

Feedback Report

2nd Meeting of the Thematic Group on Stakeholder Involvement

27 March 2015, Brussels

Session 1: How to improve rural development through stakeholder involvement at policy, local planning and project levels?

Purpose of session: Making recommendations for networks and managing authorities with regard to stakeholder involvement at the policy, local planning and projects levels

Discussion 1: Involving farmers and other stakeholders in competitive agriculture

Overall recommendation to NW and/or MA	Specific recommendations/ Tools/Activities
Identify the most important needs & decide what to focus on/ thematic focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of priorities: The Flemish Network use ‘poker coins’ – members/stakeholders got a certain number of coins and they had to place it at the priority they found the most relevant. • Thematic exchange: ENRD thematic packages (i.e. combination of activities on the same theme) is a useful & relevant method that can also be applied at national level • Face-to-face exchange/ seminars and other events focusing on specific issues/questions (that the NSU identifies beforehand) • Good practices: NSU to collect more examples on farming
Identify the appropriate geographical level of action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regionalised Member States/Networks face a particular challenge – they have to harmonise national & regional/local interests and priorities – communication between the different levels is important
Connect with the grassroots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate the grassroot perspective – encourage innovative ideas • Start at an early-age/ in schools – awareness raising about farming, environment, territorial issues, etc.
Connect farmers to policy-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different voices of farmers: Gaining understanding about concerns of individual farmers (not just the wider issues). It is important to connect directly with farmers and understand their needs & concerns – Networks can play more role in ‘informal’ exchange
NRNs to link different institutional & geographical levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create balance and synergy between the activities of farmers’ organisations and rural networks: farmers’ organisations often focus on more ‘global’ issues/interests (e.g. financing), although this very much depends on the national context (e.g. many farmers’ organisations also work on local issues/interests of farmers – e.g. school programmes, young women). • Joint meetings of farmers’ organisations, NRNs farmers: Triangle of farmers-farmers’ organisations-NRNs • Use/build on the resources of local networks/ LAGs: In many LAGs (e.g. NL LAG representative) farmers are strong stakeholders. LAGs work with farmers directly, create links with urban areas.

Overall recommendation to NW and/or MA	Specific recommendations/ Tools/Activities
NRNs to link with different funds & other (than farmer) stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NRNs should have the capacity to create links with other funds and stakeholders: ERDF/ESF. Examples are LAGs (that among others can create rural-urban links); ESF-related activities (e.g. school programmes) Links between farmers and other stakeholders: those involved in the food supply chains, tourism, etc.
Communicate the new RDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on the immediate interests of farmers: interests of farmers now is to understand the RDP measures Clarify communication roles of Managing Authorities and NRNs with regard to communicating the RDP Communication is also important with regard to linking to other types of stakeholders

Discussion 2: Sustainable management of natural resources

Overall recommendation to NW and/or MA	Specific recommendations/Tools/Activities
Clarify the mandate of NRNs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing Authorities should define the scope of action of NRNs involving stakeholders NRNs need to be entitled to coordinate actions involving different administrations
NSUs should be the best at networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NSU staff should have strong knowledge of RDPs and the Policy Framework that affect rural stakeholders NSUs should be ready to use a wide range of tools in different contexts (adapting tools to specific situations) NRNs must be inspiring and keep getting inspired- NSUs should be innovative and creative, ensuring “networking regeneration” NSUs should analyse, take on board and disseminate success factors from other projects (SE water protection project http://www.greppa.nu/om-greppa/om-projektet/in-english.html#.VSUZtPmsUSE) NSUs should focus on facilitating processes/animation (find the common interest, middle ways)
Knowledge on stakeholders’ interests and concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map stakeholders and create profiles according to needs or themes of relevance to them through discussion groups (WWF-IT), member agreements (SE), surveys, “rural-hubs”(NL), Twitter-cloud analysis (NL), etc. Invite them to the debate -be ready to listen and take proposals on board Identify the key people they rely on to carry-out work at the local level
Empower stakeholders within the NRN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote what NRN can offer Ensure an inclusive network Make sure stakeholders realize they have a role to play Involve stakeholders to define activities they want to carry-out with NSU support

Overall recommendation to NW and/or MA	Specific recommendations/Tools/Activities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage different stakeholders' expectations-make sure to get all different views and to communicate decision processes
Adopt action plans that meet stakeholders needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a balanced representation of stakeholders at the Steering Committees • Work on different chapters of the action plans with experts on different topics (on-going expert meetings) • Use the strength of member networks to put messages forward and carry out actions

Discussion 3: Balanced Territorial Development

Recommendation to NW and/or MA	Tools/Activities
Clarify the offer from NRNs to stakeholders	<p>Clear communication about the advantages of involvement is very important. NRNs can offer one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to reach unorganised stakeholders • The ability to bring different sometimes conflicting stakeholder groups together • The ability to connect stakeholders to policy makers <p>Examples are very important as are study groups and buses, face to face meetings, etc. "Creative jealousy" can be a useful motivating force</p>
Clarify the mandate from the MA to the NRN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement must be real – not just formal and on paper • The fields and scope of intervention should be clarified (better to know that something is "out of bounds" so as not to create false expectations) • NRNs should be creative and proactive not just respond to day-to-day problems.
Clarify the roles between the member organisations of the NRN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use stakeholder analysis to find out who does what best. • Avoid duplication and competition between organisations • Divide tasks, act as relays and multipliers for each other, smart specialization. • Decide what can be done best through formal channels (steering committees, etc) and what best through informal channels
Create "safe" open spaces and platforms for stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise events, platforms, fora (face-to-face and virtual) where SH can really express their opinions and be listened to by other SH and policy makers • Allow the expression of genuine differences but try to arrive at common actions. • Start with the urgent, look for quick wins, low hanging fruit.
Build and bring in capacity to the NSUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NSU action plan should clarify where NSU have the internal skills and experience to contribute and where external resources are required.
Provide "cascades" of capacity building for local actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ENRD can identify core skills and tools at EU level • These can be cascaded down and up • Key field for support include proactive animation and outreach, new tools and methods for more innovative strategies and LAG

Recommendation to NW and/or MA	Tools/Activities
	roles, self assessment and learning...

Session 2: What are the main barriers to bringing network action plans forward & how can we overcome these?

Purpose of session: Identify barriers of networks for influencing policy formulation and implementation and suggest possible ways to overcome these.

Discussion Group 1: NRN/NSUs & MA (Sweden, Netherlands, Scotland, Romania, Portugal, Flanders and Latvia) – 2nd Floor, Facilitator: Paul Soto

Note: It was not possible to relate the solutions directly to the barriers in the WS although this could be done later.

Barriers	Solutions
<p>Unclear mandate from the administration, from stakeholders and even from the formal network itself</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NRNs/NSUs need to make a clear offer showing their value added both to government and to stakeholders • There are advantages and disadvantages to the in-house/out house solutions and for the formal/informal methods of involving stakeholders. These are not the most important factors in determining effective stakeholder involvement. All can work. • The most important factors concern the institutional/governance culture and the people involved. • NRNs and NSUs need to adapt both in house and outhouse solutions and formal and informal structures to get the most out of their own context. • There are a few examples of NRNs/NSUs working as valid contributors to the formulation and implementation of policy (eg in the rolling out of Leader in some countries) but this is the exception rather than the rule. This linkage needs to be strengthened in order to produce value for both the administration and stakeholders. • Formal structures for the involvement in networks can be made more transparent and empowering in a number of ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clear rights and duties of membership ○ Conditions – contribution to work, feedback to members, etc ○ Access to timely information. ○ Real contact with policy makers, joint working groups etc. ○ Sufficient preparation ○ Clear decisions which have an effect • However, formal structures should be complemented by informal networking methods and activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To connect with individuals and hidden voices and not just the usual organisations, to identify sources of energy, clusters of activity, communities of practice... ○ To be proactive and respond to change rather than
<p>Government wants to retain control and avoid interference in decision-making.</p>	
<p>Existing powerful stakeholders also do not want interference in their channels of influence</p>	
<p>Different departments are responsible for different parts of the RDP and for the network itself</p>	
<p>There is no clear division of labour between stakeholders own networks and the NRN</p>	
<p>Stakeholder reps do not feed back. Do not take responsibility</p>	
<p>Major conflicts between ministries, departments and</p>	

Barriers	Solutions
sectors	regulations and funding. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NRNs/NSU must demonstrate that they have a degree of independence as well as having the ear of the administration • Transparency is vital • The EU level can help by mapping who is doing what well across Europe and connecting people and organisations into clusters of activity.
NRNs are perceived as an institutional extension of the ministry	
The transaction costs of networking is being challenged in the media	

Discussion Group 2: Stakeholders & stakeholder organisations (4th Floor – Facilitator: Edina Ocsko)

Barriers/Challenges	Solutions
Clarity on mandate & members of NRNs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dual role of networks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (1) At this stage NRNs most often fulfill a role in enabling, involving, creating platforms for stakeholders ○ (2) “NRN is not the one to influence policy”? • NRNs are most often are ‘networks of networks’ – key networks need to be members. Connection with the bottom-up interests is important (informal nature of networks as ‘rural hubs’) • Stakeholder organisations/ specialised networks often have a stronger mandate in policy-matters. • NRNs should have a clear (strong) mandate as a policy-network, in order that it becomes meaningful for members to get involved (influence policy through NRNs) – the benefit of members should be clear • ENRD could have a clear role in mapping of existing networks
Make members interested (common challenge of NRNs and stakeholder organisations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order to reach to the ground/ make people interested: identify relevant topics for stakeholders/members – events have to be useful, providing useful information • Decide what is important for members – and focus on those issues – providing the right information • Sweden: “<i>The network becomes what the members want it to be.</i>” – engage/involve stakeholders in designing network activities – Members sign an agreement with the Network
Connecting various networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various networks can be brought together around common interests (e.g. can influence policy on shared issues). Example: Superfast broadband has brought together farmers, local authorities and land-owners in England. • It is important to connect different networks. E.g. in England different ministries/departments are responsible for local authorities/public administration – rural development – communication between the two is important (because of common issues).

Discussion Group 3: Stakeholders & stakeholder organisations (2nd Floor – Facilitator: Elena Saraceno)

Barriers	Solutions
NRN's are part of government, are bureaucratic, lack required capabilities, in fact work for MAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity building and mobilization techniques • Commission should make sure that they retain some autonomy and are thus able to give voice to stakeholders • Develop the capacity to represent a “mosaic” of needs, provide a check and balance to top-down policies
NRNs have many “hats”; act differently according to the counterpart, sometime conflictive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the role of mediation • Work towards integrating and making coherent different/opposite positions, institutional levels, themes (not only at local level)
No participation, no role of NRNs in overall strategy, implementation, delivery of RDPs; Marginal voice (“last thing on the MA's list”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a vision of the whole, rather than an aspect of the policy • Develop the skills and capabilities for influencing rural policies • Participate more actively in policymaking • Get mandate and institutional support for improving / redefining their role
High variability of NRN's mandates in different MSs, therefore different roles and actors approached	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking between NRNs • provide explicit and coherent guidance for MA's • identify best practices for the different functions of NRNs • exchange of experiences
Weak capacity to act as facilitators of different opinions and positions (“I'm the only one”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping of stakeholders and their positions • Organization of discussions, learning to listen to other positions, managing conflict, creating consensus • Not identifying with a single interest group but as outside facilitators
Closed mindsets of stakeholders, no habit to cooperate, also across institutional levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop cooperating rather than competing attitudes • Scope of influencing policies is not that the winner takes it all, identifying shared interests