

EU Rural Networks Strategic Framework and governance bodies

*Networking for sustainable rural development and
innovation for agricultural productivity and
sustainability*

Draft
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1. Context and Purpose of this document

The EU rural development policy for 2014-2020¹ further developed the European Rural Development Network (ENRD) and created the European Innovation Partnership network for agricultural productivity and sustainability (EIP-network), recognizing the added value networks can play in supporting the policy delivery.

Both the ENRD and the EIP network contribute to the Europe 2020 Strategy to turn the EU into a smarter, more sustainable and more inclusive economy by supporting the implementation of rural development policy and of the EIP for agricultural productivity and sustainability. Effective networking can bring added value for i) the rural economy, social partners, research and the civil society; ii) Member States' administrations implementing the policy; iii) the Commission and the EU institutions in general.

This document is intended to serve as a **basis for discussing and organizing the activity of all those who are active in both networks**. Its purpose is:

- To provide a unified and commonly understood frame for the operation of the networks.
- To help ensuring coordination between the ENRD and the EIP network.
- To support the bodies governing the rural networks (see section 4 below) to agree on priorities and identify the best tools to achieve the networks' objectives, and to serve as a baseline for the identification of more specific priorities and subjects.
- To guide the network support units in the further elaboration of their activities.

¹ Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013

The following sections aim in particular at:

- Developing a single strategic framework embracing the objectives and activities of both networks (**Section 2**).
- Highlighting the basic principles for the monitoring and assessing networking activities with regard to the objectives set up by the legislation for both networks (**Section 3**).
- Outlining the organizational structure of the networks and the philosophy at the basis of the new structure (inclusiveness and flexibility), including the proposal for the Steering Group, mandate and composition of the permanent subgroups on LEADER/CLLD and on Innovation, and the provisional calendar of events linked to the governance bodies to be held in 2015 (**Section 4**).

2. Strategic Framework for the EU Rural Networks

Within the Europe 2020 Strategy, the ENRD and the EIP network contribute to achieving the three main objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy related to viable food production, sustainable management of natural resources and climate action, and balanced territorial development. The contribution of the ENRD and of the EIP network to the EU political agenda can be further qualified through the specific objectives set out by Regulation (EU) 1305/2013 for each of the two networks.

A **single Strategic Framework** can be developed embracing the objectives and activities of both networks. As its starting point, the Strategic Framework takes the objectives that can be found for the two networks in the Regulation (EU) 1305/2013 (the Rural Development Regulation) and condenses them into three major common objectives:

- o To enhance participation
- o To improve policy quality, and
- o To increase awareness

These objectives form the basic pillars for the coordinated work of both networks over the programming period 2014-2020.

Based on the three general objectives identified and on the specific objectives provided for each network by the Rural Development Regulation, a number of specific objectives have been identified as well as the main types of activities that networks can carry out to reach them.

Table 1 below describes the operational objectives and the respective types of activities in a synthetic manner, so that they could be discussed and used as a reference by all those involved in networking activities.

Table 1. Strategic Framework for the EU Rural Networks

General Objectives	Specific Objectives <i>as per Regulation (EU) 1305/2013</i>	Operational Objectives	Types of Activities
Enhance participation	<p>Increase the involvement of all stakeholders in the implementation of rural development</p> <p><i>(Art. 52.2.a)</i></p>	<p>Understanding RD stakeholders and their needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders diverse needs and potential for involvement in RDP implementation is widely understood <p>Increasing stakeholder capacity for meaningful involvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Networks provide a platform where targeted exchanges take place involving the relevant stakeholders at the most appropriate level Stakeholders have easy access to the information, training, web-tools and other exchange mechanisms required for effective involvement in the implementation of RDPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Screening of RDPs for stakeholder involvement and measure targeting NRN and stakeholder surveys Thematic Group(s) on stakeholder participation National stakeholder needs and opportunities analyses Seminars, periodicals, magazines, social media exchanges on stakeholder participation Face-to-face meetings with NRNs, RD stakeholders
	<p>Establish a dialogue between farmers and research community</p> <p><i>(Art. 53.2.b – 1st part)</i></p>	<p>Promoting adoption of innovations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Findings from research are translated better and faster into practical farming applications Research agendas are based more on actual needs of farmers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted stakeholders involvement EIP-AGRI Focus Groups Seminars and workshops on specific innovation topics Publications, newsletters and media exchanges Face-to-face meetings with farmers,

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<p>Enhance participation</p>			<p>foresters, researchers, NRN and advisors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in events organised by farmers, foresters, researchers, advisors and NRNs • Specific tools designed for this purpose (e.g. presentation for Universities) • Identification and use of stakeholders' communication tools and channels
	<p>Facilitate the inclusion of all stakeholders in the knowledge exchange process <i>(Art. 53.2.b – 2nd part)</i></p>	<p>Knowing how innovation works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders are familiar with the opportunities to stimulate innovation under the different policies <p>Connecting partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders are able to find other stakeholders relevant at national and EU level <p>Cooperating effectively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different types of stakeholders, research project groups, thematic networks, Operational Groups, cluster initiatives, pilot and demonstrative projects are increasingly and efficiently involved in both networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge exchange and communication tools based on the outputs of stakeholders' mapping • Joint actions with stakeholders • Participation in events organised by stakeholders • Identification and use of stakeholders' communication tools and channels

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General Objectives	Specific Objectives <i>as per Regulation (EU) 1305/2013</i>	Operational Objectives	Types of Activities
<p>Improve policy quality</p>	<p>Facilitate the exchange of expertise and good practice <i>(Art. 53.2.a – see also Art. 52.3.c)</i></p>	<p>Diffusing of innovations, projects and practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information on successful innovative activities is more easily available by systematic collection and dissemination Identification and dissemination of projects and practices in order to consolidate the learning potential for improving RDPs on the ground 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular collection, analysis, consolidation and dissemination of RDP implementation “good practices”, innovative actions and projects EIP-AGRI Focus Group Seminars and workshops Publications, newsletters and media exchanges Identification and use of stakeholders’ communication tools and channels
	<p>Improve the quality of RDP <i>(Art. 52.2.b)</i></p>	<p>Increasing awareness of the opportunities and needs for improving RDPs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant stakeholders have a common understanding of the real opportunities for improving RDPs as well as the main needs and organisational hurdles that have to be overcome <p>Identifying promising approaches at EU level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promising approaches to RDP improvement are identified, analysed and shared rapidly among stakeholders including RDP managers <p>Consolidating and developing communities of practice for improving RDPs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder groups including RDP managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual, comparative and thematic analyses of RDPs EU level thematic Groups carrying out analyses on specific aspects of RDP implementation Implementation of joint actions with national and regional rural stakeholders on specific aspects of improving RDP programming and implementation Setting-up online tools and information sharing and exchange platforms to support ‘communities of practice’ Targeted and active dissemination of

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General Objectives	Specific Objectives <i>as per Regulation (EU) 1305/2013</i>	Operational Objectives	Types of Activities
<p>Improve policy quality</p>		<p>actively exchange and transfer methods and tools for improving RDP quality</p> <p>Informing better RD Policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networks outputs are used to improve RD policy both now and in the future 	<p>results</p>
	<p>Support the evaluation of RDPs <i>(Art. 52.2.d)</i></p>	<p>Improving evaluation capacity of all actors involved in RDP evaluation</p> <p>Evaluation stakeholders in the Member States and at EU level have at their disposal relevant methodologies and tools for evaluating RDPs and receive appropriate training for their application.</p> <p>Consolidating and developing communities of practice for RDP evaluators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RDP evaluators actively exchange and transfer evaluation methods and tools • Good practices related to rural development policy evaluation are identified, collected and exchanged among practitioners <p>Informing rural development policy decision-making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation results provide valuable information feeding in future rural development policy development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Databases, glossaries and guidance documents on evaluation. • EU-level thematic working groups producing guidance or developing methodologies to address issues related to the evaluation of RDP • Technical support and training activities for RDP evaluation stakeholders • Exchanging knowledge, experiences and good practices on RDP evaluation • Meetings and events related to rural development evaluation • Setting-up communication tools, including electronic, for targeted dissemination of information on evaluation-related topics

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General Objectives	Specific Objectives <i>as per Regulation (EU) 1305/2013</i>	Operational Objectives	Types of Activities
<p>Increase awareness</p>	<p>Play a role in informing the broader public on the benefits of rural development policy <i>(Art. 52.2.c)</i></p>	<p>Communicating the benefits of RDPs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is greater awareness of the benefits of RDP for major societal challenges (food security and quality, biodiversity, climate change, jobs, social inclusion, etc.) • Success stories from RDP implementation show the impact of RDP on people's lives in a way that is interesting to the media <p>Disseminating and sharing the knowledge generated by the Networks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Networks activities and outputs are communicated and shared in a way which maximises their relevance for and use by stakeholders including RDP managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy-to-follow policy guides and overviews of RD programmes (via websites and promotional material) • Identification and communication of 'human interest' RDP stories (magazine, Facebook) • Identification and dissemination of good practice examples (various channels) • Regular communication of news (Websites, Twitter, newsletters)

Main tools available

Different operational objectives can be served by the same type of activity, as emerges from Table 1. The following image presents the main tools available for carrying out networking activities. The Networks' governance bodies will identify the most adapted tools depending on the objective and the circumstances. Three Network Support Units are available to support the operation of rural networks on EU level.



3. Monitoring and Assessing the activity of Rural Networks

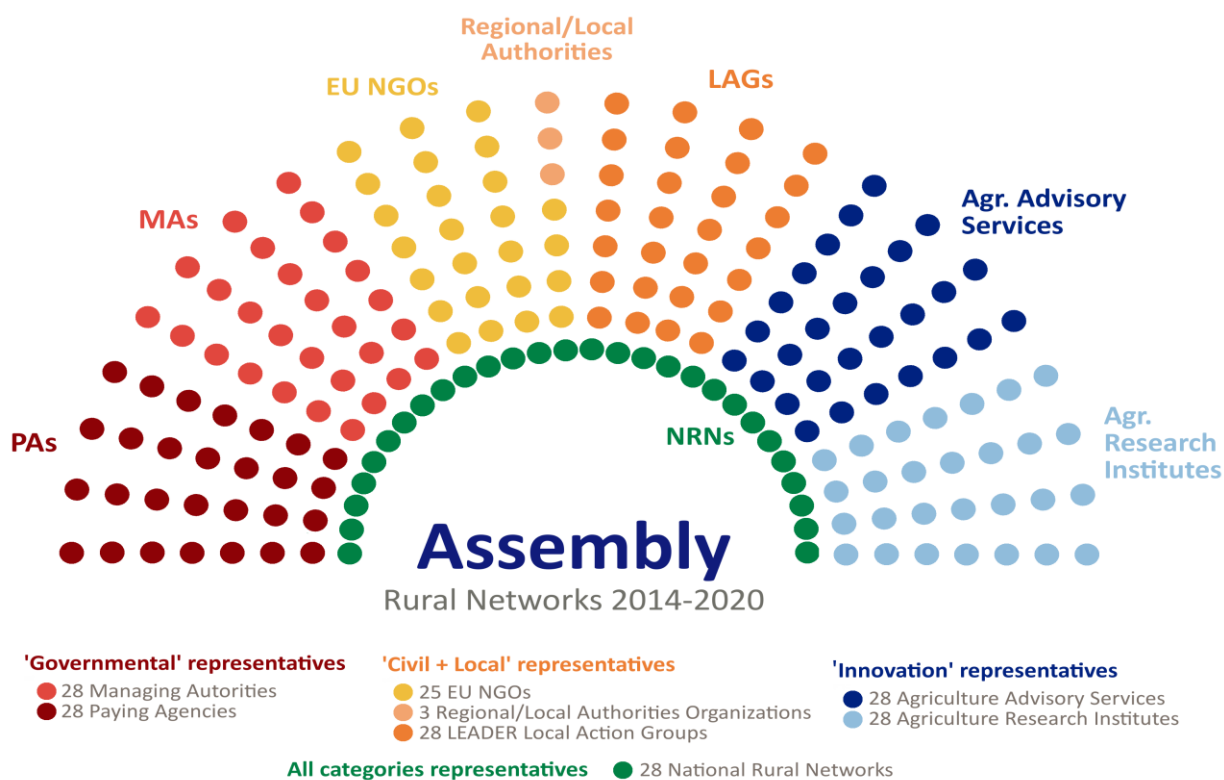
There is a broad consensus that networks and networking have **great potential to add value to EU rural development policy**. However, identifying, demonstrating and communicating this added value in a way that is clearly understandable to a wider audience, is highly challenging.

One important task of the Assembly is to ensure appropriate monitoring and assessment of the activities of the ENRD and of the EIP network with regards to the objectives and tasks of both networks. Whereas the details of this activity will be elaborated at later stage, the strategic framework described in previous section sets the basis for clear intervention logic, which will be regularly reviewed.

4. Governance of the EU Rural Networks

Rural networks 2014-2020 are governed by a joint structure organized around the three following levels:

Strategic level: an inclusive Assembly (196 members) provides the strategic framework (operational objectives, types of activities...) for both Networks; provides for thematic work.



Operational level: a Steering Group coordinates activities and thematic work (workplans)



Thematic work: the Assembly may set up 3 **Permanent Subgroups** on:

- Innovation for agricultural productivity and sustainability;
- LEADER and community led local development; and
- the evaluation of rural development programmes.

A large number of stakeholders have already expressed interest in starting the thematic work concerning LEADER/CLLD and Innovation as soon as possible. It is therefore proposed that the **permanent Subgroup on LEADER/CLLD and the permanent Subgroup on Innovation are set up by the Assembly at its first meeting**. The main lines for the composition and the mandate of these two permanent Subgroups are described in the following subsections.

At the current phase of the programming period (beginning 2015), taking into account the evaluation activities already foreseen, it is **proposed to postpone the discussion on the permanent Subgroup on Evaluation** to the next meeting of the Assembly, based on the work of the Steering Group.

In addition to the permanent subgroups, **other flexible subgroups**, thematic groups and focus groups may carry out the "substantial work" of the networks (knowledge development, knowledge sharing on specific topics), consistently with the strategic framework provided by the Assembly.

Three Network Support Units, the **ENRD Contact Point**, the **EIP Service Point** and the **Evaluation Help-Desk**, support networking activities and help facilitating the work of the different governance bodies.

4.1. Setting up the Steering Group

Background

According to the Commission Implementing Decision 2014/825/EU on setting up the organisational structure and operation for the European network for rural development and for the European Innovation Partnership Network, the Steering Group should be composed of maximum 48 members of the RN Assembly. The members of the Steering Group should be appointed by the Director-General following a proposal of the Assembly reflecting the geographic and thematic diversity of the members of the ENRD and of the EIP network and based on the voluntary commitment of the proposed members.

The Assembly members were asked to indicate whether they would volunteer for the Steering Group. The results for this first call of interest are summarized in Table 2 below (by Article 9 of the Commission Implementing Decision 2014/825/EU).

Table 2: Volunteers for the Steering Group

Category	Quota	Volunteers
(a) Managing authorities and/or national rural networks	28	28 (16 NRN, 12 MA)
(b) EU-wide organisations referred to in Art 4(1)(d) and (e)	Max 12	25
(c) Managing Authorities in charge of evaluation of RDPs	Max 4	10
(d) Agricultural Advisory Service Providers and/or agricultural research institutes referred to in Art 4(1)(g) and (h)	Max 4	35
TOTALs	48	97

For each of the categories above the Assembly may propose a rotation of the members of the Steering Group.

Proposal

It is proposed to approach **categories separately**, allowing to identify members according to different principles for different categories, and make it **in cooperation with the relevant stakeholder groups**.

The approach proposed for each category is the following:

- a) **Managing Authorities and/or national rural networks:** can have one representative from each Member State. 5 Member States did not volunteer, and 5 Member States submitted double registrations. In both cases Member States were contacted to have 1 representative per Member State in the final proposal.
- b) **EU wide organisations referred to in Article 4(1)(d)(e)** (maximum 12 members). The Civil Dialogue Group (CDG) has been approached to facilitate the selection of organisations from amongst them, as 23 organisations who are also part of CDG have expressed their interest. In cooperation with the CDG chairmanship, the final list of organisations will be proposed, which will base on the strong commitment of the organisations and thematic balance. The organisations representing regional and/or local authorities were asked to express interest separately, as they are not part of the Civil Dialogue Group.
- c) **National authorities in charge of the evaluation of rural development programmes** (max 4 members) have 10 applicants for 4 places. The group has been contacted to propose the final list of volunteers for the Steering Group membership.
- d) **Agricultural advisory service providers and/or agricultural research institutes** (max 4 members). As the number of volunteers was much higher than the number of seats, the group was approached to re-confirm their commitments, and give their opinion on different selection options. The majority preferred the rotation principle to be applied, and guaranteeing 2 seats separately for advisory services and 2 for agricultural research institutes. The group has been contacted to propose the final list of volunteers for the Steering Group membership.

The outcomes of this selection will be presented on the meeting of the Rural Networks' Assembly on 26th of January 2014.

4.2. Setting up the Subgroup on Leader and Community-Led Local Development

Background

According to the Commission Implementing Decision 2014/825/EU on setting up the organisational structure and operation for the European network for rural development and for the European Innovation Partnership Network, the Rural Assembly may set up subgroups on specific topics related to the objectives and the tasks of the ENRD, **including a permanent subgroup on Leader and community led local development** (Leader/CLLD subgroup). Subgroups shall carry out thematic work on the basis of a mandate defined by the Rural Assembly.

In the ENRD 2007-2013 around 30% of the thematic work was linked to Leader, and around 50% of the external events supported by the ENRD Contact Point were Leader or transnational

cooperation (TNC) related. In the current programming period, Leader has specific reference in the ENRD tasks in article 52(3)(h) of the Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, therefore the involvement of specific Leader stakeholders will remain important.

Proposal

It is proposed to set up the subgroup on Leader and Community-led local development as a permanent subgroup to the Rural Networks' Assembly.

The proposal builds upon the positive experience with ENRD 2007-2013 Leader subcommittee as part of ENRD governance structures, responsible for thematic work in the field of Leader and transnational cooperation. The Leader subcommittee gathered a wealth of information and analysis on Leader and TNC and provided for the exchanges on Leader during its 12 meetings and during 4 focus groups working on specific Leader implementation topics.

Mandate

The Leader/CLLD subgroup shall contribute to improving the quality of implementation of Leader in rural development programmes. The subgroup will:

1. Follow the state of play of implementation of Leader and the transnational cooperation.
2. Identify common issues/problems and identify good transferable practices at different levels (European, national, local) in Leader implementation.
3. Monitor Transnational Cooperation projects' implementation both in European Union and with third countries and seek ways to facilitate/improve the TNC.
4. Encourage peer to peer capacity building concerning Leader/CLLD implementation.
5. Identifying good practices and issues/problems in multi-funded CLLD strategies.

The Commission, supported by the Contact Point of the ENRD 2014-2020 can provide support to the work of Leader/CLLD subgroup through making tools available in line with its annual workplan, such as expert work, providing secretariat to the group and organising short term thematic work.

Composition and selection of representatives

The subgroup's activity will focus on exchanges on Leader/CLLD implementation between different stakeholders of the Leader community on European level. This requires broad representativeness of different Leader stakeholder groups. Participation in the subgroup's activities is voluntary, so the composition below sets the possible maximum numbers.

Based on the past experience the most efficient composition is the combination of public entities and local/non-governmental level. Therefore it is suggested to include:

- Managing Authorities who would participate in the subgroup's discussions from the perspective of the policy design and delivery. Their participation is particularly needed in case of discussions on implementation bottlenecks.

- National Rural Networks as they are required to work with capacity building of local action groups and with regards to cooperation on national/regional level, therefore synergies are to be sought with the European level.
- LAGs as new participant group in this period as they are the key actors in Leader implementation.
- The EU-wide organisations as they bring the non-governmental perspective at wider geographical level than LAGs.

Category	Number	Selection
Managing Authorities	28	
National Rural Networks	28	
Representatives of LAGs	28	Selection by the Managing Authorities
EU organisations, including organisations representing municipalities and regions	12	In cooperation with Civil Dialogue Group
TOTAL	96	

The intention is to use participatory meeting techniques to involve more participants in discussions.

In addition to that, the representatives of networking and support bodies for local development set up by the ERDF, ESF and EMFF can participate as observers in the meeting (max 6).

Operation of the subgroup

The group is a subgroup to the Rural Networks' Assembly and thus the Commission expert group. Members of the subgroup shall not be remunerated for the services they render. Travel and subsistence expenses incurred by the members of the subgroups shall be reimbursed by the Commission in accordance with Article 6 of Commission Implementing Decision No 2014/825/EU.

Provisionally the subgroup could meet maximum twice a year. If possible, the meetings will be held back to back with other events.

4.3. Setting up the Subgroup on Innovation

Background

According to the Commission Implementing Decision 2014/825/EU on setting up the organisational structure and operation for the European network for rural development and for the European Innovation Partnership Network, the Rural Assembly may set up subgroups on specific topics related to the objectives and the tasks of the ENRD, including a **permanent subgroup on innovation for agricultural productivity and sustainability**. Subgroups shall carry out thematic work on the basis of a mandate defined by the Rural Assembly.

Mandate

The subgroup will support achieving the aims of the EIP network - facilitating the exchange of expertise and good practice, establishing a dialogue between farmers and research community and facilitating the inclusion of all stakeholders in the knowledge exchange process – by contributing to the development of the networking activities related to the EIP.

Composition

All organisations represented in the Assembly can express their interest to become members of the subgroup. The subgroup group will be composed of maximum 30 members with the following distribution:

Category	Number
National Rural Networks and Managing Authorities	10
EU-wide non-governmental organisations	10
Agricultural advisory service providers and agricultural research institutes active in innovation support services linked to operational groups	10
TOTAL	30

Frequency of meetings

- 2-3 a year

4.4. Timeline for 2015

The initial proposal of planning for different Rural Networks' **governance bodies** is presented below, with an objective to kick off different activities as soon as possible. 2015 is a year when priorities must be set and stakeholder views listened to.

Both ENRD and EIP will have other events (seminars, meetings, workgroups), which will be presented separately and discussed in detail with the Steering Group.

Indicative planning for meetings of the Rural Networks' governance bodies 2015 draft 21 January 2015

Event	Timing	Comments
1st RN Assembly	26/01/2015	
1st RN Steering Group	25/02/2015	
1st Sub-Group on Innovation	10/03/2015	
1st Leader/CLLD sub-group	22/04/2015	
2nd RN Steering Group	11/06/2015	Possibly back-to-back with an ENRD seminar
2nd Sub-Group on Innovation	June 2015	
2nd Leader/CLLD sub-group	25/09/2015	In cooperation with Italian NRN
3rd Sub-Group on Innovation	November 2015	
3rd RN Steering Group	14/10/2015	Assess possibilities of back to back with a seminar in Milan
4th RN Steering Group	08/12/2015	Possibly just before 2nd Assembly
2nd RN Assembly	09/12/2015	

(NB! dates may change!)

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Annex: Commission Implementing Decision 2014/825/EU