



- **KEEP LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN:** An ongoing dialogue with the authorities (Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies) is important – they can alert LAGs to potential pitfalls and provide practical guidance.
- **CAPACITY BUILDING OF ACTORS:** It is very important to develop capacity of stakeholders at all levels, therefore the value of training, coaching and mentoring is high and should be recognized as such.
- **MONEY MATTERS:** Be careful with funding – assess cost accurately, assess match funding accurately and be prepared to adjust accordingly.
- **SELECT PROJECTS IN LINE WITH THE LDS OBJECTIVES:** Therefore effective selection criteria should be defined accordingly.
- **KEEP WATCHING:** The LDS and its projects need constant review – and when required adjustment, therefore monitoring and evaluation of the LDS performance on an on-going basis is important.
- **SELF-EVALUATION:** Done by LAGs is a good tool for the assessment of the LDS progress.
- **INTERACT WITH THE COMMUNITY:** It is vital that LAG members have direct interaction with the project promoters – especially as regards monitoring and evaluation.
- **FOCUS ON THE BIGGER PICTURE:** the progress and outcomes of projects must be seen in the context of the overall LDS.
- **SPREAD THE WORD:** LAGs should actively promote what they are doing and how they are doing it– especially to the community itself. People need to know there’s a strategy and that it’s being achieved.
- **ENJOY THE LEARNING CURVE:** Practitioners should be encouraged to learn through the process and share what has been learned!



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Photo : © Contact Point
 doi 10.2762/40525
 ISBN 978-92-79-26187-9

 9 789279 261879



K3-30-12-806-EN-C

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LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

LEADER Focus Group (FG) on
Better Local Development Strategies



Rural development is an increasingly important component of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). It includes many different themes and areas of interest including the LEADER community-led local development approach which is a well proven and increasingly popular tool within the EU Rural Development Policy.

In order to increase knowledge and ensure greater effectiveness in the current and future implementation of the LEADER method, four “working groups” on LEADER have been established within the ENRD LEADER Sub-Committee. Concrete recommendations based on detailed analysis of specific LEADER aspects have been proposed by each of the focus groups to improve the implementation of LEADER.

BETTER LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The Local Development Strategy (LDS) is an essential component of the LEADER approach, plotting a development path that reflects the unique combination of local assets, resources and aspirations. Local Action Groups (LAGs) have the responsibility of designing and implementing their LDS.

However, in practice, designing a high quality Local Development Strategy (LDS) can prove to be demanding. The 2010 special report of the European Court of Auditors (ECA) on the implementation of LEADER highlighted a number of weaknesses in relation to LDSs and emphasised the need for improvement.

The findings of the European Court of Auditors were one of the prompts to the establishment of the fourth LEADER Focus Group on better local development strategies formally launched in May 2011. In order to be able to advise the Member States with regards to the current and the next programming period and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the LEADER approach, the objectives of the Focus Group were to look at how EU Member States and Regions implemented their LEADER measures in order to:

- identify the critical requirements in the design of the Local Development Strategy; and
- collect tools and relevant practices used at Local Action Group (LAG) level ensuring an efficient implementation of the Local Development Strategy.

Chaired by LEADER practitioners from Finland and Portugal and guided by the Commission (Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development - DG AGRI), almost 80 volunteers participated in the group from all 27 EU Member States including representatives of LAGs, Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, National Rural Network support units and LAG Associations.



The findings of the Focus Group have been synthesised in a final report which includes a number of positive practices put in place across the EU and conclusions which identify possible areas for improvements in the design and implementation of LDSs.



- **IT'S A PROCESS:** A good LDS means a good process. A sound analysis of the needs of the community is required, based on a strong bottom-up approach, ownership by stakeholders, realism and a dynamic approach to delivering the strategy.
- **THE EARLIER THE BETTER:** Start early and plan – LDSs work well where there is continuity between one programme and the next and sufficient time taken to develop plans.
- **MOBILISING THE STAKEHOLDERS:** Beneficiaries are active partners in the LDS implementation, therefore involving them in the design and implementation of the LDS is key to success.

