, good practices and relevant experiences in RDP implementation. As a result of such NRN inputs, the ENRD has created and developed mutually beneficial information and tools on the ENRD website. These include *summaries of the structure and activities of NRNs in all Member States*[102] and a *database of RDP projects*[103] to share examples and encourage cooperation ideas. Based on case studies generated from NRNs, the ENRD has made available success stories on networking which explore the *added value of NRNs' work*[104].

> **Cooperation between NRNs**

In addition to cooperation between the ENRD and NRNs, various forms of 'peer-to-peer' (i.e. NRN to NRN) cooperation were also developed and led by NRNs/NSUs:

✓ **Peer to Peer**

NSUs and key NRN stakeholders have recognised the importance of not only cooperating with the ENRD but also with other NRNs to share best practice and lessons learnt, deliver joint activities, learn from each other and provide in depth support to their network members. 'Peer-to-peer' cooperation and mutual learning benefited the work of NSUs during the 2007-2013

---

95   ENRD website, *Events & meetings, NRN meetings*:
     http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/meetings/en/nrn-meetings_en.cfm
96   ENRD website, *Events & meetings, ENRD meetings, Coordination Committee meetings*:
     http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/meetings/en/cc-meetings-list_en.cfm
97   ENRD website, *Events & meetings, ENRD meetings, LEADER Subcommittee meetings*:
     http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/meetings/en/lsc-meetings-list_en.cfm
98   ENRD website, *LEADER, LEADER events*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader/leader/en/media-and-events_en.cfm*
99   ENRD website, *LEADER Analysis, LEADER Focus Groups*:
     http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader/leader/en/leader-focus-group_en.cfm ;
     ENRD website, *Themes*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/themes/en/themes_en.cfm*
100 As above (Footnote No 95)
101 ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Toolkit, NSU Training Programme*:
     http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/pilot-nsu-training-programme/en/pilot-nsu-training-programme_en.cfm
102 ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, NRN information* (Note: for each Member State a page
     providing information on the NRN's profile and activities is available):
     http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-information/en/nrn-information_en.cfm
103 ENRD website, *Policy in Action, The RDP Projects Database*:
     http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/rdp_view/introduction/en/introduction_en.cfm
104 ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking*:
     http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/added-value-of-networking_en.cfm

programming period. 'Peer-to-peer' training topics and sessions were developed from a training needs assessment of NSUs that was undertaken by the ENRD Contact Point in 2012. Findings from the assessment informed a training programme that focused on maximising the available knowledge and skills. Based on the *evaluation of the pilot phase of the peer-to-peer training sessions*[105], a second phase of the peer-to-peer training was delivered during 2013 and 2014.

✓ **Management and support to thematic cooperation via NRN clusters**

Many NRNs have participated in *thematic and geographical clusters*[106] created with ENRD assistance on the initiative of individual NRNs. These were established to develop joint activities, promote greater cooperation and promote technical exchange and dialogue between networks and their stakeholders on topics of common interest. Two 'geographical clusters' were also developed (supported by the ENRD) between the Nordic-Baltic Rural Networks and the Mediterranean Rural Networks.

Did you know that…

…seven thematic clusters were set up on the topics of:
- Youth and young farmers
- Community Led Local Development
- Forestry
- Social Farming
- Local Food and Short Supply Chains
- Rural Financing
- Rural Entrepreneurship

In addition 2 geographical NRN clusters were also developed.

Source: ENRD website, Networks and Networking, NRN Clusters

An example of cooperation with the ENRD – The Community Led Local Development Thematic Cluster led by the Hungarian NRN

Community Led Local Development (CLLD) and multi-funding opportunities for LAGs were identified by the ENRD in 2013 as two themes of high common interest for NSUs. This encouraged the Hungarian NRN to cooperate with the ENRD to develop the CLLD thematic cluster, which aimed to:

- enhance *cooperation and exchange of experience* among the main interested networks;
- help to *concentrate and rationalise* the efforts of the NSUs in understanding CLLD;
- produce *practically-focused tools* and guidance that could help in CLLD implementation;
- influence the way CLLD is advanced at *European and national policy-making levels*.

The Cluster delivered a conference entitled 'CLLD – The message unheard' during 2013. The purpose was to bring together key rural development stakeholders, promote the added-value of the CLLD approach and discuss the main concerns. Cluster participants discussed challenges and possible solutions in relation to the proposed CLLD topics and produced a report and summary with suggested practical outcomes and actions.

A second cluster meeting held in France aimed to finalise the set-up of the following working groups:

✓ Working Group 1: CLLD Exchange Platform, with the aim of creating a platform to exchange information and ideas on the practical details of planning and implementing the CLLD approach.

✓ Working Group 2: Demonstrating the added value of the CLLD approach, with the aim of producing a document that explains and clearly demonstrates the added value of the LEADER approach to relevant stakeholders.

Source: ENRD website, Networks and Networking, NRN Clusters

105 ENRD (2013) *ENRD Pilot Network Support Unit (NSU) Peer-to-Peer Training Programme Evaluation Report*: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-toolkit/Pilot_NSU_Training_Programme_-_FINAL_Evaluation_Report.pdf
106 ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, NRN Clusters*: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-clusters/en/nrn-clusters_en.cfm

✓ **On line interactions and exchange**

The second phase of the peer-to-peer exchange programme of NSUs was broadened to not only include training sessions but also use online based discussions via a 'Virtual Think Tank' process. This was piloted by the Swedish NSU using an online exchange of information through the ENRD website's 'MyENRD' forum facility.

As new forms of electronic networking are developed, cross border networking exchanges will continue to rise. This enables a greater flow of information between NSUs and encourages NRN members to learn from and share with rural stakeholders from other Member States.

Future topics of interest

In the *2014 NRN Mapping Survey*[107], NSUs were asked to identify any topics they felt would be of interest during the 2014-2020 programming period. Of the seventeen NSUs that replied, seven were interested in participating in activity associated with innovation and working with the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability[108] (EIP-AGRI) and its *Operational Groups*[109]. Two NSUs mentioned the communication plan and promotion to and engagement with the broader public; two were interested in monitoring and self-assessment; two in developing an NSU and an NRN; and a further two in developing cooperation projects. Other topics mentioned included implementation of CLLD, regional NRN cooperation, collecting RDP project examples and land management.

Cooperation with other European Networks

During the 2014-2020 programming period, NRNs should also consider the benefits of developing cooperation activity with existing and new European networks such as the network established to support the EIP-AGRI and the Helpdesk to support ENRD evaluation functions (see section 1.2). The EIP-AGRI has been put in place at EU level to enable the networking of advisory services and researchers among others. Since NRNs have 'networking activities for advisors and innovation support services' as one of their key 2014-2020 functions, cooperation between EIP AGRI's Service Point and the NSUs will be particularly pertinent.
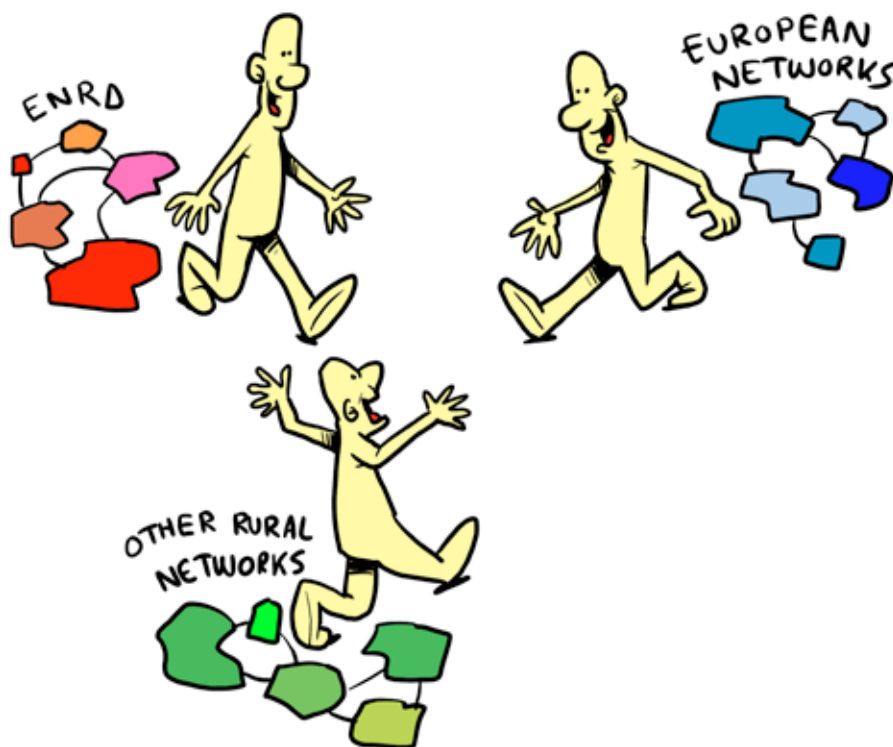
107 ENRD (2014) *Findings of the 2014 NRN mapping exercise:*
     http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/networking-statistics-and-studies_en.cfm
108 European commission website, *European Innovation Partnership: 'Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability'*: *http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/index_en.htm*
109 European commission website, *Opportunities provided by the European Innovation Partnership "Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability" and its Operational Groups*:
     http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/documents/eip-opportunities_en.htm

Useful resources developed by ENRD

ENRD website, *Events & meetings, ENRD meetings, Coordination Committee meetings:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/meetings/en/cc-meetings-list_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Events & meetings, NRN meeting*s:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/meetings/en/nrn-meetings_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Events & meetings, ENRD meetings, LEADER Subcommittee meetings*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/meetings/en/lsc-meetings-list_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/added-value-of-networking_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: Networking elements*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-networking-elements_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: NRN Task*s:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-nrn-tasks_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, NRN Clusters*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-clusters/en/nrn-clusters_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, NRN information*
(Note: for each Member State a page providing information on the NRN's profile and activities is available):
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-information/en/nrn-information_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Toolkit, NSU Training Programme*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/pilot-nsu-training-programme/en/pilot-nsu-training-programme_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Themes, Social farming*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/themes/social-aspects/social-farming/en/social-farming_en.cfm

ENRD website, *LEADER, LEADER events*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader/leader/en/media-and-events_en.cfm*

ENRD website, *LEADER Analysis, LEADER Focus Groups*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader/leader/en/leader-focus-group_en.cfm*

ENRD website, *Policy in Action, The RDP Projects Database*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/rdp_view/introduction/en/introduction_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Themes, Knowledge Transfer and Innovation, KT&I Focus Group*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/themes/research-and-innovation-gateway-development/en/research-and-innovation-gateway-development_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Themes, Community led Local Development, NRN Thematic Cluster on CLLD*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/themes/clld/nrn-thematic-initiative-on-clld/en/nrn-thematic-initiative-on-clld_en.cfm

ENRD (2013) *ENRD Pilot Network Support Unit (NSU) Peer-to-Peer Training Programme Evaluation Report*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-toolkit/Pilot_NSU_Training_Programme_-_FINAL_Evaluation_Report.pdf

ENRD (2013, unpublished), *ENRD Self-assessment Report*

ENRD (2014) *Self-assessment of the European Network for Rural Development: "Not everything that 'connects' is a network"*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-self-assessment/final_disseminationmaterial_enrd.pdf*

ENRD (2014) *Findings of the 2014 NRN mapping exercise – NRNs in transition* (preparation for the 2014–2020 programming period): Final report: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/networking-statistics-and-studies_en.cfm*

Other relevant resources

European Commission (20/01/2014) *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm (Last accessed on: 01/05/14)*

European Commission website, *European Innovation Partnership: 'Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability'*: *http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/index_en.htm (Last accessed: 01/05/14)*

European Commission website, *Opportunities provided by the European Innovation Partnership "Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability"* and its Operational Groups: *http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eip/documents/eip-opportunities_en.htm (Last accessed: 01/05/14)*

Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the European Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005: *http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF (Last accessed on: 01/05/14)*

Working document for the Rural Development Committee (2014), Updated version February 2014, Rural Development Monitoring (2014-2020) – Implementation Report Tables (not publicly available at the time of writing the Guidebook)

IV. NRN Self-assessment & Evaluation
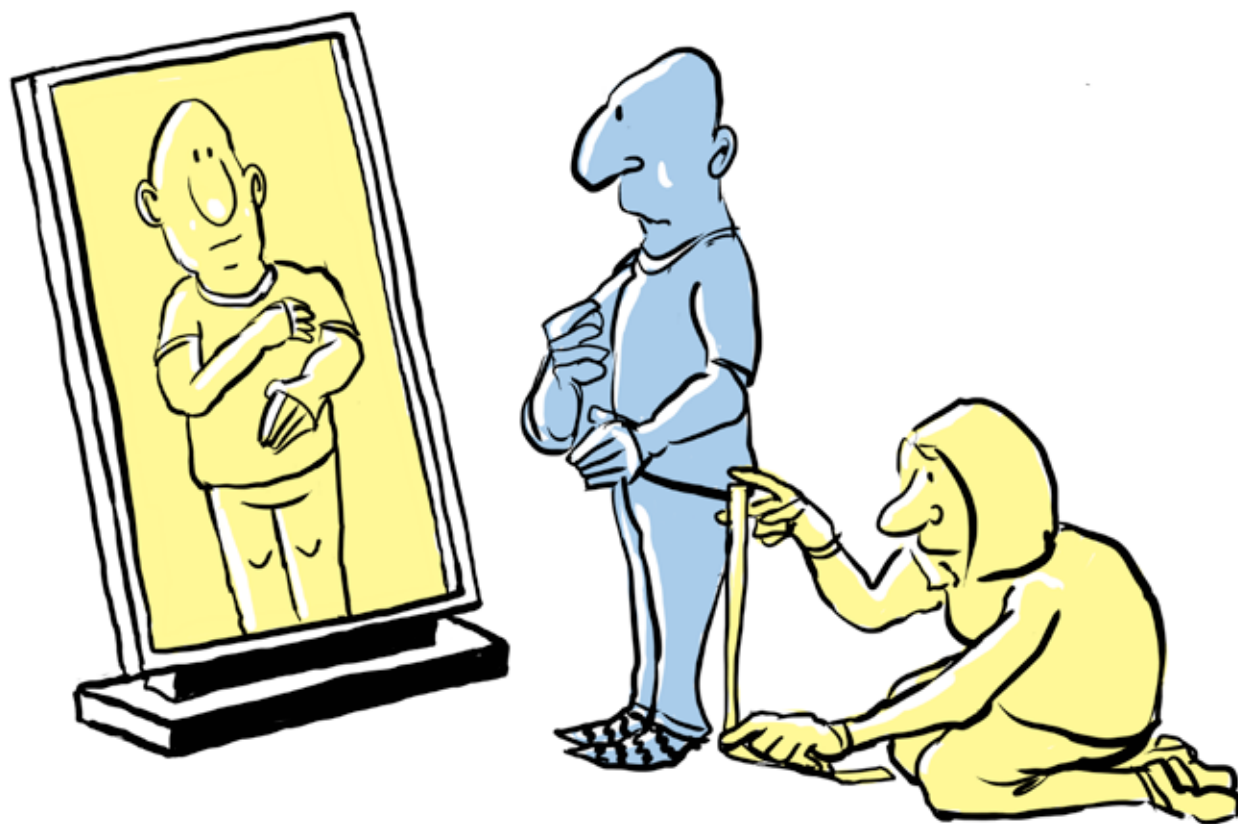
4.1 Basic concepts and framework for NRN evaluation & self-assessment

National Rural Networks (NRNs) operate in the context of EU rural development policy that is co-financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The assessment and evaluation of the work of NRNs, and Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) as a whole, is gaining increased importance from one programming period to another. The need to administer limited resources in an efficient manner results in more scrutiny on how public money is spent and how efficiently programmes perform. As *Issue 10 of the Rural Evaluation News*[110] states: *"With the prospects of tighter budgets in the next programming period, concern about the effective use of funds is growing. […] Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development is encouraging Member States to increase their efforts in developing credible evidence of rural development effects."*

One should keep in mind that one of the main mandates of NRNs is to 'improve the quality of RDPs'. As the 'pressure' increases for Managing Authorities (MAs) to understand and demonstrate the effectiveness of their RDPs, so it does for NRNs and their National Support Units (NSUs) to demonstrate their contribution to improving the implementation of RDPs. Therefore, network evaluation and self-assessment (see sections 4.2 & 4.3 for further details) are gaining importance as a tool to provide evidence for the added value of networking.

> **The importance & challenge of network evaluation**

> *"Taking into account the economic crisis and the fact that resources are not unlimited, Managing Authorities and the political level have realised that the evaluation framework could be a way for them to justify their political choices."*

> **Adelina Dos Reis, DG AGRI**

Do's and Don'ts…
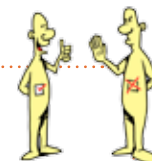
…Don't forget that NRNs are part of the RDPs and one of their main mandates is 'to improve the quality of RDPs'.

---

110 European Evaluation Network (2012) *Rural Evaluation News, Number 10, December 2012*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=B4DE1199-F20F-8239-FA8D-754182E6E95E
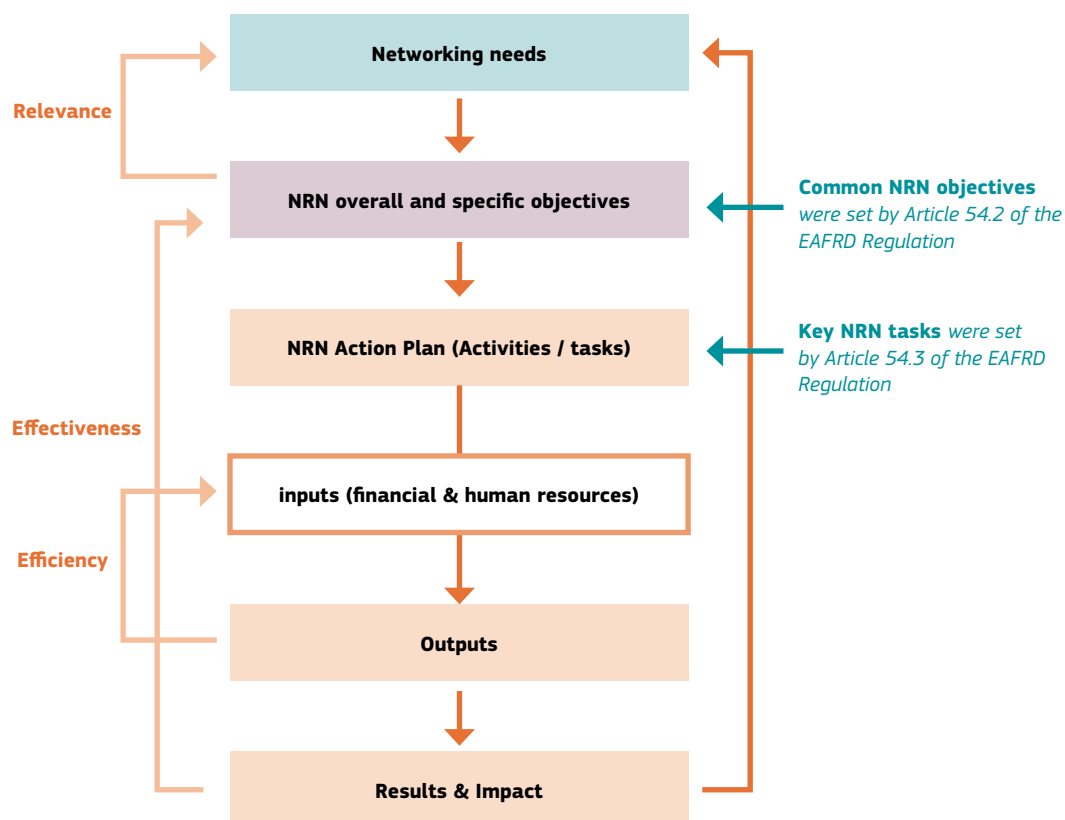
"On-going self-assessment would start with developing first an intervention logic for the NRN, setting clear objectives and indicators, then continuously monitoring the progress and feeding results back into the work of NRN."

Commission NRN Guidance Fiche

However, assessing and evaluating the added value of networking is a challenging task. As it is described in previous parts of this Guidebook, networking produces valuable results that are often intangible, and therefore hard to measure. At the same time, policy-makers often look for clear evidence to justify that public money (including that allocated to 'networking') is spent efficiently. So how to start and develop NRN evaluation and self-assessment?

Intervention logic as the basis of network evaluation

It has been widely recognised among evaluators that any kind of network assessment would need to start on the basis of a clear intervention logic. Section 2.1 of this Guidebook describes how the intervention logic forms the basis of both the overall operation of rural networks (including the Annual Work Plans) and is the pre-requisite of any kind of network assessment process. Evaluations of public interventions most commonly look at the relevance of the intervention (i.e. the extent to which an intervention's objectives are pertinent to the needs, issues and problems), *effectiveness* of interventions (the link between results and the objective(s), i.e. the extent to which objectives were achieved), and efficiency (the link between inputs and outputs, i.e. how efficiently the resources used contributed to the production of key outputs). The construction of an intervention logic should start from an assessment of the baseline situation (including strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) and the assessment of specific needs. Networks operate in specific and diverse contexts, and these can be often described by context parameters, such as the range of rural stakeholders the network aims to engage with and existing linkages between them, the level of openness of networks, existence of other similar networks, the structure and content of RDPs, etc. The specific networking needs will be determined by these factors, and network objectives would need to be defined to address these specific needs. It has to be noted, that a common set of objectives was set (pre-defined) by Article 54 of the *Rural Development Regulation (RDR) No 1305/2013*[111], based on expectations and objectives that rural networks need to fulfil in line with the objectives of rural development policy. However, defining network-specific objectives is very much in the hands of individual NRNs and MAs.

Relevance

Networking needs

NRN overall and specific objectives — **Common NRN objectives** *were set by Article 54.2 of the EAFRD Regulation*

NRN Action Plan (Activities / tasks) — **Key NRN tasks** *were set by Article 54.3 of the EAFRD Regulation*

Effectiveness

inputs (financial & human resources)

Efficiency

Outputs

Results & Impact

111 Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF

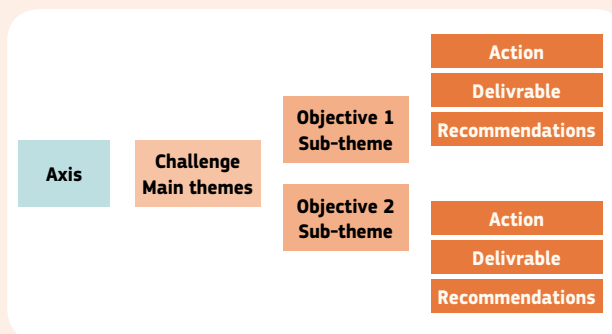## Intervention logic as a basis of self-assessment:
The case of Wallonia

As soon as the Walloon NSU was established, work started on constructing a Work Plan for the network based upon a clear understanding of the network objectives and intervention logic. Annual priorities were structured around four thematic axes, namely (i) adaptation of cultural and forestry practices to new challenges; (ii) multifunctional agriculture; (iii) urban/rural linkages; (iv) inter-territorial cooperation. For each of these themes a set of 'challenges, theme, sub-theme (objective), action, deliverable and recommendation' were defined (as presented in the figure).

Methodology Logical framework

Source: ENRD website, Networks & Networking, NRN Self-assessment Toolkit, NRN Self-assessment Profiles:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/nrn-self-assessment-profiles

Whether we talk about NRN evaluation or self-assessment, the basis should be a good understanding of the intervention logic, i.e. what the networks aim to achieve, through what kind of activities, what are the expected outputs and results of these activities and how far these results contribute to the achievement of the initial objective(s). Examples of network intervention logics can be found under the *'Existing tools used by NRNs for Self-assessment'*[112].

Did you know that…

…In 2014 two events (that built on each other) were organised on the topic of 'NRN evaluation and self-assessment': the first event, a Good Practice Workshop on *'National Rural Networks: How to show their benefits?'* was organised by the European Evaluation Network on the 10-11 April in Rome; the second event (the 21st NRN meeting and peer-to-peer training) on 'Understanding Network Self-assessment and Evaluation' was organised in Kendal, England on the 6-7 May 2014.

Source: Evaluation Expert Network, Good Practice Workshop; ENRD 21st NRN Meeting & Peer-to-peer training

While NRN evaluation and self-assessment have the same starting point, they serve different purposes. On the one hand, NRNs are subject to evaluation as all other rural development interventions co-financed by the EAFRD, in order to evaluate their contribution to the EU rural development objectives. NRN evaluation is carried out by independent experts at predetermined points in time, in line with the requirements set by the Common Monitoring and Evaluation System (CMES)[113]. On the other hand, NRN self-assessment is a process according to which NRNs assess their own operations on an on-going basis, with the aim of drawing lessons learnt and continuously adapting their rolling plan and improve their activities.

Differentiating between NRN evaluation and self-assessment

---

112   ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Self-assessment Toolkit, Practical Tools for NRN Self-assessment, Existing tools used by NRNs for Self-assessment:*
      http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/practical-tools-for-nrn-self-assessment/en/existing-tools-used-by-nrns-for-self-assessment_en.cfm
113   During the 2007-2013 programming period called Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF).

4.2   NRN Monitoring & Evaluation

For the 2007-2013 period, most Member States established their NRNs with funding from the technical assistance measure of their RDPs. However, Member States with regional RDPs had the option to submit for approval a separate programme for the establishment and operation of their NRN (called National Rural Network Programmes [NRNPs]), as per Article 66 of *EAFRD Regulation No. 1698/2005 for 2007-2013*[114].

During the 2007-2013 programming period most of the networks were evaluated as part of the RDPs[115] (Technical Assistance (TA) measure). However, four networks (in Germany, Italy, Spain and Portugal) were developed on the basis of NRNP, and as such, have been subject to ex-ante, mid-term and ex-post evaluations as per *Article 84 of the EAFRD Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005*.

Examples of Technical Assistance NRN evaluations

In **Austria**, the mid-term evaluation of the Austrian RDP included an evaluation of the NSU's performance, which essentially relied on the analysis of event participant feedback and on information about target indicator achievement provided in the NSU's annual activity reports. Furthermore the RDP-specific evaluation questions applied by the mid-term evaluator in the context of the assessment of Axis 4 measures produced information of relevance to the NRN support unit's current service offer.

Source: ENRD website, Networks & Networking, NRN Self-assessment Toolkit, NRN Self-assessment profiles, Austria:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/nrn-self-assessment-profiles/en/austria_en.cfm

The evaluation of the work of the **Czech Republic's** NRN was an independent assessment of the effectiveness of existing work of the NRN and aimed to formulate recommendations with regard to more efficient operation of the network and its activities and management processes; as well as to make recommendations for the programming period of 2014-2020. This evaluation was carried out in two phases: (i) an analytical phase including desk research with regard to NRN implementation, structured interviews with the relevant MA staff from the Ministry of Agriculture, mapping and analysis of key implementation processes of the NRN, on-line survey of members and partners of the NRN and identification of success factors; (ii) the 'proposal' phase including suggestions on how to increase the efficiency of the NRN and the verification of suggestions with the partners of the NRN (through guided discussion), as well as risk-elimination.

Source: ENRD website, Networks & Networking, NRN Self-assessment Toolkit, NRN Self-assessment profiles, Czech Republic:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/nrn-self-assessment-profiles/en/czech-republic_en.cfm

The **Scottish** National Rural Network (SNRN) was established in 2008 to support the implementation of the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP). The overarching aim of the SNRN is to connect rural Scotland and promote rural growth. The Scottish Government undertook a procurement exercise in late 2012 to identify relevant experts to undertake an evaluation of the SNRN and the SRDP Communication Plan. It was felt that an independent evaluation was the best way to understand what had worked well and what had not worked so well, in order to inform plans for the NRN in 2014-20. The evaluation has been used as a basis to develop proposals for the SNRN in 2014-20, as set out in the public consultation on the SRDP.

Source: ENRD website, Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN stories: NRN tasks:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-nrn-tasks_en.cfm

During autumn 2011 the **Polish** Network commissioned an external evaluation of its activities. The specific objective of the evaluation was to assess to what degree the Network structure was suitable and how efficiently and effectively the objectives in the Action Plan were achieved. The evaluation also compared the situations of three other NRNs (France, Italy and Lithuania) in order to identify innovative solutions for the rest of the programming period.

Source: ENRD website, Networks & Networking, NRN Self-assessment Toolkit, NRN Self-assessment Profiles, Poland:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/nrn-self-assessment-profiles/en/poland_en.cfm

---

114 Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32005R1698:en:NOT

115 According to Chapter II (Technical assistance & networking), Article 66 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 *an amount shall be reserved for establishing and operating the national rural network referred to in Article 68."*

Did you know that…

…the European Evaluation Network produced a *Working Paper on the Evaluation of National Rural Network Programmes* (July 2010) and organised a *Good Practice Workshop* in February 2012 on the same topic.

Source: Good Practice Workshop on Evaluation of National Rural Network Programmes, 7 February 2012 Brussels, Belgium

Evaluation as a whole, and network evaluation in particular, is a strengthened element of the 2014-2020 rural development policy. The main requirements with regard to RDP evaluation for the 2014-2020 programming period is set out under Articles 54 to 57 of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR)[116] and Articles 76 to 79 of the RDR[117]. A more detailed rural development implementing act[118] specifies common output indicators and evaluation questions (as part of the CMES – as specified under Article 67 of the RDR). In addition, it is planned that a European Commission Guidelines will be prepared on the evaluation of NRNs[119]. As a new element of the CMES a set of common output indicators as well as a common evaluation question are defined with regard to NRNs[120].

Looking ahead: NRN evaluation in 2014-2020

Did you know that…

…mid-term evaluation is not anymore a formal requirement by the 2014-2020 RDR. On-going evaluation however continues to be an important element. As Adelina Dos Reis (Head of Unit, DG AGRI E4) stated in an interview: *"Without on-going evaluation, you realise it too late. […] In the end, this is the real concept of on-going evaluation: being useful."*

Source: European Evaluation Network, Rural Evaluation News, No 11

---

116 Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013:
     http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0320:0469:EN:PDF
117 Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013:
     http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF
118 At the time of developing this Guidebook the implementing act was not yet adopted.
119 European Evaluation Network (2014, unpublished) *Background Document, Intervention logic and evaluation framework for 2014-2020 National Rural Networks, Good Practice Workshop, "National Rural Networks: How to show their benefits?", Rome, Italy, 10 and 11 April 2014*
120 Output indicators No 24 to 27 in *Annex IV of the draft implementing act;* and common evaluation questions in Annex V of the draft implementing act (not yet adopted at the time of writing the Guidebook).

'Networking' in the Common Monitoring and Evaluation System

According to *Article 14* of the Draft Implementing Act on Rural Development[1], the CMES referred to in Article 67 of the RDR[2] includes the following key elements:

(a) an intervention logic showing the interactions between priorities, focus areas and measures;

(b) a set of common context, result and output indicators;

(c) common evaluation questions;

(d) data collection, storage and transmission;

(e) regular reporting on monitoring and evaluation activities;

(f) the evaluation plan;

(g) the ex-ante and ex-post evaluations and all other evaluation activities linked to the RDP, including those required to fulfil the enhanced requirements of the 2017 and 2019 annual implementation reports;

(h) Support to enable all actors responsible for monitoring and evaluation to fulfil their obligations.

Annex IV of the draft implementing act and the working document on rural development monitoring (2014-2020)[3] specify three output indicators with regard to networking. These indicators are further detailed and specified in fiches and working documents:

• *Number of thematic and analytical exchanges set up with the support of NRN:* This indicator counts the total number of thematic and analytical exchanges, broken down by type (thematic working groups, consultations and other exchange forms) and as by 'focus area' (dissemination of monitoring and evaluation findings, innovation support services and those devoted for LAGs).

• *Number of NRN communication tools:* The indicator defines the number of different communication tools, such as events organised (out of which those focusing on disseminating monitoring and evaluation findings, innovation support services and LAG support), publications, other NRN communication tools used to communicate to the wider public, number of project examples and databases.

• *Number of ENRD activities in which the NRN has participated:* This indicator counts all ENRD activities in which the NRN has participated and out of those in which the NRN actively contributed.

According to the draft implementing act, the CMES also include an evaluation question on 'networking', namely: ***To what extent has the NRN contributed to achieving the objectives laid down in Art. 54.2 of the RDR[4]?***

(1)   Commission Implementing Regulation (Draft, unpublished at the time of finalising this Guidebook)

(2)   Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013: *http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF*

(3)   Working document for the Rural Development Committee, Updated version February 2014, Rural Development Monitoring (2014-2020) – Implementation Report Tables (not publicly available at the time of finalising this Guidebook)

(4)   Same as (2)

NRNs have played, and should continue to play, an **important role at the different stages of the RDP monitoring and evaluation** process as a whole. For instance, during the *'open space discussion' on 'Communicating Monitoring and Evaluation Findings'*[121] (20th NRN meeting, 28 November 2014, Dijon, France), NSU representatives considered that networks can contribute to RDP evaluation through providing their perspective on certain implementation issues, e.g. highlighting any possible misinterpretation and identify possible weaknesses in evaluation and facilitating exchange about evaluation results. NRNs may play an important role at different stages of the RDP evaluation, starting from the inception phase (drawing up the evaluation), through the implementation of the certain aspects of RDP evaluation until the dissemination of its results. Some of the NRNs played a pro-active role during the 2007-2013 programming period in this regard, and lessons can be drawn from these experiences (see box below). Among others, experience of NRNs was shared during Workshop B of the Module 7 of the NSU peer-to-peer training.

> **NRNs are not only 'subjects' but also 'tools' for RDP evaluation**

Did you know that…

…according to Article 54.2 of the RDR, one of the key tasks of NRNs is the *'dissemination of monitoring and evaluation findings' (of RDPs)?*

The role of NRNs in the RDP evaluation

The **Danish NRN decided to study LEADER implementation** in Denmark in order to explore how the added value of LEADER can be highlighted and measured. The study was carried out through a survey, some workshops and focus groups, targeting the MA and the NSU, managers and board members of LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs), students and other stakeholders working with or studying local governance and LEADER. The study contributed to the understanding of LEADER, local governance and supplied better indicators in order to improve the preparation and implementation of the 2014-2020 RDP.
Source: ENRD website, AVN story: NRN Tasks: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/added-value/DK-added-value-of-leader.pdf

The **Italian NRN** thought that in order to **consolidate and disseminate a positive culture of evaluation** it is necessary to improve the quality of evaluations conducted and to raise awareness about the need to carry out evaluations that are more successful at providing useful knowledge for the design and implementation of future development policies. In order to provide accessible training to as many participants as possible, an on-line evaluation training course was developed. To spread knowledge and improve the skills of actors directly involved or interested in evaluation, the Italian Rural Network launched E-VALPROG, a free e-learning course on the evaluation of EU rural development policy, aimed in particular at: (i) disseminating basic knowledge on the theory of evaluation; (ii) providing tools and information to better organise evaluation activities; (iii) consolidating the vision of evaluation as a useful tool for the policy making process; (iv) raising awareness of the role that people can play in the evaluation process; (v) developing a more conscious participation in rural development issues. The training course represents a useful tool for those who work on management and implementation of development policies (such as regional administrations, public and private bodies operating in development areas and all those who are interested in the evaluation of socio-economic development policies).
Source: ENRD website, AVN story: NRN Tasks: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/added-value/IT-e-valprog.pdf

---

121 ENRD (2013) *Open Space Discussion Group No 6, Communicating Monitoring and Evaluation Findings: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-meeting/20thNRNmeeting/9_Communicating-Monitoring-and-Evaluation-Findings_en.pdf*

The **Welsh Rural Network (WRN)** hosted a training **workshop on monitoring and evaluation** in August 2013. This event was designed to meet training needs reported to WRN and to address some issues around monitoring and evaluation identified by the mid-term review. This workshop provided an opportunity for the Welsh Government, the Axes 3 and 4 groups and programme evaluators to discuss various aspects of monitoring and evaluation. The event was facilitated by the 'On-going Evaluation Team'. The On-going Evaluation team is contracted to provide monitoring and evaluation assistance across the RDP.

Source: ENRD website, AVN story: NRN Tasks:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/added-value/UK-wales-glancing-back-to-plan-ahead.pdf

The **Dutch NRN** received several comments from people who have been working in rural development since 2009, about complexities and bottlenecks associated with the procedures of the Dutch RDP (2007-2013). As the RDP was in the early stages of the programme period the Network felt there was sufficient time for change and adjustment. To facilitate work in the field and smooth implementation of the RDP, the Dutch NRN organised an **interactive working session with policy-makers**, LEADER staff the Government Service for Land and Water Management and the MA to discuss these complexities and develop possible solutions together. In 2013 the NRN felt the need to evaluate the results of this first evaluation and explore what had happened with the solutions brought forward in 2009. Therefore, a round of several interviews with a diverse set of actors from different working backgrounds was undertaken. Based on long-term experience working in the RDP, the insights of these actors provided a fruitful insight for policy makers that were involved in designing the 2014-2020 RDP. The analysis of this exercise was disseminated internally to the government's RDP writing teams and published online via the Dutch NRN's website.

Source: ENRD website, AVN story: NRN Tasks:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/added-value/NL-monitor-and-evaluate-together.pdf

4.3   NRN Self-assessment

NRN Self-assessment as a flexible tool for improvement

NRN self-assessment is not based on legal requirements but is a common practice recommended by the *NRN Guidance Fiche*[122]. The main focus of NRN self-assessment is to assess the activities, outputs and results of networking, with a view to identify weaknesses and improve activities. NRN self-assessment is, therefore, an important tool for NRNs for improving their performance. NRNs can be more flexible in terms of their assessment approaches and methodologies. At the same time, a good-quality and credible NRN self-assessment can also contribute or feed into the formal evaluation process. In this sense, the two processes are often interlinked.

Did you know that…

…the ENRD has a specific *Toolkit on NRN Self-assessment* that contains among others the self-assessment profiles of 16 networks and several practical tools for self-assessment.

Source: ENRD website, Networks & Networking,
NRN Self-assessment Toolkit

For instance, in Italy, the external evaluator prepared self-assessment tools for the NRN, taking into account similar experiences in other European Member States. Sweden's NRN regularly commissions an independent evaluator to assess the activities undertaken by the network.

---

122   European Commission (20/01/2014) *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks:* http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm

Networks have taken diverse approaches towards NRN self-assessment (that are also reflected in the *NRN self-assessment profiles on the ENRD website*[123]). Through the review of the self-assessment profiles a set of common (ongoing) network self-assessment approaches can be identified, such as:

- **NRN Steering Committees or Coordination Committees** often monitor, assess and provide feedback on NRN activities, discuss and monitor action plans, and in some cases have an advisory function (see for instance *Walloon, Czech Republic and Finnish NRN self-assessment profiles*[124]).

- **Regular coordination meetings** between the MA and NSU, and in some cases other departments involved in RDP delivery, as well as consortium partners (in case of outsourced networks) can contribute to the review and assessment of NRN activities and results (see for instance *Austrian NRN self-assessment profile*[125]).

- **Participation in RDP Monitoring Committees**, including information-provision and presentation of NRN activities (see for instance the *Austrian and Czech Republic NRN self-assessment profiles*[126]).

- **Involvement of thematic working groups/ assessment along priority areas** to provide feedback on the relevant areas of activity of the NRN (see for instance examples of the *Austrian and Swedish NRNs*[127]).

- **Progress reports & annual reports** on activities, outputs and results provide regular overview of NRN achievements and activities (see for instance *self-assessment profiles of Finland, Austria and Wallonia*[128]). These reports are sometimes part of the annual progress report of the RDP (see reference in several profiles in the NRN Self-assessment Toolkit).

- **Stakeholder surveys** are tools widely used by NRNs to receive feedback on specific activities, in particular events and publications. Surveys are also carried out to assess the needs of network stakeholders (see for instance the *self-assessment profiles of the Finnish, Flemish and English NRNs*[129]). Various examples of stakeholder surveys can be found under the *'Existing tools used by NRNs for Self-assessment'*[130], and guidance on survey-design under *'Guidance on design of surveys, questionnaires and feedback forms'*[131].

> **NRN self-assessment methods and approaches**

> *"The ex-ante evaluation of the German NRNP questioned the suitability of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) for the assessment of NRN implementation. While CMEF indicators were found applicable to EAFRD projects, the evaluator concluded that specific indicators were needed for monitoring the performance of the NRNP."*
>
> **German NRN Self-assessment profile**

> *"The yearly activity plan is a practical reference manual for everybody, not too strategic in nature but useful for on-going assessment."*
>
> **Finnish NRN Self-assessment profile**

123 ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Self-assessment Toolkit, NRN Self-assessment Profiles*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/nrn-self-assessment-profiles

124 As above.

125 ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Self-assessment Toolkit, NRN Self-assessment Profiles, Austria*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/nrn-self-assessment-profiles/en/austria_en.cfm

126 As above (Footnote No 123)

127 As above.

128 As above.

129 As above.

130 ENRD website, Networks & Networking, *NRN Self-assessment Toolkit, Practical Tools for NRN Self-assessment, Existing tools used by NRNs for Self-assessment*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/practical-tools-for-nrn-self-assessment/en/existing-tools-used-by-nrns-for-self-assessment_en.cfm

131 ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Self-assessment Toolkit, Practical Tools for NRN Self-assessment, Guidance on Design of Surveys*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/practical-tools-for-nrn-self-assessment/en/guidance-on-design-of-surveys-questionnaires-and-feedback-forms_en.cfm
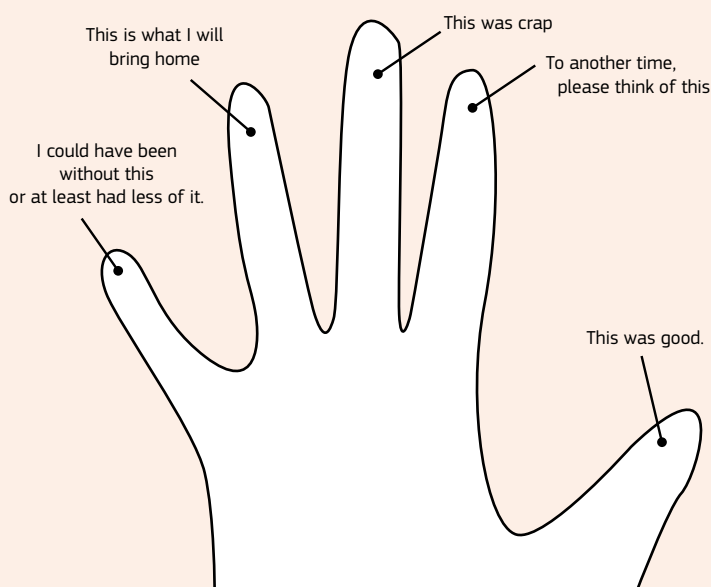
Creative survey approaches

Most networks are carrying out regular surveys, in particular related to their events and publications (see 'Stakeholder survey' sections of the *NRN self-assessment profiles*[1]). However, the real purpose of these survey questionnaires is often forgotten. Surveys most commonly ask participants to rate the usefulness, organisation, etc. of events on a scale (e.g. 1=very good, 5=poor) and in some cases simple questions such as 'what did you like about this event?' or 'what would you improve?'. Although these questions are useful to gain a better understanding about the general usefulness of the events/publications/etc., surveys can be more creative than this, keeping in mind their original purpose (i.e. to find out why people find a conference or event useful).

For instance, you may want to ask your participants, if they were to take away one key message from the whole event, what would it be or what would they do differently in their work as a result of the event. You will need to find the right balance between simple (as no one wants to fill in long surveys after an event) but still meaningful surveys. Here is the image of a survey that the Swedish Network uses for its youth events (this form and other useful practical tools can be accessed in the '*Practical Tools for NRN Self-assessment*'[2] section of the ENRD website).

Furthermore, NRNs need to consider doing follow-up surveys some time after (e.g. few months) the event.

We want to know how you liked this conference / seminar

Fill the fingers with your comments!

This is what I will bring home

This was crap

To another time, please think of this

I could have been without this or at least had less of it.

This was good.

Source: ENRD website, Networks & Networking, NRN Self-assessment Toolkit, Practical Tools for NRN Self-assessment, Existing tools used by NRNs for Self-assessment: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/ practical-tools-for-nrn-self-assessment/en/existing-tools-used-by-nrns-for-self-assessment_en.cfm#

(1) ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Self-assessment Toolkit, Practical Tools for NRN Self-assessment, Guidance on Design of Surveys*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/practical-tools-for-nrn-self-assessment/en/guidance-on-design-of-surveys-questionnaires-and-feedback-forms_en.cfm*
(2) ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Self-assessment Toolkit, Practical Tools for NRN Self-assessment*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/practical-tools-for-nrn-self-assessment/*

In addition to the on-going activities, some of the networks carry out self-assessments at certain point(s) in time of the network delivery (in some cases involving external evaluators), and **often linked to NRN external evaluation.** For instance, the *Finnish Network* contracted an external contractor for different assignments, including a study aimed to map the relationship between different organisations in order to assess the quantity, frequency and quality of networking.

The **ENRD carried out its own self-assessment**[132] covering the first four years of its operation. Among others, the self-assessment built on quantitative data/ output indicators related to ENRD activities, focus group interviews (with those involved in the work of ENRD at the ENRD Contact Point and DG AGRI) and three case studies at local, national and European levels. The ENRD self-assessment drew lessons learnt with regard to network assessment (as summarised in the box below)

Self-assessment of ENRD

What have we learnt about network self-assessment? – Lessons from the ENRD self-assessment

Networks evolve considerably over time and often produce intangible results, which makes their evaluation challenging. New initiatives (such as ENRD) always bring unexpected results, and therefore, considerable learning is involved through the process. It has been learnt that developing a 'network intervention logic' at the start can improve both the effectiveness of networks, as well as their assessment.

The main difficulty with regard to setting network indicators is that quantitative indicators often do not reflect the true nature of networks (i.e. the most important results cannot be measured). For instance, 'the number of thematic working groups and their outputs' do not fully reflect the achievements of the network; what matters is how the results of thematic working groups contributed to the improvement of rural development policies. Therefore, it is suggested that quantitative indicators are complemented with qualitative ones. In particular, it is suggested that detailed 'relevance & usefulness' indicators are developed with regard to each activity and surveys are planned to capture these.

Self-assessment should not be a 'one-off' activity towards the end of the programme implementation but should be supported by on-going assessment tools and methods (such as event surveys; website statistics analysis). It is important that these on-going assessment activities are carried out systematically in order to allow for comparison and analysis over a longer time period. Feedback from the on-going self-assessment methods should contribute to the continuous refinement of activities.

Self-assessment activities should always be carried out against the overall objectives of the network. In other words, activities are not carried out for the sake of producing certain 'outputs' (e.g. number of events; number of participants, number of reports), but they should aim at achieving 'outcomes' that directly contribute to the overall objectives.

Source: ENRD (2013, unpublished); ENRD (2014) *"Not everything that connects is a network":* http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/ enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-self-assessment/final_disseminationmaterial_enrd.pdf

132   ENRD (2013, unpublished), *ENRD Self-assessment Report*
ENRD (2014) Self-assessment of the European Network for Rural Development: "Not everything that 'connects' is a network": http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-self-assessment/final_ disseminationmaterial_enrd.pdf

While much can be learnt from existing NRN self-assessment tools and methods, 'network assessment and evaluation' also has a growing (academic) literature. As the work of networks is becoming more acknowledged *'[g]overnments, donors and practitioners are all feeling pressure to demonstrate and report on the impact of their work. [...] An increasing number of methods, tools and metrics have been proposed, developed and piloted in response to this demand'*[133]. Examples of the guidance provided for self-assessment of activities in NGO and social change networks can be found under the *'Potential Tools for NRN Self-assessment'*[134] section of the NRN Self-assessment Toolkit. Some of the advice and practical examples these guidance documents contain may also be relevant to NRN self-assessment.

Useful resources developed by ENRD

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Self-assessment Toolkit*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Self-Assessment Toolkit, ENRD Self-assessment*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/en/index_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Self-assessment Toolkit, NRN Self-assessment Profiles*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/nrn-self-assessment-profiles

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Self-assessment Toolkit, Practical Tools for NRN Self-assessment, Existing tools used by NRNs for Self-assessment:* *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/practical-tools-for-nrn-self-assessment/en/existing-tools-used-by-nrns-for-self-assessment_en.cfm*

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking: NRN Tasks, 'Sharing and disseminating monitoring and evaluation findings'* :
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-nrn-tasks_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking: NRN Tasks, 'Network self-assessment'*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-nrn-tasks_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Self-assessment Toolkit, Practical Tools for NRN Self-assessment, Guidance on design of Surveys, Questionnaires and Feedback Forms*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/practical-tools-for-nrn-self-assessment/en/guidance-on-design-of-surveys-questionnaires-and-feedback-forms_en.cfm

21st NRN Meeting, 7 May 2014, Kendal, England:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/meetings/en/21th-nrn-meeting_en.cfm

NSU Peer-to-peer Training Module 7: NRN Self-assessment and evaluation, 8 May 2014, Kendal, England: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/pilot-nsu-training-programme/en/pilot-nsu-training-module-7_en.cfm*

ENRD (2012) *Self-assessment process: Belgium – Walloon Case Study*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=84E0F838-A3CE-52A7-885E-F6059A1537C5

ENRD (2013) *Open Space Discussion Group No 6, Communicating Monitoring and Evaluation Findings*:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-meeting/20thNRNmeeting/9_Communicating-Monitoring-and-Evaluation-Findings_en.pdf

ENRD (2013, unpublished), *ENRD Self-assessment Report*

ENRD (2014) *Self-assessment of the European Network for Rural Development: "Not everything that 'connects' is a network"*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-self-assessment/final_disseminationmaterial_enrd.pdf*

133 Innovations for Scaling Impact and Keystone Accountability (2010) *Next Generation of Network Evaluation*: *http://www.scalingimpact.net/files/IDRC_Network_IPARL_Paper_Final_0.pdf*
134 ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Self-assessment Toolkit, Practical Tools for NRN Self-assessment, Potential Tools for NRN Self-assessment*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/practical-tools-for-nrn-self-assessment/en/potential-tools-for-supporting-nrn-self-assessment_en.cfm*

Other relevant resources

European Commission (20/01/2014) *Guidance Fiche For Establishment and Operation of National Rural Networks: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/preparing-for-the-future/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020/en/guidance-for-national-rural-networks-2014-2020_en.cfm (Last accessed on 01/05/14)*

Evaluation Expert Network (2010) *Working Paper on the Evaluation of National Rural Network Programmes: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/eval/wp-networks_en.pdf (Last accessed on 01/05/14)*

Evaluation Expert Network (2012) *Newsletter of the Good Practice Workshop "Evaluation of National Rural Network Programmes", Brussels: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/eenrd/1.1.1/2_Newsletter_NRNP_forweb.pdf (Last accessed on 01/05/14)*

Evaluation Expert Network (2012) *Rural Evaluation News, Number 10, December 2012: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=B4DE1199-F20F-8239-FA8D-754182E6E95E (Last accessed on 01/05/14)*

Evaluation Expert Network (2013) *Rural Evaluation News, Number 11, June 2013: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=394897A4-EDBB-21F1-9D5B-DB47D1CFE7A0 (Last accessed on 01/05/14)*

Evaluation Expert Network (2014, unpublished) Background Document, Intervention logic and evaluation framework for 2014-2020 National Rural Networks, Good Practice Workshop, "National Rural Networks: How to show their benefits?", Rome, Italy, 10 and 11 April 2014

Evaluation Expert Network (2014) Newsletter of the Good Practice Workshop "National Rural Networks: How to show their benefits?" 10-11 April 2014, Rome, Italy: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/evaluation/national-rural-networks/GPW10_Newsletter_NRN.pdf (Last accessed on 27/06/14)*

Evaluation Expert Network, Good Practice Workshop on Evaluation of National Rural Network Programme, 7 February 2012, Brussels, Belgium: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/good-practices-workshops/national-rural-network-programmes/en/national-rural-network-programmes_en.cfm (Last accessed on 01/05/14)*

Evaluation Expert Network, Good Practice Workshop on "National rural networks: How to show their benefits", 10-11 April 2014, Rome, Italy: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/good-practices-workshops/national-rural-networks/en/national-rural-networks_en.cfm*

Innovations for Scaling Impact and Keystone Accountability (2010) *Next Generation of Network Evaluation: http://www.scalingimpact.net/files/IDRC_Network_IPARL_Paper_Final_0.pdf (Last accessed on 01/05/14)*

Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) :
*http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32005R1698* *(Last accessed on 01/05/14)*

Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0320:0469:EN:PDF *(Last accessed on 01/05/14)*

Working document for the Rural Development Committee (2014), Updated version February 2014, Rural Development Monitoring (2014-2020) – Implementation Report Tables (not publicly available at the time of writing the Guidebook)

V. Demonstrating the Added Value of Networking
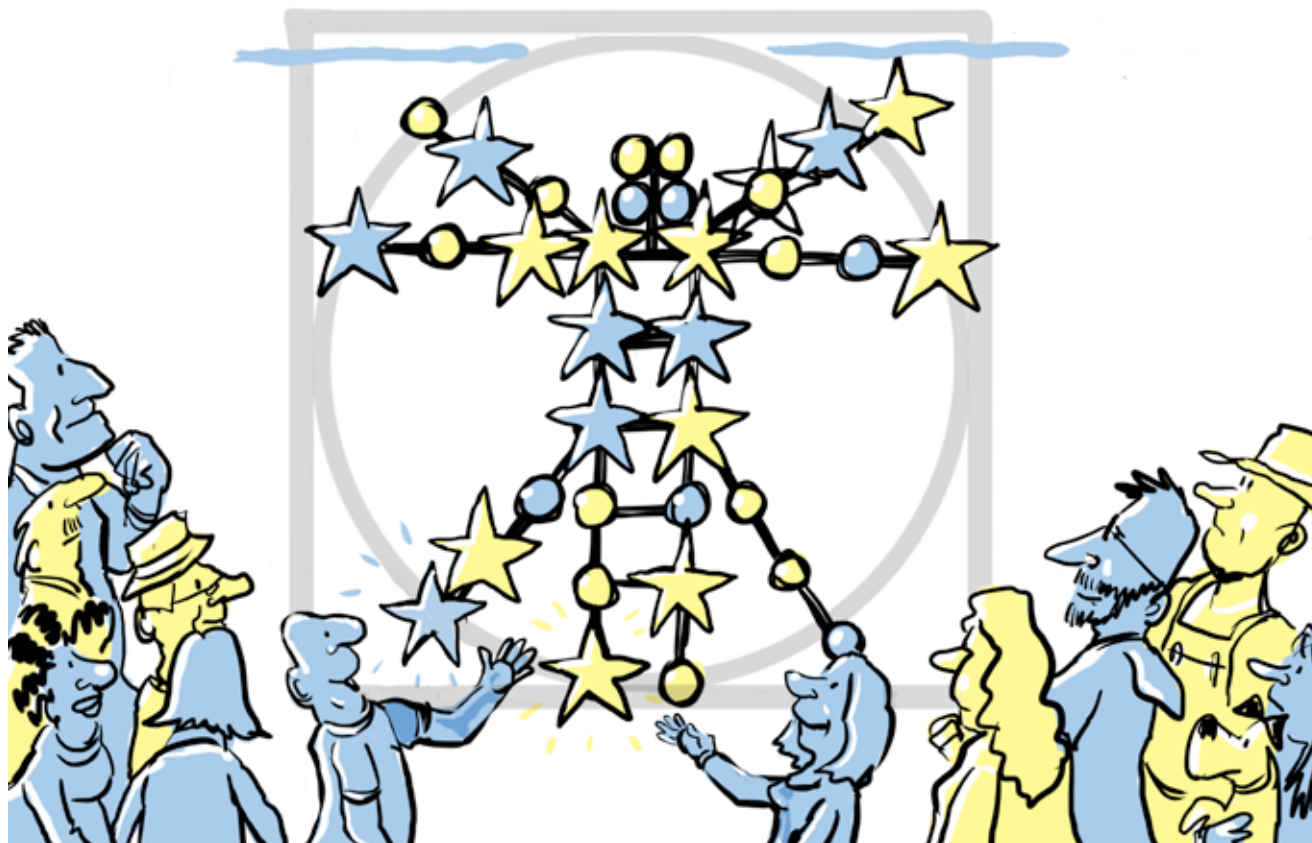
5.1   Identifying the added value of networking

Networking in the wider EU rural development policy context is a relatively new phenomenon. Although relevant experience had been accumulated (mostly through networking within LEADER) at both the European and national levels before 2007, the 2007-2013 programming period saw the first launch of networking arrangements for mainstream rural development policy. This involved the setting up of National Rural Networks (NRNs) and the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), as well as the European Evaluation Network. These network structures encompass a wide range of rural stakeholders and are now a formal (regulatory) requirement.

Networking is a complex process and networks evolve and mature considerably over time. Prior to 2007, some rural networks operated with national and regional remits. These had different levels of experience (e.g. some operated as LEADER networks for several programme generations), but the 2007-2013 programming period's networking requirements brought new challenges that none of the previous networks had faced before. The 2007-2013 NRNs were expected to engage with a wider range of rural stakeholders and provide support in many new thematic policy areas.

"What we wanted was a structure that would allow us to have a better insight on how rural development policy is implemented across Europe. Through the European Network we get information that we wouldn't get through more formal structures."

Josefine Loriz-Hoffmann, Head of Unit, DG AGRI

Furthermore, while they had to engage and 'voice the interests' of their rural stakeholders, they also had to comply with the expectations of those responsible for Rural Development Programme (RDP) management at national and European levels (including the Managing Authority [MA], Paying Agency [PA] and the European Commission). At the same time, NRNs have continously needed to assess and demonstrate their results in line with their initial mandate.

Despite the various challenges that NRNs had to face during the 2007-2013 period (and notwithstanding some initial operational weaknesses during their start-up phases) there is consensus among 'rural networkers' that networks can, and in most cases do, make a valuable contribution to rural development. Networking is broadly understood to add value through the development of social capital, supporting cooperation and joint action, improving governance, encouraging the exchange of experience and knowledge, and through the capacity-building of rural stakeholders. The richness of networking experience accumulated during 2007-2013 by networks is demonstrated by the diverse set of Added Value of Networking (AVN) stories[135] that were collected by ENRD Contact Point (CP) in line with the main areas of networking (networking elements and NRN tasks)[136] – see chart below.

Number of Added Value of Networking (AVN) Stories collected by ENRD CP (until end of Year 5) by networking element
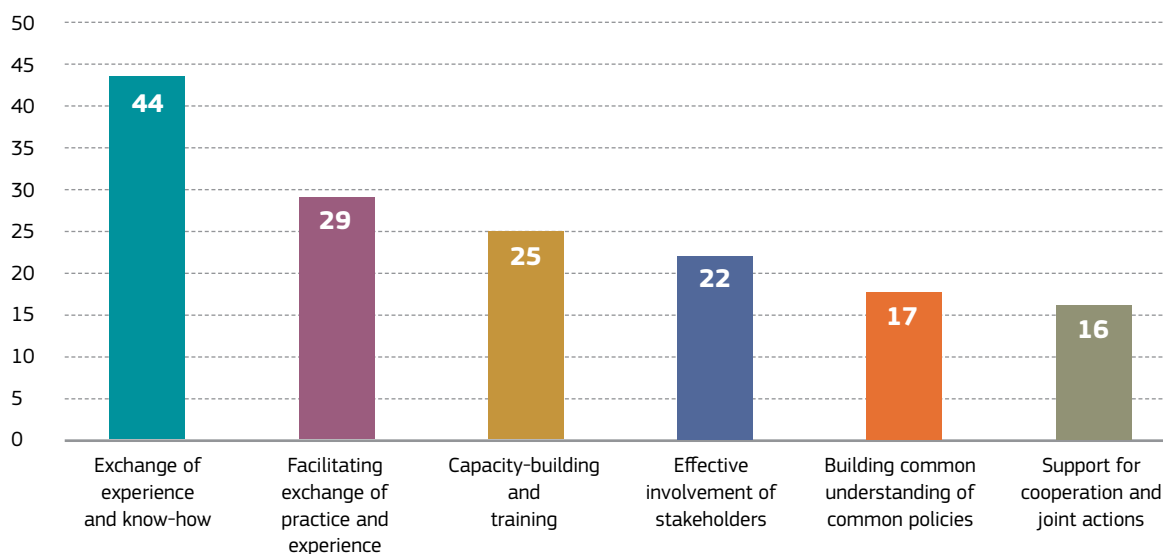
However, the added value of networking is often not understood outside of the 'networking circle'. Therefore, networks are facing a particular challenge of demonstrating the added value of networking for those not directly involved in it (and therefore, not directly experiencing its benefits).

Before moving on to how to best demonstrate the added value of networking, it is important to understand some of the key areas where networks and networking can add the most to rural development in general, and rural development policy and programmes' delivery in particular.

135 ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN stories: Networking elements*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-networking-elements_en.cfm*

136 Note that additional stories were collected in line with the tasks of NRNs set out by the Regulation for the 2014-2020 programming period. These are available on the ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN stories: NRN tasks*: *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-nrn-tasks_en.cfm*

Rural development networks can be catalysts for developing social capital, helping to activate the resources of individual members of the rural population in order to boost rural development. Most commonly social capital is understood as the resources of individuals that are activated once they start to cooperate and be involved in formal or informal networks. Social capital in particular entails trust, civic culture, and ability to cooperate with others. As a result of interactions between individuals in networks (based on mutual exchange, trust and social learning) synergies among their individual assets can be created. These can add new value to rural development processes.
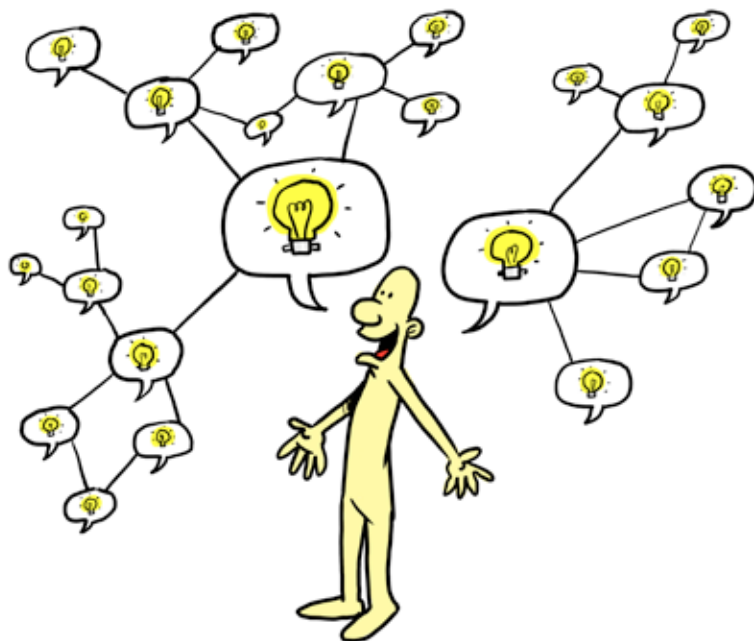
NRNs have the potential to congregate stakeholders around shared rural development objectives, and one of the NRNs' success factors is their ability to engage with a wide range of rural stakeholders covering a wide range of topics.

Effective engagement of women in local development in Poland

The role of women as catalysts in local development was recognised by the NRN's regional support unit in Wielkopolskie Voivodship, which developed a 'School of Women Leaders'. This was an initiative to effectively engage women in rural areas, provide support and improve their professional skills and consequently increase their ability to achieve positive outcomes in their communities. Innovative training was provided to women, focusing on local animation techniques and on establishing Non Government Organisations (NGOs) in rural areas. Four LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs) participated in the activity and created a support group with a tutor from each LAG. The initiative's success resulted in its continuation and expansion to cover all 27 remaining LAGs in the region, while the regional secretariat has launched a competition for the best activities developed by participants in the training courses.

Source: ENRD website, AVN Story: Networking elements:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E9C6DF-E27B-4673-4946-D1E09F73051F

Networks can also have positive effects in terms of human interactions. They offer a meeting space for individuals with different needs where they can negotiate and adjust their common goals and develop a common culture through which to implement rural development policy. **NRNs bring together actors that may not have cooperated with each other before.** Another strength of territorially-based networks is their ability to contribute to the development of a common identity within a rural area.

Adding value by supporting cooperation and joint action

The **Greek NRN** has brought together trade unions, NGOs, and public sector authorities that were not accustomed to cooperate in the past. A requirement to work out common solutions to urgent needs was apparent from network meetings. As a consequence, a common culture has started to emerge for improvements in the delivery of rural development policy.

Source: 'Network – Cooperate', 7 July 2011, Athens, Greece: http://ead.gr/english/en39d10a27307c8/6d2542f0e4d42630/e9f8d35366 d9c01b/9fa7c06307415882.html

Building a shared understanding of rural environmental issues in Finland

The theme chosen for mainland Finland's RDP in 2010 was environment. During that year, a number of events were coordinated by the Finnish NRN for the general public, farmers and rural communities to build a common understanding around the efforts taken to care for the environment. A nationwide educational tour, comprising 26 events focused on solving local and regional environmental challenges, was attended by 852 people. Exhibitions and events organised by various stakeholders also promoted the theme. Almost 400 people convened in a national seminar to hear about the latest scientific findings on agri-environmental efforts, or on new ways to improve the environment. The networking approach taken to deliver the initiative also encouraged other network stakeholders to develop and implement complimentary activities, thus adding significant value to the programme of events.

Source: ENRD website, AVN Story:
Networking elements: Environment Theme Year, 2010: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.
cfm?id=70E94662-DF79-8974-0BDC-51B91F0E0F87

Networks can bring benefits in relation to **governance processes**. Networks, especially policy networks, are associated with dynamic democracy and governance processes. In the context of the multi-level governance approach of the EU[137], networks are recognised as agents of change that should contribute to the principles of openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence. In particular, networks should allow for making EU and domestic policies more open and closer to citizens, facilitating interaction between local and non-local level stakeholders and let their voices be heard. At the same, time they contribute to empowerment of local communities and individuals. With regard to the objectives of rural development policy, networking can also contribute to a better dissemination of good practices and the results of interventions (see also section 3.1 of the Guidebook.

137 Communication (EC) on European Governance: A White Paper, COM (2001) 428 final, OJ 2001 C 287:
http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/institutional_affairs/decisionmaking_process/l10109_en.htm
(Last accessed on 01/05/14)

NRNs have great potential to develop a shared understanding among different stakeholders, especially those directly involved in the network (i.e. network members). In some countries, the NRNs are the only platform through which particular stakeholder groups communicate.

Participation in a network allows members to benefit from **exchanges of their knowledge** and experiences. Networks are oriented towards facilitating mutual exchanges that allows the generation of knowledge through social learning mechanisms, i.e. 'peer-learning' through interactions (see also section 3.2 of the Guidebook on 'facilitating thematic and analyitical exchanges). The NRNs, the ENRD, and their thematic groups can facilitate such sharing of practices between members. This helps to accumulate their existing knowledge and experiences, which can then be exchanged and transferred into new contexts. By creating learning mechanisms through exchange, **networks also act as agents of innovation** (see also section 3.4 of the Guidebook).

Adding value by encouraging exchange of experience and knowledge

In Italy, **innovation in the supply chain of the fig production sector** has been possible through the cooperation of public and private sector actors, from individual farmers to food processors to the local LAGs, who have joined forces in this large scale project to combat the decline of fig cultivation, a traditional product of the area.

The Latvian NRN organised an **exchange visit** for Latvian forest owners to learn about the experience of cooperative working in Scandinavia. During the study trip to Sweden and Finland, participants shared information on the history of cooperatives, their conditions and economic benefits, as well as about the forestry sector in general.

Source: ENRD (2013) ENRD Magazine Winter 2012/2013: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload. cfm?id=D4E5D6A8-B6AE-EEC4-0F0E-EAE14044A683

NRNs have an important role in supporting stakeholder groups (especially LAGs, see also section 3.3 of the Guidebook) through targeted **capacity-building and training actions**. These can complement the exchange of experience and good practice. Training actions are diverse as they need to be tailored to the needs of target groups. Various innovative models for delivering training have been developed and constitute a repository of good practice.

Building the capacity of LAGs in Austria

Stemming from the need to transfer knowledge from experienced LAG managers to less experienced ones in Austria, a number of initiatives from the NSU of Austria identified an **innovative learning tool, called 'intervision'**. It had been used successfully before for cooperative counselling in 'systemic consulting' by professional organisations. During an intervision session, one LAG manager describes a problem or issue they face and other participants take on specific roles and review the situation by asking questions or interpreting the information provided. The Austrian NSU organised a series of intervision groups involving up to five LAG managers, who were trained in the use of the tool. As a result they gained new ideas about how to tackle their challenges and they developed their competences. The success of the tool is based on committed participation, openness and mutual trust between the participants.

Source: ENRD website, Networks & Networking, NRN Toolkit, Building on lessons learnt, Lessons from the NRN, Capacity building and training: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/building-on-lessons-learnt/lessons-from-the-nrns/en/capacity-building-and-training_en.cfm

Despite evidence about the direct influence of networks on rural stakeholders, rural policy and rural development in general; identifying, demonstrating and communicating the added value of networking in a way that is clearly understandable to a wider audience is a highly complicated task. The main challenge lies in capturing and demonstrating the often intangible nature of real network achievements.

5.2   Demonstrating network achievements

The importance of demonstrating the added value of networking

Demonstrating the added value of networking is important in many respects. Firstly, NRNs are funded from public money and therefore, there is a strong expectation from policy-makers (and indirectly from tax-payers), as well as the wider rural community, to make sure that money is well spent. Secondly, the very existence of networks depends on the strong engagement of rural stakeholders. Therefore it is crucial that (potential) network members understand the benefits that networking could bring to them.

Added Value	→	Tools and methods	→	Channels	→	Target groups
WHAT?				*HOW?*		*TO WHOM?*
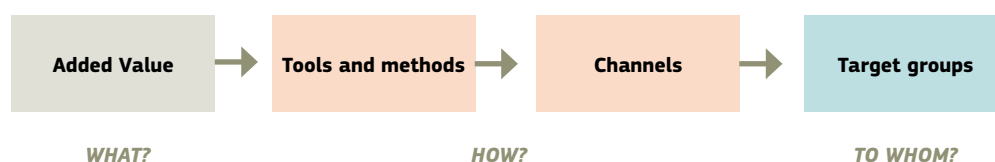
What? – The Added Value

In order to be able to demonstrate the added value of networking, it is important first to understand the scope and nature of this added value. In other words, NRNs need to ask the question '*what*' added value they bring to rural development. The network intervention logic can be a good basis for this: especially as far as the stated objectives and (expected) results are concerned (see section 2.1 and Part IV for further details on the intervention logic).

"The maturity of networks is related to their capacity to demonstrate the benefits they produce"

EU Rural Review 14

How? - Methods and tools

There are several **methods and tools** that networks can use to demonstrate their added value. These include the identification of relevant indicators and collection of related network statistics, as well as network success stories, case studies and evidence from self-assessment (including surveys and interviews). NRN self-assessment can be a particularly useful tool for understanding and demonstrating the achievements and added value of networking (see more details about NRN self-assessment in Part IV).

Each of these tools and methods reflect different aspects of the added value of networking. While, for instance, network statistics provide a basic overview of the scope and scale of network activities (e.g. how many events – targeting different types of stakeholders – are organised yearly, how many different publications are produced or how many good practice examples are collected in different thematic areas), case studies and stories may provide a more in-depth understanding of a network's achievements (e.g. through describing what the networking activity entailed, what the key success factors or challenges were, as well as quantitative and qualitative analysis of the key results and impacts, etc.).

The tools and methods used by ENRD to demonstrate the added value of networking

The ENRD (in cooperation and with support from NSUs) undertook various activities to identify and demonstrate the added value of networking activities across Europe. This process pooled the resources of many NRNs and the material that was collected is presented on the ENRD website.

(1) **Common network statistics.** Statistcs were collected from NSUs and aggregated under four headings: i) network communications, including meetings and participation; ii) knowledge exchange, including good practices; iii) training and (iv) cooperation.

(1) **Network success stories.** Over 170 stories were collected from networks under six key networking elements. Their diversity reflects the diversity of the networks themselves in terms of their experience and maturity. Early phases of the 'story-collection' process highlighted the fact that the more mature networks were often better able to demonstrate their value added through success stories. This suggests that new networks may require time to develop before they can properly judge their progress against their performance indicators, and thus demonstrate their added value.

Source: ENRD website, Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking, Networking Statistics and Studies:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/networking-statistics-and-studies_en.cfm;

ENRD website, Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: Networking Elements:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-networking-elements_en.cfm;

Channels and ways of communication vary widely and most commonly include the network website, events and publications. The most useful and efficient channels, and ways to demonstrate the added value of networking, can very much depend on the specific target group.

As described above, NSUs have common interests in presenting and communicating their achievements in clear and understandable ways for policy-makers and stakeholder groups ('vertical communication'). In addition, NSUs regularly communicate and exchange their experiences with their peer networks ('horizontal communication'). For instance, the ENRD's collection of AVN stories serves the primary purpose of exchanging experiences and useful practices among networks.

To whom?
– Target groups

Policy-makers are most often interested in concise factual data and indicators about what a policy achieved. Network indicators and data can be one of the main resources to be used in this respect to demonstrate the achievements of networks. These can be further complemented with case studies, e.g. on how networks contribute to the improvement of rural development policy implementation. It is important that this information is presented in a short, concise and clearly understandable manner, such as factsheets.

The main interest of network members is to understand the benefits that being involved in the network can bring to them, and this can be achieved through, among others, targeted events, networking activities and publications (depending also on the stakeholder group in question). Short success stories and factsheets can be targeted to the wider rural public in order to raise awareness about what the network is doing. The main channels used by networks to demonstrate their achievements include events and publications.

Examples of demonstrating the added value of networking

Several NRNs have produced dissemination materials that demonstrate different added value outcomes from networking. For instance, the UK's Scottish NSU published a *review of the network's activities over the 2008-2013 period* with statistics and examples that explain the network's actions and achievements.

Source: Scottish National Rural Network (2013) Connecting Rural Scotland: The Scottish National Rural Network 2008-2013: http://www.ruralgateway.org.uk/en/node/8513

Communication of network activities and achievements and information about other relevant aspects of RDP implementation may be combined. The publication of the Nordic-Baltic countries on LEADER transnational cooperation is not only an attractive brochure on some of the most successful transnational projects, but also demonstrates some of the key activities that the networks carried out (in this case the management and coordination of the Nordic–Baltic LEADER cooperation awards), as well as the added value of cooperation among networks.

Source: The Nordic–Baltic LEADER Cooperation Award. Tallinn 2013, Maamajanduse Infokeskus – Rural Economy Research Centre: http://www.maainfo.ee/index.php?page=3667

Networking can bring considerable added value to rural development

In the 2014-2020 programming period it will become increasingly important that networks assess and demonstrate their added value. In this regard, useful lessons can be drawn from the experience of LEADER – the most established networking element of EU rural development policy. Despite the fact that there is wide consensus about the benefits that the LEADER method brought in rural areas through several generations of programmes (such as increased rural social capital and engagement of local stakeholders through the bottom-up approach), LEADER has been criticised for not being able to demonstrate clearly its added value. For instance the report of the European Court of Auditors (2010) on the 'Implementation of the LEADER Approach for Rural Development'[138] stated that "*The Commission has not yet demonstrated the effectiveness or efficiency of the expenditure, the added value achieved through following the Leader approach, the extent to which the known risks have materialized or the real costs of implementation*". Networks need to avoid falling into a similar trap (sometimes referred to as the '*LEADER syndrome*'), i.e. thinking that '*we all know that networking adds value – it's just hard to measure its benefits*'.

The experience gained during the 2007-2013 programming period has shown that **networking can bring considerable added value to rural development and does have great potential to contribute to the improvement of rural development policy delivery**.

A lot has already been done to assess and demonstrate the added value of networking and more needs to be done. It is important to continue and enhance networking activities during the 2014-2020 programming period based on experience and lessons learnt to date; as well as to make sure that the added value of networking is assessed, demonstrated and explained to all concerned.

---

138 European Court of Auditors (2010) *Implementation of the LEADER Approach for Rural Development, Special Report No 5*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union: http://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR10_05/SR10_05_EN.PDF (Last accessed on 01/05/14)

Useful resources developed by the ENRD

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, NRN Toolkit, Building on lessons learnt, Lessons from the NRN, Capacity building and training:* *http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-toolkit/building-on-lessons-learnt/lessons-from-the-nrns/en/capacity-building-and-training_en.cfm*

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: Networking elements:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-networking-elements_en.cfm

ENRD website, *Networks & Networking, Added Value of Networking, AVN Stories: Networking Elements, Building common understanding of common policies:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E94662-DF79-8974-0BDC-51B91F0E0F87

ENRD website, *Networks and Networking, Added Value of Networking*, AVN stories: *NRN tasks:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/added-value-of-networking/en/avn-stories-nrn-tasks_en.cfm

21st NRN Meeting, 7 May 2014, Kendal, England:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/meetings/en/21th-nrn-meeting_en.cfm

ENRD (2012) ENRD Rural Review Issue 14: *Networks and Networking in Rural Development Policy:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=6A46DFCB-F0A5-2010-F339-D5859C4C6F04

ENRD (2012) *What do we know about Networking as a Rural Development Policy Tool (2007-2013)? A Discussion Paper:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-toolkit/01-DiscussionPaperonNetworking12_06_2012.pdf

ENRD (2012) *Demonstrating the 'Added Value' of Networking, Literature Screening, Nov 2012:*
https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/myenrd/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=70E9F1BE-E99B-8E03-D0FF-381BE85AE888

ENRD (2013) ENRD Magazine, *Winter 2012/2013:*
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=D4E5D6A8-B6AE-EEC4-0F0E-EAE14044A683

ENRD (2013) *Findings of the 2012 NRN Mapping exercise:* Final synthesis report:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=9956D73B-C54A-0D7C-A772-D02B98E1EA1B

ENRD (2014) *Findings of the 2014 NRN mapping exercise*
 – NRNs in transition (preparation for the 2014-2020 programming period): Final report:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/added-value/networking-statistics-and-studies/NRN_Mapping_Report_Final_260314.pdf

Other relevant resources

Communication (EC) on European Governance: A White Paper, COM (2001) 428 final, OJ 2001 C 287:
http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/institutional_affairs/decisionmaking_process/l10109_en.htm (Last accessed on 01/05/14)

European Court of Auditors (2010) *Implementation of the LEADER Approach for Rural Development,*
Special Report No 5, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union:
*http://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR10_05/SR10_05_EN.PDF (Last accessed on 01/05/14)*

Scottish National Rural Network (2013) *Connecting Rural Scotland:*
The Scottish National Rural Network 2008–2013: http://www.ruralgateway.org.uk/en/node/8513 (Last accessed: 05/05/14)

Network – Cooperate, 7 July 2011, Athens, Greece:
http://ead.gr/english/en39d10a27307c8/6d2542f0e4d42630/e9f8d35366d9c01b/9fa7c06307415882.html (Last accessed: 05/05/14)

The Nordic–Baltic LEADER Cooperation Award. *Tallinn 2013, Maamajanduse Infokeskus – Rural Economy*
Research Centre: http://www.maainfo.ee/index.php?page=3667 (Last accessed: 05/05/14)
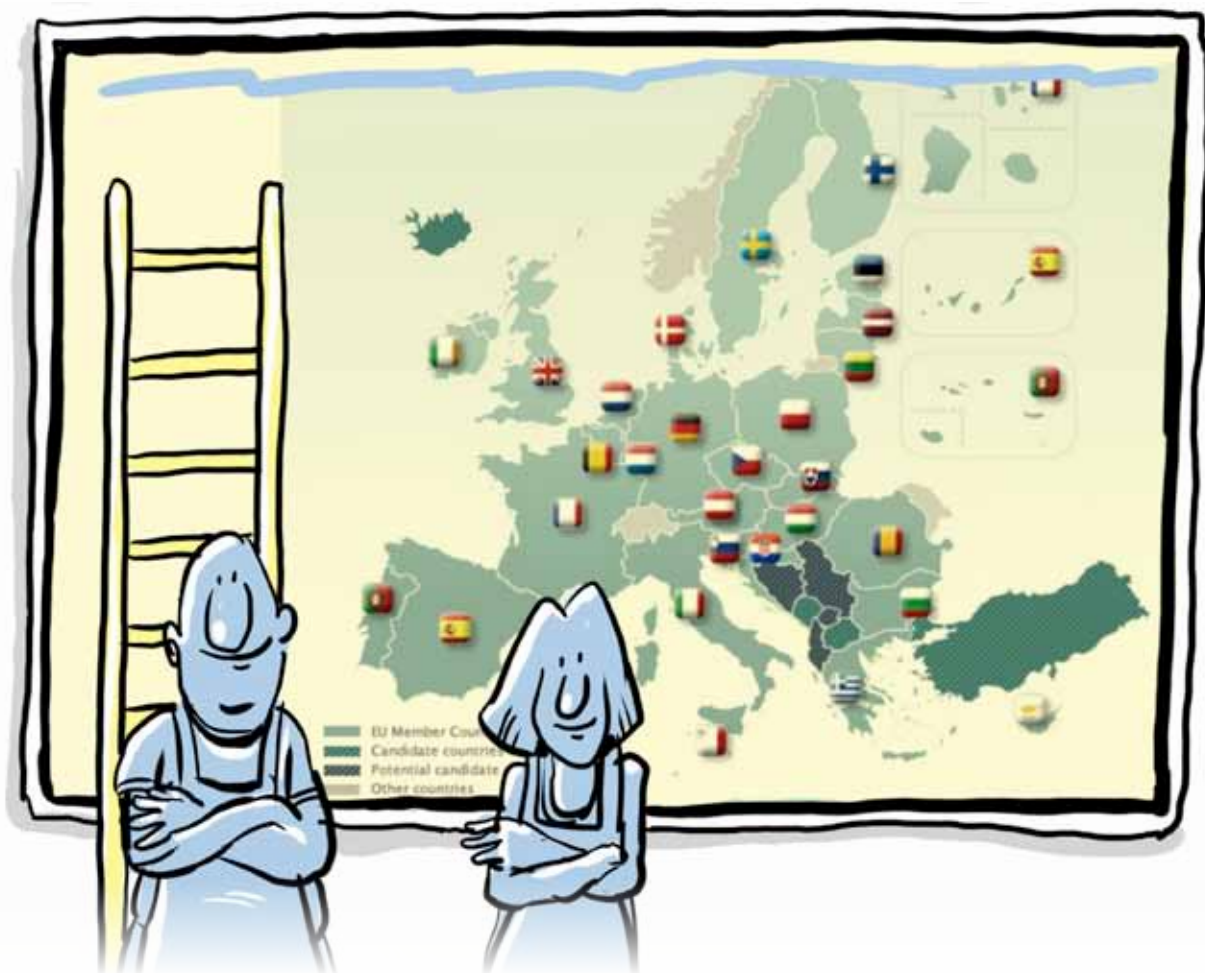
WWW.ENRD.EU

Publications Office