

National Rural Networks are focused on the delivery of Rural Development Programmes while trying to create significant connections between rural stakeholders. The aim of the workshop was to understand how NRNs undertake regional networking in order to reach rural actors working at the local level.

A baseline study undertaken as the background work for the workshop outlined different models across the EU for regional delivery. The findings were presented during the workshop, including in-depth analyses for certain member states.

The workshop responded to specific requests to explore regional and local level connections, and built upon feedback from NRNs highlighting the need for a regionalised approach

## Event Information

**Title:** NRNs going local! Exploring approaches to regional and local networking

**Date:** 31 May 2017

**Location:** Namur (Belgium)

**Organisers:** ENRD CP supported by the Belgian-Walloon NRN. Mr Benoît George (Adviser to the Walloon Minister of Agriculture) opened the meeting.

**Participants:** 42 participants from different Member States and stakeholder groups, including NRN, MAs, Regional Authorities and European Institutions.

**Outcomes:** Presentation of key analytical findings on regional/local networking and sharing of examples and way to improve across the 7 NRN tasks.

**Web page:** [http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-approaches-regional-and-local-networking\\_en](http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-approaches-regional-and-local-networking_en)

## The seven NRN tasks at work



Participants worked together in two interactive sessions after the presentation of regional delivery models:

In the first session, they were asked to identify the flow (flow of information/communication from the centre to the periphery), the inspiration (how to inspire and motivate local stakeholders) and the empowerment (what should be done to make local stakeholders more empowered in delivering against the 7 NRN tasks) that can contribute to effective and dynamic networking at local level.

# How can NRNs effectively perform their daily work and make the 7 NRN tasks ‘work’?

## 1. Collection and dissemination of Ideas

- The identification of project examples has been carried out in three differing ways: using an existing database (GR, FI, RO); starting from scratch (IT); and requesting them from stakeholder groups (GR, PO). Some Member States used more than one method
- While differing methods are used to disseminate the examples (website, video, social media) the focus is on the story rather than on the project, and on the method rather than the funding
- Understanding project delivery also means learning from failure, and in some countries specific meetings and workshops are developed to share learning



## 2. Facilitating thematic and analytical exchanges – some examples

- In Finland, the “[Giphy](#)” tool allows the visualisation of network structures to target the networks members who are least engaged in order to involve them more in thematic and analytical exchanges
- In Wallonia, interactive methodologies (world café, open space) allow improved use of time during meeting and exchanges
- Some NRNs found that thematic working groups enabled them to make closer connections with specific stakeholder groups, while others find the format of one-off events and workshops more effective

## 3. Training and networking for LAGs and cooperation

- Well-constructed training matches demands from stakeholders with NRN delivery priorities. Needs are determined through surveys, needs analysis and regular forums with LAGs. A focus on animations skills helps understand ground-level ideas
- Networking includes thematic groups, working groups and learning networks. Some regions have specific thematic groups for LAGs to share ideas
- Specific support tools examples include a dedicated CLLD officer and Leader toolkit (UK-SCO), a person dedicated to TNC support (SE) and co-development of ideas for LAGs
- Approaches to ensuring that innovation is an ‘everyday’ focus, involves NSUs using training and support to develop LAG understanding and to realise that there are differing types and levels of innovation

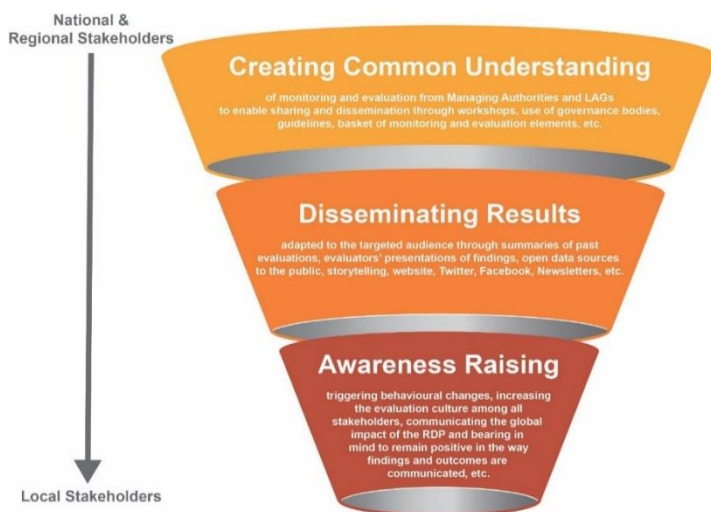
#### 4. Networking for Advisors and Innovation Support Services (ISS)

- All NRNs are networking with advisors and ISS, most of them through the organisation of events, either dedicated or involving a broader audience where they are integrated. There are different levels of involvement.
- A wide range of examples were shared including joint activity with the advisory network (IT); innovation brokers being part of the NRN (HU, UK-SCO); The partnership principle (IE) and dedicated events for advisors, cooperation and innovation (DE, FR, IE, RO). Training can also be used in creating stronger links (DE) including video (FI) and webinars (UK-E)

#### 5. Evaluation

- 3 distinct stages were determined (as outlined in the diagram):
- The first step was called "developing a common understanding of monitoring & evaluation from the national/regional governance bodies (MAs, Pas, NSU and to some extent LAGS) in order to be able to share and disseminate the info"
- The middle step represents the "dissemination of results at all levels, from the centre to the periphery"
- The last step being the most relevant to local actors – is "awareness raising"

#### Evaluation Session Diagram



#### 6. Communication

- A wide variety of tools are in use – newsletter, events, personal contact, videos, online content and games
- There are some cross-cutting challenges, such as targeting the right audience: the use of different styles including games, humour or language is useful when adapting to different audiences
- New methods for communicating are being considered for their effectiveness, including smartphone apps and video games

#### 7. Contribution to the ENRD

- The ENRD Contact Point can participate more in national events and increase face-to-face contact to gain ideas and to improve understanding of the needs from the regions
- Events organised by the ENRD CP can be more specific and the themes for discussion should be chosen based on existing activities and NRNs annual work plans
- The LAG Database and TNC offers tools can be further developed
- NRNs can improve the dissemination of ENRD workshop materials, translate good practices/ENRD materials and target stakeholders more effectively, including at a regional level

## Examples of Regional and Local Networking

In Poland, the NRN tasks are framed under Parliamentary regulation at national level.

To organise events at a local level, regions such as The Podlaskie Region in the North-East of Poland work with the support of LAGs to coordinate activities. Successful activities include linking local projects with regional activities, and hosting debates to engage stakeholders on topics such as short supply chains and on taxation in agriculture and rural development.

In France, each region has a different structure and approach to rural development and networking, and after regional changes, some combined regions manage several RDPs. The Bretagne Region plays a key role by representing and coordinating the regions of France within the network, with a clear mission:

- ✓ To assist in preparing and facilitating the meetings of the regional networks
- ✓ To facilitate peer-to-peer contacts, by encouraging informal learning and sharing of good practices
- ✓ To 'welcome' and support those new staff members responsible for running regional networks.

The Bretagne network sees itself as a place of dialogue and interaction between the actors of the rural world. The value comes from exchange, and a practical approach enables a positive view of rural life.



Cooperation at local level is vital, especially when formal structures are in place: positive examples of cooperation come from Belgium and from Slovakia.

In Belgium, the two NRNs (Walloon and Flemish) have consolidated a continuous and productive cooperation, which is crucial for their work and rural development in their regions.

Slovakia has developed a structure of Regional antennae whereby eight regions are effectively delivering against the seven NRN tasks by creating a direct link which reaches the most remote stakeholders, through a 'hub and spoke' approach connecting the centre to regional offices.

## Next Steps

Some actions to take forward from the event are:

- Further work should be undertaken to develop linkages between regional, national and European networks
- The strengthening of relationships between LAGs and NRNs needs to be further developed, as well as cooperation. This will include the development of the LAG database and TNC offers, to be taken up by the ENRD CP.
- The role of advisors should be addressed through continuing development of stakeholder links
- Communication and interaction with the NRNs to improve understanding of their needs and to support capacity building shall be tackled through ENRD CP activities
- Considering differing approaches to deliver regional RDPs as a next stage of development