



## **Self-Assessment Process: Belgium- Walloon Case Study**

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## Self-Assessment Process: Belgium-Walloon Case Study

### Executive Summary

In September 2011, the National Support Unit of the Walloon Network for Rural Development (RwDR) set up a self-assessment process to evaluate the network and develop an Activity Programme for the next three years. To achieve this the NSU hosted a brainstorming session with RwDR members to reflect on the different dimensions of networking and build a mind map describing how members understood the various aspects of networking. This enabled the development of a shared vocabulary to assess differing network scenarios and produce a logical framework. Members then reflected on and prioritised the objectives and actions of networking required to deliver the framework produced.

The NSU hosted a final meeting to further define this work looking at the content of the various working groups, to specify the topics to be addressed, actions to be implemented, expected results, roles and responsibilities of RwDR members, support required from the NSU and the implementation timeframe. At the beginning of 2012 a detailed work program was produced.

This self-assessment exercise reinforced links between members through the collective definition of realistic and achievable actions that responded directly to their expectations and needs. This work programme must now be agreed by those who did not participate in the process and where possible similar approaches be implemented in member organisations in the region. It is also important to sustain the momentum developed by this exercise through the demonstration of positive results and dissemination of this learning to other rural development actors.

## Methodology

This case study was developed based on the observations made during the process of self-assessment set up by the NSU of RwDR, discussion papers produced at each step of the self-assessment process - mind-map, logical framework, diagrams, etc. and direct feedback collected from the participants within the process of self-assessment.

## Background

The ability to monitor the progress and performance of the NRNs activities is an important part of enhancing the functionality of the NRNs, as well as improving the implementation of EAFRD funded Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) in all EU Member States.

In accordance with Article 66(3) of the EAFRD Regulation, the four Member States of Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain chose to prepare a specific programme for the establishment and operation of their NRNs. These National Rural Network Programmes are, as with all other RDPs, subject to formal monitoring and evaluation procedures. All other NRNs have however been set up under the umbrella of the Technical Assistance component of their national or regional RDPs and are not subject to any formal monitoring and evaluation procedures.

In that context and convinced of the critical importance to implement networking assessment, the National Support Unit of the Walloon Network for Rural Development (RwDR) set up a self-assessment process in September 2011 with two main objectives:

1. Identification of the strengths and weaknesses of networking; and,
2. Preparation of the programme of activity for the next three years, 2012 to 2014.

## Participants

Throughout the process approximately 30 representatives of various member organisations of the RwDR including professional associations, LAGs, Walloon administrations and Managing Authorities participated in the exchanges.

## Objectives

The NSU mission of the RwDR is structured around several main objectives set by the Wallonia Regions administration and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, these are:

- supporting implementation of the RDP 2007-2013;
- fostering cooperation and exchange of experiences between rural stakeholders and RDP beneficiaries;
- stimulating implementation of regional projects;
- facilitating access to information; and,
- following the evolution of rural areas in order to anticipate changes.

These objectives were assessed by members of the RwDR with the following questions developed:

- What is the added value of networking?
- What actions, channels, ways of exchange and tools should be developed or reinforced?
- How can the efficiency of networking be improved?

### **Process and main activities**

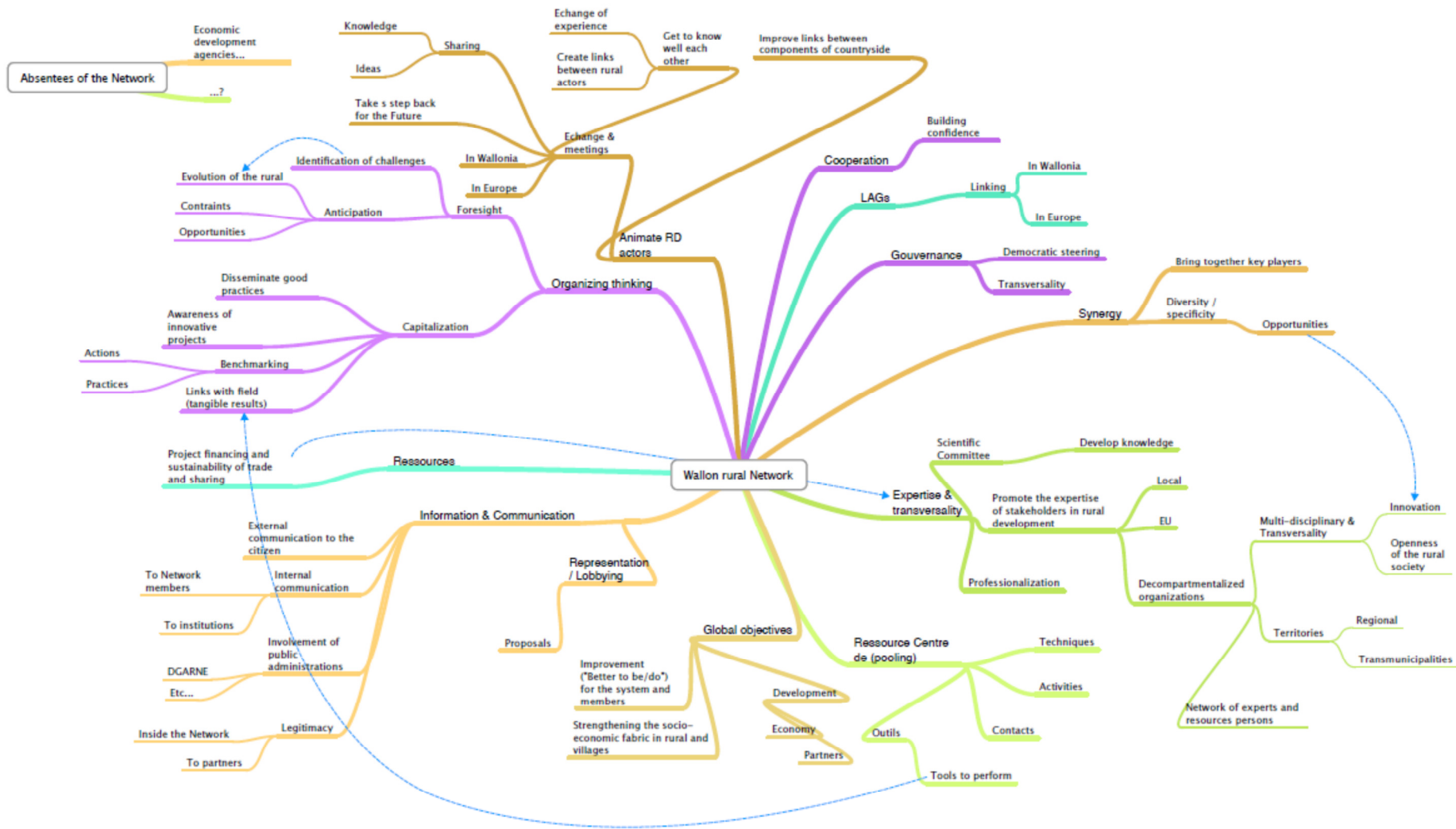
Three major steps have marked the process of the self-assessment exercise of the RwDR:

#### ***Step one: Collective brainstorming***

An initial brainstorming session with representatives of RwDR members was launched on the following issues:

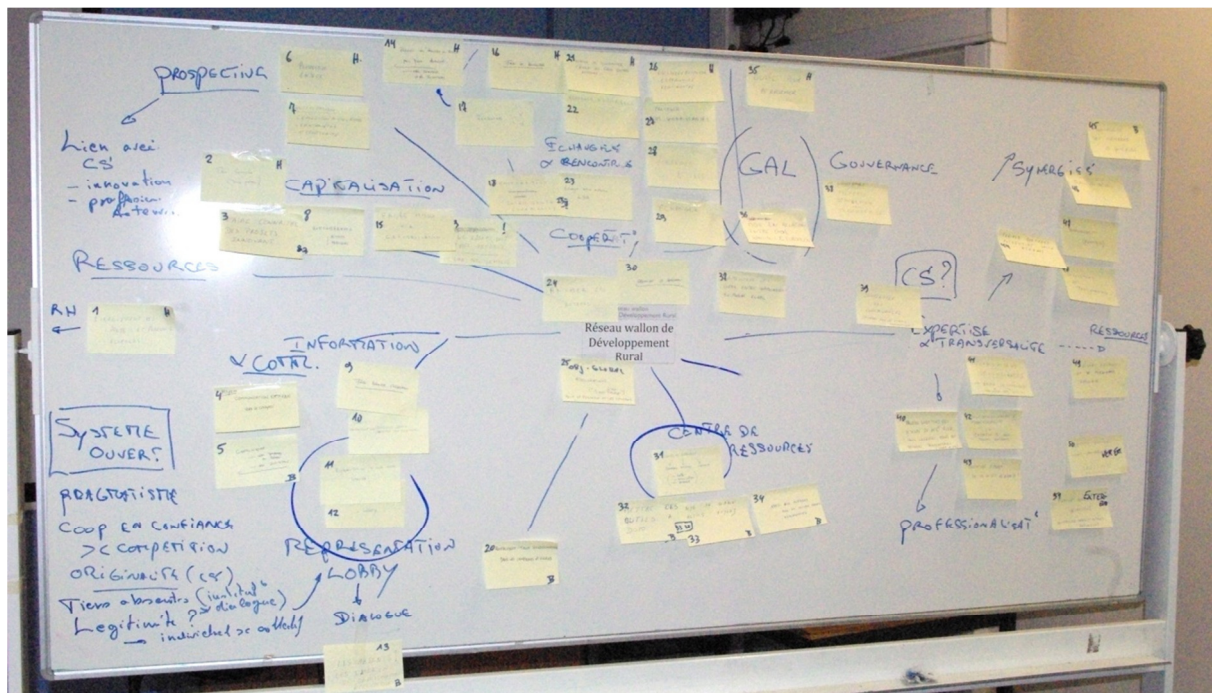
- What should the Network endeavour to achieve?
- What is the Network able to offer its members?
- What kind of support does it need to provide?
- What are the networking systems and tools that need to be developed for Network actors?

A mind map was collectively produced schematically identifying how members understood and organised the various aspects of the Network.



This first critical phase allowed members to build a common language and the common references needed to develop the work further. The divergences of opinion and common views identified helped to clarify and strengthen understanding of the “network system” with the following results:

- The Network is an open and pragmatic system;
- cooperation within the Network is organised within a climate of confidence and originality;
- the Network is a resource centre providing skills and expertise, material and immaterial resources, cross-cutting approaches, etc.;
- the purpose of the network is innovation and improving the professionalism of rural development actors;
- good governance ensures the legitimacy of the Network;
- synergies between actors and rural areas are critical.



### **Step two: Evaluation of the different dimensions of networking activities**

In the second step the objectives of the Network set up by the Walloon Region were evaluated. Three scenarios of reference were used to build a complete picture - the situation without a network for rural development, the current situation with a network and the desired scenario.

## Current situation

- Information, support and guidance of LAGs in the definition and operational implementation of their inter-territorial and transnational cooperation projects ;
- Distribution of cooperation offers from the European Network ;
- Active participation in meetings organized within the ENRD.

## Expected scenario

- Stimulating exchange of human resources ;
- Increasing interactions between Walloon RDP and other EU RDPs.

## Constraints to get there ? Solutions ?

- Staff exchange via ELARD to be considered (but limited/no immediate return for a LAG except as part of a cooperation project);
- Continuation of EU exchange visits' hosting but by targeting counterpart: return visits, exchanges based on a common approach, etc.;
- Make the EU jargon more understandable (translation, lexicon?);
- Accelerate dissemination of information on EU events (inadequate monthly information media⇒ info via RSS or blog or Facebook);
- Involve networks linked to other European programs with actions and information issues of the rural development network (RwDR);
- Transfer information about European activities to working groups of the RwDR.

## How did we reach this situation?

- Active participation of the NSU to actions of the ENRD and other national RD networks (but lower participation of RwDR members ⇒ ENRD unknown) ;
- Limited interactions with other European networks ;
- Trans-national cooperation (LAGs) on track ;
- Visit of foreign LAGs (Lithuania, Cyprus, Romania ...): interesting for step back, but no direct return (including cooperation) ;
- Links with actions and achievement of other European programs difficult to understand or develop within the rural development framework.

## Scenario without network

## Collaboration with other European networks

- What actions have been most interesting to develop European approaches?
- How to strengthen collaborations between European rural development actors?

### **Step three: Prioritisation and work programme**

The remaining step was to consolidate and prioritise the objectives and actions identified. At the beginning of the process network members acted individually by providing their own contributions and views on the priority actions. Once the synthesis of these contributions had taken place the NSU hosted a final meeting to define the content of the various working groups and to specify the topics to be addressed, actions to be implemented, expected results, roles and responsibilities of network members, support required from the NSU and the timetable for delivery.



At the end of January 2012 the overall process produced a detailed work program for 2012 to 2014, taking account of all the contributions of the network participants. The collective process of this self-assessment exercise guaranteed the development of feasible actions which were relevant to the needs of Network participants. Some working groups active during the first phase have been suspended as their objectives have been achieved; other groups have been given new themes to address, while others are starting in response to emerging concerns.

### **Resources**

Three workshops were facilitated by the NSU, grouping about 30 representatives of organisations and federation members of the Rural Development Network.

### **'Added value' of networking**

The following elements summarise the added value of networking developed under the self-assessment exercise implemented by the RwDR :

- Creating a common language on networking via a bottom up approach;
- fostering cooperation between rural development actors;
- clarification of the roles of each Network stakeholder;
- better understanding of the purpose of the NSU;



- producing a realistic and achievable Action Plan to meet the needs of network members;
- developing analytical tools for monitoring and evaluation of rural development actors and becoming familiar with the culture of evaluation;
- broadening the references of Network stakeholders.

### **What supports networking and what are the obstacles?**

This self-assessment exercise contributed to the reinforcement of links between members through the collective definition of realistic and achievable actions that respond to the expectations and needs of Network members. One of the main failures was the absence of a critical section of network members in the overall process.

### **Future challenges**

The main future challenges are:

- Participation and commitment of the absent parties to enhance the legitimacy of the work achieved;
- ownership of the process through the implementation of similar approaches in member organisations of the Walloon Network and development of exchange of experience;
- sustaining the shared responsibility and momentum developed through the added value of the results achieved, supported by monitoring and regular evaluation of the approach implemented;
- dissemination of good practice to other rural development actors.