

This ENRD workshop – organised in partnership with the Italian Rural Network – considered how the Regional Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) are supported by the NRNs. NRNs explained their structure and how they coordinate national/regional levels.

National and regional rural network representatives discussed and exchanged good practices on topics such as Cooperation (Measure 16), LEADER/CLLD and networks' capacity building at the regional level. In addition, they addressed the role of national and regional networks in coordination and policy delivery.

Participants provided recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of NRN strategies and programmes, recognising the diverse NRN structures required for regional delivery.

Event Information

Title: Improving Rural Policy Delivery: the Regional Dimension

Date: 13 February 2018

Location: Rome (Italy)

Organisers: ENRD CP in partnership with the Italian NRN.

Participants: 57 participants from different Member States and stakeholder groups, including NRNs, MAs, Regional Authorities and European Institutions.

Outcomes: Agreement to share best practice and tools created for capacity building; proposals for cooperation on thematic activities.

Web page: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-improving-regional-rdp-delivery_en

Summary of Event



This workshop explored how the NRNs can support the RDPs implementation and improve connections, coordination and cooperation between networks, both regional and national.

Participants concluded that more can be done to foster improved connections, but that there is now more awareness of regional actions, and greater will to make connections and share projects.

Three parallel working sessions were held, which looked at Cooperation, Simplification and Capacity Building and LEADER. Participants proposed a fourth session to look at the role of NRNs in coordinating or what was termed 'True Networking'.

The event was planned in conjunction with a cooperation meeting held in Rome on 14th February by the Italian NRN to consider further specific areas of cooperation, details of which can be found [here](#).

Understanding the regional dimension

Emilio Gatto, the Director General from the Italian Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies welcomed participants to the meeting, highlighting that the focus on regional RDPs had been initiated by the Italian NRN, the hosts for the event.

Analytical work undertaken by the [ENRD Contact Point](#) was presented, and a number of key points were made to set the context for the meeting:

- There is a significant level of complexity of the organisational setting across MSs that needs to be taken into consideration when discussing rural development policy delivery and its regional dimension.
- NRN activities can be 'located' on a scale ranging from a 'pure networking' approach to a 'coordination' approach.
- Developing links among regional/local stakeholders is one of key features of MS examples leading to improved policy delivery.

Panel Session – Key Points

The panel session was divided into two rounds reflecting the differences between national/regional as well as MA/NSU perspectives.

The first round of the panel session brought together national MA representatives from France, Germany, Italy and Spain. A main finding from the discussion was that the diverse challenges in bringing regions together are particular to each individual MS:

- In France, the regions are still adapting to changes after territorial reform in 2016, so the coordination of networks is still 'work in progress'.
- Germany tries to define a clear border between policy delivery, networking and coordination which the network has to manage carefully, especially given the number of small stakeholders.
- Italy specifically mentioned that a level of complexity is brought by having multiple Paying Agencies.
- In Spain, regions have a considerable level of autonomy but assistance is provided by the Spanish MA, mainly through the support service of the national NRN.

The second panel round provided a perspective of NRN representatives, both from national (Poland) and regional level (Wales - UK and Piemonte region - Italy):



- In Poland, a single RDP country where regions have only certain degree of autonomy, the presence of regional offices is still very important because of the very different economic, social and historical background of regions.
- Polish regional NSUs report to regional governments as the national NSU looks to encourage a bottom-up approach. The national NSU performs mainly "technical assistance" activities, sometimes at the expense of networking.
- Italian regional NSUs operate with individual staff based in the regions, this allows them to identify practical issues which can hinder policy delivery (delays, complex administration etc.) and suggest improvements.
- The Welsh NSU is more involved in communication activities. However, supporting coordination among MAs can potentially be more difficult, as there is no NSU at the national level.

Cooperation

This session allowed for exchanges on how MS and regions are implementing Measure 16: Cooperation. The discussions included an update from participants on their implementation of cooperation activities, and a few key points emerged:

- There is a great deal to be gained in connecting and promoting EIP-AGRI Operational Groups between regions and countries.
- Where there are experts at regional level or even within a MS (either on thematic points or on technical issues within the RDPs), a way to link these experts and their expertise to other regions and countries should be found.
- There is the potential to learn from and share the methodologies of Innovation Brokers and Innovation Support Services.
- It is important to make sure the link to LAGs is promoted in cooperation actions.
- Effort should be made to create thematic connections and communities of practice, and share best practice.
- There are ways of connecting EIP-AGRI actions and rural network activities – the French NRN is looking at specific resources to look at these connections.

Simplification & Capacity Building

Three important points were discussed:

- Obstacles to simplification in the functioning of NRNs;
- Possible simplification processes and good practices that NRNs and ENRD could adopt or facilitate; and
- The role of the networks in strengthening capacity building.

The main discussion outcomes were:

Obstacles to simplification:

- Differences in administrative capacity at different level of governance and in different regions.
- Innovative tools take time to be understood

Simplification processes:

- All MAs and local actors should be guided towards an equal level of knowledge;
- Paying Agencies should be regularly involved in NRNs' activities;
- The offer of webinars, e-learning, peer-to-peer exchanges, focus groups and task forces should be increased and innovative tools already in place successfully in other MSs should be replicated.

Capacity building:

- On some specific topics (e.g. forestry measures), NRNs could develop their services to provide a “training centre” offering regular formation and information services;
- Rural Networks should rely on a bottom-up approach and be more informal and less institutional, to reach and involve more stakeholders;
- Capacity building activities should be reinforced in preparation for the post-2020 CAP.



LEADER

The LEADER session was mainly composed of participants from the four “big” countries with regional RDPs (France, Germany, Italy and Spain). The discussion focused on shared challenges stemming from regionalised RDP/LEADER delivery and potential solutions.

The most frequently discussed issue was the coordination of interterritorial cooperation (ITC). An inspiring example from Spain was presented where all relevant stakeholders have formed a dedicated ITC working group at national level. The other approaches raised to enable smooth implementation of ITC were:

- Harmonisation of guidelines and Monitoring & Evaluation procedures at the national level so that they are similar for all regions (e.g. developing one template);
- Dedicated staff who provide technical assistance for cooperation; and
- The integration of different programmes and funding schemes (e.g. INTERREG).

The participants also touched upon other ways to improve the regional policy delivery of LEADER. The provision of trainings, peer-to-peer learning (such as the advisory programme ‘colleague advice’ in Germany) or shared methodologies and tools at the national and European level can be very helpful in achieving this goal.

The coordination of multi-funding does not seem to be a challenge in countries with regional RDPs, as only a few regions have decided to employ the CLLD approach.

Networking or Coordinating

A fourth parallel working session, proposed by the participants on the day was based on the finding of the analytical work conducted by the ENRD CP that some NRN’s operate primarily as ‘True Networking’ organisations and others as ‘Coordinating’ organisations. The main outcomes of the discussion were that:

- A significant element of ‘True Networking’ should be a must for all NRNs. The potential to network is what makes NRNs contribution unique in supporting the implementation of the RDPs.
- The challenge for almost all NRNs – as publicly funded organisations – is to enhance the ‘bottom-up’ approach.
- Coordination always forms a part of NRNs work. It is more of a challenge and particularly important for MS with Regional RDPs and/or regional networking structures. By fulfilling a coordination role, the NRN increases its voice with decision makers in the MA.
- Most NSUs now operate from within the MA. This institutional setting typically leads to a situation of less autonomy compared to out-sourced NSUs, and may mean that the NSU tends to be seen simply as an additional resource for the MA.

Network managers must try to strike the right balance between the different approaches: ensuring and often trying to do more ‘true networking’, while still fulfilling the vital roles of coordination and supporting the delivery of the RDP(s).

Next Steps

- There are several common potential cooperation topics between networks at both national and regional level.
- Capacity building can be a task carried out by the NRN as a real or virtual ‘training centre’ as in the case studies presented by Spain and Germany.
- There are ways of grouping thematic activities on a regional basis, as shown by the French NRN model.
- There is a role for the ENRD Contact Point in developing cooperation on thematic activities which can be taken forward in forthcoming NRN Meetings.
- The follow-on session hosted for NSUs by the Italian NRN developed further collaboration topics across regions and MS, along themes such as short supply chains, farm exchange visits, social farming and social inclusion, forestry measures and climate change, conservation agriculture, farm diversification, and on developing best practice in LEADER and Advisory Services, which will be developed in cooperation with NRNs.

