



Report of the 6th meeting of the Permanent Sub-group on **LEADER and CLLD**

Brussels, 31 January 2019



Introduction

9.30 – 9.45

Welcome and
Introduction

Neda Skakelja,
DG AGRI

John Grieve ENRD
CP

Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided

Ms Skakelja welcomed participants to the 6th meeting of the Permanent Subgroup on LEADER and Community-Led Local Development. She informed the meeting that 3070 LAGs were now 'active' in the ENRD LAG database, and that implementation of LEADER in terms of budget execution is on average 14% for the EU, with Member States (MS) ranging from 5-40%. The [agenda](#), presented by the ENRD Contact Point, was structured to provide an overview of what has been learned so far and to discuss how to assess and communicate the achievements of LEADER.

9.45 – 10.30

[CAP legislative framework](#), Guido Castellano,
Karolina Jasińska-Mühleck, DG
AGRI, European
Commission

Guido Castellano and Karolina Jasińska-Mühleck presented the state of play of the CAP legislative framework proposals and the key implications for MS. Mr Castellano emphasised that one of the objectives in the coming months is to discuss the issues related to the performance review and clearance of expenditure. The formal negotiations with both Council and Parliament are likely to begin in Autumn 2019.

Ms Jasińska-Mühleck focused on the consequences of the new proposals for LEADER, in particular the opportunity for the Member States to design support adapted to the objectives and specificity of the tool, as well as the local context. She highlighted links between EAFRD and the CPR, including the common provisions for CLLD applicable to all the ESI Funds.

Q&A

Subgroup members raised several points and questions. Result indicators are needed to monitor policy implementation and progress towards targets, setting the latter ex-ante on an annual basis is challenging for LEADER, this may be easier for other measures. Mr Castellano replied that LEADER would be only one of the interventions contributing to the result indicators at CAP plan level. There would need to be annual milestones reflecting LEADER's contribution. MS can explain any deviation from the planned indicator value in their annual reports.

If a Lead Fund were used for a multi-funded LDS, can the LDS be implemented according to EAFRD rules? DG AGRI responded that this was certainly one of a number of possibilities. The Lead Fund principle was introduced to address the challenge of different rules for each fund used. Ms Jasińska-Mühleck recommended early planning for this involving all the authorities in charge. Eligibility conditions, any delegation of functions should be agreed at the outset and reflected in the relevant programming documents. The intention would be to have one application and one control system covering any multi-fund LDS. Payments, including their possible delegation, would have to follow the Fund specific rules.

One participant noted that many programmes are delayed, due in part to the need for LEADER to access national public fund which are sometimes not released in time. Asked if rules to avoid this in the new Programme had been considered DG AGRI responded that there were no EU level solutions to this at the moment, for LEADER or other intervention types.

Clarification was sought over whether LEADER may support infrastructure and business start-up activities in the new Programme as demarcation

between ERDF and EAFRD was mentioned in the presentation? DG AGRI confirmed that this demarcation rule does not apply to LEADER, this enables LAGs to have the maximum freedom to plan and decide what to support in their area, this is also being debated in the Council.

A concern was raised that if approval of the CAP legislative proposals is not completed under the current EU Parliament transitional rules may be needed. DG AGRI confirmed their working assumption of starting the new programming period in 2021. If delays occur, the Commission will provide transitional rules at the moment required.

ENRD support activities, progress & priorities

10.30 – 10.45

[Overview of ENRD CP LEADER support activities](#),
John Grieve, Peter Toth, ENRD CP

John Grieve and Peter Toth updated participants on LEADER related support activities throughout the year, including the redesigned LEADER Resources web page and the work of the LEADER Simplification Practitioner's Working Group (PWG). Colleagues were encouraged to continue to update the LAG Database and make full use of the Partner Search tool to stimulate transnational cooperation (TNC) activity.

Ms Jasińska-Mühleck confirmed that a workshop on Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) will take place before the summer. MS need to enable the use of SCOs in their RDPs, LAGs and MA/IBs are invited to put forward workable ideas which can be discussed with the EC. MS are encouraged to propose relevant questions, suggestions and topics for the SCO workshop.

Q&A

In response to a query whether the ENRD LAG database linked directly with the SFC it was explained that it did not but there is a link from the SFC web page to the ENRD LAG Database. Asked whether LAGs could attend the Simplification PWG the CP response was that at present this PWG is for MA/PA and NRNs who are working up suggestions that will be put to the LAGs for discussion at a future date.

10.45 – 11.15

[LEADER Cooperation – progress and priorities](#), Peter Toth, Veneta Paneva, ENRD CP

Participants were shown how to find and search the LAG database and LEADER/CLLD Cooperation offers on the ENRD website and how to use the CLLD Partner Search tool search feature. The different roles of the National Manager, LAG Managers and Staff, in relation to the LAG database were explained. The LEADER/CLLD section of the website currently holds 34 factsheets on national and regional rules and procedures, along with DG AGRI and ENRD guidance and tools. There are 81 notified TNC projects on the SFC, the largest group of which involved two EU MS.

Progressing LEADER delivery, performance and achievement

11.45 – 13.00

[Progressing LEADER delivery, performance and achievement](#),
John Grieve, Peter Toth, Susan Grieve, ENRD CP

The [presentation](#) highlighted a number of action points for optimising LEADER implementation in the current and future programming periods which had emerged from the various ENRD activities throughout 2018.

These activities included the [5th LEADER/CLLD Sub-group meeting](#) (March 2018), [ENRD Seminar on 'LEADER: Acting Locally in a Changing World'](#) (October 2018), the [LAG survey findings](#), and meetings of the ENRD LEADER Practitioner-led Working Groups on Cooperation and Innovation.

Discussion

Key action points identified from this included the need for:

- Improved information sharing and coordination, both peer-to-peer and among all actors involved in the LEADER delivery chain;
- Capacity-building activities such as events and platforms for LAGs and MAs to ensure common understanding and adequate governance;
- Simplification, harmonisation and flexibility in implementation to ensure appropriate support for LAGs;
- Improved communication and networking to showcase LEADER added value and increase transferability of LEADER achievements (including through using enriched qualitative indicators);
- Appropriate resourcing of, and trust in, local innovation whilst taking account of the diversity of local contexts.

Discussion on 'Progressing LEADER delivery' focused on three main aspects, the following actions necessary to implement them were suggested.

1. Minimising current implementation bottlenecks:

- Allow for creativity and flexibility to face problems;
- Strike a balance between rules, guidance and LAGs' independence;
- Improve MA level communication to properly address LAG issues;
- Simplified delivery systems with more coordinated action among MS;
- Improve communication and collaboration among LAGs, MAs, NRNs and the European Commission (e.g. re success stories and lessons);
- Sufficient funding for administration and animation; e.g. improved and increased use of lump sums;
- Improved and expanded use of IT systems and new technologies;
- Improved support for monitoring and evaluation;
- Enhanced support for local innovation through streamlined policy.

2. Optimising success factors now:

- Improved communication between LAGs, MAs and beneficiaries through more frequent contacts between LAGs and MAs;
- Capacity building for LAGs, including detailed guidance on SCO, lump sums and umbrella projects;
- Improved LAG communication and dissemination of good LEADER projects and achievement, increase visibility of LEADER support;
- Invest 20% of LAG time in peer learning and networking;
- Improved involvement of stakeholders, especially young people, in the process of designing the local strategies;
- Increase the number of project proposals submitted to LAGs to ensure a smooth process in case of failure;
- A holistic approach to LEADER innovation, including appropriate LAG animation, training and use of consultancy services.

3. Optimising success factors in the future, post-2020 period:

- A more risk-oriented control system (decided at MS level);
- Preserve LEADER's development ethos i.e. beyond project funding by recognising capacity building as a critical success factor in both European and national fora;

- Increased exchanges among MS to address divergent CLLD rules and implementing practice; ongoing dialogue between the national actors involved and EU level peer-to-peer exchange is required;
- Improve indicators and evaluation of LEADER's added value in terms of economic and territorial impacts as a means of mobilising citizens;
- Allow innovative projects to be evaluated on the basis of non-numeric, qualitative indicators;
- Work collaboratively along the delivery chain to implement LEADER efficiently and rapidly in the post-2020 Strategic Plans framework;
- Ensure simplification, low administrative burden and the avoidance of 'gold plating', including through timely post-2020 preparations;
- Enhance the use of SCOs, including for innovative projects;
- Facilitate TNC through the timely approval of projects;
- Ensure LAG independence and adequate qualification through capacity building.

Ensuring results and added value: LAG self-assessment

14.30 – 15.45

[LAG self-assessment, John Grieve, ENRD CP](#)

John Grieve fed back on LAG self-assessment findings from the Rust seminar and introduced three examples of current self-assessment approaches from a Managing Authority, a LAG and a network perspective.

[LAG self-assessment in Austria, Julian Gschnell, Austrian MA](#)

To ensure results and added value LAGs in Austria were required to include a chapter on Monitoring and Evaluation in their LDS. This includes monitoring of internal LAG structures and the use of a mandatory impact orientated monitoring system, identifying 'who does what, when and how'. This information is communicated to the MA by the LAGs, usually through a Quality Management Board, with enhanced reporting for 2019.

[LAG self-assessment in Finland, Marjo Tolvanen, LAG Sepra](#)

In Finland LAG Self-Assessment is built into their Quality Management System. Marjo explained the reasons for this active quality management system and how it was built with support and guidance from the NRN/NSU drawing on experience from the 2007-2013 period. She explained that self-assessment is done according to set criteria, on a scheduled basis and from the respective customer, economic and development perspectives.

[LAG self-assessment in France, Lucie Paquet MA of Ile de France and Dorian Spaak, LAG Plateau de Saclay](#)

The Ile de France MA outsourced the design of an evaluation tool, this is now implemented by all their LAGs. Each LAG has its own specific framework, the animation and cooperation measure indicators are common. The evaluation system is designed to assess impact, involve stakeholders and build a shared vision and can be used by LAGs or externally. LAGs can use self-assessment outputs as a decision making tool to guide the LDS and communicate the added value of LEADER to the wider territory. Self-assessment using this networked approach is an effective way to keep people involved in the LAG ensuring openness and frankness.

Discussion

Participants then discussed how to deliver and follow up self-assessment.

What actions are you taking to promote / deliver self-assessment?

- To promote self-assessment broader civil society has to be involved – you need 'local watch dogs' – this cannot be done only by the LAG;
- Evaluation to be promoted as a positive activity, not a negative monitoring exercise. Outputs useful in advertising LAG's good work;

- Ensure sufficient funds for evaluation are invested and available from the beginning right through to the end of the programme;
- Use new technology, e.g. a small survey published via Google Forms received 200 local responses, it was promoted in newspapers etc.;
- All the stakeholders in the delivery chain should do self-assessment, including MAs, peer-to-peer auditing between MAs recommended;
- Suggest creating links between EU MS. Self-assessment to be built into programming to allow peer-to-peer assessment between MS.

What actions to follow up from self-assessment are needed?

- Actions to be LAG specific based on their self-assessment outcomes;
- Communicate results to the rest of civil society and take any necessary corrective actions;
- Mobilise more local stakeholders;
- Ensure the results are built into the planning of future LDS measures;
- LEADER self-assessment should take the broader development context (other territorial funds, etc.) into consideration.

Ensuring results and added value: Communication

14.30 – 15.45

[Communicating LEADER practice and achievement](#),
John Grieve, ENRD CP

The current and future importance of communicating LEADER practice and achievements and what makes this specific was highlighted.

A distinction should be made between basic, quantitative indicators for measuring LEADER success and additional, qualitative ones. The latter can tell a fuller, more convincing story of the real value of a LEADER project.

The role of LAGs as communicators was emphasised in terms of reaching the wider public, but also as recipients of information from the MAs.

[Communicating LEADER in Germany](#), Anke Wehmeyer,
German Rural Network support unit

Anke Wehmeyer's presentation provided examples of how the German NRR Support Unit communicates about LEADER. Over and above regular coverage in the NSU's main publications and media (magazine, newsletter, website and social networks), LEADER is also communicated via a project competition with the winner announced at the annual International Green Week. In addition, they have an online database of 900 LEADER projects and have produced short videos on a selection of these.

Discussion

Participants discussed and identified ways to better communicate about LEADER practice and achievements with three distinct stakeholder groups:

- policy developers and decision makers;
- policy deliverers;
- beneficiaries and the wider public.

Policy developers and decision makers: It is important to identify who these people are in your own MS. It may often be politicians or higher-level officials that decide on budget and design the overall framework. LAGs may not normally be in close contact with these groups. It is vital to identify the right people in each context and target both the message and the method for delivery to this specific target audience.

The most important message to pass on to politicians is that LEADER/CLLD is a relatively inexpensive method of building trust and reconnecting with many of the rural people who may feel that have been left out of global

developments. It does this by going beyond simply creating jobs; it improves the quality of life and strengthens the fabric of rural society, in very important, but harder to measure ways.

Real life stories, told by the people who have seen improvements to their lives, can be a particularly powerful tool for getting the broader message across to policy makers. Participants argued that decision makers ultimately want this message to be backed up by facts and figures. They further argued that this is why a lot more needs to be done to measure and communicate the intangible benefits of LEADER.

Policy deliverers: Communicating that LEADER is doing a ‘good job’ in delivering what the LAG territory needs is most important. It is agile and flexible and delivers real benefits across a wide breath of needs. LAGs and local champions are the people best able to convey this. It was thought important to also consider using ‘people who speak the language of policy deliverers’. Participants thought that the most effective communication channels to use here would be digital media, including audio / video, podcasts etc, but not printed media. These mediums can convey LEADER benefits from the perspective of real people, not in an abstract way.

Beneficiaries and the wider public: The most important aspects to communicate to these stakeholders were the ‘uniqueness’ and the ‘how’ of the LEADER approach. It is a positive example of an EU wide initiative, created and delivered in local communities to address their distinct local needs. Sharing real examples and communicating more widely can inspire and motivate others to become involved in LEADER. LAG partnerships and existing beneficiaries are the most credible people to do this. One LAG used ‘active visits’ to demonstrate LEADER achievements, e.g. bicycle tours around their area visiting LEADER projects en route proved very popular and a great way to show the benefits in action.

Closing session

16.45 – 17.00

Closing and next steps

Neda Skakelja (DG AGRI) thanked all colleagues for their contribution and input over a long and busy day. Looking to the future there is a lot of interest from colleagues as well as many questions, this highlighted the need for continued communication and further exchanges.

Many discussions need to take place at MS level, through subsidiarity they need to consider how to implement LEADER in future in their own MS.

It was clear that continued communication and flexibility on all levels was needed to address the bottlenecks in the current programme.

In addition to remaining flexible and adaptable to finding solutions, it is critical to assess what works in LEADER. Self-assessment can be a very good tool to demonstrate the results and the added value of the LAG and LEADER approach. Ultimately, it does not matter how well we ‘do what we do’ in LEADER if it is only known to the LEADER community and we have no proof. At this stage in the process the importance of demonstrating, communicating and showcasing LEADER’s achievements is critical.