



The Brussels Declaration: Safeguarding the future of the LEADER approach

On the 27th and 28th of April 2012, more than 400 local development experts from 300 Local Action Groups and all 27 EU Member State representatives met in Brussels for the ENRD Leader conference “Local Development Strategies and Co-operation: Key Approaches to Local Development” in order to kick start their preparation for the 2014-20 Community Led Local Development era envisaged to contribute towards the EU2020 goals.

Against the background of the regulations for the next programming period 2014-2020 and the emergence of Community Led Local Development as its central tool, the participants of the conference endorsed the following declaration in support of the Leader approach:

- The Commission’s initiative to bring Community Led Local Development and the multi-fund approach to the forefront of the next programming period is a highly commendable development. Moreover it indicates the Commission’s recognition of the true potential and the positive impact that bottom up, grass roots methods and approaches can have upon the regeneration of stagnating economies and the rejuvenation of rural areas as a whole.
- Having said this, the process of securing adequate funding for Community Led Local Development in EU rural territories should by no means result in the reduction of Leader funding within the 2nd Pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy, as for most of the EU’s 2.300 Local Action Groups, rural development will still remain the main area of focus in 2014-20.
- The Leader approach is an ideal tool for supporting the Europe 2020 Strategy aims in terms of “smart”, “sustainable” and “inclusive” growth. Thousands of Local Action Groups have demonstrated that applying the specific features of the Leader approach can help find innovative, environmentally and socially sustainable solutions for rural development as well as help mobilising the unique human, social, economic and cultural potential of rural Europe.
- Therefore a decrease in the budget allocated to Leader will most definitely result in hindering the start up of new businesses, increasing unemployment, crippling services and endangering the overall generation of welfare in rural areas.



European LEADER Association for Rural Development – AISBL

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- Having at heart the welfare and sustainability of rural areas and communities, we call on policy makers to up keep their commitment of a minimum 5% allocation to Leader from the Rural Development funds.
- Following the publication of the findings of the European Court of Auditors report on Leader implementation (special report No5/2010), the ENRD established a Focus Group inclusive of a variety of actors from most member states whose work concentrates on improving the quality and impact of the Leader Local Development Strategies (LDS). Special emphasis has been placed on improving the methods of measurement and documentation to demonstrate the added value of the Leader approach. In parallel the Focus Group, in an effort to support the Community Led Local Development programming and implementation both at national and LAG level, has collected a wealth of information, relevant practices and recommendations on LDS design and implementation. Should Leader funding be reduced, the results of the Focus Group will most definitely not be fully utilised while the capacity to put the recommendations into practice would be significantly hampered, thereby impeding the further improvement of the Leader approach.

We, the participants at the ENRD conference “Local Development Strategies and Co-operation: Key Approaches to Local Development” assembled in Brussels, urge policy makers:

- To safeguard the continued and smooth implementation of the Leader approach by securing a minimum 5% allocation from the Rural Development funds.

And hence

- to make rural areas more attractive to people to live and work in, and become centres of a more meaningful life for a growing diversity of people of all ages;

27th of April 2012