

Notes on Group 2 : Processes which may be used in the national campaigns

The aim is to achieve the 'upward cascade of ideas'. How is this to be done ?

1. Through our own networks

Countries with ramified networks (i.e. having their roots at local level), are accustomed to passing ideas up and down between local and national level, via counties or regions, and can use that system. Examples are Sweden, Estonia, Finland, Denmark, Netherlands.

In other countries, the national champions may have a structure based more on partnership between different national and regional NGOs, and will need to find a way to use the networks of these partners. Examples are ACRE in England, with its network of Rural Community Councils; the RDN of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with 50 NGOs in membership; the RDN of Serbia with its 16 regional centres; the RDN of Macedonia with its 60 civil-sector member organisations, including those focused on women or on youth; SYTY in Finland which can use its networks of village action groups, Regional Village Associations and LAGs.

2. Through meetings which are already planned

Some countries already have meetings programmed for autumn 2014 or the first half of 2015, and can use these meetings to open up the theme and to gather ideas. For example :

- VIPA in Slovakia has its biennial Forum fixed for 16 October 2014
- The RDN of Macedonia will hold its General Assembly in October or November, and has regular regional meetings
- In Germany, the federal Village Association will hold its first assembly in November
- Latvian Rural Forum has a regular pattern of regional meetings and community weeks
- LDF Denmark will hold its national General Assembly in March 2013
- Romanian Network of LAGs will hold 4 regional meetings in Spring 2015
- Round-tables, and networking meetings with NGOs, are regularly held in the BiH Federation and in Republika Srpska
- SYTY in Finland will hold a national meeting in May or June 2015.

3. Through National Rural Parliaments

Some countries already have plans for National Rural Parliaments within the nine-month period October 2014 to June 2015, and can bring these events into the process of preparing for ERP 2015. Examples are Scotland, holding its national RP in November 2014; Bosnia and Herzegovina an RP covering the whole country in April or May 2015; Latvia in June (within its national EU presidency) and Estonia in August

4. Through Allies

Those national champions which do not have fairly complete coverage of their country may need to seek help from allied organizations. For example, the emerging national village network in Germany does not expect to cover more than Brandenburg, and suggests that the national LEADER network might cover the other Lander. The Rural Development Network in Serbia would seek help from the Convention (?) which brings together about 60 representatives of civil,

public and academic sectors; and from the LEADER-related media. ACRE, in England, can seek the help of its related networks, such as the Rural Farming Network and the LAG Network.

Some countries are still developing their civil networks. For example, Kosovo has a very weak Rural Development Network; no strong tradition of face-to-face consultation; some links between villages and municipalities; but very limited links between villages and government. People in the villages were not consulted in the preparation of the rural development program for 2014-20. The Kosovo team would like help, provisionally offered by SYTY (Finland).

In each country, members of the ERCA, PREPARE, ELARD or ECOVAST networks (other than the national champion) can be brought in to support the efforts.

In some countries, it may be necessary or useful to work through experts, such as the Romanian Centre for European Policy, which could organize a study at national level with support from the LAGS, using agreed techniques. Belarus has 35 Regional Strategies, which include analysis of the role of NGOs in rural and regional development. These could link to the proposed Think Tank at European level.

5. By electronic techniques

It is clear that websites, e-mail, electronic newsletters, skype etc. will play a major part in the stimulating and gathering of ideas, except in those countries (such as Moldova) which have relatively few computers in rural areas. Survey monkey may be a useful tool.

Social media – facebook, twitter, blogs – could do much to generate interest in the whole campaign, both in national languages and (in English) throughout Europe; but will need to be moderated if they are also to produce usable ideas.

6. Using a common thematic framework

The group asked for early action in preparing a clear framework of themes which may apply in many countries; which could be pursued by a questionnaire-type system; and which may thus be suited to a process of standard presentation in the report on each national process, followed by synthesizing at European level.

However it was also recognized that the process must be open to gathering themes and ideas which are special to particular countries or localities : this may point towards the use of open-ended questions, which will pose a challenge of presentation and synthesizing.

7. Face-to-face meetings, workshops etc.

Electronic means are not alone enough to handle the upward cascade of ideas. There must be face-to-face contact with some of the many people who may be involved, in order (a) to ensure reality, and inject human and local interest, and (b) to secure the signatures which are essential in order to justify the expected funding from Europe for Citizens.

This face-to-face contact may be achieved in local meetings, drop-in sessions, workshops etc. or in regional or even national meetings, organized by the national champion or their allies. Such meetings may be publicised through local media, and will need skilled moderators.

8. Preparation and training

Gathering ideas in a sensitive and systematic way, including effective listening, stimulation and synthesis, is a skilled task. National champions will need to undertake thoughtful preparation, and if necessary training of those who will handle the cascade.

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