

Focus Group “Innovative/experimental character of leader”

First Focus Group meeting

(Brussels, 28 January 2010)

Draft Minutes

Participants

Members

Frank Bartelt (Co-Chairman)
Anke Wehmeyer
Marieke Koot (Co-Chairman)
Luis Fidlschuster
Nele Vanslembrouck
Els Soenen
Jan Florian
Aivar NIINEMäGI
Pascle Riccoboni
Paul Keating
Joanna Gierulska
Gusztav Nemes
Pedro BROSEI
Jean-Michel COURADES

DG AGRI

Contact Point

Haris MARTINOS
Kasia PANFIL
Pascale VAN DOREN

1. Context and purpose of the Meeting

The Focus Group meeting had three main objectives:

- Launching of the Focus Group: reminder of the Focus Group context and purpose, introduction of participants and overall experience/views regarding Leader;
- Common discussion on
 - the scope of innovation relevant to Leader and,
 - several examples experimented by the members in the design and implementation of eligibility conditions for innovation projects both on RDP and on local level;
- Discussion of a possible Focus Group working framework and timeframe to provide evidence basis (case studies, practical examples) in the design and implementation of innovation support schemes.

2. Introduction session

The Chairman reminded the key issues and difficulties regarding the preservation of the innovation/experimental character of Leader in the mainstreaming context in terms of eligibility rules for innovative actions, lack/absence of selection criteria regarding innovation in the standard measures, added value of Leader for beneficiaries within the current mainstreaming period, controls and financial circuits/instruction of payments, etc. Moreover, he reminded the overall delay in Leader implementation.

In that context, the role of the Focus Group is to gather relevant information and look for possible solutions.

2.1. Introductory presentations¹:

“Innovation in Leader approach in Poland RDP 2007 – 2013”, Joanna Gierulska, Polish Ministry of Agriculture

The presentation illustrated the approach followed in the Polish RDP as regards promoting innovation in Leader. Innovation is defined in an instruction to beneficiaries and implementing bodies. Poland provides a relevant example of a programming environment which facilitates innovation. In fact, innovation is a specified chapter for all Local Development Strategies and in their applications prospective LAGs must articulate their perception of such concept; innovation was one of the criteria of LDS quality assessment while selecting LAG. Transferability is also a pre-defined criterion for assessing innovation. Possible examples of innovation in Poland were mentioned.

The presentation also detailed the implementation approach of small projects (1000-5000 Euro) quite successful in Poland, designed especially for Leader, outside the catalogue of measures, contributing to the achievement of axis 3 objectives and defined by a wide scope of projects and potential beneficiaries. There is simplified version of the project application form for small projects.

“Preserving the innovative character of Leader: Claim & Reality”, Luis Fiedschuster, Austrian NRN

The presentation focused on the possible restrictions and prerequisites to manage innovation processes in Leader although there is a wide scope for innovation interpretation in European, national and local rural development strategies.

Limitations to innovation in Leader include that:

- almost the total budget is allocated to pre-defined measures;
- not all administrations are open to innovative approaches;
- there is often a lack of criteria to assess the innovative character of LDS or projects, which leads to non-transparent decision making.

Moreover, important pre-requisites for innovation in the context of Leader are appropriate organisational structures and the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders.

“Reminder by DG AGRI of the EU legislative framework applicable to Leader for the current period of rural development programming and interpretation issue by the Member States”.

- Definition of the Leader approach at programme level (Art 61 of Regulation 1698/2005)
 - area-based approach*
 - bottom-up approach*

¹ Presentations made during the 3rd LsC meeting on 25 November 2009

- public-private partnership*
- integrated approach*
- **innovation**
- cooperation
- networking *

** mandatory at Local action group level as well*

As a result of this provision innovation is included in the LAG selection criteria

- Article 64 of Regulation 1698/2005 foresees that operation can be supported outside the menu of measures (example of territorial marketing was mentioned as an example). This is a way to intervene in emerging economic activities to support other categories of beneficiaries or new types of projects. LAGs can therefore approve projects outside the pre-defined list of RDP measures (subject to the scope of Leader within an RDP); this procedure allows greater flexibility to LAGs.

2.2. Key discussion elements addressed by the Group

Main discussion points addressed on the introductory presentations:

- Scope and definition of innovation (and specificities/added value of Leader regarding innovation):
 - need to refine/update the concept of innovation and precise its added value in the Leader context e.g. improvement of local governance;
 - role of the LAG to support innovation and how to support the LAG with this role;
 - scope of innovation: transferability to new targets, new areas, sustainability of innovation, product and process innovation, etc;
 - alternative/complementary definitions addressed: creativity, acquisition of knowledge
- Alternative/creative ways and procedures to facilitate/accelerate the development of innovative projects:
 - create measures outside the catalogue;
 - use the flexibility offered by small project schemes (PL, NL).

3. Practical examples of implementation of Leader- approaches and examples for innovative measures/ projects

3.1. Examples delivered by the Group members

Example 1: Process Innovation and the LEADER approach by Paul Keating, NRN Ireland

The presentation was focused on process-innovation in the Leader approach applied to a practical example in the renewable energy sector, articulated around three main objectives: (i) to create a greater awareness among the general public as to the potential renewable energy (RE) provides; (ii) to provide technical support and establish RE projects in the area; (iii) to generate employment in RE installation.

The main questions addressed through this example are the following ones:

- Why look at process innovation?
 - Why do rural Areas need process innovation (lagging in some sectors, geographical areas?)
 - Can the LEADER approach nurture innovation (using the approach, the resources)?

- Can LAGs do this better than others (Leader is process and project oriented, added value of Leader)?
- Where is the Innovation? Integrated view of the project cycle, inter-territorial basis, focused partnership and complementary funding, customised approach, etc.
- Added value of the Leader approach: multiple project view, hybrid and focused partnership, transferability to other areas through LAGs.

Example 2: Innovation in Estonia, some samples by Aivar Niinemägi, LAG PAIK

The Estonian example illustrated an innovative system for evaluation of the projects in which 13 LAGs are involved. This new method of evaluation is focused on an integrated tool combining an electronic database, electronic evaluation and electronical reports.

Example 3: Innovative project from Bavaria by Anke Wehmeyer, NRN Germany

The Bavarian innovative project includes many projects and the objective is to improve the added value for the tourism sector and the professional assistance of visitors based on the definition of a marketing concept, establishment of a network of cooperation partners to develop different offers including gastronomy, hotel sector, field trip destinations, culture, shopping facilities for local products and a focus on development of agricultural, energy related and local development projects.

Example 4: Innovation in the RDP and Leader by Marieke Koot, NRN Netherlands

The presentation was firstly focused around the definition on innovation as defined in the RDP e.g. new products, services, new methods of involving local people in the decision-making process and the implementation of projects, links between economic sectors, as well as the LAG level (free to chose its own definition for innovation) e.g. experimental character, strengthening of social cohesion, function model for other areas.

Secondly, a practical example of innovative project has been detailed “Traveling landscape” aiming to raise awareness about the culture and landscape based on the following innovative components: (i) new way of presenting information; (ii) initiative which travels to the people and not the other way around; local involvement; youth involvement.

3.2. Key discussion elements addressed by the Group

Main discussion points addressed based on the practical examples presented:

- Interpretation of innovation at the different levels (MAs, LAGs); need for dialogue between the different stakeholders on Leader and key components understanding;
- Selection criteria for innovation: how is it addressed at RDP level, at LAG level?
- Demarcation criteria with other EU funds: how is it addressed at RDP and local level?
- Consideration/ integration of risk component linked to innovation by the selection bodies e.g. Managing Authorities;
- As a key intermediary contribution of the Focus Group, need to collect evidence basis material with practical experiences illustrating how innovation is defined/applied in Member States (identification of issues and practical solutions).

4. Next steps

The following actions have been agreed by the Group:

- Members are invited to provide their comments on DG AGRI working paper;

- CP to send the draft minutes to the Chairs (DE and NL) within 10 days maximum and to be further circulated to the whole Group;
- Together with the draft minutes, CP to provide a draft questionnaire template as a common tool to collect concrete examples on how the MS addressed and applied innovation; possible aspects to be covered:
 - Various models for innovation? Different definitions of innovation at different levels
 - Innovative examples from Member States
 - Key areas of innovation in Member States
 - Review of administrative procedures to better fit with innovation dimension

Suggestion:

- Comments on Questionnaire to be sent back by 26th February 2010
- Draft practical examples based on the questionnaire to be completed by end of March.
- Finalisation Focus Group 2 report (set of concrete solutions/recommendations based on experiences) for the next Leader subcommittee by end of April 2010.
- Based on the above material, members are invited to provide any other key suggestion e.g. working programme and implementation process until end of April.

Annexes:

- Introductory presentations
- Practical example presentations
- Working document established by DG AGRI
- Draft template to collect innovation examples (design of the implementation procedure and practical applications) in Member States