

## **National Rural Networks**

### **Summary of the third meeting of the National Support Units (NSUs)**

**Brussels, 1 April 2009**

#### **Round table discussions and NSU collaboration**

##### **Introduction**

Welcome and introduction by Martin Law, EN RD Contact Point, who outlined the items on the agenda. It was noted that the agenda was as previously agreed at the 2<sup>nd</sup> NSU meeting in Prague, and that this meeting was being kindly hosted by the Belgian NSUs for Flanders and Wallonia. The agenda was based on several inputs: planned 'themed workshops' to be based on the results of feedback from the NSUs further to the 'Capacity Building Seminar'; and a 'speed dating' exercise proposed and coordinated by the Walloon network, where NSUs had been asked to provide details of possible areas of collaboration with other NSUs, such as organising joint events. On the basis of this feedback, workshops were organised around identified themes, and the 'speed dating' exercise took place in the afternoon.

Mr Haris Martinos, Team Leader, Contact Point also introduced some specific elements of the proposed 2<sup>nd</sup> year work programme, in respect of planned tools and services related to Transnational Cooperation and Networking, and invited comments.

##### **Morning session: round table discussions, aims and objectives**

As was mentioned during the 2<sup>nd</sup> NSU meeting in Prague, it was foreseen that the 'Capacity Building' seminar would trigger further thoughts and ideas about networking, which could be addressed during the course of this meeting in smaller 'discussion groups'. The NSUs identified some key areas of networking which formed the basis of 'structured' workshops. Although it was planned to hold two rounds of workshops, it was apparent that the depth of discussion required more time than was foreseen, and on this basis it was agreed to continue with the themes at the next meeting to allow a greater participation.

The outcomes of the discussions of the individual workshops are reported below:

##### **Workshop 1: "What are the possible functions of a Network?"**

Animator: Anke Wehmeyer, Rapporteur: Nele Vanslembrouck

This workshop was mainly chosen by those National Support Units with no or a low level of networking experience.

Questions to be asked: What do you expect from yourself? What do you expect from your country? Top-down versus bottom-up approach?

Topics raised by the group:

1. What is (are) the specific target group(s)? On European level? At the national administration? Within the rural actors in your country?
2. What is networking? Knowing each other; Understanding each other; Getting together; Cooperation

***How to be a successful network on national level:*** Tips on how to involve people at national level?

**First task: SWOT analysis ('strengths & weaknesses' and 'needs & priorities' at national level).** Using the same criteria this method can also be used at the European level.

**Second task: To define the groups that need to belong to your network.** How to encourage them when they already have established their own meetings & groups? The NSU has a specific task of bringing these people (groups) together in a common meeting. The NSU can deliver added value as a gatherer of information and facilitator of exchange. This has to be communicated to all rural actors!

An example from Bulgaria showed that this can only work through a 'slow step by step' approach. They started with information seminars (direct contact with large groups), followed by open door sessions at community level and completed by visits to individual farms with experts.

A strategy based on finding friends! Build trust between the administration and all levels and sectors based on a strategic approach linked to information requirements. Central elements for finding friends include building trust and encouraging stakeholders by a 'step by step approach'. This enables a move from a small to a wider spectrum of rural actors. It is important to have an exchange of information and communication "from the bottom to the top" and vice versa. Making **direct** contact leads to: discussion, trust & friendship, and being aware of different approaches and knowledge about other policy areas. Not least, find common objectives & differences, since these common elements can give birth to a 'win-win'-feeling for all partners in the meeting.

#### **How to be a successful network on European level: some tips:**

**Firstly get together and know each other!** How? Every member state should analyse its own strengths & weaknesses. Combined at an international level we all learn about the situation in other Member States, which can lead to better cooperation. This is a task for the national network at the national level; and for the Contact Point at the European level. The Contact Point can also: define needs & priorities on a European level; answer questions about demarcation; build links to other EU Funds; and help in understanding the role of the European Commission.

#### **Workshops 2 "Innovative combined practices – creativity" and Workshop 3 "Animation and communication tools/methods"** were combined.

Animators/Rapporteurs: Pascale Van Doren & Dieter Wagner

#### **1. Methodology**

- Introduction of the aims of the round table: *what are the key issues faced by NSUs to develop innovative and efficient animation and communication tools/methods?*
- Overview presentation of experiences and innovative practices regarding animation and communication tools/methods by each NSU taking part in the round table;
- Discussion between participants and exchanges of views on key issues regarding innovative and efficient animation and communication tools/methods including suggestions of initial ideas and solutions.

#### **2. Main issues and initial ideas suggested by the group**

1. Networking and establishment of links across rural development axes: facilitation of stakeholders' cross-participation in existing, specific networks, through, e.g.:
  - Development of "horizontal" working themes to attract and integrate several groups of stakeholders;
  - Study visits designed and organised to support a multi-stakeholder/cross-sectoral approach, joint events with complementary structures or with other NSUs;

- Development of advisory groups as bridge builders between axes and/or various groups of rural development stakeholders.
2. Develop tailored animation and communication tools considering the various groups/levels of rural development stakeholders, their priorities and related needs:
    - Undertake observation of needs, if appropriate and possible down to the local level, through questionnaires.
  3. Consider experience and background of a variety of relevant networks (Leader, SME's, etc) and related needs to reach successful communication and networking:
    - Transfer of good practices to rural development networking.
  4. Promotion of the existence of NRNs, targeting the local, regional and national level and sustainability of networking:
    - NSUs must behave as service units and propose concrete and needs driven solutions;
    - Multiply impact of promotion e.g. through regional units/info points to raise awareness about the existence of the network; in parallel coordinate efforts between different levels to avoid confusion and duplication: improve convergence through a consultation process between national and regional units before establishing the NSU's action programme;
    - Develop attractive and innovative tools e.g. a competition for ecological farms, movies, creative workshops, dynamic websites; offer pedagogical guidelines using a journalistic/lively style.

### 3. Conclusions

There is a confirmed need to continue the discussion and exchange of practical information about operational tools to stimulate and further sustain networking at local, regional and national level.

From the initial ideas and solutions suggested, two major groups of networking tools evolved:

- Learning tools, supporting the capacity development of Rural Networks' NSUs, responding to their need for a pedagogical and practical approach to communication:
  - Issue-based and horizontally themed cooperation with complementary structures and NSUs of other Member States: organising field trips to other Member States, visiting each other's events, organising joint events;
  - Involvement of innovative actors and journalists in the communication of good practice, in order to ensure the provision of concise, attractive and practical information.
- Promotional tools, raising the awareness about the existence of the NRN and establishing an attractive service offer that is needs-driven and solutions-oriented:
  - Use of NSU funds to involve stakeholders, launching small calls for proposals for the preparation and implementation of specific NRN events;
  - Regular screening of regional/local level action plans and organisation of regional/local level surveys to allow the NSU to present and position itself as a service provider offering relevant and practical support;
  - Offering network participants access to solutions, thus establishing the NSU as the 'contact point' where issues and ideas will be pooled (e.g. identifying experts to provide specific/thematic support, providing advisory support on funding issues, assisting/mediating to overcome issues with administration etc).

## **Workshop report 4: "Network Administration"**

Animator: Martin Law, Rapporteur: Marga de Jong

### **Key question to address: How to set up an efficient network administration?**

#### The main areas that were discussed:

##### a) Network administration:

Have the right team of people. It was considered important to select people according to the skills required in order to cover all four axes of the EAFRD. Typically such a team would need to include: an ICT specialist; an agricultural specialist; publication/communication specialist; event specialist; an administrator; experience from the Leader period; and a specialist in the 'social domain'.

In addition to these specific skills, administrations need to take into account of: the different national/cultural/ethnic (including language) aspects, for example in Belgium; consider 'entrepreneurial aspects'; be able to take into account of 'gender and generation' issues; and have flexibility within the team of people being able to cover a wide range of issues. It was also considered useful to try to involve representatives from other 'expert networks' in the team as this is an excellent way of providing additional expertise.

##### b) Financial aspects:

It was considered that cost will vary over time, but that 'start-up' costs in the first year related to certain tasks (web-site development), as well as meeting the requirement of guidelines and regulations make the first year more expensive. This also concerns technical assistance where a minimum % has to be made available from the budget. Network administrations also need to take account of the 'funding demarcation' between activities carried out between the Managing (national authority) and the network support unit. However, there is also scope for sharing costs and expenses for certain activities such as events. Here it may be possible to work in partnership with various organizations and provide resources, such as time and skills, rather than a monetary contribution. Mention was made of the 'cheque system' (which is used in Sweden), and which is useful in certain cases such as 'operational start-ups' and which avoids the need for 'public tender/procurement'. Another consideration was to open up certain areas of the network's activities to 'private partners' who could contribute financially to certain areas of network activity.

##### c) Internal network relations

Internal communication with other departments is important in order to ensure a good level of coordination. The importance of networking with the Managing Authorities (particularly when the national support unit is outsourced) and involve them as far as possible in activities was seen as important. To do this requires an investment in time and communication. One possible way of improving network relations could be to have a 'seconded expert' from the Managing/national authority involved as this would provide another view of the network from the partner.

##### d) Evaluation

The NSUs are concerned with self evaluation for their own needs, and have developed criteria for their own needs. However it was seen as important to have a European Perspective, which would help to understand some of the best network practices, for example, to share best practice (learning from others) about organizing events. In order to transfer this best practice it was suggested that visits to other networks was an appropriate method. In addition it would be good to consider 'e-learning' as a platform (as proposed via the 'My EN RD' part of the EN RD web-site).

## **Workshop report nr 5: "Co-operation and study visits"**

Animator/Rapporteur: Benoit Delaite

A mapping exercise was carried out in order to see how those NSUs present in the workshop are organised for co-operation, with remarks from the individual NSUs tabulated (see below).

### **Organisation of National Units:**

Component	Italy	Spain	Estonia	Flanders	Bulgaria	Finland	Wallonia
Managing Authority	Public	Public	Public	Public	(Public)	Public	Public
Network facilitator	Public	Public	Public	Public	(Corporate)?	Public	Corporate
Technical assistance (LAG)	Public	(Public)	Public	Public	(Public)	Public	Semi-public
Support to co-operation (LAG, Axis 4)	Regional funds	National funds	Unknown	Regional funds	Unknown	National funds	Regional funds
Support to co-operation (Other axis)	National funds	National funds	Unknown	None	National funds	National funds	Regional funds
Remarks	1		2		3	4	5

### **Remarks:**

1	In Italy, the national support structures have access to supports other than RDP in order to facilitate co-operation, and help generally to drive RDP priorities towards other programmes.
2	The situation is quite new in Estonia and not well known by the participant.
3	The LAGs are not yet established in Bulgaria. It is important to know about best practice on different aspects of cooperation from experienced countries.
4	Finland does not provide different support for Axis 4 (LAGs): all measures are eligible to receive support for co-operation actions.
5	Wallonia established a special support for axis 4 (LAGs), but also included direct support for co-operation in axis 1-3.

### **Actions for developing transnational co-operation:**

#### **Resources available for LAGs to co-operate**

Some resources are dedicated to help LAGs find partners and activities for co-operation. In Wallonia, LAGs try to develop both inter-territorial and transnational co-operation. Partners from the other axes can also be involved in such contacts: LAGs could play a role as a local/regional 'template' to develop transnational co-operation on sectorial topics for the advantage of their 'Task Force' members (such as environmental organisations, professional associations...).

In particular, the LAGs in New Members States should greatly benefit from cooperation with experienced LAGs.

**Help and support to link with Interreg funds:**

Example: in Italy, an agreement has been made between the National and regional units to guide applications for regional funds if rural development priorities are addressed. This facility is available also for LAGs.

In Spain, the same approach is established to favour access to UNESCO-biosphere programme.

**Study trips:**

Finland has positive results in organising study tours. It is possible to involve more than two countries. Axis 2 (but not only) is a good place for this activity.

Tips for maximising the impacts:

- Participants agree with foreign partners which activities to share; priority should be given to those who are more pro-active (leaders).
- Benchmarking: comparing procedures, bureaucracy (to determine flexibility).
- Costs could be partly at the expense of the beneficiaries.
- Results must be clearly identified in order to show that the trip was worthwhile and in order to facilitate feed-back of the results.
- Timely feed-back needs to happen (within 2 weeks).
- Results need to be seen from the point of view of both parties (the visitors and the hosting organisation).
- Activities based on results must be identified at an early stage in order to encourage and develop their impact.

**Expert exchange:** This is a quick way to boost new activities in a region or a country.

**Common analysis:** A cross-analysis between Network Units about common rural development thematic activities is useful. LAGs have a bottom-up approach that facilitates the identification of common issues. Beneficiaries from axis 1, 2 or 3 can work on sectorial issues as a way to find common themes (example: forest policy and environment, climate change and agriculture...)

**Outputs to include:**

- Abstracts and methodological guidelines for: mainstreaming of best practices at Europe Union and/or national level; adapting projects
- Changing mind and habits for: accelerating adoption of new methods; facilitating social innovation

**Some ideas on how to boost co-operation for new groups or teams****For the European Contact Point:**

- Data base on beneficiaries, projects
- Co-operation fair
- Training workshop on co-operation.

**For activities of the National Units Network:**

- List of other programmes supporting co-operation actions (SEF, Interreg, MEDA, IPA, ERDF, ENPI, Biosphere UNESCO, GEF...), conditions to apply to these programmes, best practices in relation with RDP.
- Sub-networks on sectorial thematic (example: ELREN)
- Study tour on common topics (1. identification of common issues, 2. identification of participants, 3. visits, 4. Feed-back).

### **Afternoon session: Speed dating**

The results of the 'speed dating' survey for possible cooperation projects were presented, along with details about how the 'speed dating' was going to take place. Each 'project holder' was allowed 7 minutes to explain to the potential cooperation partner the details of their proposal. Several 'rounds' of dating took place until all participants had been able to meet their 'potential partner' and indicate their interest. The results of the 'speed dating' are attached in Annex.

The results/progress of the 'speed dating' exercise will be monitored and reported back during future NSU meetings.

### **Next steps and next meetings**

It was confirmed that the NSU meeting foreseen to take place after the Coordination Committee in May had been cancelled. Instead, a NSU meeting is planned to take place in Seville on June 8th, and will take place during a Cooperation Fair (June 8-10) that is being organised by the Spanish Managing Authority and the Junta of Andalusia. Mr Eduardo Crespo of the Spanish NSU was invited to give more information of this event. It is proposed that the NSU meeting will take place as a parallel event within the Cooperation Fair, to allow for visits to the Fair/exhibition and possible field visits. More information will be provided at the next NSU meeting.

Participants were thanked for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

N.B. Comments received during this meeting and via the 'evaluation form' will be taken into account in future planning.

## **ANNEX**

### **Speed dating – overview of the 32 \* 'cooperation' projects proposed by NRNs:**

**Table 1. Projects that were 'speed dated' (results are given as 'expressions of interest in the summary below**

<b>Nr</b>	<b>Title of projects</b>	<b>Theme proposed by :</b>
1	Attractiveness of territories (good practices, cooperation fair, local networks)	Sybille FOURNIER, France
2	Thematic Network on Forestry Policies	Massimiliano PIATELLA, Italy
3	Development of Leader methodology	Juha-Matti MARKKOLA, Finland
4	Net Formation Day	Luis FIDLSCHUSTER, Austria
5	Research and development (professional databases, TNC)	György MUDRY, Hungaria
6	Explore greater IT synergies across NNUs e.g. an NNU search engine	John HANNAFIN, Ireland
7	Publication about quality standards in rural tourism + benchmarking	Malvina GONDOVA, Slovakia
8	Thematic Networks on rural Mediterranean Policy	Riccardo PASSERO, Italy
9	Interregional business development - seminar	Marga DE JONG, Netherland
10	Role of landscapes in sustainable rural development	Eduardo Crespo, Spain
11	Benchmarking on relations between agriculture and environment	Benoit DELAITE, Wallonia
12	Peri-urban issues / relations between countryside and city	Nele VANSLEMBROUCK, Flanders
13	Best practices about setting of young farmers, social farming ...	Raffaela DI NAPOLI, Italy
14	Field visits for farmers and local authorities	Françoise BONERT, Luxembourg

\* Of the 32 projects received, 14 (as indicated in Table 1 - above) were 'speed dated' during this meeting



## **Summary and outcomes of "speed dating" \***

*\* proposals in blue italics were not part of this particular exercise, but may be considered for future cooperation projects between NSUs. If you are interested to take part in any of these projects please take direct contact with project proposer.*

### 1. **French rural network:** Sybille FOURNIER

#### Proposal :

- Attractiveness of territories:
  - area management
  - incorporation or preservation of populations in a perspective of sustainable area management
  - development of local networks, including short-distance networks farm and no farm products, forest, biomass

#### Means :

- Capitalisation of good / best practices
- Cooperation fair (all actors of EAFRD, including LAGs.)
- Web site and interactive tools (For the 26 regional networks programs)
- Training

Expressions of interest: Ave Bremse, NRN - Estonia

### 2. **Dutch rural network:** Marga DE JONG

#### Proposal 1 :

- (Inter)regional business development in North Western Europe – Spring 2010

Expressions of interest: Gyorgy Mudri, MA – Hungary; Isabell Friess, NRN – Germany; Luis Fidschuster, NRN - Austria; Emiliya Germanova – National Business Development Network, Bulgaria.

#### Means :

- Take part in this International Event
- Organisation of the next international event on this subject (the second round)

#### *Proposal 2 :*

- *To share about agriculture and care (good and best practices, methodologies, conference) and city/country relations (good and best practices, methodologies, conference, articles)*

### 3. **Finnish rural network:** Juha-Matti MARKKOLA

#### Proposal 1 :

- Development of Leader methodology: New Leader 2.0 -version (axis 3)  
Deadline: June 2010

Expressions of interest: Marieke Koot/Marga de Jong, NRN - Netherlands; Gyorgy Mudri, MA \_ Hungary; Benoit Delaite, NRN – Wallonia, Belgium; Ave Bremse, NRN - Estonia

Proposal 2 :

- *Environment (axis 2) thematic seminar in 2010?*

Proposal 3 :

- *To share about experience of International Leader-seminar, Levi, Finland (17-19.3.2009)*

4. **Austrian rural network:** Luis FIDLSCHUSTER

Proposal 1 :

- Net formation days (axis 4)

Means :

- International conference with sportive LAG competition, exchange of experience and cooperation fair.

Expressions of interest: Marga de Jong, NRN - Netherlands; Nele Vanslembrouck, NRN - Flanders, Belgium; Isabell Friess, NRN – Germany; Françoise Bonert, NRN - Luxembourg; Benoit Delaite, NRN – Wallonia, Belgium; Ave Bremse, NRN - Estonia; Emiliya Germanova – National Business Development Network, Bulgaria.

Proposal 2 :

- *Views from Work – women in rural areas (axis 3 & 4)*

Means :

- *Publication - pictures book*

5. **Hungarian rural network:** György Mudri

Proposal 1 :

- Research and development (professional databases, TNC) (axis 1-4)

Expressions of interest: Paivi Kujala, NRN – Finland; Sirma Komitiva – National Business Development Network, Bulgaria; Krassimira Kaneva, MA - Bulgaria

Proposal 2 :

- *Best practices – axis 1-4*

Proposal 3 :

- *Leader TNC (partner searching tool, experts database)*

Means:

- *International event, study tours on renewable energy, local products, agro-tourism*

*Needs: network managing tools, how to manage thematic groups, tool to develop bottom-up in cooperation, tool of the best practices which reaches all the four axes.*

6. **Irish rural network:** John Hannafin

Proposals:

1. *Developing a set of strategic performance indicators for the NNUs*
2. *Developing a database of conference speakers*
3. *Developing a database of case studies developed using a standardized format*
4. *Explore the use of common content/gifts for delegate packs*
5. Explore greater IT synergies across NNUs e.g. an NNU search engine

Expressions of interest (proposal 5): Chris Parkin, NRN – Scotland; Stefan Kamper, NRN – Germany; Marieke Koot/Marga de Jong, NRN - Netherlands

7. **Italian rural network:** Riccardo PASSERO, Massimiliano PIATTELLA, Raffaella DI NAPOLI

Proposal 1 :

Best practices analysis about :

- Setting up of young farmers (generation renewal)
- Social farming
- Cross compliance and Axis II management

Means :

- exchange of know-how, experiences, best practices and innovations

Expressions of interest: Nele Vanslebrouck, NRN – Flanders, Belgium; Paivi Kujala, NRN – Finland; Marikene koot, NRN- NL

Proposal 2 :

To implement Thematic Networks:

- **Thematic Network on rural Mediterranean policy** (*Italy, Spain, France, Greece, Portugal, Cyprus, Malta*)

Expressions of interest: Sirma Komitova – National Business Development Network, Bulgaria; Donald Aquilino, MA – Malta; Sybille Fournier, MA – France; Maria-Cristina Makrandreou, MA – Greece; Teresa Escudeiro, NRN - Portugal

- **Thematic Network on Forestry policies** (*Austria, France, Slovenia, Germany - Alpine area; Spain, Portugal, Bulgaria, Romania (for Central Italy and Southern Italy forests)*)

Expressions of interest: Eduardo Crespo, NRN- Spain; Isabell Friess, NRN- Germany; Benoit Delaite, NRN – Walonia, Belgium; Paivi Kujala, NRN – Finland; Matej Stepec, MA- Slovenia.

**8. Slovakian rural network:** Malvína Gondová

*Proposal 1 :*

- *Organisation of mutual exchange of practical experiences and examples of RDP projects implementation (field visits / study tours - all axis)*

*Proposal 2 :*

- *Organisation of/participation at cooperation fair for the V4 countries LAGs*

Proposal 3 :

- Writing a publication about the quality standards in rural tourism and realizing some European benchmarking (axis 3 and axis 4).

Expressions of interests: Chris Parkin, UK – Scotland; Françoise Bonert, NRN – Luxembourg

**9. Spanish rural network :** Eduardo Crespo de Nogueira y Greer

Proposal 1 :

- Willing to participate in networks regarding the role of landscape in sustainable rural development and good practices in landscape management.

Expressions of interest: Sybille Fournier, MA – France; Matej Stepec, MA – Slovenia

Proposal 2 :

*Organisation of "cooperation fair: 1st International Forum in Rural Development Cooperation" (Sevilla, Spain, June 8-10, 2009)*

Proposal 3 :

- *Organisation of "International Fair of Rural Businesswomen", Old city, Segovia, Spain, 1st semester 2010*

**10. Luxembourg rural network :** Françoise BONERT

Proposal 1 :

- *Field visits and study tours (especially for farmers axis 1+2 and local authorities axis 3 + 4)*

Proposal 2 :

- *Organisation of a seminar about good practices in rural tourism*

Proposal 3 :

- Building up a network about local and regional products (setting up, marketing, ...)

Expressions of interest: Chris Parkin, UK –Scotland; Krassimira Kaneva, M.A., Bulgaria; Ave Bremse, NRN - Estonia; Malvina Gondova, NRN – Slovakia.

**11. Walloon rural network** : Benoit DELAITE, Cécile SCHALENBURG

Proposal 1 :

- Benchmarking on relations between agriculture and environment (Natura 2000, different uses of land, public spaces and forests, ...) , publications, study tours, articles, ...

Expressions of interest: John Hannafin, NRN - Ireland

*Proposal 2 :*

- *Organisation of an international event on adaptation of agriculture and rural economy to climatic changes (2011)*

12. **Flemish rural network**: Nele VANSLEMBROUCK

Proposal 1 :

- Peri-urban issues / relations with the countryside - cities (seminar)

Expressions of interest: Luis Fidschuster, NRN – Austria; Riccardo Passero, MA – Italy; Donald Aquilina, NRN – Malta; Ave Bremse, NRN – Estonia; Marieke Koot, NRN - Netherlands

*Proposal 2 :*

- *Sustainable agriculture (seminar)*

*Proposal 3 :*

- *Cultural (agrarian) heritage on the countryside (seminar)*