

Meeting for Fisheries Community-Led Local Development Managing Authorities and National Networks Brussels, 17-18 June 2019

Participants: around 40 people from 19 Member States representing Managing Authorities (MAs), Intermediate Bodies (IBs) and National Networks responsible for Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) financed under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)

Organisers: FARNET Support Unit (FSU) at the initiative of the European Commission

DG MARE encourages Member States to take advantage of fisheries CLLD in the next period

With over 4 400 projects approved under fisheries CLLD, many Member States (MS) have already committed a considerable share of their funding allocated to CLLD under EMFF. Deputy Head of Unit Anna Zito stressed that DG MARE is convinced of the need to capitalise on the experience and capacity built on the ground and is looking forward to improving CLLD further in the next period.

In particular, it will be extremely important to remove the bottle necks in certain delivery systems, so that FLAGs can react more quickly and flexibly to local needs. Heavy systems, long administrative processes and complicated rules (“gold plating” the EU legislation at the national and/or regional level) undermines the bottom-up approach. On the other hand, where delivery seems to be working well, radical changes should be avoided.

Preparations of the EU legislative package for the 2021-2027 period are progressing, and key decisions concerning budgets and basic regulations are expected in early 2020. However, MAs should not wait to begin their preparations and dialogue with the FLAGs should start as quickly as possible.

Encouraging quality CLLD projects

To facilitate reporting of CLLD projects in Infosys, the FSU and FAME SU, have prepared an [explanatory note](#) to help MAs attribute the correct Infosys codes for “type of operation” and “type of beneficiary” to operations funded from Union Priority 4 (UP4) of the EMFF.

Eleven MAs agreed to share examples of interesting projects supported by their FLAGs:

Master – Apprentice Programme (Finland)	Fishermen Recommend (Preporučili Rybari) (Croatia)	Courtmacsherry Co-operative Community Shop (Ireland)	The Seaweed Agenda (Sweden)
Galician Women Cooperation Project (Spain)	Promoting Cultural Heritage in Lake Peipsi (Estonia)	Restoring the Gøl Boat (Denmark)	Public Access to the Baltic Sea (Latvia)
Canning Factory (France)	Dried Fish Museum (Portugal)	The Best Fish is Posavje Fish (Slovenia)	



Based on these presentations, participants discussed how they define quality projects. The following criteria are what they considered to be the most important characteristics of good CLLD projects:

- ✓ The project responds to a local need and has clear objectives.
- ✓ The idea of the project comes from the local level and there is clear support from the community.
- ✓ It has a strong local dimension (e.g. adding value to traditional activities).
- ✓ The project is embedded in a larger development plan for the area and can create a “snowball effect” (although this is extremely difficult to assess based on application).
- ✓ Partners from several sectors are involved (a strong partnership is an asset for the long-term sustainability of the project).
- ✓ The project is sustainable and its impact is maintained after the project period (in the case of non-profit investment projects, funding is assured for maintaining the activity in the long run).
- ✓ If jobs are created, they are sustainable.
- ✓ Private sector projects should have a solid business plan, while the beneficiary’s business skills are a key asset.
- ✓ However, it is important not to focus too much on “safe” projects, as innovation is only possible when a certain level of risk is allowed.
- ✓ For public projects, public access and the number of people benefitting are important.

Many participants mentioned that good projects are those that successfully transfer a tested good practice solution from another area – hence the importance of sharing such good practices.

Some characteristics of poor quality projects were also identified, e.g. projects imposed from the top down, projects that don’t lever in additional funding sources, funding of activities that are normally the obligation of local authorities, projects that are too complicated and difficult to implement in practice, or that have too many owners (leading to tension in the partnership).

What can MAs and National Networks (NNs) do to support quality projects?

MA/IB tasks	Joint MA and NN tasks	NN tasks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a good balance between “top-down” policy and “bottom-up” initiatives • Develop national rules that help FLAGs (“positive gold plating”) • Advice on projects to FLAGs and applicants • Rules for decision-making in FLAGs which ensure wide community participation • Carrying out or supporting evaluation • Setting up the National Network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular meetings, constant dialogue and exchange with FLAGs • Training for FLAGs to develop a strategic vision • Ensure clear and transparent information • Encourage a focus on evaluation and results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FLAG meetings • Brainstorming to facilitate innovation • Joint training for all actors: MA, IB, FLAGs • Focus groups with thematic experts and professionals • Dissemination of good practices

Towards a more efficient delivery of CLLD

A survey of FLAGs was carried out in early 2019 to collect information about the delivery systems of fisheries CLLD. Responses were received from 198 out of 367 FLAGs selected in the 2014-2020 period (54%), representing all 20 MS implementing fisheries CLLD. The respondents provided information about the **functioning of the delivery systems** and notably the speed of the delivery process, **key barriers** and their **negative consequences**.

In many MS, **significant delays** are observed during the initial phases of launching the programme (at the time when FLAGs are selected and starting their operations), as well as during the delivery process, particularly at the **approval and payment stages of projects**, with beneficiaries having to wait many months to get a decision or receive payment. Considerable differences are observed between MS, for example the average time to approve a project varies from less than two months to over nine months.

Delays and difficulties identified in the delivery of CLLD are mostly linked with the **application process** or the **approval stage**. The most frequently mentioned barrier is national/regional legislation limiting types of projects and/or beneficiaries followed by complicated application forms with a lot of information required and long time needed by MA/IB/PA to check and approve projects. Among the key negative consequences of delivery issues reported are: potential beneficiaries not applying, loss of FLAG credibility in the area, bad image of the EU in the area and a shift of budget towards easily spendable projects.

Delivery systems **designed with strong FLAG involvement** are assessed as significantly more helpful, especially if the FLAGs are also involved in **reviewing the system on an on-going basis**. Most respondents stress the need for delivery systems to be simplified and streamlined.

An ideal delivery system according to MAs (with some contributions from FLAGs):

- Is simple for all actors and includes mechanisms to make things easy for small private beneficiaries (including advance payments).
- Is flexible, adapted to needs and focused on results, not compliance.
- Leaves no scope for audit concerns (transparency rather than complexity).
- Has clear rules (without “grey areas”), but – knowing that it is impossible to foresee all eventualities – provides a systematic way of resolving ambiguity.
- Ensures adequate upstream work so that projects are better prepared at application stage.
- Makes it possible to get approval within a short time (for private beneficiaries in particular, “short” means 2-3 weeks).
- Is well explained to beneficiaries so that they understand all the requirements and limitations.
- Where possible, allows multi-funding and ideally the same rules for all funds.
- Allows for transfer of experience between funds.
- Has adequate resources: competent and sufficient staff in MA/IB, efficient digital application system, etc.

It is also important not to introduce radical changes in the implementation system between one programme period and another, as this leads to loss of capacity and big delays until the new system is fully operational.

Not much time is left to prepare for the next period: if FLAGs are to be operational by 2022, discussions with FLAGs, work on SWOT analysis, drafting the OPs and national rules (including a simple and efficient management and control system), building MA staff capacity, enabling preparatory support for developing the LDS and organising calls for FLAGs must start now.

National Networks

National Networks representatives exchanged ideas on what NNs can do to improve delivery systems of fisheries CLLD, and what they would like to see in the delivery guide currently being prepared by the FSU.

Although only a few NNs have a formal role in CLLD delivery (generally those in regionalised countries where they help to coordinate between FLAGS and IBs from different regions), many NNs contribute informally to improving delivery systems through activities such as:

- Periodic meetings between MA, IBs and FLAGS.
- Facilitating informal discussions between delivery actors, playing the role of a platform for dialogue.
- Organising round tables of all actors to analyse delivery and propose improvements.
- Regular Skype meetings (in Finland – once a week) to discuss different topics including delivery.
- Organisation of training days for MA, IB and FLAGS to ensure a common level of understanding.
- Playing the role of mediator between FLAGS, IBs and MAs, improving communication.

Some ideas for the CLLD delivery guide:

- 🗨️ Provide both good and bad practices at each step of delivery systems, and the “story behind success” (explain why delivery systems in some MS seem to be working better than in others).
- 🗨️ Present different models of calls for projects, including on-going applications (to avoid bottlenecks).
- 🗨️ Give some tips for the FLAG selection process in the next period (including information on the size of FLAG territories in different MS).
- 🗨️ Provide examples and explanations of well-functioning IT systems for CLLD delivery.
- 🗨️ Explain how the delivery tasks could be shared between MA and IBs in regionalised countries.
- 🗨️ Explain what NNs can do to improve delivery of fisheries CLLD.



MA Twinning

During the meeting some MAs used the opportunity to discuss in detail certain aspects of fisheries CLLD delivery with another MA in a special session of “MA twinning”. The Greek MA analysed the practices and rules which made it possible to select FLAGS and get them operational very quickly after the OP approval in Finland and Estonia. The Danish MA found out how the system for supporting FLAG cooperation projects worked in Poland.

Sea basin exchanges

Discussion of MAs from the Atlantic, Baltic and Mediterranean & Black Sea basins focused partly on [pesca-tourism](#) - this activity, understood as taking tourists on active fishing boats to watch fishermen at work, is allowed in some MS but not in others, mainly due to health and safety rules. Some MAs suggested that other activities could also be included here, e.g. ice-fishing in the countries around the Baltic Sea.

