

Draft background document

Enabling factors for rural revitalisation

Analysis of the feedback from stakeholders and other relevant information sources

1. INTRODUCTION

This document presents the results of a quick review of the enabling factors outlined by stakeholders during the Expression of Interest to join the ENRD Thematic Group on Rural Revitalisation¹ and by key EU-level documents produced by relevant EU institutions and organisations. Over the years, there has been extensive work conducted (studies, reports and opinions) to provide a substantial diagnosis of the main challenges faced and opportunities present in rural areas. The communication on the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas launched by the European Commission (EC) was inspired by a review of the extensive literature available about rural areas, as well as by the results of stakeholder consultations, and learning from EU multi-actor research projects. All the analytical information and data considered in the elaboration of the Vision are compiled into an EC Staff Working Document².

The ENRD Thematic Group (TG) on Rural Revitalisation will aim at moving beyond the diagnosis, and focus on the practical actions needed to boost rural development, particularly in areas lagging behind with issues of depopulation, ageing and lack of economic opportunities. The TG will consider Smart Villages and integrated territorial approaches as well as the role of small towns to drive the revitalisation of their territory. Also, it will explore the needs, and develop ideas and recommendations, to help shape the future Rural Revitalisation Platform to be developed by the European Commission.

This document aims at supporting this TG by outlining the main enabling factors³ that need to be considered in the design of strategic interventions to support rural communities to plan and implement action around the main local challenges and opportunities, so as to help them contribute to the Rural Vision by 2040.

¹ In the Expression of Interest to become a member of the Thematic Group on [Rural Revitalisation](#), stakeholders were asked to outline three key enabling factors for rural revitalisation.

² See Staff Working Document part 1, 2 & 3. https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/long-term-vision-rural-areas_en

³ Enabling factors for rural revitalisation are understood in this document as the intrinsic features and conditions that can, if present, enhance the likelihood to trigger change that contribute to the revitalisation of rural areas in all relevant thematic fields.

2. WHAT ENABLING FACTORS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED FOR RURAL REVITALISATION?

The sources explored for this document often outline as enabling factors those to be taken into account in any policy approach to facilitate and boost actions in all relevant fields for the development of rural areas (digitalisation, climate change, social inclusion, etc). The review of feedback received from stakeholders expressing interest to join the TG and key literature (see section 3) provides a good starting point for an initial identification of the main enabling factors for rural revitalisation. The identified enabling factors could be clustered in four Building Blocks.

- Building Block 1: Horizontal integration and coordination
- Building Block 2: Vertical integration and coordination
- Building Block 3: Local empowerment and capacities
- Building Block 4: Local innovation, rural smartness

2.1. Enabling factors for rural revitalisation

Building Block 1: Horizontal integration and coordination

There is considerable common agreement about the multifaceted and multisectoral nature of the challenges and opportunities in rural areas. As an example, the ENRD Rural Voices report, that collected information about needs and opportunities from more than 3 000 rural citizens from 19 Member States, is structured around areas such as infrastructure, services, digitalisation, technology, basic goods, income, work, jobs, social inclusion, vitality, environment and climate change. Addressing these areas requires horizontal integration and coordination of actions. The following are enabling factors identified:

- **Holistic and place-based strategies** tuned to the local context. Strategies need to be future-orientated, coherent and holistic, and address economic, social and environmental issues.
- **Integrated governance structures** for rural policies that bring together all competent public authorities in the areas relevant for rural development to plan, implement and monitor action (e.g. interdepartmental task forces, cross sectoral agencies).
- **Policy alignment** through mechanisms for the coordination of all relevant rural policies and funds supporting rural areas. Rural proofing is considered a useful mechanism to align policies to the specificities of rural areas.
- **Territorial cooperation**, including partnership models and support to strategic collaboration among rural areas. In particular, **rural-urban** cooperation is often outlined (e.g. reciprocity contracts, intermunicipal cooperation).
- **Flexible and adequate funding** allocated to strategies at all levels to ensure financial and decision-making autonomy.
- **Monitoring and evaluation** the progress made in relevant thematic areas, through rural intelligence and smart targets and indicators (e.g. rural semester).

Building Block 2: Vertical integration and coordination

A frequent recommendation is to translate EU level policy ambitions down to the local level and to see local communities as key actors of change. This requires better integration of the goals at different levels (EU, national, regional and local). The following are enabling factors identified:

- **Multilevel and inclusive governance structures** that connect visions & strategies & targets at different levels (from EU to local levels). Local strategies need to be integrated into national frameworks.

- **Flexibility to adapt higher level strategies to the local context.** Strategies should create the conditions and provide the tools for rural communities to respond to the challenges and opportunities.
- **Simplified access to funding for local actors** through simplified administrative procedures, and flexible implementation. Integrated and multi-funded approaches are encouraged.
- **Communication and building new rural narratives** about the positive characteristics and values of rural areas to motivate the engagement of actors at all levels in development processes.

Building Block 3: Local empowerment and capacities

Local actors and communities are recognised as being instrumental for the formulation, design and implementation of policies for rural areas. An important set of enabling factors involves empowering local communities to take action and provide them with the necessary capacities. The following are enabling factors identified:

- **Stakeholder inclusion in decision making** boosting participatory democracy in rural life.
- **Local animation and facilitation.** Animation of local communities to engage in rural revitalisation and facilitation of strategic development processes. It is particularly important to engage non-traditional actors, the 'hard to reach', including youth and women.
- **Enhance local capacity,** providing technical and administrative support to enable local actors and authorities to prepare projects (e.g. preparatory support) and have capacity to identify and apply for funding opportunities.
- **Knowledge sharing and networking** with other local actors and areas to exchange best practices and build long lasting communities, building local social capital.

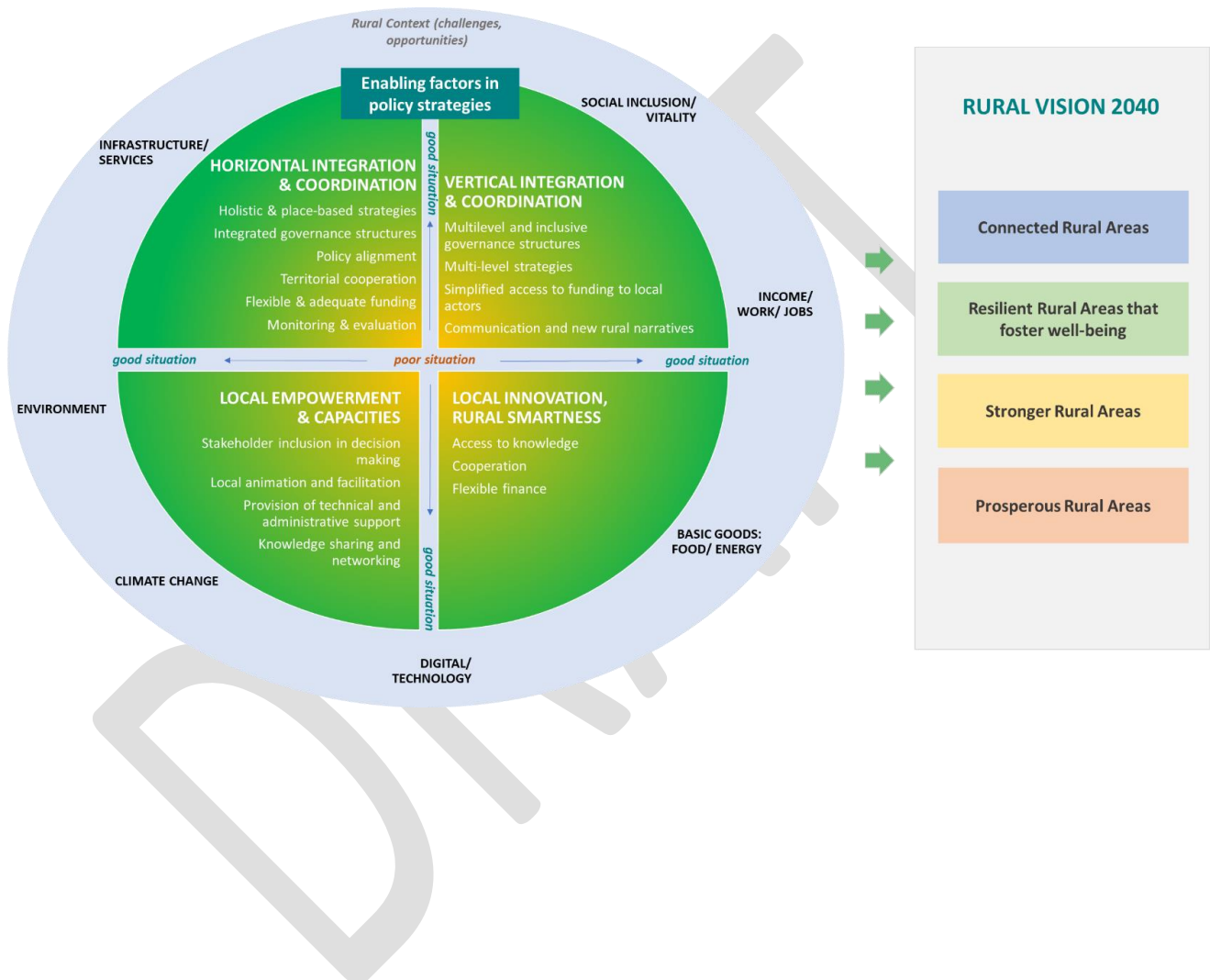
Building Block 4. Local innovation, rural smartness

Revitalisation implies moving away from the negative contexts and trend by implementing new actions and innovations that help to provide a new impulse to local areas and position them in a new positive development dynamic. Digital, technological and social innovation are considered essential for rural areas to be active actors in dealing with modern societal challenges. The following enabling factors are identified:

- **Access to knowledge, data and information** that can boost innovation. Local capacities, resources and know how are often not sufficient to provide innovative responses to the very complex challenges and opportunities such as the digital or green transition. Innovation brokers (e.g. agents, private sector, hubs, universities, LAGs) can connect communities with external sources of knowledge and help to capitalise on these synergies.
- **Cooperation** among key actors from private and/or public sectors is essential (e.g. researchers, farmers, SMEs, municipalities, etc.) to achieve and develop innovative solutions to outstanding problems in rural areas. This requires actions for the animation of key actors, and support to leaders of the communities to drive action.
- **Flexible financial instruments** that enable the implementation of innovative projects which are riskier in nature and allow for adaptation based on needs, such as Simplified Cost Option Methods.

The following figure illustrates the Building Blocks and related enabling factors identified in this analytical exercise and outlined above. It shows that enabling factors can support rural areas and stakeholders to address the challenges and opportunities in their context (outer part of wheel) and help rural territories move from a poor situation (yellow) to a better one (green) in key areas such as infrastructure/services, social inclusion, environment, basic goods, etc.

Figure 1 : Enabling factors for rural revitalisation



3. SOURCES REVIEWED

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