



ENRD LEADER Thematic Workshop

LEADER: 30 years and preparing for the future: delivering LEADER's unique added value

Highlights report

This LEADER workshop focused on exchanging experiences about LEADER's unique added value and discussing how this added value can be ensured in the CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs). The European Commission presented a 'roadmap' for planning LEADER for the next programming period, based on the application of all LEADER's seven principles from a performance perspective.

Through panel discussions, representatives of LEADER Local Action Groups, Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, National Rural Networks and LAG networks from various Member States, discussed their own implementation experiences and considerations in ensuring that LEADER delivers added value in terms of better partnerships, better local development strategies, and better projects and initiatives and their contribution to social capital and better local governance.

Setting the scene



John Grieve (ENRD CP) emphasised that, in celebrating this 30th anniversary of LEADER, this is the most stable transition between programmes in LEADER's evolution. He drew participants attention to the significant achievements in people's participation and how they do things, as well as the lasting positive impacts of LEADER in rural areas. He also encouraged participants to continue their engagement with LEADER.

Panel discussion

The opening discussion introduced the key themes of the day – the added value of the LEADER approach, of LAGs and Local Development Strategies (LDSs), and the distinctive additional benefits of LEADER projects. This session supported by Member States' (MS) experts highlighted common themes including the bottom-up approach, cooperation and networking.



In making her contribution **Laura Janis (MA, FI)** praised LEADER's holistic and integrated approach to local development. She highlighted how local people have been able to put the LEADER principles into action to support 'different' things. She also raised her concerns about suggested amendments to the Commission's

proposals under the new programming period for LEADER, which might have diluted the approach¹.



For **Hans-Olof Stalgren (Jordbruksverket, SE)**, LEADER's added value concerns the feeling of belonging to the territory - a marked shift in thinking from a village or town level to a broader (LAG) area-based identity. LEADER has had a

positive impact on building local capacities and creating local decision-making mechanisms and structures for local development. LEADER projects are unique for their collective nature and "dreaming together" - "LEADER brings the EU to the kitchen table".



Jean-François Pecheur (GAL Pays de Condruses, BE), explained how LEADER's added value

Event Information

Date: 3 June 2021

Location: Online meeting

Organisers: ENRD Contact Point

Participants: 81 participants from 25 EU Member States, including RDP Managing Authorities (MAs), Local Action Groups (LAGs), National Rural Networks (NRNs), LAG networks, national and regional stakeholder organisations, Paying Agencies (PAs) and the European Commission.

Outcomes: Exchange of experiences and ideas on key aspects of the added value of LEADER and how this can be programmed under the CAP Strategic Plans.

Web page: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/leader-30-years-and-preparing-future-delivering-leaders-unique-added-value_en



Helen Williams (DG AGRI) welcomed the fact that LAGs, Managing Authorities (MAs) and Paying Agencies (PAs) from 26 EU Member States had shown an interest in the workshop. She reminded participants of the co-legislation process and the two-year transition period ahead for the LEADER community. She underlined the strong role of LEADER in local development and the need for maximising added value.

¹ It has subsequently been confirmed that this EP amendment has been withdrawn.



lies in developing a common vision and goals for local development. Walloon (BE) LAGs have been forerunners in development policy, initiating e.g. local

food projects and agroforestry initiatives, now mainstreamed in national or European policies. LEADER projects' most distinctive feature is

their collective and collaborative nature, which aims for the common good and not profit maximisation.

Telling the story of LEADER's added value



Peter Toth (ENRD CP) provided an [overview of LEADER's evolution over the past 30 years](#) – from a European Community initiative to a mainstream part of EU rural and regional development policy. He emphasised that LEADER has not only improved in quantitative terms, but the approach, the LAGs, their networks, and the delivery systems have also 'matured'. This enables local communities to address increasingly complex local and global challenges such as climate adaptation, depopulation and digitalisation. The application of LEADER's seven principles is at the core of its unique added value, along with LAGs and LDSs. Enabling rules and sufficient funding are essential to maintain and ensure the delivery of this added value.

Programming considerations for LEADER/CLLD



Iwona Lisztwan (DG AGRI) presented key [programming considerations for LEADER/CLLD](#) under the CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs) and a 'roadmap' for planning and ensuring LEADER's unique added value. She emphasised that LEADER could contribute to any of the nine CSP specific objectives and noted that rules about implementing LEADER at EU level were limited, so with increased MS level decision-making, the question for MSs was 'how' best to ensure added value. The LEADER method is a solid 'vehicle', consisting of and driven by the seven principles, by which all LAGs should work. The clear intention from the EU level is to ensure that the principles are renewed and strengthened and that each LAG applies them. The added value of LEADER needs to be clearly explained in the CSPs and enabling conditions or requirements for this should be also clearly outlined on national level. Mrs. Lisztwan's presentation also touched upon LAG territories, delivery mechanisms, control systems and simplification, among other topics.

Q&A

Participants sought clarifications the current status of the negotiations relating to the CAP Strategic Plan Regulation, MS's different possible interpretations under the new CAP legal framework and maintaining the innovative character of LEADER. Emphasising that the negotiations were still ongoing, Marina Brakalova (DG AGRI) encouraged participants to approach their MS authorities for clarifications. She also acknowledged agricultural stakeholders' strong willingness to increase their visibility in LEADER. The Commission's commitment to maintaining the LEADER principles was reinforced. Workshop participants were assured that the Commission would help MS authorities responsible for CSP planning with appropriate interpretation in relation to the final legal outcome impacting the implementation of LEADER. It was also noted that the CSPs and their performance focus provide more scope to design national level systems for proportional controls and risk assessment – thus allowing for more innovation, and setting enabling LEADER implementation conditions. The national and local level application of all seven LEADER principles should be visible within the delivery cycle. Innovation should be put into practice at the LDS level and not for each individual project or initiative.

Discussion sessions

Better partnerships – delivering added value in practice

[The two rounds of discussions on better partnerships](#) were supported by an **expert panel**, comprising **Anastasios Perimenis (Lesvos Local Development Company, EL)**, **Michael Fischer (NRN, AT)**, **Laura Janis (MA, FI)**, **Gemma Estany (ARCA, ES)**, **Juha-Matti Markkola (NSU, FI)** and **Helle Breindahl (LAG Djursland, DK)**.

Open and simple access to LAG partnerships is essential to build trust and facilitate local development involvement and ownership. Getting the decision-making mechanisms 'right' ensures that LAGs can deliver added value.

The partnership approach is integral to the LEADER delivery chain and requires the clear definition, mutual appreciation and understanding of the respective roles of LAGs, NRNs, MAs, and PAs. The cross-sectoral, integrated partnerships and their blend of socio-economic and environmental awareness and understanding allow for better LDS synergies and could also be adopted at the MA or Ministerial level, as demonstrated by an Austrian example. Partnerships also allow for economies of scale and cost-effective local development actions.

The networking of rural actors across the LAG partnerships is particularly useful for identifying new opportunities and building community confidence. LEADER partnerships' inclusive approach to building social capital can therefore support good rural governance practices by helping a wide range of stakeholders find common ground, which in turn boosts ownership and



commitment to local development actions. For example, partnership-led ‘umbrella’ approaches can take account of these identified needs and opportunities for the whole LAG area.

Better local development strategies - delivering added value in practice

[The two rounds of discussions on better local development strategies](#) were supported by a **panel of experts - Mireille Groot Koerkamp (LAG Salland, NL), Alexandra de Haas (LAG Aland, FI), Miklós Maác (MA, HU) and Françoise Bonert (MA, LU).**

Key ingredients for better LDS include their flexibility, animation and communication. All of these should be designed and coordinated through a bottom-up approach, building consensus among local stakeholders. Trust is crucial for this and LAGs should make efforts to create and maintain it.

Stakeholders’ ownership of local development objectives is a key prerequisite of an LDS that delivers added value. To build ownership, local stakeholders should be brought on-board through a bottom-up process, involving them in the development and implementation of the LDS. The LDS could also be used to translate global policy into practical reality on the ground – helping people think bigger in a local context.

The LDS could offer a unique bottom-up channel that can help provide a large amount of information and evidence of diverse local needs, informing better policy making. The LDS lifecycle brings many rural actors together and this provides opportunities for new social capital synergy that could not happen without LEADER.

Terms such as ‘swarm intelligence’ can help describe the value gained from collectively sharing know-how, experience, ideas and opinions throughout the design, implementation and evaluation of each LDS. MA support and guidance to LAGs for LDS development and implementation is key, and should be based on mutual trust, direct dialogue, and a simple and flexible framework that empowers LAGs with the right resources.

Better quality projects and initiatives – delivering added value in practice

[The two rounds of discussions on better quality projects and initiatives](#) were supported by a **panel of experts comprising Iva Přichystalová (PA, CZ), Anni-Mari Isoherranen (LAG Keskipiste, FI), Helle Breindahl (LAG Djursland, DK), Alina Cunk-Perklic (MA, SL) and Anastasios Perimenis (Lesvos Local Development Company, EL).**

Better quality LEADER local projects and initiatives often rely on the animation inherent in the methodology. This work builds social capital by increasing skills and confidence within rural communities. Animation also strengthens governance by proactively involving people (who might not normally be engaged) in local development decisions. This can help reduce the sense of people feeling ‘left behind’.

LEADER’s methodology pro-actively involves a balanced cross-section of local economic, social and environmental know-how which helps increase the holistic quality of LEADER’s actions. Effective animation depends on adequate resourcing, particularly the required expertise and time.

LAG flexibility is a further success factor for better quality as it means that LDS priorities can be revised, if needed to better reflect changing local, national and EU level circumstances or opportunities.

Communication about animation processes, selection criteria and results of LEADER projects is key. LEADER communication should be tailored to different target audiences who may not speak “LEADER language” and have different needs (e.g. project beneficiaries aiming to explain their projects to local communities or LAGs reporting to national or EU level about their projects’ contribution to policy objectives).

Closing plenary

A **panel of workshop participants** featuring **François Bonert (MA, LU), Shane Conway (NRN, IE) and Hartmut Berndt (National LAG network, DE)** further reflected on how to achieve and promote LEADER’s added value.



The panel confirmed the working groups’ finding that **networking** helps facilitate local development ambitions. LEADER was seen to “make things happen that would not normally happen” and helps to strengthen rural resilience. Key success ingredients identified include the strength of the bottom-up principle, public and private partnership structure, and the innovation focus, all of which can inspire new initiatives and benefit rural territories.



The panel noted that **added value can “look different” in different places** and this should be taken into account when analysing the impacts of LEADER. One-size-fits-all frameworks hinder LEADER’s ability to create quality local projects, build social capital and enhance governance. LEADER’s flexibility is an asset for both policy makers and rural populations.

In **summing up the workshop**, **Iwona Lisztwan (DG AGRI)** highlighted the need to further clarify and communicate LEADER’s narrative: its method, its added value, its potential contribution to any of the specific CAP objectives, and its enabling delivery mechanisms with the LAGs, Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies. The added value of the LEADER method generated by



its core seven principles can be summed up as: improved social capital, better local governance and better projects/results compared with mainstream delivery. It deserves more attention in policy discussion and programming, and more work to gather evidence to inform and use qualitative and quantitative indicators.

Closing messages from the ENRD CP encouraged participants to share the information collected during the [workshop](#) and to continue CLLD networking in order to further strengthen rural resilience through the LEADER methodology.