



ENRD LEADER Thematic Lab

Designing LEADER for resilience and sustainability

Highlights report

This LEADER Thematic Lab focused on how LEADER can contribute to local resilience and sustainability during the transition period and under the CAP Strategic Plans.

Speakers from different Member States shared experiences of LEADER implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic and discussed how to capitalise on them in order to 'build back better'. One definition of rural resilience which was considered relates to the capacity of rural areas to adapt to change while maintaining satisfactory living standards.

Through group discussions, the participants looked at the main social, economic and environmental aspects of resilience and LEADER's role in optimising these. They also discussed key capacity and delivery systems features for resilience and how LEADER can build on them.

Event Information

Date: 14 January 2021

Location: Online meeting

Organisers: ENRD Contact Point

Participants: 44 participants from 21 EU Member States, including RDP Managing Authorities, local and territorial organisations, Paying Agencies and EU institutions.

Outcomes: Exchange of experiences on key aspects of local resilience and delivery system features needed for LEADER to perform during the transition period and under the future CAP Strategic Plans.

Web page: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-leader-thematic-lab-designing-leader-resilience-and-sustainability_en

Perspectives



Karolina Jasinska Muehleck (DG AGRI) noted LEADER's ability to achieve synergies between economic, social and environmental aspects of local development. By approaching local development in a holistic, cross-sectoral way, LEADER helps minimise negative trade-offs between the interests of different sectors. LEADER LAGs have also demonstrated their responsiveness and flexibility in addressing emerging issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The need for a post-COVID recovery and the new high-level priorities on the EU policy agenda (e.g. Green Deal) represent a new challenge for LEADER to make these high-level policy objectives meaningful for local development across Europe. For LEADER to help 'build back better', it is important to maintain those flexibility and simplifications which were introduced as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



In his presentation **Peter Toth (ENRD CP)** reminded participants that, in previous discussions on LEADER and resilience, LEADER stakeholders have highlighted the importance of a flexible, simple and fast LEADER delivery model. This requires sufficient funding and flexible local development strategies (LDS) to ensure a high-level of responsiveness to local needs. The presentation then focused on the key theme of the day - optimising LEADER's contribution to social, economic and environmental resilience during the transition period and under the CAP Strategic Plans.

The German perspective




For **Andreas Griess (Managing Authority, Saxony) and Hartmut Berndt (German LAG association, BAG LAG)**, flexibility, simplifying regulations to the minimum necessary and not imposing thematic limitations on LEADER are key to ensure LEADER's role in overcoming the COVID-19 crisis and responding to new challenges. As funding continuity is available, the transition period will now enable LAGs to maintain and build on their capacities and pandemic experiences to develop more flexible LDSs. Andreas emphasised that the DE LAGs should cover a population of 25 000 to allow LAG funding to cover at least two full time LAG employees, ensuring adequate capacity for animation of the territory. Simplified Cost Options will be essential for effective functioning of LEADER in the next period.

The Finnish perspective



Laura Jänis (Managing Authority), Anne Vanttinen (LAG Rajupusu Leader) and Teppo Leppänen (LAG Piällismies) shared the view that the keys to making LEADER in Finland even stronger in the future are: fully respecting the bottom-up approach, strong top-down support and ensuring a well-functioning forum for dialogue. Finland has allocated € 83m in total public funding to LEADER in the transition period. This, coupled with the opportunity for adjusting the LDSs, will enable LAGs to strengthen local resilience and play an important role in post-COVID recovery locally. In the future, LAGs in Finland will need to cover a minimum population of 20 000 to ensure human and financial resources are at a sufficient level.

The Polish perspective

 **Joanna Gierulska (Managing Authority) and Piotr Sadlocha (Polish Rural Forum)** [emphasised](#) the need for enabling LAGs to respond flexibly to local needs. In responding to the COVID crisis, flexibility is required to help beneficiaries 'survive' economically. To support this, adjustments to beneficiaries' business plans and applications have been made possible and procedures were accelerated by changing to digital/e-applications. Simplified Cost Options are planned to be extended in the future, the lump sum option has been particularly useful for small businesses and start-ups. In Poland, transitional funding will be allocated to LAGs and local Smart Village concepts will be piloted with the involvement of LAGs during this period. The main goal of LEADER in Poland is to enable the building of local identity through animation and local resources. To this end, LAGs will have the freedom to decide what the challenges and main objectives of their LDSs will be, based on a menu of broad objectives.

Main outcomes of group discussions

Social, economic and environmental resilience - LEADER's optimising role



A 'caring community' built on strong volunteerism and community connection is essential for **social resilience** and LAGs have an important role in supporting this. Local commitment and action are needed to strengthen **environmental resilience** linking national and global objectives. Strengthening local supply chains, raising climate awareness and local ownership are key areas where LAGs can help. Making rural areas more attractive is a key to their **economic resilience**: this can be achieved by supporting local SMEs, strengthening local ownership and through the strong role of the LAG in creating synergies among various local initiatives.



LEADER needs support in developing local innovation ecosystems – this is one of the key elements to avoid the return to 'business as usual'. LAGs also need to 're-learn' their local territory, by studying the 'hidden' impacts of the COVID pandemic. In some Member States (e.g. Germany, Ireland), there is a renewed interest in people moving to rural areas. LAGs and rural communities need to integrate the 'newcomers' and involve them to be able to utilise and deploy their skills and capacities for the benefit of the community.



LAGs need capacity building support to enable LEADER to effectively contribute locally to the objectives of the Bioeconomy Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy (and other EU-level strategies related to the European Green Deal - EGD).

Capacity and delivery system features for resilience – building back better through LEADER



To 'build back better', LAGs and LEADER need to actively retain and strengthen the links to the local economy and services. A LEADER delivery system should enable LAGs to support local community ownership of development and political processes. LAGs need to be enabled to focus on specific themes of most relevance for local resilience. The delivery system should be based on a common understanding of relevant rules and regulations and founded in trust. It should enable the full application of all the LEADER principles and not be unnecessarily limited by top-down restrictions.



Redesigning and upgrading the local partnerships, focusing on innovation and digital solutions and creating local links to EGD and other EU policy priorities are important for the transition period. Networking is essential for effective knowledge exchange and sharing. In Finland, a dynamic network analysis is a basic component of the LEADER process, networking skills are recognised as essential. LAG capacities and resources as well as continuity of LAG operation and human resources are needed to maintain local partnerships. Knowledge, networking and financial stability is essential. LAG stability and innovation should be balanced.



Adaptability and flexibility are important to face emerging challenges. LAGs should be given the flexibility to revise, amend, add to, and adapt their LDS to meet the needs for recovery and respond to new circumstances. LAGs should be able to change the selection criteria for projects to respond to the new situations. In Poland, for instance, LAGs are now able to focus on supporting local SMEs most affected by the COVID-19 crisis.



The visibility of animation should increase – both as a result of LAGs supporting it and through being monitored and reported to Managing Authorities. Capacity for animation should be adequately funded e.g. by specifying a minimum number of full-time equivalent LAG staff (e.g. two in Germany, Finland and Slovenia, three in Greece, 1.5 in Sweden). In Sweden, animation capacity and other competences are considered in terms of LAG staff numbers and in relation to the LAG membership.