European Network for Rural Development

This factsheet presents key findings about the experiences of Network Support Units (NSUs) in collecting and disseminating examples of projects supported through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The findings emerged from the analysis of information gathered through an online survey addressed to NSUs in October 2018 and the experiences shared in the discussions between NSUs representatives during the ENRD Workshop on 'Project Examples and Good Practices', held in November 2018 in Brussels.

Project examples & Good practices

Project examples are used to communicate the results of strategies, policies and programmes. They are focused on good results, ensure transparency and do not necessarily need to comply with specific criteria to be chosen for this purpose.

Good practices can refer to strategies, programmes, projects, but also procedures, management and implementation practices. They should contribute to the improved performance of a project, programme, initiative, rural business or organisation. Thus, project examples are not necessarily good practices, since there are often no resources or time to ensure that a project has the necessary impact to qualify as a good practice. What is 'good' also depends on context.

Good practices are key to the **capitalisation process**. This consists in taking advantage of existing experiences to create a tangible 'capital' of knowledge, learning from good practices and sharing them to improve performance. The capitalisation process should be adapted to the policy setting.

Main steps of the capitalisation process

1. Decide objectives of the process and main themes to be tackled

2. Have a good overview of the existing practices and select them

3. Collect the information and describe the practices

4. Analyse the practices

5. Share and disseminate the good practices

How to add value to the process?

> **Focusing on the wider impacts or indirect effects** of implemented projects on a community. This requires revisiting projects over time to identify long-term impacts and capture small-scale processes that are transferable to other contexts.

> **Broadening the target audience** of NSUs' dissemination activities to wider audiences (e.g. urban areas, universities, businesses) in order to show the potential of rural areas to citizens living elsewhere.

> **Strengthening the interaction and cooperation between NSUs and ENRD,** through capacity building events on project examples/good practices for NSU staff or coordinated work on common priority themes (e.g. youth).

> **Sharing and not duplicating the work.** An increasing amount of project examples are being collected both at national and European level. It is necessary to find ways to share this material without duplicating effort.

Identification and collection

Typically, NSUs informally request Managing Authorities (MA) and Paying Agencies (PA), or other network partners (e.g. advisory services, LAGs), to suggest relevant projects, from which the NSU selects the most interesting ones. NSUs also identify project examples through events, web searches, social media and suggestions by members of thematic working groups.

Only a few NSUs have applied formalised procedures to collect project examples; Italy, Latvia, Poland, and Sweden. These consist of formal competitions, awards, or calls for projects. The nomination as 'good practice' is carried out by a jury using approved criteria that usually emerge from formal consultations with NRN partners.

In the case of informal selection processes, criteria mainly rely on the compliance with general rules or conditions (e.g. sound financial implementation, relevance to themes of interest).

Possible improvements and challenges faced

👍 **Engaging with Network members.** NSUs should establish good cooperation and communication with their members and especially MAs. Direct exchanges and negotiation with project holders may also help.

👍 **Selecting project examples.** The focus should be on completed projects, as dissemination is more effective if based on tangible and concrete outcomes.

👎 **Limited availability of information.** It is time-consuming to find projects and challenging to reach the person who can provide the necessary information needed to tell the project story. Project holders tend to hesitate over having their projects published, fearing additional controls.

👎 **Operational challenges.** Communication with and between different departments of MAs and PAs is often complicated and time-consuming. In addition, NSUs capacity to collect project examples can be limited due to insufficient human and/or financial resources.

The Hungarian approach

The Hungarian NSU collaborates with local representatives in the 21 regions. The representatives are asked to provide one project example per month; the focus is on interesting projects, without strict selection criteria.

The Scottish approach

In Scotland, the NSU has internalised the whole process of identifying projects, collecting information and dissemination. The NSU staff identify projects from various sources and **directly** contact the project holders to gather information.

Dissemination and communication

NSUs use mainly online tools, such as websites and dedicated project databases. Social media, in particular Facebook and Twitter, are also widely used. Various publications are produced, including newsletters, e-bulletins, projects brochures, etc. Detailed and lengthy project descriptions are developed only for particularly interesting projects that are treated as case studies.

NSUs also take advantage of workshops, conferences, seminars and field visits to promote project examples. The production of videos and films published on YouTube is also common, while there is a new trend of developing interactive maps of supported projects.

Possible improvements and challenges faced

👍 **Communicate success to foster inspiration:** promoting inspirational projects which are more attractive and can be disseminated more easily **through the media**.

👍 **Take advantage of the new communication trends** generated by social media platforms, e.g. influencers to promote NSUs' campaigns though social media.

👍 **Be more active at local level** by engaging local 'heroes' who can influence people in small communities. Participate in local events, share material and printouts and establish direct contacts with local actors.

👍 **Measure the success of dissemination and communication** with the available online tools, benchmarking, etc.

👎 **The lack of internet access in rural areas and the use of different languages** across the EU constitute significant challenges for NSUs' communication activities

👎 **Assessing or evaluating the success** of NSUs' communication strategies is challenging as their impacts are often indirect or only identifiable in the long term.

The Flemish approach

The NSU considers that their audience prefers visual (e.g. video) to written communication products. Thus they use a variety of channels to reach wider audiences, including on-site meetings where projects are presented and discussed.

The Spanish approach

The Spanish NSU facilitates direct input from RDP beneficiaries, who can submit information about their projects directly onto a dedicated section of the NRN website. The proposal is reviewed by the NSU and, if accepted, is published.