



ENRD LEADER Thematic Lab

Developing local strategic approaches to address green issues

Highlights report

This Thematic Lab focused on ‘Developing local strategic approaches to address green issues’, also linking with the ENRD thematic work on the European Green Deal (EGD) in rural areas. Participants exchanged their views and practical experiences related to the potential contribution of LEADER and Local Action Groups (LAGs) to ‘greening’ and EGD objectives locally.

Participants discussed key factors in local strategic approaches, including resources, capacities, setting local objectives in the context of national and EU level objectives, capacities, resources and networking methods that LAGs can mobilise to achieve these objectives.

Event Information

Date: 26 November 2020

Location: online meeting

Organisers: ENRD Contact Point

Participants: 41 participants from 21 EU Member States, including RDP Managing Authorities, LEADER LAGs, National Rural Networks, LAG networks and EU Commission representatives

Outcomes: practical considerations related to the role of LAGs in addressing green issues

Web page: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-leader-thematic-lab-developing-local-strategic-approaches-address-green_en

Introduction

Karolina Jasinska Muehleck (DG AGRI) welcomed the participants with an introduction referring to the considerable achievements of LEADER and LAGs in relation to a diverse range of local development topics. She emphasised the aim of this Thematic Lab - exploring how local development strategies and local LAG actions can be steered to contribute to addressing climate and ‘greening’ challenges in an efficient and effective way.

Peter Toth (ENRD CP) [‘set the scene’](#) for the workshop discussions. He summarised the key issues shared by the participants prior to the meeting, including local ownership of green energy projects, local delivery and supply chains, and cooperatively run processing plants. **Laura Jalasloki (ENRD CP)** presented the ENRD Thematic Group on the [EU Green Deal and Rural Areas](#) and emphasised that LEADER can be a key instrument in addressing EGD objectives locally. LEADER and LAGs can support the transition to a green economy by raising awareness, improving local understanding of global challenges and EU policy discourse and creating local partnerships for small-scale community investments. LEADER can allow local communities to address both high-level ‘green’ objectives and specific local objectives, such as sustainable housing, mobility and circular bio-economy.

Member State perspectives

LEADER and the Green Deal

Michael Fischer (NSU, Austria) [explained](#) how the EGD will be the Austrian NRN’s 2021 priority topic. About two thirds of its planned actions focus on enabling LAGs to play an active role in implementing EGD objectives, including through agenda setting, the identification of possible fields of action, good practice exchange and thematic workshops. Austrian LAGs see themselves as parts of a continuous system of policy delivery ranging from the local to the EU level and are ‘translating’ EU policy objectives into their local development strategies, based on local needs. Topics include sustainable mobility, energy efficiency and local food. Austrian LAGs work with various authorities at different levels (local, regional, national) who hold responsibility for the different policy areas defined in the EGD.

LAG Bornholm addressing green issues

Hans Jorgen Jensen (LAG Bornholm, Denmark), explained his LAG’s [‘lighthouse model’](#) - building the local development strategy around a few keywords that capture the most important local needs. The island’s strategy was born ‘green’. LEADER has been used to build a sustainable bio- and experience-based island economy through renewable energy, energy- and resource-efficient buildings, a self-sufficient local economy and ‘green’ education. Examples include fishing seaweed and producing rapeseed for animal feed to replace imported animal feed and re-using materials after demolishing old, empty buildings. The approach has led to quantifiable successes in terms of self-sufficiency and sustainability and the ‘Bright Green Island’ (by now a strong regional brand) has attracted new business start-ups.



Transition to a green economy in LEADER Åland

Alexandra de Haas (LAG manager, LEADER Åland) [explained](#) that in the beginning of the 2014-2020 programming period, non-productive investments under the Åland RDP were allocated to implementation under LEADER to promote wetlands, nature pastures and other biodiversity projects to farmers. The LAG integrated this measure into its strategy thanks to its existing focus on nature, tourism, and well-being. Sustainability criteria have been applied to all of the projects selected for support under the local development strategy and more than half of the projects funded focus on the environment. The mindset of beneficiaries has also changed over the years and most projects are now 'multifunctional'. The LAG worked with communities, municipalities, interest groups and farmers on a "Development and Sustainability Agenda for Åland" which has been approved by the Åland government. The key success factors for working with limited funding were the LAG's ability to network across sectors, involve the whole society, value volunteer work, make local development accessible and support projects in a transparent way.



The EU Green Deal and the LEADER approach

Mireille Groot Koerkamp (LAG Salland) [talked about](#) the Salland approach to local development, which is guided by three keywords: People – Planet - Profit. These provided the basis for the local development strategy, designed involving about 700 local people. The integration of these three principles is key to the development and implementation of every project supported by the LAG. For example, the LAG cooperates with 70 farmers in supporting local food projects and works with local municipalities, the regional water board and volunteers on demonstration projects for sustainable soil management and providing alternative incomes for local farmers to shift their focus from global to local markets. Underlying all these efforts is the 'De Kracht van Salland' (the power of Salland), a way of working in networks between different sectors of the local economy and people for common goals where each and every participant contributes. 'Salland Café' meetings organised by the LAG complemented this process and supported the development of projects about energy cooperatives, local food and biodiversity.

Ensuring LEADER's contribution to current and future 'greening' ambitions



'Green' topics have evolved over the years from environmental protection to climate change mitigation. **All EGD themes can have local relevance for the future of LAGs**, while topics such as local food, short supply chains, circular economy, and sustainable mobility are particularly important. Therefore, small farmers and local farming associations are 'natural' target groups for LAGs working towards lively, vibrant rural areas.



When **local development strategies (LDS) integrate 'green issues'**, it is important to demonstrate the benefits to the local community and economy, e.g. in terms of local ownership of energy systems, local food production and sustaining local natural resources. The level of urgency of local problems to solve – including energy efficiency, biodiversity, deforestation and soil degradation – also plays a part in integrating EGD objectives into local development strategies.



LAGs have the capacity to do 'transformative' work and raise awareness to foster a 'green' transition locally. Green issues are already addressed in many LAGs and LDSs but there is **room for improvement**. LAG boards and members need to be better informed about the EGD and its relevance to local development strategies. LAGs need new expertise as well and can work together with research and academia to improve their knowledge base and develop local responses to 'green issues'. Examples of national and EU good practices are helpful.



Key success factors for LAGs to successfully address 'green issues' locally include local 'embeddedness' – connecting projects to local issues, themes, places and history. To ensure local buy-in it is important to demonstrate how greening projects can address local problems, to highlight local opportunities (for example through local info-points) and to communicate the message that 'nobody is left behind'. Ways to achieve this include integrating 'green' activities into LAGs' own projects, making climate and environmental aspects cross-cutting in the LDS and integrating 'green' aspects in project evaluation and selection. LAGs can also raise awareness about the importance of climate action as an end in itself. LAGs can act as multipliers and raise EGD objectives to higher levels in national policy agendas. Other success factors include coordinating efforts between different sectors of the local economy, networking, connecting with other programmes and effective communication and dissemination.



Results take time. **LAGs need adequate resources, capacities and networking** to address green issues. They need adequate funding, expertise and animation capacity to be able to maintain the focus on relevant themes over the years, involve the local community, create a community feeling and maintain the momentum around specific, locally relevant themes. Flexible administrative process, adequate funding, guidance and coaching, as well as stronger cooperation with regional and national authorities are also important. Combining different funds to achieve development goals is also needed.