

LEADER AXIS

1. TITLE OF THE AXIS

Leader

2. LEGAL BASIS

Articles 61 to 65 of Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005.

Articles 37 to 39 and point 5.3.4.1. of Annex II of Commission Regulation (EC) No... /2006.

3. OBJECTIVE

The Community Strategic Guidelines stipulate that the resources devoted to the Leader axis should contribute to the priorities of axis 1 and 2 and in particular of axis 3, but also play an important role in the horizontal priority of improving governance and mobilising the endogenous development potential of rural areas.

4. MINIMUM COMMUNITY REQUIREMENTS

The Leader approach at programme level shall comprise at least the following elements:

- (a) Area-based local development strategies intended for well-identified subregional rural territories;
- (b) Local public-private partnerships (local action groups)
- (c) Bottom-up approach with a decision-making power for local action groups concerning the elaboration and implementation of local development strategies;
- (d) Multi-sectoral design and implementation of the strategy based on the interaction between actors and projects of different sectors of the local economy;
- (e) Implementation of innovative approaches
- (f) Implementation of cooperation projects
- (g) Networking of local partnerships

5. SELECTION OF LOCAL ACTION GROUPS

Local action groups shall satisfy the following conditions:

- They must propose an integrated local development strategy based at least on the Leader characteristics as defined under 3.1 (a) to (d) and (g)
- They must consist of either a group already qualified for the Leader II or Leader + initiatives or according to the Leader approach, or be a new group representing partners from the various locally based socioeconomic sectors in the territory concerned. At the decision-making level the economic and social partners, as well as other representatives of the civil society, such as farmers, rural women, young people and their associations, must make up at least 50% of the partnership
- They must show an ability to define and implement a development strategy for the area
- Ability to administer public funds: The managing authority must ensure that the local action groups either select an administrative and financial lead actor able to administer public funds and ensure the satisfactory operation of the partnership, or come together in a legally constituted common structure the constitution of which guarantees the satisfactory operation of the partnership and the ability to administer public funds.

Area covered by the strategy:

- It shall be coherent and offer sufficient critical mass in terms of human, financial and economic resources to support a viable development strategy.
- The population of each area must be as a general rule greater than 5,000 inhabitants and not exceed 150,000 inhabitants. However, in properly justified cases the limits of 5,000 and 150,000 inhabitants may be lowered or increased respectively.
- Member States or regions may opt to cover either their whole territory or part of it by adapting accordingly the criteria for selecting the local action groups and the areas they represent.

Procedure for selecting local action groups:

- The procedures to select the LAGs must be open to all rural areas and ensure competition between the local action groups putting forward local development strategies
- Calls for proposals for the selection of rural areas for the implementation of local development strategies shall be organised no later than two years after the approval of the programmes. However, Member States or regions may organise additional calls for proposals, especially where Leader is open to new areas, in which case a longer time period may be needed.
- EU-15 member states (member states which belonged to the European Union before 1 May 2004) shall seek to ensure that priority is given to the selection of Local Action Groups which have integrated cooperation in their local development Strategies.

6. MEASURES

6.1. Measure “Implementation of the local development strategies”

As defined by the programme these strategies will contribute to achieve the objectives of one or more of the three other axes (improving the competitiveness of the agriculture and forestry sector; enhancing the environment through land management and improving the quality of life and promoting diversification of economic activities).

If the operation funded under the local strategy correspond to an eligible operation under one of the measures defined in Regulation 1698/2005 for the other axes, the relevant conditions (including exclusions deriving from demarcation criteria with other EU funds –ie. Structural funds) applied to this measure in the Regulation will apply. But operations supported do not have to be restricted to the ones eligible under the Regulation measures, LAGs can finance other actions conditioned to achieve the objectives of the three axis.

6.2. Measure “Cooperation”

- Eligible cooperation partners

Cooperation shall involve at least one local action group selected under the Leader axis. It shall be implemented under the responsibility of a coordinator local action group.

Cooperation shall be open to partnerships covered by the provision under article 59 (e) of the Regulation 1698 (public-private partnerships) and to other rural areas organised according to the following features: a) presence of a local action group active in rural development, with capacity to elaborate a development strategy for a geographical territory, b) the organisation of the local group is based on a partnership of local actors.

- Content of the cooperation project : conception, preparation and implementation of a joint action

Cooperation shall include the implementation of a joint action.

Only expenditure for the joint action, for running common structures and for preparatory technical support is eligible.

Expenditure on animation may be eligible in all the areas concerned by the cooperation

Please note that technical assistance for cooperation is eligible under the National network action plan under Technical Assistance (Article 68).

- Types of the cooperation

Two types of cooperation activities exist:

-Inter-territorial cooperation means cooperation within a Member State

-Transnational cooperation means cooperation between territories in several Member States and with territories in third countries. In this case, only expenditure relating to the territories within the Community shall be eligible for support.

- Selection of the cooperation projects

The cooperation projects are selected:

- by the local action groups where cooperation action is integrated in their local development strategy.
- by the competent authority of the Member State for other local action groups . In this case, cooperation projects may be submitted by the local action groups to the competent authority by 31 December 2013 at the latest.

Member States shall send the Commission the list of the approved cooperation projects

5.3. Measure “Running costs, acquisition of skills and animation”

Acquisition of skills and animation may consist (according to article 59 of the 1698/2005 Regulation) of:

- Studies of the area concerned
- Measures to provide information about the area and the local development strategy
- The training of staff involved in the preparation and implementation of a local development strategy. Please note that the preparation of training programmes for LAG in the process of formation is eligible under the National network action plan under Technical Assistance (Article 68).
- Promotional events and the training of leaders

Running costs of local action groups shall be eligible within a limit of 20% of the total public expenditure of the local development strategy.

Distribution of running costs, acquisition of skills and animation must be done pro rata to the amounts of Axis 4 which will contribute to the objectives 1, 2 and 3.

6. GOOD PRACTICES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION

- The success of the bottom-up approach implies that there is no pre-existing precise definition of eligible operations by the competent authorities. The objective is to take greater account of initiatives launched by local people, subject respect of course of the eligibility rules of the EAFRD.
- Selection criteria for local strategies and not territories should be identified at the level of the programme. Quality of prior diagnostic of territories, pilot character and integration of strategies are key issues.
- Co-financing by regional authorities should respect the autonomy of LAG. These authorities should therefore not be represented within the LAG among the local authorities.
- In the implementation of LAG development strategies there must be a balance between management and animation tasks.

- Managing authorities should limit their role to the eligibility check in the approval procedure of individual operations and should leave the project selection as a competence of the Local action group.

7. LESSONS LEARNED FROM IMPLEMENTATION (EXPECTED DIFFICULTIES)

Measure "Implementation of local development strategies"

In several Member States, the implementation of the Leader operational programmes has encountered some difficulties such as: delays in the selection of LAGs, and consequently in the launching of programmes, the creation of fragile partnerships when roles are poorly defined, the accumulation of disparate procedures, poor innovative character of actions, resulting in interventions of low effectiveness.

MEASURE TEMPLATE “IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES”

Title of the measure

Measure code

Article which covers the measure

Objectives of the measure

Axis (1, 2 and/or 3) covered by the Leader Axis

Procedure and timetable for selecting the local action groups, including objective selection criteria

Planned indicative number of LAGs

Minimum percentage of economic and social partners and civil society organisations represented at the decision making level of the LAG (minimum of 50%)

Planned percentage of rural territories covered by local development strategies

Justification for selection of areas whose population falls outside the limits set out (5,000 to 150,000)

Procedure for the selection of operations by the local action groups

Description of the financial circuits applicable for local action groups

Type of aid

Demarcation criteria with other local partnerships financed by EU funds (ie. groups under the European Fisheries Funds)

Financing

Quantified targets for EU common indicators

Type of indicator	Indicator	Target 2007-2013
Output	Number of local action groups supported	
	Total size of LAGs area (in km ²)	
	Number of projects financed by LAGs	
Result	Gross number of jobs created	
	Number of successful training results	
Impact	Net additional value expressed in PPS	
	Net additional FTE jobs created	

Additional programme-specific indicators and quantified targets

MEASURE TEMPLATE “INTERTERRITORIAL AND TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION”

Title of the measure

Measure code

Article which covers the measure

Scope and actions

Procedure, timetable and objective criteria to select inter-territorial and transnational cooperation projects, including indication whether cooperation will be ex-ante integrated in the local development strategy or selected later by the Managing authority.

Axis (1, 2 and/or 3) covered by the Leader Axis

Quantified targets for EU common indicators

Type of indicator	Indicator	Target 2007-2013
Output	Number of supported cooperation projects	
	Number of cooperating LAGs	
Result	Gross number of jobs created	
Impact	Net additional FTE jobs created	

Specific programme indicators and quantified targets

MEASURE TEMPLATE “RUNNING COSTS, ACQUISITION OF SKILLS AND ANIMATION”

Title of the measure

Measure code

Article which covers the measure

Objectives of the measure

Rationale of the measure

Limit to apply on the share of the LAG budget for overhead costs (maximum of 20%)

Indicative estimate of the share of expenditure under article 59(1) to (d) of Regulation 1698 which will be used for skills acquisition and animation for the Leader axis

Quantified targets for EU common indicators

Type of indicator	Indicator	Target 2007-2013
Output	Number of skill acquisition and animation actions	
	Number of participants in actions	
Result	Number of successful training results	

Programme specific indicators and quantified targets