European Rural Networks' Assembly

Permanent Subgroup on LEADER and Community-Led Local Development

Report
5th Meeting, 8 March 2018

Centre Albert Borschette (Room 0D)

Rue Froissart, 36

1040 Brussels

Welcome and Introduction	
09.30 – 09.40 Welcome and Introduction Mario Milouchev, DG AGRI John Grieve ENRD Contact Point	*Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided* Mr Milouchev welcomed participants to the 5th meeting of the Permanent Subgroup on LEADER and Community Led Local Development. He stressed the importance of this stage in the programme cycle and the opportunity of using the evidence gathered on LEADER implementation to contribute to improvements. The ENRD Contact Point presented the agenda.
The state of play and future developments	
09.40 – 10.40 Update on implementation of LEADER and EU level changes in the legislation, Karolina Jasinska-Mühleck, DG AGRI CAP Communication, Guido Castellano, DG AGRI Q&A	*Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided* Karolina Jasinska-Mühleck (DG AGRI) provided an update on the state of play of LEADER implementation and described the developments to the legal framework. She further explained the modifications in the Omnibus regulation and the amendments to the EAFRD control regulation. Guido Castellano (DG AGRI) presented main elements of the CAP Communication and explained certain aspects of the proposed new delivery system at EU and Member State levels. The future CAP aims to provide a basic EU governance structure and requirements which gives Member States the freedom to define the detailed implementation rules to be applied under their CAP Strategic Plans. Subgroup members raised a number of questions. With regards to introducing Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) at LAG level, they asked whether this required a prior amendment of the RDP. Karolina Jasinska-Mühleck replied that this would require an amendment to the RDPs but that there is no need to explain the methodology. RDPs will also have to be amended to allow the use of draft budgets. LAG`s role in the process should be indicated. Once the RDP is amended the LAGs can then develop their proposals. DG AGRI will organise training for MAs and LAGs on how to put this into practice. Participants suggested that future indicators should reflect the LEADER principles and methodology and take a longer term and wider perspective. For example, the number of jobs created within a 7 year period often does not reflect the longer term and spectrum of benefits produced by LEADER. Concerns were expressed about how the bottom-up approach would fit into the new delivery approach as some Member States may apply a more top down approach. Other questions included: Whether there would be a ring-fenced budget allocation for LEADER? Will there be Commission Guidance for the new delivery system with specific LEADER provisions? Will the CAP Strategic Plans allow for multi-fund CLLD in which so much has been invested? Guido Castellano indicated that as much of the preparatory work is ongoing he could not provide very specific answers to all these questions. The ring-fencing of the LEADER budget is still under discussion. Inter-service working

	groups are also discussing the multi-fund approach and the aim is to have a consistent legal framework across all the ESI Funds. DG AGRI is aware of the specificities of LEADER and is working to find pertinent indicators. In the future, guidance is likely to take a different shape - with fewer EU level rules and more focus on good practices as opposed to legal interpretations. Mario Milouchev confirmed that no definite answer could be given regarding future budgetary ring fencing. He also indicated that, in the future, there would be an even greater need to share good practices and so rural networking would probably have a bigger role.
CLLD Implementation under ERDF and ESF: study by DG REGIO	
10.40 – 11.00 Loris Servillo, Researcher, Leuven University	*Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided* Loris Servillo presented the results of the research he has undertaken for DG REGIO into CLLD implementation under the ERDF and ESF. He provided updated statistics on the extent and way in which Member States are using the multi-fund approach. This was illustrated using specific case studies from selected Member States.
Improving LEADER/CLLD implementation: Part I	
11.30 – 12.00 Feedback and discussion of emerging priorities from recent LEADER/CLLD activities, *ENRD Contact Point* Exploratory opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee: advantages of CLLD approach, *Kristiina Tammets, expert* Q & A	*Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided* John Grieve and Peter Toth (ENRD CP) presented a summary of the main ENRD CP LEADER activities undertaken during the past year including the Practitioner-Led Working Groups and associated events, the joint DG Seminar on CLLD in Gyor (Hungary) and the LEADER Reflection Group. They summarised the emerging lessons for improving LEADER implementation and meeting support needs. Kristina Tammets (EESC expert) presented the 'Exploratory Opinion' of the European Economic and Social Committee on "What kind of advantages the Community-led Local Development multi-funded approach creates for integrated local and rural development". This investigates the benefits of CLLD for Member States, identifies possible bottlenecks and makes recommendations for their resolution and for the future approach to CLLD. Participants raised a number of questions about the EESC Opinion. The Commission was asked to comment on the findings of the Opinion on the importance of the multi-funded approach and how it could be improved. A specific point was raised about the proposal for a single integrated CLLD fund as a means for simplifying the implementation process in the Member States. Mario Milouchev (DG AGRI) replied that, at this stage, DG AGRI could only assure participants that there will be room for LEADER in the future CAP as it is mentioned in the Communication on the Future of Food and Farming, and that Member States will have a bigger role in designing it in their programmes. All four Directorates General involved in CLLD are jointly discussing the future of CLLD and DG AGRI is willing to continue with the multi-funded CLLD approach in the future.

ENRD LAG Survey on the implementation of LEADER	
12.00 – 13.00 Presentation by *Peter Toth and* *Susan Grieve,* *ENRD CP* Q & A	*Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided* Susan Grieve and Peter Toth (ENRD CP) presented the results of the ENRD LAG survey conducted in 2017. This had received responses from 710 LAGs in 27 Member States. The presentation and survey were well received by members and led to questions and observations on the content, process and use of the findings. In response to requests to access national data for those Member States that have contributed to the survey, Mario Milouchev (DG AGRI) replied that national reports will be prepared for countries with replies from five or more LAGs (or 100% response rate). This is to preserve confidentiality of LAGs where there are small numbers of responses from the Member State. A number of Member States expressed an interest in replicating the survey at national level. A question was raised about whether 710 LAG responses from 2346 surveyed was satisfactory and whether participation in this kind of survey could be increased. Mario Milouchev replied that 30% is a statistically satisfactory percentage response in social research. John Grieve (ENRD CP) stated that as an evaluator he viewed this response rate as relatively high and positive. Participants also asked the ENRD CP to share the lessons learned from the previous programming period and identify the improvements that have been made as a result of these. John Grieve replied that this is an evidence-based LAG survey, part of a wider approach linked to other initiatives. Although it focuses on the current period and reflects what is happening now, its lessons are also transferable to the future. One member noted that the length of time LAG managers work for their LAGs affects their understanding and the effectiveness of the way they work, so could the survey provide such a breakdown? John Grieve replied that LAGs were not asked for this information, but cross tabulation of results such as the age and type of LAG was possible.
Improving LEADER/CLLD implementation: Part II	
14.30 – 15.50 Group work on selected topics from the LAG Survey and other recent activities **Facilitated by the ENRD CP**	*Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided* Five working groups discussed four topics selected by participants from the summary findings of the ENRD CP activities. The aim was to identify factors which work well in LEADER implementation and to identify practical means for improving weaker aspects of implementation. **Working Group 1: Enabling LAGs to focus more on animation, project support and development.** Proposals included: • An animation toolkit: possibly developed by the CP with practical examples of good animation which has brought about more than just good project results.

- Increased peer-to-peer exchanges and mentoring is needed.
- Recruit the `right` people and resource them properly – for 7 years - to build the necessary trust and thematic knowledge (organisational memory).
- Training on the LEADER approach and animation (animation requires a specific skillset) both for LAG members and LAG staff.
- A thematic as well as geographic approach to animation, reach out to existing networks for training/expertise for both animators and LAG managers.
- LDS should be truly living documents and animation should be an ongoing and adaptable activity within it.
- Effective CLLD should be equivalent to effective animation.

Working Group 2: Modifying Member State's existing delivery systems to improve LEADER delivery and results. Proposals included:
- A platform for preparatory exchange between MAs – for example, regarding LAG competences (simply sharing email contacts would help).
- Introduce a common lump sum for LAG running costs.
- Avoiding gold-plating by LAGs themselves.
- A simplification workshop for LAGs.
- More good LEADER management/implementation system examples.
- Review delivery systems to identify where administrative burden can be reduced e.g. working groups to identify possible improvements in the current period.

Working Groups 3 + 4: Simplification - moving forward together at the Member State level. Two working groups firstly identified examples of good practice in simplification and then made suggestions: Examples included:

- Setting up coordination groups between LAGs and MAs to establish a culture of communication and 'working together'. (e.g. LAG, MA, PA – in Denmark, Romania)
- Exchanging best practice from EAFRD and other funds on the use of SCO for different cost items e.g. preparatory support, running costs, travel, events etc. (Poland, Slovakia)
- Design of SCOs should not be too top-down and their actual benefits should be demonstrated.
- Delegating more authority to LAGs. (Greece, Slovakia)
- Creating single integrated and transparent IT systems with full workflow and a single application form. (Austria, Estonia)
- Committing co-funding upfront as an obligation.
- Department set up where PA and MA work together to coordinate LEADER work. (Sweden)
- Holding 'start-up` meetings for each approved project with LAG, MA, beneficiary and PA participation. (Netherlands)
- Applying the rules of the lead partner of a TNC project in other partner countries. (Luxembourg, Germany)

Suggestions included:

- Reducing the number of levels of project controls and the cost of controls.
- In designing controls take account of the marginal cost e.g. of reducing the failure rate from 4% to 3%.
- Getting Paying Agencies more involved throughout the processes.
- Presenting practical examples of good management practices e.g. cooperation in the delivery chain in EU level meetings.
- Special EU level workshops to discuss technical details.
- Getting governance systems right and mutually understand the different roles in the LEADER delivery system.
- Having an open, positive, `can do` attitude understanding that LEADER is for local development.
- Getting Paying Agency and audit representatives more involved in finding solutions. For example, EU audit should share best practice from other countries.

Working Group 5: Demonstrating the added value of LEADER. Participants argued that it is crucial to decide what added value is, who defines it and how it will be assessed. To ensure a common understanding of the added value of LEADER in the delivery chain, participants made the following proposals:

- Collect good quality information.
- Ensure that local people/beneficiaries participate in demonstrating the added value of LEADER.
- Communicate good examples/case studies by looking at entire LAG areas/regions instead of separate projects.
- Present not only quantitative data (indicators), but also qualitative aspects (stories, social capital – real added value).
- Understand what the added value sought from LEADER is at the EU level.

A "Quality management system" from Finland was mentioned as a concrete example of improving knowledge about LEADER in the delivery chain.

Update on ENRD CP support tools to LEADER	
15.50 – 16.10 Presentation Veneta Paneva ENRD CP	*Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided* New interactive tools for LAGs were introduced by Veneta Paneva from the ENRD CP. First, she explained the next stage for the LAG database with considerable expansion of LAG data, the type of database users and their roles. Secondly, she described a tool for CLLD partner search to support LAG to LAG cooperation.
Evaluating CLLD: Handbook for LAGs and FLAGs	
16.10 – 16.40 Monica Veronesi FARNET	*Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided* Monica Veronesi of the FARNET Support Unit presented the Evaluating CLLD: Handbook for LAGs and FLAGs developed in conjunction with the FAME (Fisheries and Aquaculture Monitoring and Evaluation) Support Unit. The handbook, designed on behalf of the four CLLD DGs, draws on information from a survey of FLAGs, a review of evaluation practice and in-depth case

studies. The user-friendly handbook has been drafted in a practical and hands-on way. FARNET welcomed feedback from practitioners in the room.

The work by FARNET was well appreciated by participants. Monica Veronesi said that FARNET had undertaken a literature review of 98 different publications. A question was raised about how the CLLD Handbook fits with the Evaluation Helpdesk's guidance on LEADER evaluation. Monica Veronesi replied that the CLLD Handbook builds on what has been done previously but that this publication does not deal with Programme evaluation. It is very much a practitioner's handbook which can be used by CLLD LAGs across the ESI funds.

Closing session and next steps

16.40 – 17.10 Information of LEADER Evaluation workshop, Finland *Valdis Kudiņš, Evaluation Helpdesk* **AGM – Advanced Gateway to EU Meetings** *Isabelle Tranchant, DG AGRI, European Commission* **Information about forthcoming activities** **Closing remarks by the chair**	*Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided* Valdis Kudins (Evaluation Helpdesk) provided information about a LEADER Evaluation workshop taking place on 17-18 May 2018 in Helsinki. Members were invited participate. Finland's NRN invited members to arrive on 16 May. Isabelle Tranchant (DG AGRI) introduced the Advanced Gateway to EU Meetings (AGM), an online meeting management system for EU Institutions. Alistair Prior (Scottish Rural Network) presented the upcoming OECD Rural Development conference in Edinburgh which includes a series of pre-conference workshops organised by the ENRD Contact Point. **Closing remarks:** Mario Milouchev (DG AGRI) thanked participants for their contributions. He suggested that even though LEADER is seen by many to be overly complex as shown in the LAG Survey, the workshops had been positive. They showed that much can be improved in this period and that we should focus on the solutions. LEADER should concentrate on delivering results. He invited LAGs to start self-evaluation work as around half of all LAGs have not yet begun this process. Self-evaluation should be a learning process and could help provide evidence and showcase the added-value of LEADER. Mr Milouchev referred to the point made in the morning session that the EC legislative proposals should be finalised by 29th May 2018. He said it is therefore crucial for informed voices about the importance of LEADER to local communities to be heard now and encouraged everyone to take an active role in highlighting the beneficial role that LEADER is playing. He thanked the contributors to the LAG Survey advising that DG AGRI is investigating the best way to disseminate the results. In the afternoon many examples of animation, simplification and LEADER added value were provided showing the benefits of learning from each other. Even though cooperation was not discussed, it is of high importance and learning from local actors in other regions and countries should only be encouraged.