

## Working session for NSUs of Member States with regionalised RDPs

*10 May 2016  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

### *Summary Report*



### **Context of the meeting**

The working session was initiated by the Italian Network Support Unit (NSU) and aimed at exploring **the common needs of NSUs in regionalised Member States**, as well as potential opportunities for joint work in the future. Participants (see Annex I) identified three main themes and related questions for the discussion prior to the meeting (see suggested discussion themes in Annex II).

This short report starts by summarising the state-of-play and main challenges of participant NRNs (by Member State)<sup>1</sup>, followed by some common themes to be discussed/explored further with regionalised and non-regionalised NRNs.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the report does not aim to provide a full picture, but reflect the outcomes of the meeting only. NRN profiles are currently being developed, where further details may be found about the operation of NRNs.

## 1. Italy

### State-of-play & lessons learnt through 2007-2013

In Italy there are:

- 21 regional RDPs,
- 1 National Rural Development Programme (NRDP),
- 1 NRN (established within the Ministry of Agriculture),
- Regional representatives of the NSU in each region.

The NRN activities are carried out on the basis of a two-year work plan. A technical secretariat (four people in total) is in charge of managing the NSU. The work of the NRN is supported by a staff of some 60 people at the national level (although most of them are not full-time), and 25 regional representatives at the regional level.

#### *Regional representatives*

The Italian NRN has regional antennas: **25 experts** work in the NRN regional units covering all the regions. The regional antennas act as the link between the NSU in Rome and the regions. Regional representatives contribute to the planning of NRN activities. Generally, if they ask for an activity and it seems feasible the NRN supports it. Regional representatives are expected to identify challenges at local level and find common solutions. Their representatives meet regularly to plan and implement NRN activities at local level.

#### *Better targeting*

The evaluation of the 2007-2013 programme highlighted **in some cases the need for better targeting of key stakeholders**. The evaluation showed that there were a lot of outputs produced. The result and impact indicators of the Programme were good and in line with the expectations. For the 2014-2020 period, however, the priority of the Managing Authority is to improve further NRN's efficiency and effectiveness. ,

The new strategy is, therefore, more 'target based', aiming to address the needs of the four main stakeholder groups/themes: 1. MAs/ LAGs (RDP "implementers"); 2. Rural stakeholders, workers in the primary sector, farmers, SMEs, NGOs, potential beneficiaries; 3. Civil society, public opinion, universities, and new players; 4. Stakeholders involved in innovation, EIP, and Horizon 2020. In 2016 the NSU is planning to establish four non-formal<sup>2</sup> monitoring committees in line with the four above-mentioned target groups.

### Current challenges

#### *Better involvement of regional representatives: thematic competences*

During this programming period the aim has been to organise NRN regional antennas better. According to the new NSU strategy, **regional representatives will be organised based on competences and will focus on specific themes**. Regional representatives will be more involved in

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<sup>2</sup> A 'Programme Monitoring Committee' is informed about the NRN implementation. Specific indicators to measure outputs, results, impact are set by the Managing Authority in collaboration with the independent evaluator of the Programme.

specific NRN projects, and are expected to improve the mobilisation of stakeholders at regional level, as well as identifying key participants for the activities of the network.

### ***More bottom-up approach in defining thematic work***

During the previous programming period the activities that informed the work plan were organised by thematic areas addressed through thematic taskforces. This organisation model worked well in with regard to themes where there was a networking experience to work together. However this approach had in few taskforces a number of weaknesses, including too much self-referentiality and in some cases lack of dynamism. **Rather than organising thematic taskforces in a top down process, during this programming period, the work builds on concrete projects from the ground.** Projects are designed according to the priorities of the programme. 57 specific projects (each one with clear expected and measurable outputs) have been approved in the 2015-2016 work plan so far by the NRN Monitoring Committee.

There is a need to **focus more on stakeholders and civil society needs** (including the mobilisation of farmers, information to potential RDP beneficiaries, involvement of new actors ).

There are also a number of **more technical RDP implementation issues** that regional RDP managers are interested in, and where capacity building is needed.

## **2. Germany**

### **State-of-play & lessons learnt through 2007-2013**

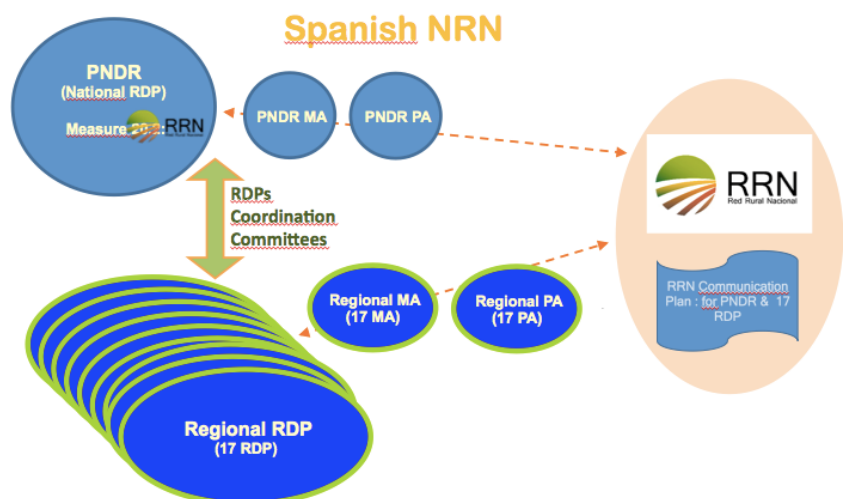
In **Germany** there are 13 regional RDPs. There is weaker connection between national NSU and regional technical assistance. The evaluation of the regional programmes is outsourced to a national public institution. This means that the NSU does not need to assess the work of regional counterparts; the relationship between the national and regional level is mostly based on cooperation (e.g. with regard to the improvement of the implementation of specific measures).

## **3. Spain**

### **State-of-play & lessons learnt through 2007-2013**

In Spain there is only one NRN. The NRN is set up as a sub-measure (20.2 within technical assistance) of the national RDP (PNDR). The Spanish NRN does not have any regional antennas/coordinators in the regions. Therefore, the national NRN must work for all the RDPs and for all the regions.

The NSU is established within the Managing Authority of the national RDP. A number of committees are set up to coordinate the implementation



of all the RDPs. The NRN contacts the MAs of the regional RDPs whenever it is necessary. The Spanish NRN/RDP structure is presented in the chart.

#### ***National communication activities***

The Spanish Network has a new website, where they include information on LAGs, projects, calls for tenders, etc. The new and independent (outside of the ministry) NRN website has several applications to facilitate the exchange of information and communicate with regional MAs and the officers in charge of the RDP measures.

## **4. France**

### **State-of-play & lessons learnt through 2007-2013**

In France there are 27 regional RDPs, one national NRN-Programme (NRNP) and a National Framework, which sets the strategy for the regions, i.e. what to focus on (covering some 60% of available regional networking funds).

#### ***National communication activities***

In France, a new website is currently under progress, it will be connected with regions and will gather contacts and project in a national **database**. Furthermore, they try to plug the SFC project database with their website as far as possible.

### **Current challenges**

#### ***Limited tasks at the national level & limited capacities at regional level***

The main challenge is that the 27 regional networks operate/ are governed within the regional structure, while the mandate of the national NRN is relatively limited, i.e. mostly finances interregional actions and other activities (e.g. IT-related ones). Regional networks have their own activities and projects according to the decision of each regional authority (their yearly budget is around 200,000 to 600,000 euro). Consequently, the coordination role of the national rural network is more complex in a heterogen context.

Given this new decentralised context, France has decided to finance through its national rural network 16 collective projects involving 107 structures, associations, organisations. Each of these projects focus on different problems of rural areas in line with the 5 French themes: agroecology, urban-rural links, local food governance, circular economy, social and solidarity economy.

#### ***Make MA/NRN/civil society work together***

It is important to make the civil society and programme stakeholders work together. The Rural Network in France is preparing a synthesis on each measure and its application in each regional RDP. This is expected to help civil society stakeholders to get more informed, involved and able to apply for RDP funds.

## 5. United Kingdom

### State-of-play & lessons learnt through 2007-2013

There are 4 NRNs, one for each RDP in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They communicate through regular telephone conversations (quarterly), face-to-face meetings (twice a year), and using an online collaboration tool (Huddle). They co-ordinate UK participation in the EU Rural Networks and invite each other to each other's events. Over the 2014-2020 period there is a commitment for each of the 4 NRNs to host a UK-wide event during the programme. Over the course of the 2007-2013 programme the UK NRNs moved towards a more informal and voluntary collaborative approach which allows more flexibility and minimises additional demands on resources (e.g. there is no longer a UKNRN website).

### Summary of common challenges

While there are significant differences in the regionalisation of RDPs and NRNs in different Member States, there are also a number of common challenges.

- **How to identify RDP implementation challenges** and support MAs to address these. Challenges and interest may be related to RDP themes or more technical implementation issues (such as simplified cost option, preparation of calls for proposals, selection criteria, etc.). Exchanges about these issues among MAs can be supported at both national level (in case of regionalised MAs) and EU-level (involving both regional and national MAs).
  - **Italy:** The Italian NSU is planning to develop a project catalogue collecting best practices in Italy on how to improve RDP implementation and the quality of the programming.
  - **Wallonia:** Interest in training for young farmers (benchmarking practices with other networks)/ **Italy:** how to use single application for multiple measures like in the 'young farmers' package' ("Pacchetto Giovani"), that would allow the integration of different measures towards a single goal, such as generation renewal.
  - **Germany:** The German NSU would welcome exchange on how regionalised MS implement Measure 10 (agri-environment-climate) to find out more on how to deal with collective applications, like in the Netherlands RDP.
- It has been challenging to define a **division of roles and responsibilities** between regional technical assistance (regional NSU/ regional antennas) and national technical assistance/ networking (national NSU). National NSUs aim to improve the involvement of regional level in NRN strategy planning.
  - **Italy:** National NSU aims to involve regional NSU representatives more actively (e.g. through thematic responsibilities) in designing and implementing NRN action plan/ improving RDP implementation. The aim is to improve involvement of regional MAs in projects, as well as carries out capacity-building.
  - **France:** Regional NSUs are in charge of implementing regional RDPs. The main challenge for the national rural network is to gather the information from the ground and answer to different needs and fulfill the different expectations of each region. It is difficult to get some of the regions involved in the work of the NRN; as a consequence the NRN is lacking information for some regions.

- It is important to identify the **needs at the local level, and in particular involving representatives of the civil society** in the work of the NRN (and RDP implementation in general). Regional RDP managers, regional NSUs / regional antennas of NSUs can play a particularly important role in this. For this purpose, capacity needs to be built with regional NSU representatives, and channels should be developed to feed local-level needs into national/European level activities.
  - **Italy:** Regional representatives with thematic (rather than territorial) responsibilities
- It is challenging to define RDP **communication responsibilities** at the national level, as both NRN and MA have responsibility for this. Also need to strengthen regional communication activities/strategies.
  - **France:** Information dissemination is one of the main functions of the network, and therefore there is a database of contacts and projects on the website : to ease connexion between stakeholders, beneficiaries, potential beneficiaries and greater public. In order to complete information with European scale and foster cooperation, they will try to plug the SFC project database for the new website.
  - **Spain:** The website is a key tool of the Spanish Network, where they include information on LAGs, projects, calls for tenders, etc.
- It is important that the **role and potential of NRNs in improving RDP implementation is strengthened and acknowledged** by the Managing Authority. NRNs should also find ways to “tell the story” of how they contribute to improving RDP implementation, i.e. demonstrate the added value of networking. Among others, the NRNs have to play a key role in **better engaging local stakeholders and civil society**, identify key thematic issues where exchange can improve RDP implementation, as well as technical issues that regional (and national) MAs find challenging. Regional MAs/ NSU representatives should also play a key role in identifying needs on the ground.
  - **UK:** while the NRNs have slightly different relationships with their MAs a common theme is the extent to which the NSU can be a “critical friend” of the MA. Comparing NRNs across the EU, stakeholder engagement is of particular interest, for example how to improve the NRN’s connection to the local level.

## Next steps

The meeting showed that all NSUs appreciate exchange of experience and relevant practices with regard to the operation of networks in Member States with regionalised RDPs, and find merit in continuing such an exchange. However, given the large differences in the way regionalised RDPs and NRNs operate, the main challenge is to find meaningful ways to exchange about these themes further.

A number of key areas were identified where the ENRD CP in cooperation with NSUs could continue to support this process:

- **Engaging MAs on specific measures/issues**, including thematic work and activities/workshops on cross-cutting (more technical) RDP implementation issues;
- **Bringing regional MAs together** at national, and possibly at European level to facilitate sharing of experience between them on common issues
- **Finding a way to continue the NRN exchange**, e.g. through communication channels and other European-level forums.

## Annex 1: List of participants

Firstname	Surname	Email	Organisation	MS
Xavier	Delmon	x.delmon@reseau-pwdr.be	NRN	Belgium - Wallonia
Gaya	Ducceschi	gaya@enrd.eu	ENRD CP	Belgium
Ed	Dyson	Edward.Dyson@defra.gsi.gov.uk	NRN	UK - England
Paola	Lionetti	p.lionetti@politicheagricole.it	NRN	Italy
Coralie	Meurice	c.meurice@reseau-pwdr.be	NRN	Belgium - Wallonia
Stephanie	Mueller	stephanie.mueller@ble.de	NRN	Germany
Edina	Ocsko	edina.ocsko@enrd.eu	ENRD CP	EU
Riccardo	Passero	r.passero@politicheagricole.it	NRN	Italy
Alistair	Prior	alistair.prior@gov.scot	NRN	UK - Scotland
Mariam	Sanchez Guisandez	asguisandez@magrama.es	NRN	Spain
Joelle	Silberstein	joelle.silberstein@agriculture.gouv.fr	NRN	France
Paul	Soto	paul.soto@enrd.eu	ENRD CP	EU
Jan	Swoboda	jan.swoboda@ble.de	NRN	Germany

## Annex 2: Main discussion themes for the working session

1. **NRN organisation (including the role of regional antennas) & steering of the NRN programme**
  - How is your NRN/NSU organised?
  - What are the main roles & responsibilities of regional antennas?
  - How do you organise the steering/monitoring of the NRN programme? Do you have coordination committees/ steering committees? If yes, what are their roles?
  - What are the main channels/processes through which the national NSU and regional antennas cooperate?
  - What is the contribution of regional antennas/NSUs to the NRN programme?
  
2. **Support of regional RDPs**
  - How the different NSUs (national NSU & regional antennas/NSUs) can support regional RDP implementation?
  - What mechanisms/processes are in place to coordinate regionalised RDP implementation across the MS?
  - Any good practices that you would like to highlight in this regard?
  
3. **Cooperation between (national) NRN programme activities and the Technical Assistance allocation within regional RDPs**
  - How to create synergies between the (national) NRN programme activities and similar activities supported through technical assistance within regionalised RDPs?
  - What coordination processes exist between the national NSU and regional antennas/NSUs to most effectively coordinate activities?
  - Any good practices that you would like to highlight in this regard?