

Thematic Group Improving RDP Implementation

1st Meeting
Brussels, 17 March 2015

REPORT



V1 – June 2015

INTRODUCTION TO THE DAY

Presentation

Thematic Group on Improving RDP implementation

by Fabio Cossu
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The opening presentation had the objective of: i) putting the work of the Thematic Group (TG) in the wider context of current ENRD activities ii) illustrate the scope of the TG and its expected outcomes; iii) clarify the purpose of the first meeting.

Key messages from the presentation:

- The TG is part of a wider ENRD ‘work package’ on the theme: *opportunities for the improvement of RDP implementation.*
- A number of ENRD activities (ongoing or planned) are part of this work stream and link with the work and the expected outcomes of the TG. Namely:
- A series of **trainings and workshops** dealing with aspects related to the good management and performance of RDPs are currently taking place, mainly addressing MAs and PAs. They deal with technical aspects that are also the concern of TG members (i.e. use of simplified costs options; avoidance of irregularities and causes of errors).
- The second issue of the ENRD periodical **Rural Review** is expected to be a practical reference tool for RDP managers to address key management and implementation issues and provide concrete examples. In this respect, it will build upon the outcomes of the workshops and – to the extent possible – on the work of the TG.
- A **Seminar** is envisaged to take place in June ideally bringing forward experiences collected through the work of the TG to encourage further exchanges, reflections and practical suggestions for RDP managers.

Further reference: TG Summary prepared for the Rural Networks Assembly.

Presentation

Priority themes for EU Networks

Paul Soto
(ENRD CP)

The scope of the presentation was to provide the framework for the following group discussions. It summarised key outcomes of the first meeting of the Rural Networks’ Assembly and Steering Group (respectively held on 26.01 and 25.02), which provided indications about the **priority themes** for EU Networks for 2015 and following years.

N*	Selected topic (not ranked)	Priority
1.	Simplification (for all, in order to achieve the relevant objectives)	++
2.	Empowering advisory services – Knowledge transfer – Broader innovation	++
3.	Local food – Short Supply Chain – Rural-urban partnership – Small farms	+
4.	Pillar 1-Pillar 2 linkages	++
5.	Demographic change & social inclusion	+
6.	Multi-fund approaches	+
7.	Green economy related to job and growth	+
8.	Starting-up the NRNs	+
9.	Evaluation of networking activities - NRNs	+
10.	Climate change	+

Key messages from the presentation:

- The RN Steering Group expressed a clear interest and urgency about focusing on the **launch of the new RDPs**.
- There is scope for a better articulation and definition of the **priority themes** identified in terms of issues and possible intervention of rural Networks.
- Consequently, the scope of the first TG meeting was declinated upon taking forward the instances emerged in these early discussions.

Further reference: List of priority topics identified by the Rural Networks' Steering group (meeting of 25 February 2015)

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT / URGENT FOR A GOOD START OF THE RDPs?

Group discussion

The first round of discussions focused on identifying **key issues to address for the successful start of RDPs**. At the same time, participants were asked to identify possible areas of intervention for rural networks and refer to practical examples.

Three discussion tables were set up around the same set of questions (see left column). Groups were then asked to share and comment on each other's findings. The following is a summary that takes into account recurring issues emerged during the group discussions.

What is important to focus now for the rolling out of the new RDPs? Why?

Key issues to focus on for the successful start of RDPs:

A horizontal reading of the outcomes of the three discussion tables highlighted **3 main aspects** that hold potential for further discussion. Some examples brought forward by participants directly linked to such aspects

1. **Communication** was raised on several occasions as key to ensure a good roll out of RDPs. Communication was mainly declined in two aspects: i) specifically in relation to the **tools and measures** provided by the programme, to make potential beneficiaries aware of the possible achievements deriving from their correct use and; ii) more in general, for **generating a common vision** among a wider set of concerned stockholders, raise the profile of rural policy intervention, eventually succeeding in keeping interest and expectations high with respect to the new programmes.

Example 1: The Scottish Rural Parliament has been using Twitter ([#ruralhour](#)) to promote communication and exchange between its members. The subject for discussion is selected according to the stakeholders' interest. The date is set and announced in advance. For that hour, which is usually in the afternoon when stakeholders are less busy, participants can post their views and take part in the dialogue. The benefits of this approach is that it is simple, effective with large participation. Another benefit is that it also allows the animators to gather all information exchanged. This activity is considered as very successful and is still on going. A possible reason for this might lie in its informal and open character.

2. **Formal and informal coordination.** At the outset of programmes implementation, it is essential to keep a high level of interest and commitment of all stakeholders and ensure that programmes are 'client-oriented'. This can be achieved in formal and less-formal ways. On the one hand, the RDP **Monitoring Committees** were of course pointed out as main formal structures to ensure the engagement of all concerned stakeholders. Crucially, MC are the places where decisions are taken with respect to **selection criteria**. On the other hand, participants claimed that establishing **informal coordination mechanisms** among all actors of the 'delivery chain'

are important to ensure that a common level of understanding is reached on the purposes and benefits of the policy interventions, and that everyone's views are heard in the aim of achieving 'simplification for all'.

Example 2: In Finland, 'coordination' projects take place around a theme (groups of measures) and cover more than just the formal procedures. These consist in training and meetings where programs are 'read together' and are also relevant for building common understanding.

3. Capacity building. A last and more technical aspect deemed necessary for the successful start of the programs relates to **raising the capacity of programme managers** in order to improve the **quality of the implementation**. Interestingly, this aspect opens up different perspectives about what 'capacity' and 'quality' mean in concrete terms. Two dimensions were brought up: i) the first links to the **technical knowledge** of staff, which demands for more exchanges among peers, training and learning by concrete experiences; ii) the second links to the rolling out of adequate **IT tools, procedures and information channels** at the administrative level.

Example 3: In Italy it is now under consideration to apply the ISO 9001 standard certification system as to ensure quality assurance of RDP implementation.

Example 4: France is developing a 'tool box' by measure, and providing training to regional programme managers on strategy/focus areas, control, evaluation, etc.

Where can Rural Networks intervene and make a difference?

Possible areas of intervention for rural networks

The following table summarise suggestions for EU rural networks in addressing the key issues previously identified:

Issue	Possible actions from Rural Networks
Communication about RD policy and programmes	<p>Keep stakeholders ‘warm’ with different communication initiatives <u>throughout the whole implementation process</u>.</p> <p>Ensure that communication goes beyond explaining rules (‘pedagogic’ function)</p>
Formal and informal coordination mechanisms	<p>Collect good practices on MC (establishment, participation, organisation). Support organisation of MC both through inviting relevant stakeholders and supporting practical work (e.g. providing technical input).</p> <p>Invite stakeholders and ensure their involvement when details on RDP measures are defined.</p> <p>Contribute to the design of administrative processes and tools to ensure simplification from the clients’ end.</p>
Raising administrative capacity and quality	<p>1. Collect and share good ‘methodological’ practices > 2. provide information > 3. organise trainings.</p> <p>Provide concise information and further reference/contacts. Promote the flow of technical knowledge and connect relevant experts in the administrations (particularly between regions with less experience).</p> <p>Communicate questions to the EU and MS level in order to find existing expertise, retrieve examples and guidance.</p> <p>Identify the key steps and the institutional level concerned, then facilitate and provide input for capacity building and trainings.</p>

GETTING PRIORITIES RIGHT FOR THE FUTURE THEMATIC WORK OF THE ENRD

Group discussion

What defines the theme in terms of issues and challenges?

What would you expect as result of any future work on the topic?

Can you provide example of successful approaches?

The second round of group discussion focused on **refining selected priority themes** previously identified by the Rural Networks' Steering Group. Ten priority topics for 2015 (and beyond) were tabled among which participants selected three to be further articulated in the group discussion. The chose themes were:

- 1) Demographic Change in rural areas: attracting young farmers/young entrepreneurs, raise awareness and understanding of their needs, involving older people.
- 2) Sustainable management of natural resources
- 3) Circular economy

Three discussion tables were set up each focusing on a single topic. Each group was asked to reply to a set of questions (see left) and finally share the findings with all participants.

Please see [Annex 1](#) for a detailed summary of discussions.

NEXT STEPS, TOWARDS THE ENRD SEMINAR

Discussion

How to make the ENRD seminar and its results more relevant to stakeholders?

In the last session of the meeting, participants were asked to take stock of the previous discussions in order to brainstorm on the organisation of the forthcoming ENRD Seminar on the topic of 'improving RDP implementation'.

The Seminar is expected to be held on the 10th of June (provisional date TBC) and it is envisaged to involve around 150 participants.

The questions put forward for prompting initial exchanges were:

- *Whom the Seminar is addressing?*
- *Which themes should be considered?*
- *What format should be envisaged?*

Initial suggestions for the ENRD seminar

- The focus should be on practical implementation aspects (e.g. 'how MA are setting up their management systems to avoid double funding?')

- Technical challenges as control regimes, compliance issues and auditing should be addressed.
- Challenges should be looked at from different perspectives without neglecting those of the 'clients' (e.g. 'are beneficiaries informed?' 'how to ensure the client-focused approach along every step?').
- The take up of measures by farmers should be compared and discussed.
- New measures (e.g. cooperation) should be the focus. Most advanced Countries should be invited in order to share their experience on how they go about new measures.
- The following categories of stakeholders should be invited (among others): auditors, DG AGRI desk-officers, representatives of the informal networks of PAs.



Annex 1: Outcomes of discussions around thematic priorities

Sustainable management of natural resources

Summary of discussions: The thematic group highlighted a number of specific needs along the whole programme's delivery chain. Interestingly one can find all three horizontal aspects identified by the group as key for the successful implementation of RDP measures (steady communication and stakeholders involvement and improvement of technical capacity). It appears evident from discussion that the focus of future work should be in *strengthening the link between RDP actions and stated environmental objectives* (through targeting, outcome-focused intervention and and controls).

Programming stage	Key issues & needs	Networks' actions
Measures design	<p>Setting appropriate and realistic targets</p> <p>Ensure measures' design fit the SWOT analysis</p> <p>More inclusive discussion with relevant stakeholders <u>including auditors</u></p> <p>Attractiveness of measure</p>	<p>RDP analysis and comparison of specific measures</p> <p>Exchange and analysis of experiences about measure design</p> <p>Establish communication platforms among stakeholders at all level</p>
Rolling out measures	<p>Get farmers on board</p>	<p>Communication and information actions</p>
Measure implementation	<p>Deal with reducing the error rate</p> <p>Understand and implement result-based approaches</p> <p>Monitoring and controls</p>	<p>Exchange of practices (e.g. simplification linked to objectives)</p> <p>Support on technical aspects (gather and spread the knowledge) - capacity building</p> <p>Learn from implementation and swiftly launch discussions for the following programming period</p>

Demographic change and social inclusion

Summary of discussions: Discussion *mainly focused on the issue of new entrants in agriculture* (youth and young farmers). The main conclusion from the discussions is that the topic requires thinking ‘out of the RDP box’. This means to focus on complementary forms of support that address issues which are not strictly falling within the possibilities offered by the EAFRD, but that often represent preconditions for any effective intervention. A number of issues, for example, access to land, were brought forward in support to this thinking and suggestions for possible Rural Networks’ action were identified. From an RDP implementation perspective there is still *scope for understanding how key issues can be addressed through the available tools to generate the expected results.*

Programming stage	Key issues & needs	RDP implementation aspects	Networks’ actions
Horizontal	Lack of attractiveness of rural areas as a place to live and work	Need to approach the topic from the point of view of available tools (RDPs) and what can be achieved with them.	Information /communication (e.g. TV programmes; out-of-school activities; review of educational curricula) Mapping which Networks are working on the topic (these already include FI, SE, FL, LV, NL) and how.
Measures design & Implementation	Lack of skills at the level of business management/development Access to credit Access to land	Analysis and comparison of RDP measures and sub-programmes (e.g. priorities, eligibility conditions, support offered, coordinated actions) Review measures with relevant stakeholders	Training on business management skills Exchange of practices Identification and analysis of relevant financial instruments

		(young people) in rural areas	
		Explore potential of targeted LEADER actions; exchange and compare practices	

Circular economy

Summary of discussions: The main outcome of the discussion was a clear *need for better understanding the topic and its implication for rural development actions starting at the farm-level*. A number of questions were raised around the possible contribution of RDP to the circular economy that would require further articulation mostly through interactive research, advice and sharing of existing practices. Consequently, not much discussion was devoted on specific RDP implementation aspects. However it was anticipated that capacity building actions (mainly through advisors) would be needed at project implementation level.

Programming stage	Key issues & needs	Networks' actions
Horizontal	How can rural development contribute to the circular economy?	
	Definition of circular economy based on a small-scale production	Raise awareness of tools available from RDPs (e.g. cooperation measures, advisory services, EIP-OGs)
	How to make it workable at the farm level (on-farm use, reuse and recycling).	Involve research to plug gaps in knowledge
	How circular economy is financially viable (e.g. generation of income savings)	Reach and disseminate knowledge already available Sharing experiences from MS.
	How different funds can contribute to the circular economy	
Measures design & Implementation	Linking with advisory services	Collect and disseminate examples of good practices coming from different MSs.
		Capacity building actions

		Capacity building for LAGs in order to consider circular economy aspects in the definition of LDS (e.g. through project selection criteria considering environmental impacts of projects)
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