



European Leader Association
for Rural Development
Brussels, www.elard.eu

Portuguese
Presidency
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Commissioner Corina Crețu, Regional Policy
Commissioner Phil Hogan, Agriculture and Rural Development
Commissioner Marianne Thyssen, Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility
Commissioner Karmenu Vella, Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
Commissioner Carlos Moedas, Research, Science and Innovation
Copy to President Juncker Cabinet

Brussels, 18 April 2018

The role of LEADER and CLLD (Community-Led Local Development) in the integrated and sustainable development of rural, coastal and urban areas, and in connecting citizens to the European mission, beyond 2020

Dear Commissioners,

We write to you on behalf of more than 2,000 Local Action Groups (LAGs) currently active in rural, coastal and urban areas and which are supported by the EAFRD LEADER measure and/or by other ESI Funds. As the European umbrella organisation of national LAG networks, we also speak on behalf of member organisations from 25 European countries level represent LAGs in rural, coastal and urban areas. Many of these LAGs deploy funding from different major EU funds, through the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) instrument introduced in 2014.

We believe that sub-regional partnerships, built on the LEADER and CLLD approach, can make a powerful contribution to the integrated and sustainable development of rural, coastal and deprived urban areas in the programme period beyond 2020, and could also assist greatly in connecting marginalised and disaffected citizens to the European mission.

We recognise the scale of the challenge facing the European Union, and in particular the need to sustain the impulse towards smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. We know that rural and coastal regions, with their natural and human resources and high-quality environments, can make a large contribution to this essential growth. We know that this contribution depends upon continued efforts to diversify the rural and coastal economies, to sustain and strengthen services and to manage sustainably the environmental resources. We know also, that urban deprivation causes a terrible waste of human resources; and that substantial efforts of urban regeneration, addressing the challenges specific to each urban neighbourhood, are needed in many parts of our cities.



These points imply that formal processes of regional, rural and urban development must continue in the years beyond 2020. These processes must combine and harmonise the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development; and they must be skilfully related to the individual character and developmental needs of each rural or coastal sub-region or urban neighbourhood. Moreover, at a time of high pressure on the resources of public authorities at all geographic levels, there is high need to harness the energies and resources of private and civil stakeholders and of local communities.

The LEADER approach, which has been widely tested and adapted since its introduction in 1991, and which has been extended into CLLD, is well-suited to be a key instrument in the development processes described above. It is a unique bottom-up instrument for sustainable, integrated and multi-sectoral local development. It enables public, private and civil stakeholders in each rural or coastal sub-region or urban neighbourhood to come together, to form partnerships, and to involve the local people in each area in shaping and implementing a local development strategy.

The local and participative character of the LEADER/CLLD approach also gives it high potential for connecting citizens to the European mission. Many citizens feel marginalised or disaffected, as is shown by low turnout in European elections and by impulses towards nationalism or urban disaffection. Local Action Groups, deploying European funds in a spirit of public participation, can enable people to ‘own’ their local development strategies and to share in decision-making “made in the EU”. In the territories supported by LEADER/CLLD, citizens feel that the EU has been caring for them in their own locality.

The future role of LEADER/CLLD. The LEADER Local Action Groups and ELARD are actively participating in the ongoing discussions on the future of the European rural development and cohesion policy. In this context, we would specifically like to refer to the [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the role of CLLD](#), which includes a proposal for a new implementation model. This is entirely consistent with the [“Cork 2.0 Declaration: A Better Life in Rural Areas”](#) and our own [“Tartu Declaration: Renewing LEADER/CLLD for 2020+”](#), which we have built in a participative manner with stakeholders from 25 Member States.

We therefore urge, that the framework for future EU development programmes should include a radical rethinking and expansion of the role of LEADER/CLLD. It should be seen as the crucial link between (on the one hand) the policies and funds of the European Union and of national or regional governments and (on the other hand) the efforts of local communities to pursue local development strategies, which truly reflect the special character and meet the needs of their localities. Local Action Groups should be truly enabled (in the words of the Smart Villages initiative), to be “a vehicle for social innovation and capacity building, empowering citizens to take ownership of the area’s development through the design and implementation of strategy and projects”.



This concept has clear implications for the degree of freedom and delegated authority which Local Action Groups should have in:

- the preparation of local development strategies in close consultation with local communities;
- the application of funds drawn from a range of European, national and regional programmes, and
- decisions about projects to be supported in their localities.

There should be an increased measure of freedom and delegated authority for Local Action Groups, with simplified rules and procedures and a truly integrated approach to local development and to the use of multiple funds.

Funding. Looking ahead to the next programme period, we wish to see the emergence – throughout the EU – of a widespread family of Local Action Groups and other sub-regional or neighbourhood partnerships, briefed and equipped to support local initiatives in the way described above. We therefore urge that:

- LEADER/CLLD should be mandatory in all Member States, applying in all types of territory – rural, coastal and urban.
- A new mechanism at European level should enable the smooth implementation of LEADER/CLLD in all Member States, with funding from the different ESI Funds managed in a “common basket”, with a single set of rules. At national or regional level, a single Managing Authority should handle all ESI and matching national funds for LEADER/CLLD.
- These funds should be earmarked for the objectives set by community-led local development strategies, with no demarcation between the different ESI funds. The funds should be deployed on a decentralised basis, through local partnerships, so that local strategies can respond to local needs, challenges and opportunities.

We would be happy to discuss this personally with you and therefore hope we will have the opportunity to meet you.

Sincerely,

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