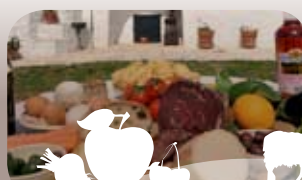




The European Network for Rural Development **Communicating EU rural development policy**





European Network for Rural Development

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. This brochure forms part of a series of ENRD publications that has been introduced to help encourage such information exchange.

Find out more on *the ENRD website*:

<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu>.

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1 Communicating EU rural development policy

2

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) is providing €96.4 billion of co-finance to help Member States implement EU rural development policy. A communication action plan is a mandatory element of each Rural Development Programme (RDP) since communication is vital to ensure that beneficiaries understand how to access this support and also for European citizens to be aware of the benefits generated by EU rural development policy.

Communicating EU rural development policy and the EAFRD has never before involved so many opportunities, or as many challenges. The EAFRD communication mandate contains a broader range of policy support than any previous EU rural development initiative, and this now covers an EU of 27 Member States. At the same time, today's communication media continues to evolve at a highly dynamic rate. Expectations among European citizens are also increasingly demanding in terms of their appetite for up to date information about different aspects of EU rural development policy, which they seek to be delivered via a growing variety of different media.

This context is the reality within which EAFRD communications are required to operate. EAFRD communication operations reflect the European Commission's overall approach to communication¹, which is based on three main principles:

- Listening to the public - taking their views and concerns into account; communication is a dialogue, not a one-way street. It is not just about informing EU citizens but it is also about citizens expressing their opinions so that the European Commission can understand their perceptions and concerns

- Explaining how policies, programmes and projects affect peoples' everyday lives in a manner that people can understand and relate to if citizens are to follow political developments at European level.
- And Connecting with people locally - addressing them in their national or local settings, through their favourite media.



EAFRD communications actions are developed in line with communication strategy operations from the European Commission's Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI). With the appointment of the current Commission in

2010, a new strategy was established to be in line with the communication challenges for the period ahead (2010-2015), mainly the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In line with this political agenda, the objectives of the strategy are to gain support of opinion leaders and decision makers in view of the debate on the CAP reform; to strengthen DG AGRI's relation with multipliers (especially media) and to raise public awareness on the CAP and its achievements. The identification and collection of concrete examples and success stories from a diverse range of situations and Member States, especially through the ENRD, is thus of major importance for the implementation of DG AGRI's strategy.

¹ See Action Plan to improve communicating Europe by the Commission http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/pdf/communication_com_en.pdf

EAFRD communication approaches are carried out by numerous stakeholders, most notably by the National Rural Networks (NRNs), Leader Local Action Groups (LAGs) and EAFRD authorities like Managing Authorities.

These EAFRD stakeholders know that successful communication is based on a process which starts with proper planning to identify communication objectives, different target groups, establish key messages adapted to different audiences and determine which media is best suited to reach each target group. Effective communication planning leads to the roll out of relevant EAFRD communication strategies which reach their intended audiences with the right information, at the right time and in the right format.

Good practice also requires EAFRD communication strategies to be monitored and regularly evaluated to check if they are achieving their objectives. Feedback from this ongoing review then helps to adapt, update and fine-tune communication approaches to ensure they remain fit-for-purpose and customer-oriented.

A variety of interesting examples exist from around Europe that show how different aspects of the EAFRD communication process can be applied in practice. This ENRD brochure has been produced to illustrate some of these examples.

Experience confirms that practical examples are extremely useful communication tools for explaining the EAFRD to its customer-base, and so this ENRD brochure also uses a mix of different EAFRD communication examples to highlight experiences from one area that can be transferred to other areas.

Its publication comes at a time when the EAFRD is entering the second half of its current term, and when results from mid-term evaluations of the RDPs have noted the importance of communication as an instrument for concentrating RDP efforts on new challenges and encouraging greater uptake of EAFRD opportunities.

Effective EAFRD communication is therefore more important than ever and the following sections have been prepared to help build capacity in successful EAFRD communication practices.

2 Adaptable communication strategies

Communication has been defined as the “activity of conveying meaningful information”. And, a communication process is said to be complete “once the ‘receiver’ has understood the ‘sender’”. But **Communication is more than information**: it establishes a relationship and initiates a dialogue with European citizens, it listens carefully and it connects to people.

In order for EAFRD information to be meaningful, the senders need to adapt their communication approaches to fit with the receivers’ information needs and interests.

Communication strategies are the main tool used by NRNs, LAGs and RDP authorities to manage the dissemination of meaningful information about EAFRD activities. The art of

preparing a good communication strategy can be helped by using a working framework which covers: objectives, audiences, messages, tools and techniques, resources, timetables, evaluation, and readjustments.

When these core communication strategy elements function well together, results ensure that meaningful information is sent and understood in a cost effective manner. The framework is applicable to both ‘one-off’, ‘stand-alone’ type communication projects, as well as larger-scale communication campaigns with wider coverage.

EAFRD communication strategies incorporate similar approaches. Sweden’s NRN has adopted such a framework to its EAFRD communication work and their experiences (reported overleaf) provide interesting demonstration value.



Country case study: Sweden

Objectives for the Swedish NRN's communication strategy were designed to fit closely with the organisation's main goals. This ensures that all communication work is organisation-driven (rather than communication-driven). Aligning communication and organisational objectives in this way helps to strengthen the value of communication work and justify the resource commitments involved.

Initial communication objectives for the NRN have now been updated to mirror changing priorities as much of their early communication work has been completed. Goals have shifted from creating awareness and interest in their network to focus more on using communication

methods to facilitate dialogue and exchanges. Jessica Hagård, Information Officer from the NRN, explains that, "Spreading knowledge and best practice are key communication objectives at this time and we expect to continue this work which will be designed to reach a range of different target groups".

By carefully channelling its communication efforts towards their target audiences the NRN is taking a prudent and cost efficient approach. Adopting 'blanket' approaches using standardised press releases aimed only at high profile mass media can be self-serving (communication-driven) with limited impact. Ms Hagård describes the different audiences that she and her

colleagues work with. "We have identified a direct target group and an indirect group as audiences for the Swedish NRN communications activities. The direct group are the members in the network (stakeholders on a national level) including the Leader groups. The indirect group includes for instance young people, rural entrepreneurs, social inclusion groups, environmental stakeholders and other funding bodies. Through the direct group we reach the indirect group."

Special attention is also paid to getting NRN communication messages out to groups that can have a 'multiplier effect' and so spread the EAFRD messages even further through their own networks and contacts.

Nytt från Landsbygdsnätverket



Nr 3 2011



Landsbygdsnätverkets arbetsgrupp för planeringsfrågor vill att kommunerna tar in även landsbygden i sina översiktsplaner.

Planering i landsbygder med nya PBL?

Nu i början på maj träder den nya Plan- och bygglagen (PBL) i kraft. Frågan är om de nya riktlinjerna i lagen kommer att innebära att fler av Sveriges kommuner tar med även landsbygden i sina översiktsplaner?

Text: Jessica Hagård | Foto: Daniel Johansson

Många kommuner är idag dåliga på att uppdatera sina översiktsplaner. I Sverige har nästan var tredje kommun en översiktsplan som är äldre än 15 år. De nu aktuella ändringarna i PBL handlar bland annat om en strategisk översiktsplanering och om förenklingar av planeringsarbetet. I framtiden åläggs till exempel länsstyrelserna att

– Förändringarna är inte så stora, det tydligaste är en starkare regional koppling och det är ju bra. Det är också bra att översiktsplanerna kan och ska användas mer strategiskt, man behöver inte driva alla frågor samtidigt utan kan fokusera på det som har stor betydelse för den egna kommunens utveckling, det kan vara olika för olika

Både Emma Franzén och Louise Andersson är överens om att det kommer att vara länsstyrelsernas uppgift att i framtiden påminna kommunerna om vikten att inte glömma landsbygdsprogrammet i sammanhanget. Samtidigt betonar också Emma Franzén att det är upp till varje kommun hur mycket av det som står i de

Tailored approaches

Tailoring communication tools to audience requirements presents challenges. In Sweden, the NRN keeps its collection of communication tools under review and monitors their effectiveness on the ground. The NRN website is a core tool for disseminating and receiving information to and from target audiences, as well as wider interested parties. Electronic media like the website tools (including sister social networking sites) are growing in relevance across Sweden, where rural areas have good internet access and a high proportion of rural citizens use e-communications on a daily basis. By contrast, production of printed NRN communication material remains limited in Sweden. However, in other Member States, the opposite situation exists and the relevance of paper-based EAFRD communication tools is much higher.

Radio and TV tend to be effective EAFRD communication tools in all parts of the EU and their use is often common in EAFRD communication strategies. Swedish NRN experiences show that film and radio has been successful. Non-commercial channels are used mostly and adverts have not been considered a priority. Content for the broadcast media is designed to tell EAFRD stories (avoiding technical bureaucratic details) in both informative and inspirational ways. "We are aware of the importance of producing messages that are easy to understand. Therefore we work a lot with new media, such as film", says Ms Hagård.

Special films have been produced for example about EAFRD projects that received prizes from the NRN's annual good practice award scheme. The awards scheme is another interesting communication tool in itself. It succeeds in disseminating inspirational messages about how the EAFRD can be used to create the type of rural development benefits that are encouraged by the NRN. Furthermore, the award scheme prizes are presented at a high profile 'Gala' event which attracts media interest and helps explain the role of the EU's rural development funds to a wider audience.

Resource allocations for these different NRN communication tools are reviewed on a regular basis as part of the communication strategy's ongoing evaluation. Findings from monitoring and feedback systems help the NRN to decide where their communications funds have good effect.

Evaluation experiences

The Swedish NRN evaluates their communication strategy once each year. An independent specialist company is used to carry out the research which investigates the type of questions noted in section 5 of this publication about evaluating EAFRD communication material.



By thinking in new ways Brålanda is on its way to achieve efficiency in the biogas process. In the near future there will be an annual production of fuel for 250 cars, 30 trucks and 30 buses from the eighteen farms cooperating in the project. The pride of the district can not be mistaken.

Brålanda biogas venture is the pride of the community

The background to why biogas now is so popular and interesting is of course the unused energy in the manure, which many are interested in. But you need large volumes of manure to make it profitable. Therefore, the manure is often transported from farms to large biogas plants, until now, you may add. The project Biogas Brålanda produces biogas directly at each farm to avoid unnecessary transports.

— We thought the other way around, says Peter Eriksson, project leader for Biogas Brålanda. If we make the process more efficient and transport only the gas we are avoiding costly and environmentally demanding shipments of manure, he continues. This is an innovation and a brand new system, which means that many different skills and competences have to be involved in the project.

— The project is a great collaboration, says Karin Stenlund, project coordinator at Innovatum Technology Park. Among those involved in the project you find of course Biogas cooperative society in which the farmers are members but also the Vänersborg and Mellerud municipalities, companies delivering the biogas plants to the farms, the farmers' Union LRF, Trollhättan Energy and Lantmännen. There are both large and small partners, which also is needed to succeed in this. The technology already exists but nobody has put it together like this before, she says.

Karin believes that the support from the Rural Development Program was vital to launch such an extensive project. A very important part of the project focused on how the farmers could be involved throughout the whole production process.

— That way the rural entrepreneurs will make money all the way in the business chain. That is how rural development is created, says Karin.

The interest in the project has been great and this fall the first gas delivery will be made.

— It will increase the interest further, says Karin. The whiskey industry in Scotland follows our project. We are also thinking of how to manage this and how to be able to receive visitors interested in the technology, she concludes.

Want to know more? www.innovatum.se

Project owner: Innovatum Teknik Park | Contact: Karin Stenlund | Contact information: karin.stenlund@innovatum.se, 0520-28 93 22, 0703-94 48 29
Project duration: 2007-05-09 to 2009-10-31 | Funding from the Rural Development Program: 2 173 700 SEK for diversification into non-agricultural activities

Conclusions from Sweden's most recent evaluation of the NRN communication strategy were collated in spring 2011. These highlighted opportunities for revising some of the communication strategy's goal, such as paying special attention in the future to the youth target audience. Other updates included undertaking more communication work linked to debate about the next CAP programming period and new efforts are being introduced to promote 'economic sustainability' as a development priority for rural businesses.

Other evaluation recommendations included increasing the visibility of NRN members' activities in NRN materials and setting up targeted information through selective subscriptions. Respondents to the 2011 evaluation also suggested that it would be useful if the news items sent out could be coded by geographic location and subject type. This was proposed as part of a plan to help set up a searchable library of news and information items on the NRN website. Client feedback from young people indicated that the NRN should test the use of 'unorthodox methods' and use the younger generation's own ideas for communicating on their interests via their preferred media.

Swedish NRN experiences show how their communication strategy has been adapted to fit with changing priorities. Once new communication activities are established, performance indicators need to be introduced to monitor the success of any new EAFRD communication work. Such indicators should then feed into the ongoing evaluation of RDPs.

Indeed, the important role played by communication in implementing RDPs has been highlighted by a number of RDP mid-term evaluation reports. These called for increased

emphasis on communication actions to encourage greater uptake and understanding of EAFRD opportunities.

The essence to cost effective communication is common sense and an over-riding rule to keep in mind is 'always make sure you have the resources to deliver what you promise, when you promise it - and never over promise'. Expectations for EAFRD communication strategies should be realistic in relation to resources and timescales.

Communication findings from RDP mid-term evaluations

Findings from [RDP mid-term evaluations](#)² are highlighting the value of communication as a tool for implementing effective RDP operations. The mid-term evaluations are also identifying areas, measures and target groups that require special attention to improve the uptake of EAFRD. Communication can play a key role in this process.

Romania's mid-term RDP evaluation for example states that "There is a need for information activities for all the potential beneficiaries of measures." The report goes on to say that, "Communication efforts should be more effective in less-developed areas because of the randomly spread beneficiaries and the limited accessibility." An important point is underlined concerning the fact that, "Access to new technologies for informing about rural development is still low and there is a need for the direct means of communication". Mid-term evaluators in Romania drew attention to the NRN as "one of the actors which should boost the cooperation and the communication on both national and transnational levels.

Denmark's mid-term evaluation of its RDP makes recommendations to strengthen the communication skills of LAGs so they can advise on the types of business development projects that can be funded by Leader. The Danish report picks up on the potential benefits from "stimulating communicating examples on projects that have proven to have positive effects."

Mid-term evaluators in Malta made recommendations for the RDP Managing Authority to strengthen its communication with the farmers. This was thought useful for encouraging further involvement in training and education, as well as (among other points), in setting up producer organisations. Improved communication for LAGs was another observation that the Maltese evaluation highlighted.

In the UK, communication actions by Northern Ireland's rural network were assessed as a beneficial support mechanism. Mid-term evaluation recommendations emphasised stepping up communication activity to help ensure a consistent uptake of EAFRD across the RDP axes stating, "It is necessary that communication is timely and user friendly. All parties to seek to move this aspect of the delivery structure forward."

EAFRD support from axis 2 of the Bulgarian RDP is noted as benefitting from a dedicated campaign encouraging greater use of EAFRD measures targeting environmentally sustainable agriculture. The evaluators also pointed to the Bulgarian NRN's important communication role recommending that, "The rural development network should continue to provide examples of potential cooperation projects and to create meeting places for developing joint projects. Learning and exchanges of experiences should be emphasised in the projects."

Get INVOLVED in the Maltese National Rural Network

In upcoming issues, NRNM will start focussing on rural localities, events, programmes and projects. Inform us about any experiences, past or upcoming events in rural development in your locality, region by sending us an email on rdd.mrra@gov.mt

Step 1 Spread the word about NRN: Inform and encourage other stakeholders to be added to our mailing list by sending us an email on rdd.mrra@gov.mt

Step 2 Share information about Rural Development: Send us a brief description plus the link of any initiatives, campaigns, projects for us to promote on our website and newsletter

Step 3 Make the National Rural Network for Malta more known: Post a link to the MA website, www.mrra.gov.mt/ma, on your website

Hvad kan du få i tilskud?

Tilskud til at omlægge til økologisk jordbrug udgør:

- 1.050 kr. pr. ha pr. år i de tilslagne, hvor arealet er under omlægning, og
- 100 kr. pr. ha pr. år i de følgende år i tilslagsperioden.

Herudover kan du evt. søge den direkte støtte til Ekstensivt Landbrug. Denne støtte udgør 850 kr. pr. ha pr. år.

Du kan læse mere om støtteordningen på www.farm.dk/okologisklandbrug

Om lægningstilskud

Du kan søge tilskud til konventionelle landbrugsarealer, som du ønsker at omlægge til økologisk drift.

Færdiggørelsen giver tilgang for en 5-årig periode. Omlægningen skal være påbegyndt ved tilslagsperiodens begyndelse.

Vanskeligeste betingelser for tilskud

- Du skal som ejer eller forpagter drive tilslagsarealet i hele den 5-årige tilslagsperiode.
- Din bedrift skal høre tilslagsperiodens støtteautoriseret af Planlægningsrådet til økologisk jordbrugsproduktion eller være omfattet af en omlægning heraf.
- Dine tilslagsarealer skal i tilslagsperiodens første vækstsæson være støtteberettiget efter ordningen om støttebetaling eller være tilsluttet med julemand.
- Du må ikke være underlagt andre miljølovgivninger med forpligtelse til udtagning af produktion.

Vær opmærksom på, at de har beskrevet støttebetalingen ikke er udstemende.

Du kan læse mere om tilskud til at omlægge på www.farm.dk/okologisk

The above provides a sample of responses from the mid-term evaluations. These RDPs are not alone in recognising

the potential that communication plays in managing the EAFRD, and many useful practices can be shared between EAFRD stakeholders. The Danish Managing Authority for instance has produced an extremely useful printed brochure for farmers about the funding that is available for [converting production systems to organic principles](#)³.

Denmark's organic brochure's content covers information such as: "How do you apply for the grant"; "How much can

you receive"; "When is the grant paid"; and "Key requirements for receiving a grant"; among others. The brochure is available in web and printed formats so could provide a model to help other RDPs address some of their communication challenges. The Danes have also produced a publication about LAG projects that will be a useful tool for helping to build communication capacity in the country's Leader groups.

3 Communication tools

EAFRD communication tools come in different shapes, sizes, formats and languages. Many communication strategies use a mixture of tools such as the internet, publications and other printed materials, video, film, radio, media relations, spokespeople and EAFRD events like special days, award ceremonies, exhibitions, seminars etc. New communication tools in the social media field are also now becoming more commonplace as a mechanism for sending and receiving information regarding the RDPs and EU rural development policy.

Choosing which communication tool (or combination of tools) to use in particular circumstances depends on the purpose of the communication and the intended audience(s). Nevertheless, good practices in communication approaches advise that, whilst the choice of tools deployed may differ in a communication strategy, a consistent approach should be applied to all tools. Tools therefore need to: use a uniform linguistic style and tone; reinforce and reiterate common core messages; and maintain a coherent visual identity. Lack of this type of consistency can confuse or distract target audiences.

Mainstream communication media

The majority of EAFRD communication approaches are delivered using mainstream tools such as printed media, TV, radio and websites. Much of rural Europe still relies on conventional communication media that are capable of reaching out into the required target audiences.



Further guidance for EAFRD communication tools can be taken from the experiences of other EU funding programmes involved in supporting the development of rural regions. An interesting selection of [Regional policy communication case studies](#)⁴ has been produced and these include useful tips that are relevant for RDP communication tools.

Regardless of the changes in communication technology or tools, the market for well-crafted messages will always have an audience.

Valuable lessons learnt from CAP communication work suggest that EAFRD communication tools should aim to:

- Be modern, visual, interesting, easy to understand, and memorable.
- Avoid as much as possible burdening readers/viewers with the complexities of EAFRD jargon (like 'axes', 'measures', 'regulation' or 'legislation' reference numbers).
- Highlight the EU dimension of the policy, programme or project early on (but save the administrative details for the end).

Experiences from the Italian NRN's communication strategy illustrate well how coordinated communication messages can be developed and disseminated using these types of mainstream tools.

³ http://ferv.fvm.dk/landdistrikter_2010.aspx?ID=53675

⁴ http://www.interact-eu.net/downloads/3747/Newsletter_INTERACT_%257C_Issue_2011-03_%257C_N8_%257C_Communication

Country case study: Italy

Reflecting good practice, the NRN in Italy has adopted a flexible but still consistent approach to its communication campaign. Flexibility involves applying different media for different purposes and consistency centres on a selection of core messages that the campaign is pursuing. The NRN's main headline messages advocates the importance of 'sustainable development in rural areas' and another common message repeated in parallel throughout the campaign promotes the slogan 'agriculture for the benefit of all'

Media messages

Their campaign translates the complexities of rural development policy into subject matter and messages that the general public can relate to as being relevant for them. A group of eleven core subject areas have been chosen to describe the purpose of Italy's National Strategic Plan (NSP) for rural development. These distil the NSP down to its support for: enterprise, youth, quality, landscape, safety, climate, water, energy, biodiversity, cohesion and broadband. The core topics provide a framework for the

area face concerning the eleven core topics. The communication tools also highlight opportunities that are available from the NSP to tackle these challenges.

Good practice approaches to media relations follow similar tactics and the use of specialised articles, rather than standardised press releases, can prove more productive for securing press coverage (and achieving the ultimate objective of communicating information). Ms D'Aprile refers to this in her comments about how, "Our campaign is designed to tell different stories about the different topics. An example of this is how we talk about the benefits that can be gained from proper planning and careful management of supply chains in our messages about the ways that the NSP can help support rural enterprises". Copies of the campaign material are available from the [NRN website](#)⁵.

Providing further details about these communication investments, Ms D'Aprile says that, "Advertorials have been placed in 17 general interest newspapers and in three special interest newspapers. In all, 135 full-page adverts were published. Banner ads for websites have also been used for two months on special-interest online newspapers. The radio campaign covers 60 second radio commercials on the network of 140 local radio stations for ten weeks, and 60 second radio commercials twice a day for two weeks on the national RDS radio station. So far we know that the published material has reached nearly seven million people and listeners to the radio broadcasts are estimated at similar numbers of just over seven million".



Federica D'Aprile, Communication and Event Management Staff Assistant Coordinator, describes how the Italian NRN's communication programme aims to improve understanding about the NRN's programme of support activities. The campaign is thus based on the organisation's strategic objectives and aims to reach, "A large number of people in rural areas as well as other people who have an interest in rural development issues. Our communication operations make our target audiences aware about the challenges faced by rural territories and we explain how the EAFRD can be used in Italy to support sustainable rural developments".

messages and information that is being disseminated by the NRN communication strategy.

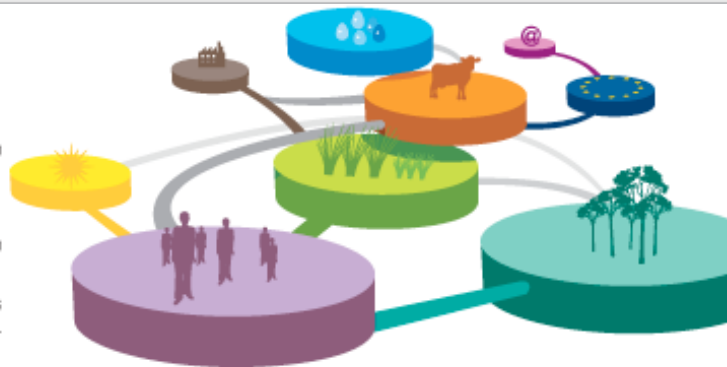
One of the high profile tools deployed by the strategy is a mass media campaign. Costing around €1 045 000 the mass media initiative takes a proactive approach of purchasing editorial space using 'advertorials' in general and special interest newspapers and magazines. An associated series of radio 'infomercials' forms another integral part of the NRN's outreach work.

Advertorials and infomercials raise awareness about the challenges that Italy's rural

[What is it all about?]

The Rural Development Network web site is:

- A COMMUNICATION TOOL, BOTH TRADITIONAL AND INNOVATIVE
- A FLEXIBLE SERVICE ORIENTED TO USER NEEDS
- A COOPERATION-BASED PROJECT IMPLEMENTED THROUGH A NETWORK OF RELATIONSHIPS
- A TOOL ABLE TO CONVERT LIABILITIES INTO ASSETS BY INVOLVING HUMAN, FINANCIAL AND SOCIAL RESOURCES
- A TOOL ABLE TO ENSURE THE INFORMATION FLOW



[Our services]

- Monitoring of Rural Development Programs
- On-line forum related to thematic contents
- Presentation of events on rural development
- The focus on programs and related activities
- S.O.S. for bees - service on bee emergency
- Members reserved area

[Figures]

Visitors overview: from October 2008 to October 2009

108.320	Visits
45.261	Absolute Unique Visitors
748.395	Page views
8,01	Average Page Views

[Most wanted]

List of the most wanted topics

- LEGISLATION
- DOCUMENTS
- SOS FOR BEES
- LEADER APPROACH
- REGIONS
- ENVIRONMENT
- EVENTS
- RURAL AREAS

By packaging their communication messages in this relevant way and targeting a large scale audience the Italian NRN are helping to strengthen the general public's perception and appreciation of EU rural development policy. Other communication tools are also being used in conjunction with the press campaign such as a number of specialised websites.

Italian web tools

The main NRN internet portal provides a host of information functions and part of the NRN's communication strategy involves explaining how people can make the most of the portal's content. A leaflet has been prepared (in Italian and English) for this purpose. The leaflet's use of graphics and sound bites offers interesting ideas for other websites communicating EAFRD matters.

In addition to the main internet portal, a suite of complementary web tools have also been designed and launched by the Italian NRN with specific objectives to reach younger people.

[YOURuralnet](http://www.youruralnet.it)⁶ provide a web space for an online community of people interested in the NSP and its work. Containing message board blogs and related social networking functions, it is used by young farmers and

other EAFRD stakeholders to share knowledge, exchange experiences and gain information about good practices.

A 'RURALand Project' is involved in the delivery of three more dedicated websites communicating EAFRD messages to younger generations. [Rural4Kids](http://www.Rural4Kids.it)⁷ and [Rural4Teens](http://www.Rural4Teens.it)⁸ provide interactive tools for encouraging increased awareness among children and teenagers about the effects of their actions and habits on society and the environment. A forthcoming 'Rural4Youth' website will target university students and provide academic information supporting study programmes covering rural development topics. The website is also expected to be used as a case study for graduates following communication courses.

More details about the Italian NRN communication campaign (including its approach to evaluation) is available from the NRN communication team (c.zaccarini@isMEA.it; f.daprile@isMEA.it)

Rural4KIDS

INTERNET KIOSK

Le 4 sfide del mondo rurale spiegate ai bambini

SCOPRIAMOLE INSIEME SU
www.rural4kids.it

RETE RURALE NAZIONALE 2007-2013
L'AGRICOLTURA A BENEFICIO DI TUTTI

6 www.youruralnet.it
7 www.rural4kids.it
8 www.rural4teens.it

Websites

Whilst internet sites were once a novel form of communication, the web is now a mainstream tool for distributing information about the EAFRD. The Italian case study demonstrates how different websites can be used for different purposes, targeting different audiences, and the vast majority of organisations involved in communicating EAFRD issues use at least one type of website.

Internet growth continues at a phenomenal rate and the web's multi-functionality provides many opportunities for building the communication capacity of EAFRD organisations. Results can provide improved web services for rural development stakeholders.



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The Scottish one door, any door approach

Scottish RDP authorities from the UK have taken advantage of the web's potential for providing information about EAFRD grant application processes. The Scots adopted a novel approach to web technology based on a partnership with other providers of funding for rural and environmental projects. This collective approach, called SEARS (Scotland's Environment and Rural Services) was introduced in response to requests from rural development stakeholders for better quality information services.

Feedback from consultations that were held to help shape the Scottish RDP found that some people in the countryside were not sure which organisation they needed to deal with about different types of rural development issue. This tended to mean that these people ended up being passed around between organisations. The assortment of government agency websites also assumed that their customers knew about what information they wanted to find on specific subjects, but in reality this was frequently not the case. Both these problems were exacerbated by the fact that information services within the different rural and environmental agencies tended

to operate rigidly within their own area of responsibility.

SEARS set up a website (www.sears.scotland.gov.uk) and telephone helpline to address these concerns and introduced more streamlined information about rural development support processes. The website covers information for land managers on funding from both CAP pillars as well as all other sources of rural development services that are available to Scottish rural communities. For EAFRD applicants, the introduction of SEARS means that they no longer have to seek advice from numerous different organisations, whose advice was not always the same. What happens now is that all staff dealing with enquiries in the SEARS organisations are able to take ownership of a customer's query and either get back with an answer or put the customer in contact with the official who can answer the question.

By using the SEARS web portal, rural citizens and businesses can find it easier to identify which organisations provide which type of rural development support. The general enquiry phone number created for SEARS helps to avoid previous problems so customers would no longer be passed around different organisations because the person they speak to "does not deal with that". The Scots call their SEARS website a "one door, any door approach" and this model holds win-win benefits for organisations involved in managing the EAFRD, as well as people seeking information about how to use the EAFRD.

RDP project databases can be found on some websites and these help to inform on RDP achievements. An innovative approach is to insert maps to identify the location of EU funded projects in rural areas (e.g.: <http://www.europe-en-france.gouv.fr/Cartographie-des-projets>).



Internet pages are now the favoured source of information for a great many EU citizens. Broadband's expansion of coverage in the countryside means that rural citizens are also heavily involved in using the web for information purposes. Providing a presence on key information portals like 'wiki' sites can help raise awareness about an EAFRD organisation's operations and offer options to reach out to new audiences. EU and national government bodies recognise the relevance of having a wiki presence which can be monitored and updated on a regular basis as part of mainstream communication strategy actions⁹.

TV and video

A review of EAFRD communication tools indicates a trend towards greater use of video and television. Video is a popular medium which allows key messages to be transferred in visually interesting ways. The approach can be effective at reaching large audiences as well as being tailored to meet the communication needs of specific target groups.



Many examples of EAFRD videos already exist. A [French example](#)¹⁰ forms part of a [national campaign](#)¹¹ aimed at improving awareness among the general population about the practical ways in which the EU is helping French citizens, businesses and communities. The videos reflect some of the good practice referred to earlier in this publication and focus on the subject matter rather than the institutional details of EU funding programmes.

Containing multi-lingual subtitles, the French videos' short and 'to-the-point' format has been designed specifically to assist distribution through internet TV channels. This format provides useful multiplier functions

'Wiki' sites represent part of the web 2.0 generation of internet services that facilitate a shift towards two-way communication (see the social media section on page 15 for more information about website's potential as two-way EAFRD communication tools). Audio visual approaches are fast becoming core communication techniques for web 2.0 sites, with portals like YouTube estimating in 2011 that, on average, over two days worth of internet video footage are being uploaded every minute to their site.

because the videos can be easily viewed and passed on by smart phone devices or similar mobile multi-media technology.

Audio-visual tools are becoming increasingly popular and represent an excellent way to convey a story. Careful planning helps to ensure value for money from investments in video communication. Preparations need to ensure basic considerations such as: who is our audience and how are we going to reach them? If for instance an NRN is interested in producing a video about young farmers, a pre-production process needs to decide whether the aim of the communication exercise is to either: promote the EAFRD setting up support among potential beneficiaries, promote young farmers to non farmers; or to promote young farming to would-be farmers; or to promote young farmers to the public/policy makers.

Thought is also required to assess dissemination options and design an evaluation system to gain feedback on the video project's results. As previously noted with all other types of EAFRD communication, effective use of video is achieved when the right tool is used, for the right message with the right audience.

Various guidance manuals can be found on-line that provide advice about [developing effective video communication](#)¹². Benefits can be gained by searching through such guidance materials prior to launching a video communication campaign. It is also worth remembering that using video does not need to involve spending a lot of money. Using commercial media like local or national television or radio channels can sometimes be the best tool to use, and costs relatively little.

⁹ See the Wikipedia pages about the CAP (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_Agricultural_Policy) DG AGRI (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Directorate-General_for_Agriculture_and_Rural_Development) and the ENRD (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Network_for_Rural_Development) for instance. Scope exists for NRNs, Managing Authorities, LAGs and RDP projects to build their own Wikipedia pages and link these with the existing ENRD pages.

¹⁰ www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFJHJtyH8o

¹¹ www.leuropeengage.eu

¹² http://cdn2.reelstatic.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/03/Guide_OVC.pdf?5f2860

Working with TV and radio broadcasters: tips of the trade¹³

The key to getting broadcasters to give airtime to EAFRD-related activity is to provide them with stories that will interest their viewers or listeners. Therefore, selling your story to a broadcaster requires that you know their audience and you know how to pitch your story to make it interesting to this audience.



Firstly, ask yourself a series of questions about your project/story:

- Why this? Why now?
- What is special about this project/story?
- Why would this audience be interested in hearing about it?
- How is it different/unique/innovative?
- Is there an important anniversary, event, publication or other development that relates to the project in some way?

In targeting a local audience it is important to connect your project or story with local issues. If you are after a more regional or national audience, then adapt your story accordingly.

Find an 'Angle'

Producers are always looking for an 'angle' for a story. They are rarely interested in a project or story for its own sake, but instead they look for something, an 'angle', in the project or story that they know will be of interest to their audience and, therefore, makes it 'newsworthy'.

Deliver visual / aural appeal

When trying to think like a producer, keep in mind also that TV is an image-based medium, and radio is a sound-based medium.

or the splash or trickle of a stream can communicate an image to radio listeners that helps to locate or reinforce a message.

Clarify your objectives

Before contacting the media, think about what you want to get out of the process. If you do manage to get a thirty-second slot on the local evening news, what would be the one thing you want to get across? What would you define as a success in your dealings with the media? Think about this goal throughout the whole process. All your dealings with the media should relate back to this aim or message.

Identify key contacts

If you are lucky enough to have a TV journalist who specialises in rural stories, then this is the obvious person to attempt to contact. In such instances, do a bit of homework beforehand, and watch the TV news programmes over the space of a week, taking note of which journalists seem to be working in areas or covering stories that are not too distant from the EAFRD story that you want to communicate. Identify which reporters seem to show interest in areas related to your field and decide which ones seem likely to be the most sympathetic to your areas of concern.

Persevere: Remember that both TV and radio stations work to very tight deadlines and may be too busy to get back to you. If you don't make contact within a reasonable period of time, try calling the news desk or the person in charge of the appropriate department.

Be proactive: This begins with not pestering the journalist, but it also means not waiting for them to contact you. Anticipate their needs by delivering to them information on any interesting new developments.

Choose a spokesperson: There should only be a main contact person from your organisation who deals with the media. This spokesperson should be someone who speaks well, knows the subject, doesn't

You should be thinking about what images related to your story are visually appealing? A gripping story with little in the way of interesting images will not grab a TV producer's attention. Yet a less interesting story with very exciting images may have more TV appeal.

Thinking about what visual elements you can offer the producer/journalist will also help you win air time. For example, aim to avoid doing an interview in an office behind a desk if you have something like a farm, coastline, woodland, river, factory or a water treatment plant etc. that can be used as background instead.

Radio, on the other hand, is essentially language driven, rather than image-driven. That said, birdsong, the sound of animals,

¹³ This text is an adaptation of a fact sheet on using the media produced by the European Commission's LIFE programme (<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/toolkit/comtools/resources/factsheets.htm>)

mumble and, most importantly, will not get nervous in a broadcasting situation.

Preparing for a TV or radio interview:

Be brief: Speak concisely and be to the point. If it's not live, the broadcaster will probably edit the interview down ruthlessly. If it is live, you'll still only get a few seconds or a minute or two at most.

Stick to your message: Because of the need to be brief, it is important to stick to your one main message. Attempt to make this message snappy. Good phraseology or witty catch-phrases are much more likely to be used by the producer.

Most important information first: Do not view the interview as a chronologically

recounted story, with a beginning, middle and end. Instead, think of it as a short newspaper article, with the most important information first, followed by the next most important pieces of information, and concluding with the details.

No jargon: Do not use jargon or scientific language. Rather, use language the general public will understand.

Keep it topical: Again, as when attempting to get a producer interested in your project, try to link your project to a current topic of public interest.

Be prudent: Be aware that journalists may ask difficult questions. If you know that any problems have happened during the EAFRD project then prepare in advance

positive answers to any questions that the journalist may ask (because journalists do their own research on a story before meeting the people involved).

Mention the EU's involvement: Never forget to mention the EU dimension of EAFRD activities.

Working with broadcasters can help reduce costs of EAFRD communication campaigns and result in high quality video or radio material. It is normally possible to receive a copy of the video or radio programmes so that these can then be used for further dissemination purposes. Websites, internet TV and audio-visual presentations during EAFRD events provide a sample of options for repeat broadcasts.



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© Tim Hudson

Events

EAFRD communication events, like the Swedish Rural Gala for promoting best practice RDP projects noted on page 5, provide effective communication tools. Such events not only provide delegates with an opportunity to find out information on new and different topics different but they also offer extremely useful occasions for networking. Feedback from participants at events often highlights how one of the most positive outcomes from attending the event was the contacts that people make. Good practice therefore includes arranging special time and facilities for delegates networking at EAFRD events.

Spain's NRN, like other EAFRD organisations around Europe, takes a proactive approach to using the power of events for communicating EAFRD issues. A programme of different seminars, workshops and conferences continues to be rolled out in Spain at regional and national level with good success and broad coverage. These include large-scale events like Europe's first 'International Forum on Cooperation in Rural Development' or their 'International Tourism Fair'.

Other high profile events supported by Spain's NRN have focused attention on important topics such as a European Forum on 'The Role of Women in Sustainable Development of the Rural Environment' and 'Shepherds in the XXI century'. Additional agricultural events have also been organised and helpful outcomes have come from NRN capacity building meetings like sessions devoted to 'Public presentations of cooperation projects and innovative experiences'.

Other examples of EAFRD communication events are featured under the Rural Outreach heading on page 21 (including an innovative 'Citizen Talk' initiative from Germany).

Publications

Whilst electronic technologies continue to expand the choice of communication tools available for conveying EAFRD messages, traditional paper-based tools still have an important role to play. Publications remain the most common form of EAFRD communication, and different examples of EAFRD publications are spotlighted throughout this EAFRD publication.

All EAFRD authorities produce publications and these can reflect good practice approaches such as knowing that first impressions count, so the cover pages of many EAFRD publications aim to be eye-catching and ideally attractive.



Articles in EAFRD magazines, newsletters and other publications also need to be written concisely and in the 'active voice'. Text should be edited to ensure clarity, achieve conciseness, avoid unexplained jargon, remain realistic in length and be accurate.

Although some EAFRD publications might have a tendency to be written in 'stiff' bureaucratic terms, this is generally not good practice.

Most readers find that information is often more interesting and easy to understand when it is told as a story by someone talking about it.

Quotes from people involved in the subject matter (e.g. interview with an EAFRD beneficiary) are thus another way of improving the 'readability' of EAFRD publications and the layout of a publication is also a crucial success factor. Choosing an appropriate layout will help readers identify and remember the main messages that the publication aims to convey.

New thinking in terms the structures and formats for EAFRD events can produce interesting results and the integration of information technology now offers even more possibilities for EAFRD communicators.

Video streaming of EAFRD events live over the internet allows participants from anywhere in the world to benefit from the event presentations and debate. Other emerging technologies such as 'Webinar' services represent useful forms of 'virtual' events. These can be especially pertinent for events like training sessions on EAFRD grant processes, or briefing sessions for journalists about EAFRD stories.

Using large colourful photographs and providing enough blank empty space are two of the easiest and least-expensive ways to make a publication appear more attractive and easier to read.



This advice applies equally to printed and web-based publications. Most of the EAFRD publications produced in Member States and at EU level are available in both print and web formats. An interesting selection of the web publications go further than presenting standardised low resolution PDF files for download, and use different types of interactive presentation methods.

This use of new technologies in EAFRD publications is likely to increase as more readers chose to view publications on their computers, laptops or mobile multi-media devices.

Advances in new information technology are driving the development of EAFRD communication tools. One of the modern communication tools that are being used increasingly in all forms of EU communication is social media.

Social media

Commonly referred to as 'social media', 'social networking' or 'web 2.0' tools, these new internet-based communication forums continue to grow in relevance for EAFRD stakeholders.

More and more people use social media at work and at home, particularly the younger generation. Different Member States experience different levels of use and uptake of social media in rural areas depends on factors such as the availability of affordable broadband or the development of ICT skills among rural citizens. These factors need to be considered by EAFRD communicators when assessing social media investments within their current communication strategies. Longer-term forecasts predict that social media will become a dominant form of communication in all parts of the EU.

Today's social media revolution is being taken forward by the new type of communication opportunities that the tools offer. Their biggest strengths are their (relatively) low cost, their accessibility and their 'interactivity'. Communication via social media goes beyond the mainstream approach of publications, TV, radio, and websites. Most of these conventional tools represent channels of 'one-way' communication where one entity sends information and others receive it. Social media enables dialog where people and organisations can converse and share information with each other. Social media dialogue can take place on existing websites where interactive facilities are available and through dedicated social media web portals.

EAFRD and social media

Various EAFRD communication approaches can make good use of social media. In all cases it is important to note that social media communication is most effective for generating interactive communication. Its full potential is undervalued if EAFRD communicators only use social media as a one-way communication channel.

Interactive EAFRD communication through social media can include knowledge development processes like:

- Encouraging people to ask and respond to questions on contemporary rural development issues.
- Monitoring where and when examples of good or interesting practice (e.g. EAFRD project work, experiences from RDP implementation, or policy development actions) are described online and then sending out information about these examples with requests for feedback on people's ideas, experiences or views for how they could be used/replicated elsewhere.
- Reinforcing the relevance of EAFRD events or publications by asking people for suggestions to help develop content. Events can even incorporate live feedback forums where people in the audience (or watching on-line) can post questions for speakers or delegates to respond to via social media.

Adopting and integrating such social media into any organisations' communications strategy requires the development of a social media strategy. Before developing a strategy the organisation should have a very clear understanding of how the use of social media will support its overall business goals and objectives.

Another prerequisite for developing an EAFRD social media strategy involves identifying and understanding the audience(s). Research ideally needs to be carried out to determine in advance the following: Where do the target audiences converse online? Are there social networking site and/or forums where target audience are already active? What are the audiences' social behaviours online? What type of information do they share information? On what topics do they converse? Who are their influencers? How do target audience use social technologies in the context of EAFRD products or services?





Collating information on audience characteristics can be complex. For organisations that are new to social media, the necessary information may be both difficult to find and challenging to properly grasp what it means in practice. A good social media strategy should therefore always be flexible and be able to adapt to the knowledge acquired during actual use of social media tools.

This advice also applies to the monitoring and evaluation of a social media strategy. It may be useful to revise indicators as the strategy is implemented. In all cases it is crucial that an accurate baseline is first established from which indicators can then measure progress against.

Typical types of social media indicators include: the number of friends/followers/subscribers you have; the number of interactions your social media presence generates (for example the number of comments or questions you receive); the amount of internet traffic your social media presence drives to your website; and the number or type of other internet sites and blogs that link to your site(s).

Successful social media

Commentators on social media promote a number of common steps to help ensure the success of an organisation's social media strategy. These are explained by John Hannafin who has been involved with implementing a social media strategy for Ireland's NRN. He notes that the key ingredients to successful social media involve EAFRD communicators being able to:

- **“Listen.** It is important to listen to those on your chosen social network(s) and seek out those who you feel may be interested in your product or service. It is also important to become familiar with the language used on the network. For example, the use of hashtags (#) has become very popular on Twitter as a quick search and reference tool. Listening will also help you identify who are the influencers within your network of interest;
- **Share.** Learn the different sharing techniques. Share information you acquire from those within your network with others in your network (remember that your network of friends or followers may not all be friends with, or following, each other). Sharing other people's information helps you establish relationships with those whose information you are sharing;
- **Comment.** It is important to engage in dialog by commenting on what others say and share. Again, this helps establish relationships with others. Many EAFRD organisations like the NRNs and LAGs can be viewed

as a network of stakeholders, where there is a real opportunity to act as an information bridge between the various stakeholders (and indeed their respective friends and followers);

- **Produce.** Produce content that you feel your friends and followers want and that's true to you; and
- **Facilitate.** Seek to select, steer and guide your content and, importantly, the conversation around it.”

In addition to these success factors, Mr Hannafin also recommends that social media communication should aim to, “Be brief! Generally people don't use social networks for reading large compositions of work. Instead, communicate the main points and direct your reader to a source of further information. Be casual and personal. Remember it is all about people and relationships so it is possible to be less formal than you would, for example, on your business website. Don't be afraid to ask for others opinions and actively encourage people to contribute their ideas, experiences and feedback.”

“The thing that we are trying to do at Facebook is just help people connect and communicate more efficiently.”

Mark Zuckerberg, cofounder of Facebook

Ireland's NRN social media toolkit

Ireland's NRN uses three main social media technologies. These are the NRN website, Facebook and Twitter. The [website](#)¹⁴ hosts a blog allowing people to leave comments on articles posted on the site. Subscribers

to the website can also use Really Simple Syndication (RSS) technology to receive notifications every time a new article is added to the site.

The [Irish NRN Facebook page](#)¹⁵ has approximately 550 followers. It is used to share links to new articles posted on the NRN website and also news that is posted on their partners' websites, like those run by LAGs, the Managing Authority and other rural development groups. Information about events is also disseminated and welcomed. Facebook's technology allows all followers and friends to provide their feedback on the news or events and these

comments can create useful debates. One of the simple forms of feedback is a type of voting system whereby readers choose whether to 'like' (👍) the article. Facebook monitoring systems can track the articles that people like most and least. Regular analysis of such statistics can be used to help assess the type of content that followers are interested in.

Twitter has also been used as an integral part of the Irish NRN's social media strategy. Approximately 1500 people and organisations have registered as followers of the [NRN's tweets](#)¹⁶. These tweets share links to new articles that are posted on the NRN's and other relevant websites. Followers also send in tweets about their activities to the NRN and these can be 're-tweeted' by the NRN back out to its followers. This approach allows information to spread very quickly via Twitter. Re-tweets can also be monitored as an indication of positive feedback on the material posted via a social media strategy.



Mr Hannafin observes how the NRN made a choice to encourage their social media toolkit to be used as general communication forums on rural issues, and they have not restricted debate to EAFRD activity. This has helped attract a wider group of followers who the NRN can then reach with information about EAFRD matters.

He explains, "The NRN's Twitter page is used frequently to share job advertisements from rural Irish stakeholders. The page, similar to its Facebook page, is followed by many rural Irish enterprises which the NRN regularly promotes through the sharing of information from these sources. It is also followed by many Irish media companies, Public Relations firms and journalists. There is no doubt that the Irish NRN's presence on Facebook and Twitter has helped raised the profile of the NRN amongst a diverse and global audience."

Managing social media

In Ireland, the NRN's Communications officer manages their social media toolkit. They are responsible for producing most of the Facebook and Twitter material. Other members

of NRN staff also have access to the social networking accounts in case the Communications Officer is unavailable. Similar approaches are applied by NRNs in Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK where social media continues to increase in relevance as a mainstream EAFRD communication tool for these Networks.

Protocols have been drawn up by NRNs to manage the type of material that is communicated through social media. Guidelines in Sweden for example promote social media posts that are 'written for the reader' and encourage contributors to find out more about their audiences before publishing discussion information on-line.

Rob Janmaat from the Dutch NRN explains that, "In The Netherlands we have contracted with a consultant on social media to act as our Twitter manageress. She tweets on our behalf, communicating with Dutch farmers not only in the Netherlands but also elsewhere in Europe. She monitors Twitter and other social media for relevant rural development information and passes it on to our followers. In addition, we send her information that we think will be interesting such as news about the results of RDP projects, dates for farm open days, LAG events etc."

¹⁴ www.nrn.ie/

¹⁵ www.facebook.com/ruralnetwork

¹⁶ [http://twitter.com/#!/ruralnetwork](https://twitter.com/#!/ruralnetwork)

Useful social media experiences have been gained from the Dutch NRN's venture into social media management. Referring to the choice of social media tools Mr Janmaat says that, "We don't feel we need to use Facebook because the combination of our LinkedIn group, on-line blog and Twitter account meets our current social media needs. We find that these are enough at the moment and we are still learning different ways of using the tools. All the staff in the NRN have our own thematic specialties and we are all experimenting to see which tools work best for different tasks."

He continues, "We do not use social media much for public relations purposes, nor for disseminating information about how to use the RDP funds. This is more of a one-way communication process which takes place through our website and paper-based communication material. For us, social media is a tool for stimulating interactions and debate. We may use social media to inform followers about outcomes of an EAFRD project for instance, but by using social media here our aim is not just to raise awareness, and we are much more trying to gain feedback on peoples' ideas about the project that could be useful for other projects. We see that social media is effective as a tool for encouraging bottom-up communication and we purposely avoid using it as a top down communication tool."



Mr Janmaat describes occasions where he has found that social media tools work well for collecting information in his work. "I sent out a request for information about farms that cooperate with nature conservation organisations and I received responses on enough farms to organise a special study excursion about cooperation on recreation arrangements. We could have organised the study tour without social media but using it helped us identify nature farms that we didn't know about previously and also I believe it helped things happen quicker."

New areas of Dutch NRN activity continue to arise where social media is relevant and effective, such as work with a recent initiative about 'how to organise rural development in your region'. The NRN used social media to send out requests for ideas about who should be involved and in what way. Response came back almost immediately and demonstrated social media's potential as an antenna for reaching out into the rural areas.

These Irish and Dutch experiences provide useful reference points for EAFRD authorities interested in social media. Other relevant advice includes producing procedures to manage what is deemed appropriate information to share and what information is not appropriate. Agreement within an organisation is also useful about the internal process through which information must be routed (and approved) before being distributed on social media tools. This should apply to both original material being sent out as well as responses to questions or comments coming in from friends and followers.

All responses to comments and feedback should be timely because social media is fast moving. Hours, rather than days, should be the targets for response times if EAFRD communicators are serious about maintaining their followers' interests (plus long-term loyalty).

'My ENRD': a dedicated networking platform for the European Network for Rural Development

Many of the networking functions available through public social media sites are also available from the 'My ENRD' forums on the ENRD website. This section of the website is designed as a membership facility that can be used by NRNs, LAGs and other members of the ENRD.

My ENRD acts as a collaboration platform with more than 2700 users. Its multi-functional structure and content offer possibilities for users to create profiles for LAGs and other ENRD stakeholders, share interesting projects and programming experiences, set up discussion forums and announce events.

One of the new features on My ENRD is a facility for uploading information about RDP projects. Project details link through into a database search engine which is accessible on the public section of the ENRD website.

RDP Projects database

This [RDP Projects Database](http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/projects/en/projects_home.cfm)¹⁷ is a powerful communication tool for EAFRD stakeholders. It supplements other databases of its kind established at Member State level (for example from Finland, Belgium, Austria, Italy and the UK, among others). The ENRD database of RDP projects brings together for the first time project information from all EAFRD axes and all 27 Member States within a single search engine.

NRNs can upload RDP project information directly onto the database and this is presented in a 'postcard' communication format. Anyone can then search and

download these RDP project postcards from the public website and use their information to raise awareness about how the EAFRD is being used for different purposes, by different countries, and by different types of beneficiaries.

Its value has been recognised by the ENRD Contact Point which uses the database's project information as source of material for their publications about RDP activity. Projects submitted by NRNs to the database are therefore being disseminated widely around Europe and this free communication channel offers significant opportunities for raising the profile of Member States' RDP activity on an international stage.



4 Going Local



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'Going Local' is a guiding principle governing EU communication matters. Member States also see this as a fundamental factor behind successful approaches for communicating on policy-related messages.

For EAFRD communicators, Going Local means using methods and techniques to ensure that communication strategy messages and materials reach intended audiences in their homes, at their places of work, or in other easily accessible places. 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.

The less people know, the more and louder they yell

Different 'tricks-of-the-trade' exist for Going Local. For example, communication experience from an EU project stretching across regions in the Baltic States and Belarus used cartoon characters to help people recognise and identify with different aspects of their work. The communicators involved advise others interested in similar approaches to, "Make your programme wear a human face" because this helped local people to understand their actions.

Other advice from this regional development project with potential use to rural development situations relates the way the programme chose to pitch their communication language. The team involved remarks how their Going Local characters do not always speak "Oxford English" but this is not vital if colloquial language can be used in a way that does not undermine their communication messages.

Local language

Using the right type of language is a basic prerequisite for effective Going Local communication. This is true for the right type of dialect used in a particular geographic location. It is also true for the right type of tone and style that is preferred by the target audience(s) in any given territory.

EAFRD communication strategies acknowledge the importance of language and multi-lingual approaches have been adopted in numerous parts of Europe to help maximise the extent to which local people can understand EU rural development policy.

Multi-lingual approaches

In Estonia the Managing Authority website provides its information in Russian as well as Estonian to engender an equal opportunities approach for the large population of Russian speaking communities in rural areas. Website content is also available in English to facilitate international networking.

Elsewhere in the Baltic States, LAGs and NRNs from Latvia and Lithuania also take pragmatic approaches to communicating EAFRD information to rural people. Whilst official printed material is usually available only in the national language, local

communication events have been tailored to fit with the linguistic needs of potential beneficiaries from Polish or Russian speaking parts of the countryside.

In Spain's autonomous region of Catalonia all of the main awareness raising activity about RDP matters is presented in Catalan. The Managing Authority website includes information in both Catalan and Spanish. Notifications in the Official Journal (including calls for proposals) are published in both Catalan and Spanish.

Italy's television, radio and press communication campaign materials that are featured in the case study on page 8 of this publication have been translated

into German to suit the bilingual border region of Bolzano.

All communication material about EAFRD application processes and RDP activities from Wales in the UK are produced in Welsh and English languages in order to maximise the reach of the NRN's communication strategy.

In Luxembourg, EAFRD information has been prepared in Luxembourgish, French, German and English.

Scandinavia is another part of the EU where EAFRD authorities regularly communicate using different languages covering multi-lingual regions in Sweden, Finland and Lapland.



Rural Outreach

Use of relevant languages is thus important for effective Going Local approaches to EAFRD communication and such outreach strategies can also be assisted by devolved structures for implementing EAFRD operations.

Slovakia's NRN for example uses its network of seven regional offices to broaden its communication outreach services. Malvina Gondova, manager of the Slovak NRN, tells how, "This structure had been chosen with the aim to be as close to clients as possible." She continues, "Because each region has distinct communication needs and requirements, the types of measures and funding support that we communicate about are also different. For example, people in mountainous regions are more interested in forestry, environment and rural tourism; those in intensive agriculture areas are more interested in topics about modernising and improving productivity in agriculture, or about village renewal and marketing ideas, etc."



Ms Gondova notes how, "Regional NRN offices are in day-to-day contact with local rural people through personal contact, e-mail, phone, etc. Using these forms of communication the staff of regional offices systematically help to identify and assess rural stakeholder needs for information, trainings, and contacts with other partners, etc."

The importance of the regional NRN offices communication outreach service is underlined by Jan Serbin, Mayor of Baska village from Eastern Slovakia who says, "Without the actual information from the Regional NRN Office we would not be as successful with our projects for village renewal."

In Germany, novel outreach approaches to EAFRD communication activity have been successfully demonstrated by RDP authorities from the Schleswig-Holstein region through a 'Citizen Talk' initiative. This involved the regional prime minister participating in a series of road-show type events that visited a different LAG territory each month.

Born out of an idea between the regional rural network, the Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Development, as well as a regional newspaper, the Citizen Talk events were launched in March 2009 and completed a first programme of communication activities in May 2011. These covered 90% of the regional LAGs.

Editorial space in the regional newspaper is provided to promote the events and report on their content. Much of the events' agenda were devoted to presentations from rural development projects that explained their work and often led to discussions about project implementation issues. Time was also allocated during the events for authorities to inform local people and businesses about the types of rural development support that is available. The events are deliberately not restricted to EAFRD projects and rural development work funded by other EU or national sources have also been presented during the Citizen Talk events.

Meetings were held in the evenings and attendance numbers ranged from 70 to 250 participants. Communication activity from this pioneering technique resulted in useful two-way dialogue between politicians, decision makers and EAFRD beneficiaries about the RDP's operations. Rural citizens were able to discuss directly with their minister topics concerning the citizens' development aspirations. The events also significantly increased the prime minister's appreciation about RDP-related matters.

Bottom-up communication approaches like the Citizen Talk events score high on their ability to Go Local. They can also have a strong multiplier effect as participants who attend an event can pass on its key messages through word of mouth discussions with their friends, family and colleagues.

Multiplier effects

Achieving multiplier effects is a priority for many EAFRD communication strategies and using techniques to spread messages further supports Going Local goals. Formal and informal methods are being deployed to achieve these multiplier effects.

EAFRD communication practices in Poland illustrate how multipliers can be gained using formalised approaches through advisory services. Here, RDP co-finance has been used to build the capacity within public and private advisory services for raising awareness about the opportunities and practicalities of accessing EAFRD measures.

Specific training programmes have strengthened the capacity of advisers to guide farmers and rural residents about EAFRD opportunities. There are nearly 5000 farm advisers in Poland and the vast majority work in public sector bodies. The multiplier effects that can be gained from this network is considerable.

Less formal methods for spreading news or information about the EAFRD are also active in Europe's countryside. Informal communication channels are diverse and might include, for example, reference to a local development

project in a sermon by a parish priest or vicar. Keeping influential community members informed about EAFRD projects or prospects can therefore represent cost effective options for circulating and multiplying coverage of RDP messages. Other opportunities to discuss EAFRD topics might occur during meetings of community or special-interest groups.

In Slovenia, word of mouth information about the EAFRD has been communicated through branch meetings of the Association of Rural Women of Slovenia (ARWS). Tatjana Cop, Editor of the monthly magazine for Slovenia's Chamber of Agriculture notes that, "It all started through an informal arrangement between the ARWS, the RDP Managing Authority and the Chamber of Agriculture. This led to a series of informal information sessions about the RDP being provided to ARWS members during regular regional gatherings." Good participation levels at the meetings helped to ensure a strong multiplier effect from the Managing Authority's information sessions. Ms Cop is keen to emphasise that "by using the normal ARWS meetings the communication activities were able to be delivered at lower costs than if separate meetings were arranged".



Multiplier effects in Latvia

Latvia's 'Daugaubils and Ilukste' Leader LAG uses an original approach for securing multiplier effects from its communication campaign. Their method is based on a network of enthusiastic volunteers (known as 'Spots of Light') that act as EAFRD ambassadors and information contact points in each of the LAG territory's 20 parishes.

Most of the 20 volunteers are either professional social workers or librarians. There is also one farmer in the LAG's network of outreach agents. Their work forms an

interesting example of Going Local action and strong multiplier effects have been gained by training these community animators.

Inga Krekele, executive director of the LAG, believes that their approach complements other more classical methods of communication. She stresses that the volunteers are not intended to replace conventional information channels and she says, "There is no single communications system. We also make good use of our website, emails, and the local media. We have been working like this for more than eight years, and the system works."

Information from the LAG is sent out to the Spots of Light who use different means to disseminate the information, like local notice boards or community meetings. Two-way communication is achieved through this network which is able to act as an agent for transferring bottom-up messages back to the LAG about the information needs that exist in communities.

Types of EAFRD information that is commonly requested through the Spots of Lights network include know-how about opportunities for projects related to quality of life and economic development.

5 Evaluating EAFRD communication

Evaluating EAFRD communication activities is absolutely essential. Without feedback from your target audience it is impossible to know if their messages have been meaningful or understood. Evaluation improves the effectiveness of your communications and a carefully planned evaluation strategy will help to identify which tools are working well and which activities might need fine-tuning (or more radical adjustments).

Evaluation is not something that should be seen as an administrative burden!

Evaluating EAFRD communication work helps you to engage more effectively with your target audience!

Throughout implementation of a communication strategy, evaluation can help you find ways to gather feedback from your audiences and learn how they are responding to your messages. Situations change, so strategies and tactics may need to change as well. Since socio-economic and environmental changes are often an intrinsic element of rural development, EAFRD communication work will inevitably face unexpected events, opportunities and threats that affect the work. Evaluation helps to collect valuable information at these critical moments so that you can make

tactical and strategic adjustments. It can also help you determine whether your changes are putting you back on the path to success.

Evaluation can also help ensure that EAFRD resources are being allocated in cost-effective ways. Findings from monitoring and evaluation exercises feed into management decision making processes that determine whether your communication investments could be redistributed more effectively to achieve the desired results.

Good practice approaches to evaluating an organisation's communication activities not only assess external audiences but also internal communication practices. Communications evaluation takes similar approaches as other types of evaluation. Numerous examples of [advice and guidance](#)¹⁸ can be found on-line to help you evaluate your communication actions.



The basic steps involved in evaluating EAFRD communication include:

Determine What You Will Evaluate: A first step involves deciding what exactly you are evaluating. Is it a strategic communication initiative, a tactical effort targeting a focused topic, or something else? Be specific.

Define Your Goal: Confirm what type of outcome you are pursuing. What is the change your organisation is trying to achieve through the communication?

Identify Your Audience: Make sure you know who are the target audiences for your communication activities? Are there any other audiences who can also provide valuable insight for your evaluation?

Establish Your Baseline: What information do you need to establish your baseline – the starting point against which you

will measure your activities? If you don't understand your audiences' priorities and values before starting a communication campaign it is difficult to assess what difference the communications work has made. Baseline research conducted early on with stakeholders will help.

Agree Your Evaluation Questions: Be aware that different types of questions may be relevant at different stages of a communication initiative. Common evaluation questions for communication work seek to identify information about:

- what do different audiences read/see/hear;
- what works or doesn't work for different stakeholders;
- what do people want to see more of;
- how do people currently receive information and what other ways

would like to receive information;

- what information do different target groups need that they are not currently supplied with; and
- how often do audiences want to be communicated with?

Select Your Indicators: After deciding the questions a timeframe is required. You will need to decide, what are the most meaningful indicators and milestones that will demonstrate progress toward your objective? You will also need to clarify how you will measure them. Remember, you want to track outcomes, not outputs!

Choose Your Evaluation Technique(s):

This stage relates to both collecting data to establish your baseline and for tracking progress against your indicators and milestones. Common techniques include





surveys, focus groups, interviews and statistical analysis. You may choose techniques that can help you monitor several indicators at once. You will also need to agree the techniques that will be used to analyse, verify and present the evaluation information that you collect.

Some techniques may require working with professional evaluators or training your staff to ensure proper application and accurate data interpretation. The NRN case studies from Sweden and Italy featured on pages 4 and 8 use independent specialists to evaluate their communication strategies on a regular basis.

Be aware that the techniques you choose will also impact on your evaluation costs. Commentators suggest that as a 'rule of thumb' an evaluation budget should be at approximately five to seven percent of the total budget of your communication

programme. This commitment aims to ensure that sufficient effort is invested to understanding the effects of your communication investments.

Set a realistic timetable: Decide when you need what type of evaluation information and give yourself enough time to achieve your goals. Plan all the steps in advance. Include a sensible amount of contingency time.

Monitor the implementation of the evaluation: Keep an eye on the evaluation process. Make regular checks to ensure that milestones are being achieved.

Following an evaluation framework such as the steps noted here will help ensure objective and useful results.

Lastly it is essential that you communicate the findings of your evaluation work. You

may want to consider whether you want to share the same information internally and externally. Think about who could benefit from what you are learning through your evaluation. These could be your team, your Board, your colleagues in different parts of your organisation, or your peers in other organisations. Evaluation results from national EAFRD communication campaigns will also be of interest to the European Commission.

A plan for disseminating evaluation findings should thus also be prepared in advance.

To assist the ENRD Contact Point carry out its ongoing evaluation of ENRD communication materials, it would be very useful if you could take time to answer a few questions about this publication by clicking [HERE](#)¹⁹. Such electronic approaches to evaluating EAFRD communication materials can also be used by Member States.

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The European Network for Rural Development (EN RD) was launched in October 2008, to act as a focal point for all rural development actors across the EU. In particular, the EN RD helps ensure that Member States efficiently implement Rural Development Programmes (RDPs). Read [more](#) or download the ENRD leaflet (PDF [ENRD Leaflet](#)).

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24 August 2011: Call for case studies on mountain wood projects
In this the International Year of Forests, ENRD member EuroMontana is promoting good practice projects that use wood as a driver for rural development in Europe's mountain areas. A call has been launched by EuroMontana to collect project examples from mountain areas involved with wood supply chains and adding value to forest wood resources among others. The call for case studies is open and has been extended until the end of August. You can respond in French, English, German, Spanish, Italian and Romanian. Full details are available on the [EuroMontana website](#).

27 July 2011: Run@ News for July/August available in multiple languages
The summer issue of the ENRD newsletter, Run@ News, is now available to download in the following languages: French, German, Spanish, Italian and Polish, as well as English. This month we take a closer look at the new ENRD Communications Initiative and visit Spain in our country focus. Click [here](#).

15 July 2011: First Greek NRD Conference held in Athens
Some 60 rural development stakeholders attended the first Greek national NRD Conference on 7 July, in Athens. Key objectives and priorities for the network were discussed. Click [here](#).

15 July 2011: EAFRD brochures on 'Leader' and 'Green Growth' projects published
Two new EAFRD brochures have been published on the ENRD website – one on Leader projects and the other on environmentally friendly (green growth) projects. Click [here](#).

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