



European Commission
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*European Network for
Rural Development*

Improving the delivery of rural development programmes Seminar

Extended summary of the outcomes

9 December 2011





Introduction

Looking ahead at the future generation of Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020, the seminar “Improving the delivery of Rural Development Programmes” was organised by the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) in Brussels, 9 December 2011. It aimed at engaging Member States in the exchange of experiences and practices on how to improve the implementation of EU rural development policy.

The seminar built upon the outcomes of the ENRD Thematic Working Group 4 - Improving the delivery of EU rural development policy (TWG4) which, by mean of case studies, analysed the delivery mechanisms in 12 Member States.

1. The delivery of rural development policy: current experiences/ future perspectives

The work of TWG4 bridges almost three years of thematic analysis undertaken by the ENRD on a series of aspects of rural development policy (e.g. the linkages between agriculture and the wider rural economy, the provision of public goods and services in agriculture, territorial specificities and needs of rural areas, the implementation of the Leader approach) with reflections on the shape of the future policy in the EU, which is now being elaborated in the form of the European Commission’s legislative proposals for the post 2013.

This was in substance the message of the first presentation delivered by Rob Peters (Head of Unit for the European network and monitoring of rural development policy, DG AGRI), which opened the plenary session of the seminar. The presentation briefly described the work of TWG4 and how it has fed into the thinking of the European Commission with regard to its proposal for the new programming period. In his presentation six common areas where TWG4 suggested improvements were highlighted namely:

- (i) *sharpening the focus on policy goals and strengthening coherence through the delivery chain;*
- (ii) *offering fewer, simpler measures and more flexibility in their use;*
- (iii) *defining and implementing specific conditions of Leader;*
- (iv) *improving implementation rules (including applications and controls);*
- (v) *further enhancing M & E as a support tool for making and implementing policy;*
- (vi) *improving coordination and exchange of information.*

A number of key problems and issues were highlighted and specific suggestions for improvements were included in the presentation¹.

¹ The full set of presentations delivered during the seminar can be found on the ENRD web site: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/en-rd-events/en/seminar-on-improving-the-delivery-of-rural-development-programmes_en.cfm





The following exchanges with the audience focused on discussing specific features of the EC's proposal for rural development after 2013².

The majority of the seminar was devoted to three parallel workshops which provided the occasion for exchanging points of view on specific steps of the RDP delivery process. In each of them, brief 'implementation' case studies were presented to kick-off the discussion.

2. Workshop A - How to improve the design of programmes (stronger strategic orientation, better targeting and coordination with other policies)?

2.1. Consultation process and preparation of the NSP and the RDP – the example of Austria

The preparation of the NSP and RDP in Austria was characterised by a very wide and articulated consultation process. The process started early, was very participatory, involving a very wide range of economic, environmental and social actors and institutions. Formal and informal consultation mechanisms were both employed. Despite its profound advantages (e.g. consideration of local issues) the challenge arose about how to effectively coordinate intense/participatory consultation processes in a way that well serve rural development needs and priorities at all institutional levels (national/regional/local).

Highlights from the discussion

- The Austrian case highlighted a positive perception of the participatory process on behalf of stakeholders
- This was particularly the case for the stakeholders at regional level. A positive link was stressed between wide consultation and the involvement of the federal regions in the definition of the strategy and the objectives of the policy at national level.
- EU strategic guidelines were the starting point of the process; however, difficulties associated with the coordination of different needs and priorities led to some overlooking of the strategic dimension in the RDP.
- Timely development of consent on "how measures are implemented" and a smaller number of measures would both improve strategic relevance and coherence. In this sense, national strategy would effectively reflect regional ones.

² A short guide for the Commission's proposal for EU rural development after 2013 can be found on the seminar's web page (see link above), under the section "Documentation".



2.2. Effective policy design and coordination with other policies – the example of Denmark

The Danish case provided an interesting example of effective rural development policy design and coordination with other policies. The procedure adopted focused on the design of the NSP in a way that facilitated strong coherence between rural development policy and EU and national strategic development priorities. Hence, rural development policy in Denmark provided a framework for policy coordination, the design of the NSP (and subsequently, the RDP) being included in the wider strategic framework of the national “Green Growth Agreement”. Also, the flexible utilisation of RDP axes and measures through their integration by (national) thematic priorities, constituted an innovative feature in the delivery.

Highlights from the discussion

- Based on the outcomes of the TWG4, there exists a duality in the specification of rural development strategy: there are Member States which have developed broad strategies mostly based on the Community Strategic Guidelines, and Member States whose strategies are mainly influenced by the presence of strong national priorities.
- The challenge for strategy is to ensure coherence between the national and regional needs and priorities and combine them effectively. Subsequently, the important issue is how to “get the right balance” and achieve this coherence, especially if links between national and regional authorities are not so strong (e.g. in the case of policy interventions specific to Axis 3).
- There is a danger that the NSP might not reflect well regional development strategic plans which might not be closely and directly related to the principal EU policy priorities.

2.3. Outcomes of Workshop A

How to achieve high quality of the programmes and of the consultation process?

Regarding the achievement of **high quality of the programmes**, it is clear that such a theme might have a different meaning for different rural development policy actors (e.g. Central Ministries, Regional Administration, Development Agencies, measure beneficiaries, environmental NGOs, taxpayers, etc.).

In terms of the **consultation process**, the design of strategically coherent Partnership Contracts in the next future will “benefit” from the involvement of a wider range of stakeholders. In this context, the challenge arises to ensure that the process is not driven by stronger pressure groups. Consultation with local actors and stakeholders should facilitate the “translation” of Europe 2020 priorities into strategic frameworks which well embody regional/national priorities. However, if such a process is not driven by a clear agreement on the role of agriculture and rural areas in each context, it could well result in strategies determined by balance of interests among an expanding range of different stakeholders. This could lead to neglecting rural areas’ needs, as rural interests would have to compete with urban interests, infrastructure interests, etc. Within this context, the





importance of who controls the participation of stakeholder emerges. In this respect, broad dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders and think-tanks expressing different interests and priorities could be facilitated by NRNs.

How can we ensure that the content of programmes is genuinely determined by strategic targeting based on the EU's priorities and the findings of the SWOT analyses - rather than by past spending patterns and established expectations of beneficiaries?

The first challenge is **sharpening the strategic focus of policy design**. A territory-specific SWOT analysis could be a right step towards meeting this end, especially if the multi-fund dimension of strategic design in the forthcoming programming period is taken into account. Hence, it was suggested that there should be a strategic/territorial/multi-fund focus of the SWOT analysis and that a key element would be to ensure that different EU funds exploit synergies serving common strategic goals.

Partnership Contracts (PCs) will assume a central role in this respect. PCs should benefit from Europe 2020 strategic guidelines, but being national strategy documents, they will have also to reflect national and regional (rural) specificities, taking future rural “conditions” into account. Further, PCs should refrain from setting unattainable standards and target.

Finally, as public intervention in rural areas is financed by taxpayer funds, evaluation judgements on effective spending and impacts (i.e. what it has been done and how successful it has been) should be taken into account in strategic targeting. To this end, a **more rigorous ex-ante evaluation** together with proving evidences of market failures specific to rural areas should be emphasised.

How can programmes respond in a balanced way to top-down influences on the one hand (e.g. EU strategic guidelines, national strategies, future partnership contracts) and bottom-up influences on the other hand (e.g. results of SWOT analyses, involvement of local stakeholders)?

The relevance and the content of the **strategic framework** were both indicated to be very important aspects. Strategic design should not be an issue of merely aggregation of local/regional strategies. A strategic plan should point out how policy goals will be achieved and how policy tools can work together. Hence, it should promote the exploitation of synergies among different types of public intervention (i.e. Pillar 1, Pillar 2, ERDF, Cohesion Fund, etc.). However, even though specific regional needs and priorities should be taken into account, strategic design should also recognize and promote horizontal, “cross-regional” priorities.

Considering the right way to approach the design of the strategic framework, as **policy beneficiaries’ needs** can be better met at the local level, this is also the place where consultation should be carried out. In other words, strategic design and also eligibility criteria and other important implementation aspects should deal with local/regional priorities.

The influence of **different institutional and administrative settings** on strategic design is an important issue which influences the effectiveness of strategy. Different delivery settings (i.e.





centralised vs. decentralised) generate different needs for consistency and coordination, the main question being –though no definitive answer was reached- at which level should consistency and coordination be pursued (i.e. at which level the strategy should be defined).

The relation between **RDP measures** and strategic design was also discussed. It was noted that it is difficult to incorporate several regional programmes -each one with a variety of RDP measures- into a national strategy and that fewer pre-defined measures would enhance strategic coherence at national level.

How to ensure coordination with other EU policies?

Despite the fact that a multi-funded rural development strategy is not new, coordination is a very complex and demanding issue. Existing national strategies for rural development should not be ignored, but it seems that the new regulatory framework requires **further thinking about effective coordination** of Pillar 2 with Pillar 1 (principally left to Member States), development action pursued by other EU Funds, as well as with other important policy domains such as business development and environmental policy. The issue is how to effectively combine local development strategies and funds and whether this exercise should be done at territorial or at targets level. To this end, a lot seems to be expected from the forthcoming Common Strategic Framework.

In this context, a suggestion was put forward on the possible advantages of a rural development approach which pursues the integration between Pillar 1 and Axis 2 of Pillar 2 (i.e. a land-management approach), as well as rural business support through Axes 1 and 4. Another suggestion was that post-2013 CAP could only involve Pillar 1 support, agri-environment payments and other “greening” measures.

Closing Remarks

At the conclusion of the workshop the following recommendations were proposed to guide the strategic programming in the new period:

- Ensure that strategy is the reference for programming and not vice-versa. In this context, good balance between priorities and measures should be pursued.
- Recognise the importance of linkages between national/regional priorities and Europe 2020 objectives and guidelines.
- Ensure the effective utilization of tools such as SWOT analysis and evaluations (including those referring to previous programming periods).
- Achieve balance between top-down and bottom-up influences and national and regional priorities.
- Ensure that local partnerships are innovative enough and utilise the “new” multi-fund environment.





3. Workshop B - How to make the implementation of programmes more effective and to enhance coordination between implementing bodies?

3.1. Streamlining implementation and improving synergies - the Global Farming Contract model in Catalonia (Spain)

The purpose of the Global Farming Contract (CGE) is to improve competitiveness and multifunctionality at the farm level. It is essentially a 5-year business plan which brings together a series of measures to promote a modern entrepreneurial approach for farmers. Farmers work with advisory services while developing their business plans, which are linked to available RDP measures. The CGEs are designed and implemented during an annual cycle called the 'campaign'. The main advantage of the CGE is that it operates as a 'one-stop-shop' for farmers, furthermore it results in increased visibility and awareness of the potential support; encouragement for better business planning and; provision of advice and reduction of uncertainties. Possibly, the main disadvantage is the administrative burden related to the initial setting up of the contract.

Highlights from the discussion

- Though administrative burden of the CGE is relatively high, generally this model puts more pressure on the administration, but for farmers the whole process becomes less burdensome. The contracts also led to simplified relations between the beneficiaries and the administration.
- The contract allows a certain degree of flexibility to cope with possible changes in the business situation. However for the contracts to be successful, every farmer has to have a longer than 1 or 2-year term vision.
- One call per year is undertaken instead of many calls, thus increasing predictability. The annual campaign is fixed and takes place between February and April each year. During the first three years there was one call each year. In year 1: 2,700 contracts were signed, in year 2: 4,900 and in year 3: 5,300.
- The CGE is essentially a delivery instrument around which the whole implementation mechanism – as it relates to farmers - can be organised. The question is whether it is possible to cover the entire set of objectives of the programme with a single delivery instrument.





3.2. Flexible use of measures and coordination between implementing bodies – the case of the food chain integrated projects in Italy³

The purpose of the integrated food-chain model is to increase the competitiveness of the agri-food sector through coordination. In some of the Italian regions (where agriculture is already an important part of the economy) it is to consolidate the sector further. In others, the purpose is to create a food-chain through establishing new vertical linkages. Based on current experiences, it is in the first instance that the instrument has proven to work best. Currently 13 regions use this instrument in Italy. A leader/coordinator is responsible to develop the strategy involving various actors along the supply-chain. A partnership is set up, which represents the direct beneficiary of the programme and proceeds with the selection of the projects. The procedures differ amongst different regions, and can become fairly complicated (a coordination procedure for all regions is being currently developed in Italy).

Highlights from the discussion

The model appears to be a pre-cursor of the new cooperation measure as envisaged by the EC's proposal for rural development after 2013. The latter will be able to take various forms, e.g. a food chain or a territorial partnership, with the aim of getting different actors together more easily. Experiences such as the Italian one can facilitate the development of the future cooperation measure.

3.3. Outcomes of Workshop B

How to ensure effective coordination through the delivery chain? What are the main issues arising in communication between implementing bodies and how they can be overcome? With which instruments?

Difficulties in **communication and coordination between the Paying Agency (PA) and the Managing Authority (MA)** are recognised in different Member States. This is often generated by different perspectives on the policy intervention logic (achieving programme objectives vs. maintaining financial accountability). Ensuring a common understanding of the objectives of the policy and better communication between the different bodies would facilitate coordination and coherence of implementation.

Different approaches and solutions exist in Member States with single programme and in those with regional programming. In both cases the **NRN can play a role in facilitating communication and exchange**. However the aims of the NRN as well as the available budget are factors that determine the network's scope of action and approach to coordination.

³ Presentation of the case study originally prepared by Dr Flaminia Ventura, Italian NRN. Due to Ms Ventura's absence, the presentation titled 'Flexible use of measures and coordination between implementing bodies' was briefly commented by Ms Serena Tarangioli (Italian NRN).





The intention for the future rural development policy is to have a more integrated approach with regard to programme management. In this respect, **exchanging of practices and experiences** across countries will be encouraged. Integrated approach on-the-ground, could – and arguably should – rely on the work of integrated teams (e.g. with the joint participation of PA, MA and LAGs). Thus integration may concern measures (e.g. food chains) but also joint management teams dealing with specific problems. This integrated approach could also be reflected in the future regulation.

What can be the role of the NRNs in enhancing exchanges to support programme implementation?

As highlighted, the **NRN should facilitate communication and exchanges** between the various implementing bodies. In some of the Member States the important role of the Network is however not recognised by the majority of stakeholders. Evidence from TWG4 and the experience of stakeholders suggests that the efficiency and credibility of the NRN is often not related to the fact whether it is integrated or independent from the MA. The main issue is therefore, not whether the NRN operates independently from the MA (this may vary by MS), but whether it is perceived as a useful forum and a credible institution by the relevant stakeholders. Continuity in the Networks' action is also required, i.e. the complete reorganisation of NRNs in the future would not be useful as this may result in losing existing knowledge and contacts.

Member States have different amounts of experience (and levels of expertise) with regard to the operation of Networks. Based on current experiences, Networks appear to be more easily operated in smaller Member States. Also long-term expertise may contribute to their better functioning. Organising networks by bringing together relevant stakeholders by theme/axes may be a useful approach.

How can we ensure that programmes use eligibility conditions and selection criteria to target support in line with their stated strategic priorities? How significant an influence on programme implementation is lack of administrative capacity (if at all)?

Setting **appropriate selection criteria** is not an easy task. If criteria are too limiting then there is the risk of 'missing out' on good projects. If criteria are too wide, then there is a risk that specific objectives are not achieved. It is very important to link selection criteria to objectives and targets. Therefore, it is also important to set clear (and realistic) objectives and targets.

If public funds are to be spent on the most effective measures, it is important to **prioritise measures** in terms of their contribution to the programme's objectives. However sometimes this principle is not applied and, priorities appear to be based on past spending patterns.

In order to address the above issues, the quality of all evaluation exercises should be improved including through the **better use of on-going evaluations and Monitoring Committees (MC)**.



The lack of administrative capacity in a number of Member States results in the outsourcing of various tasks. However, this procedure implies certain risks. Including the maintenance of quality requirements

With respect to Leader, the **lack of administrative capacity** and/or expertise has been a particular problem as well at the local level (e.g. in the case of some LAGs), which then resulted in the (over-)control of selection criteria definition by the MA. Centrally defined selection criteria, however, often do not ensure that such criteria sufficiently reflect the objectives of local development strategies, and therefore often do not sufficiently contribute to the achievement of local strategic goals.

4. How to facilitate access to funding for potential beneficiaries? – Workshop C

4.1. Communication and information strategy towards potential beneficiaries as part of the application process – an example from France

The French example illustrates the implementation of an active communication and information strategy towards potential beneficiaries. The strategy was targeted both at the general public and potential EAFRD beneficiaries. An important aspect of the strategy was that direct feedback was provided to the administration by the beneficiaries through regional monitoring committees. The case study also illustrated the benefits of providing technical support to potential beneficiaries, requiring the engagement of local support structures such as local administrations, or regional and local bodies of professional organisations.

Highlights from the discussion

- Given the wide range of beneficiaries both from the private (farmers, forest holders, SMEs,) and the public sector (including national, regional or local authorities, bodies like NGOs, service providers etc.), different needs in information or technical support arise. The design and implementation of an effective communication and information strategy towards potential beneficiaries should be based on a comprehensive identification and grouping of the beneficiaries, according to their needs.
- In the case of France, while technical assistance is generally managed by the central Managing Authority, communication, information and related evaluation activities are carried out both at national or regional level. A significant problem reported is therefore the difficulty to find national counterparts in this task (and secure co-financing).
- Potential beneficiaries are usually approached through professional organisations (e.g. farmers' organisations) or the regional or local administration (chambers of commerce, tourism organisations etc.). The National Rural Networks can and should play a key role in both collecting information about current programme and project implementation and disseminating information about funding use and opportunities.





- Communication methods also need to be strengthened to allow targeting of potential beneficiaries who are outside the reach of existing networks, including the use of off-line tools and targeted use of technical assistance. National and regional media can also be a valuable tool in raising awareness to a broader group of beneficiaries and the general public.
- The regional monitoring committees in France, among other tasks, facilitate the direct exchange of information and experiences between the beneficiaries and the administrations responsible for the application procedures. When originally established, the committees had a more formal structure. Gradually a more open structure was adopted which now facilitates the direct discussion between beneficiaries and representatives of the administration. Formal structures usually limit spontaneity and this is a constraint to effective flows of communication.
- The importance of measuring the progress of the implementation of the communication and information strategy is strongly emphasized. The findings of such an evaluation should be the basis for planning the future activities and adapting the process.

4.2. Improving application process for investments (two-steps application approach) - the experience of Poland

The Polish case provided practical examples of effective simplifications in the application process and towards minimizing the administrative burden for the beneficiary. The presentation illustrated a number of simplifications which have been introduced in the application processes of the measures 121 “Modernisation of agricultural holdings”, measure 214 “Agri-environment payments” and measure 321 “Basic services for the economy and rural population” of the Polish Rural Development Programme. These improvements were introduced in order to facilitate the beneficiaries and thus to accelerate the disbursement of funds, while directing them to the measures which produce the greatest value added.

Highlights from the discussion

- In the case of Poland three key sources of information were used for the identification of constraints in the application process. Firstly, farmers’ or young farmers’ associations provide useful feedback and information to the administration. Secondly, the mid-term evaluation of the programme provided an assessment of the application process and many of the difficulties were identified. Finally, during last years’ disasters in Poland (floods) many farmers requested specific issues to be addressed in order to accelerate the disbursement of the support.
- The role of central government is very important in the process of facilitating access to funding for potential beneficiaries. In Poland, it was a centralised decision by the Government to ease as much as possible the access to funds for the beneficiaries. Due to this mandate all institutions involved in the process had to cooperate and find ways to improve their efficiency.
- Due to the significant number of sub-measures available under measure 214, beneficiaries are usually in need of assistance from the advisory services during the application process. Advisory





services in Poland are state owned and their services are provided for free, however for the preparation of agri-environment (AE) activities, beneficiaries pay a fee. The farmer can however apply for a refund through the advisory service measure.

- Application for measure 214 in Poland requires farmers to include an AE activity plan in their application. The purpose of requesting the AE activity plan is to help the farmers to be prepared for the future commitments and obligations (particularly since they will have to undertake commitments for a 5 year period which will go beyond the cross compliance). A further simplification introduced in this respect is the possibility for the applicant to apply for support for the preparation of the AE activity plan by submitting an application to the implementing body.
- From the administration's side, the decisions for the AE payments have been simplified to a significant extent and they are made at the same time with CAP Pillar 1 and LFA payments as they are all based on the declaration of parcels. As a consequence, for the administrative system and the paying agency it is less costly to deal with multiple applications at the same time. For area based payments the calls for proposals are made usually at the same time each year and applications are collected by regional offices of the PA.
- More than 70% of the farms in Poland are small (average less than 10 hectares). No special measures or administrative provisions were foreseen for small farms. Under measure 121 the decision was made during implementation to ease the administrative burden for small farms and/or young farmers. For example, beneficiaries are now allowed to submit collective application forms for 3 or 4 small holdings in order to purchase and invest in common machinery and equipment.

4.3. Outcomes of Workshop C

How can we reach beneficiaries and make implementation arrangements for measures well adapted to beneficiaries' context and possibilities (e.g. call of application, eligible period, etc.)?

Considering the **wide range of possible beneficiaries**, there is the need to identify the most suitable approach for each target group. This requires an analysis in order to recognise what information people need and how to facilitate the access to that information. ICT-based instruments can be effective but also require certain conditions for their use and should be accompanied by other solutions for allowing access to different target groups. Also, different measures or schemes have different requirements and this must also be taken into account when preparing a communication plan.

Three main factors have to be taken into account when different types of beneficiaries are targeted, namely: i) the need to ensure the provision of incentives; ii) the need of communicating relevant information and; iii) ensuring a favourable financial situation. The financial context must be taken especially into account as sometimes beneficiaries (especially for smaller-scale projects) do not have the means to get the projects off the ground. The exchange of examples of financial measures and tools which might have been used in different Member States (for example guarantees; pre-financing etc.) should be encouraged.





Small farmers usually require **different options and solutions**. In certain cases (e.g. in Latvia) not all small farmers are part of farmers' organisations and therefore other channels for approaching them are required. From a different perspective, while big farmers have the means for searching and paying for services and information, it is the farmers' organisations who should primarily aim to support small farmers. In some Member States where farmers' organisations do not exist, the advisory services should undertake that role.

Based on the experiences reported for the Polish case, a **stronger engagement of the NRNs** could be envisaged to actively support potential beneficiaries in the application process. For example, they should promote the dissemination of information on good practices. Particularly for investment projects, beneficiaries could be supported by the provision of more targeted information on how to maximise the return and the added value from their investments rather than begin accompanied in the development of a business plan. This could be achieved by supporting, for example, market surveys and other similar analyses.

How can we minimise administrative complexity for beneficiaries and ensure sound management of programmes?

The need for creating a '**one-stop shop**' / a single contact point for the beneficiary was emphasised. The beneficiary should be fully aware from where assistance can be received/options available for different types of project. The proliferation of different administrations that the beneficiaries will have to contact in order to collect information should be avoided. Such a single contact point should, in addition, provide information on a whole range of subjects which are important for the beneficiary (e.g. mandatory EU standards).

A **single management tool** will have a significant impact in facilitating the beneficiary. This could be an ICT tool managed with pre-filled forms through which the data will be submitted once and they would be available for all relevant agencies. The data (for example the identity reference), will be recorded once into the system and re-registering the data should not be required.

A "results-based approach" should be adopted. The **use of lump sum payments**, for example, could help to shift the focus of the controllers from "how resources are used" to "what results are obtained". During the design of an investment, crude cost estimation should be made. Advance payments could also be considered, particularly for start-up businesses. Lump-sum payments could also be made upon completion of certain investments, instead of the need for detailed invoicing, on the basis of actual work undertaken.

Harmonisation of implementing rules is another way forward for simplification and reduction of administrative burdens. In some Member States (for example in Poland, Latvia and Estonia) a lot has been already achieved for area-based measures, electronic application procedures etc.

The **principle of proportionality** has been indicated as an overarching principle for coping with administrative complexity, while ensuring sound management. According to this principle, "the less money requested, the less paperwork should be needed".





How can the delivery system better cope with complex integrated projects including those using different EU funds?

The major concern raised with respect to the use of different funds is the **harmonisation** of their management procedures. The ERDF, the EAFRD, the ESF, the EMFF and the Cohesion Fund are not managed the same way and this will create difficulties, specifically for LAGs or Leader projects. Other issues concerning harmonisation will also need to be clarified in the next programming period, including: monitoring rules; rules for national co-financing and; rules concerning eligibility and selection criteria including eligibility of expenditures.

It is recognised that the new legislative framework already provides for harmonisation between the 5 funds and there are common rules proposed especially for local development. Moreover specific items such as staff costs and VAT rules have been harmonised or the process is on-going. However, there will be specificities in each fund which have to be taken into account as the legal basis are different. Such improvements should facilitate the implementation of integrated projects. As additional possibility towards simplification it has been proposed under the Community led local development that a single fund covers the running and animation costs when a development strategy is funded by several funds.

With respect to complex projects, a **lack of administrative capacity** has been identified .

Clear interpretation of the common rules from the Commission is sought for the future. This should assume the form of **more guidance** from the Commission to the Member States level and down to the implementing agencies level.

5. Summary of the workshops and conclusions

The rapporteurs of the three parallel sessions summarised the workshop discussions in the final plenary session. Considering all the parallel sessions, the following issues were highlighted as warranting further discussion in relation to the forthcoming programming period:

- How to ensure that regional/local issues are taken into account in the Strategy?
- Are EU Guidelines on strategy definition needed?
- More clarification is needed on the Partnership Contracts.
- Coordination between Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 requires more attention.
- Ensuring coherence through the delivery chain requires administrative capacity which is not always in place.
- How to balance focus on achieving objectives while maintaining accountability?
- How to embed the principle of proportionality throughout the delivery chain?
- What should be the role of the NRNs in communicating to beneficiaries?





Concluding remarks to the seminar were provided by Mr Jose Manuel Sousa Uva, Director of Horizontal Aspects of Rural Development, DG AGRI:

- In the forthcoming programming period there will be a move to more comprehensive and focused strategy in support to programme definition.
- The European Commission recognises the need to provide guidelines on the functioning of Partnership Contracts (and partnerships in general).
- Enhanced cooperation among funds aims to a more effective policy and securing economic development.
- Better coordination between the two Pillars of the CAP will be ensured.
- Pillar 2 should be coherent to specific territorial needs. In this context, emphasis will be put on strategies which fit national/regional specificities while responding to EU priorities.
- The issue for the future will not be “to add”, but “to combine”, i.e.: combine measures and actions with key priorities. This can be achieved only through the combination of the two Pillars and coordination with other Funds.
- Evaluation is important, as is continuous impact assessment for improving results and impacts.
- Sound management, less bureaucracy and simplified implementation are the keywords for the future.

