



How to work with Smart Villages?

Orientations for LEADER Local Action Groups

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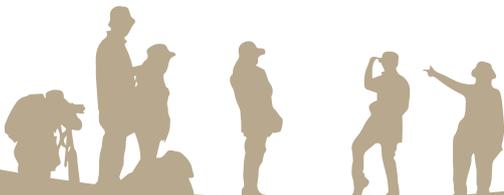
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This working document complements the relevant briefing documents prepared by the ENRD Thematic Group on Smart Villages and builds on information collected and shared during the LEADER Thematic Lab on working with Smart Villages. The contents of this document do not represent the official position of DG AGRI

1. INTRODUCTION

Building on the outcomes of the LEADER Thematic Lab on 'Working with Smart Villages'⁽¹⁾, this document aims to complement the ENRD briefing⁽²⁾ on the potential role of LEADER/CLLD in supporting the Smart Villages concept. The document presents supplementary information on how Smart Villages can be enhanced in a LEADER context. It considers possible key steps for LEADER stakeholders planning to embark on the path of Smart Villages development and provides some recommendations for policy planners and LEADER stakeholders for consideration of the next programming period. More general information on Smart Villages is accessible via the ENRD's Smart Villages Portal⁽³⁾.

- (1) https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-leader-thematic-lab-smart-villages_en
- (2) https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/enrd_publications/smart-villages_orientations_leader-clld.pdf
- (3) https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/smart-and-competitive-rural-areas/smart-villages/smart-villages-portal_en



2. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY LEADER SUPPORT TO SMART VILLAGES?

LEADER delivers development solutions to sub-regional territories through the involvement of local stakeholders in the design and implementation of Local Development Strategies (LDS). Local Development Strategies should include ‘innovative elements in the local context’.

Smart Villages (SV) approaches develop innovative local solutions at community level. According to the working definition of Smart Villages these are “communities in rural areas that use innovative solutions to improve their resilience, building on local strengths and opportunities.” This also means that there is no rigid definition or a ‘one size fits all’ model for Smart Villages. Smart Villages also rely on a participatory approach and in some cases make use of digital technologies to offer solutions to local challenges in rural communities.

LEADER is formally programmed with a minimum earmarked budget as an integral part of Rural Development Programmes (RDPS) in the current (2014-2020) programming period. Smart Villages do not have a specific intervention or budget within the

RDPS framework in this programming period and LEADER can therefore be one of the important ways of supporting them. In this respect, the approach under the future CAP Strategic Plans will be very similar.

Both LEADER and SV should be enabled to develop local solutions for local needs identified by the communities concerned which contribute to developing their territories. Innovative solutions in Smart Villages often focus on supporting local actions which lead to a digital, green or social ‘transition’. This often involves working on basic services – such as care, education, mobility and energy. Member States may, however, encourage Smart Villages approaches to address some specific thematic priorities defined in the CAP Strategic Plan (e.g. climate change, social inclusion).

For a better understanding of the context in which LEADER and Smart Villages can interact and in which LEADER may provide support to Smart Villages, it may be helpful to compare the Smart Villages approach to the key elements of the LEADER approach.

Key element of LEADER*	Essential for SV	Description
Sub-regional areas		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In LEADER the definition of the Local Action Group territory (within certain population thresholds) is required from the outset when drawing up the Local Development Strategy. For Smart Villages initiatives there is no requirement to have a pre-defined sub-regional area (or Local Action Group territory). The aim is to respond to citizens initiatives in one or two villages within a LAG territory or groups of villages which may cross LAG territories.
Local Action Groups		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In LEADER, (formalised) Local Action Groups are required for the design and implementation of the Local Development Strategy. Smart Villages initiatives do not require the existence of formalised Local Action Groups – they can be initiated by informal community groups, NGOs, etc.
Integrated and multi-sectoral area-based local development strategies		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An integrated and multi-sectoral area-based local development strategy is a requirement of the LEADER approach. Smart Villages support local actors to find solutions for specific local challenges. They are not ‘mini-LEADER strategies’, rather targeted collective projects, and can also work independently, without the existence of LEADER Local Development Strategies.
Based on local needs and potential		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The involvement of local stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of the Local Development Strategy and the identification of local needs is essential to LEADER. Smart Villages initiatives are based on local demand, capacities and the active participation of the local communities.
Networking		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Networking is an essential principle of LEADER and a strong success factor for Smart Village initiatives. LEADER’s strength lies in animation, linking resources, and access to expert advice. Similarly, in Smart Villages it is particularly important to involve knowledge ‘agents’ (research, universities) in networking activities.
Cooperation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cooperation is an essential principle of LEADER. Cooperation is a strong success factor for scaling up Smart Village initiatives and can involve partners that are not covered by LEADER.
Innovation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovation is an essential principle of LEADER. Innovative elements need to be put into practice considering the local context and innovation should be assessed in reference to the local situation. Smart Villages also build on local needs and aim to find innovative responses to these needs at local (village, community) level.

LINKAGES BETWEEN LEADER AND SMART VILLAGES

There is considerable potential for ‘cross-fertilisation’ between the LEADER and Smart Villages approaches. LEADER Local Action Groups are well placed to support Smart Villages. For such LEADER support to be effective, the most important is a framework that ensures that LEADER LAGs can fully implement all the features of LEADER without excessive administrative and other barriers, along with an enabling environment in terms of access to funds, regulations conducive to SV development and coordination among different levels.

* Based on REGULATION (EU) No 1303/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013

3. KEY SUCCESS FACTORS FOR LEADER AND SMART VILLAGES

For successful LEADER support to Smart Village initiatives the ‘interplay’ of several success factors is necessary. These can relate to the following:

Role of the Local Action Group (enhanced animation and brokerage)	Awareness and access to knowledge	Local vision and strategic framework	Enhanced partnerships and cooperation	Smart Villages integrated in programming documents	Sufficient resources - fast, flexible funding
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Here is how each of these can work in the context of LEADER providing support to SV:

- Role of the Local Action Group:** Local Action Groups (LAGs) need to build on and enhance their animation activities to raise awareness and support local communities to create their own vision for what they want to achieve as Smart Villages. For Smart Villages to succeed, LAGs need to be able to support social innovation processes for which an enhanced partnership and wider cooperation is often essential. This adds to the local public, private and civil society partners traditionally associated with LAG partnerships and should ideally draw in wider expertise in the form of research institutes, universities or other knowledge networks who may be operating outside the local community.
- Awareness and access to knowledge** about the challenges that will be tackled through Smart Villages their benefits, viability and added value in the local community (for example, renewable energy, digitalisation, sustainable mobility). This requires awareness-raising activities coordinated and supported by the LAG at the local level, access to external expertise and clarity regarding what is meant by Smart Villages at all levels of the LEADER delivery system. There is also a need for local people to have better access to knowledge about emerging technologies.
- Local vision and strategic framework:** LEADER LAGs can decide to integrate SV within their Local Development Strategies (LDS) during the LDS development process. This integration should mean that LDSs are ‘equipped’ to work with and support Smart Villages through funding support, animation, networking and other means. The specific definition and focus of the SV transition must always be based on the local context (specific needs of villages or communities). LAGs can also support bottom-up SV initiatives evolving within their territory led by local ‘champions’ that can be individuals, NGOs, businesses, or institutions.
- Enhanced partnership and cooperation:** The cooperation and partnership LAGs are involved in within their local territories need to be enhanced to involve relevant knowledge agents (universities, training centres, research institutions, etc.) for enabling the social and technological innovation processes required for an SV transition. At the same time, LAGs involved in SV transition need to actively engage with SV knowledge networks and other LAGs involved in SV.
- Smart Villages integrated in programming documents:** The Smart Village concept needs to be integrated in the relevant local, regional and national development programming documents to provide a solid basis for SV development. The enhanced role of LEADER Local Action Groups in providing effective support to Smart Villages also needs to be recognised in relevant programming documents (rural development programmes or the future CAP Strategic Plans) and by the relevant regional and national authorities. Based on this, LEADER Local Action Groups should have a clear mandate and resources to work with Smart Villages.
- Sufficient resources, fast and flexible funding:** Access to LEADER funding needs to be simple, fast and flexible for SV to work. Due to the broad nature and complexity of some Smart Villages projects, tools such as Simplified Cost Options⁽⁴⁾ and combinations of various funding sources (other EAFRD measures, other EU funds, national regional and local funding) help to enable the implementation of these more ‘complex projects. The use of SCOs is particularly important as it reduces the administrative burden (administrative cost in human resource, document, time spent) related to the need to justify each cost item (this may be particularly burdensome in the case of complex projects with various types of activities and costs). Local Action Groups should have a sufficient level of resources for local animation and capacity building – two key preconditions for successful Smart Village initiatives.

(4) More information:

- at the event page of the ENRD workshop on Simplified Cost Options ‘Experience gained and new opportunities’ https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-simplified-cost-options-experience-gained-and-new-opportunities_en
- in the ENRD Guidance on SCOs (in five parts) at the event page of the ENRD Workshop on Simplified Cost Options in LEADER/CLLD https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-simplified-cost-options-leaderclld_en

4. WHAT ARE THE KEY ACTIONS IN SMART VILLAGES DEVELOPMENT?

The implementation of a Smart Village transition requires a number of activities (see figure) starting from raising awareness about Smart Villages in the local territory to planning and implementing the relevant transition/change. For Smart Villages to succeed locally, the LAG's role in strategic animation relating to these activities can be very important.



Some LAGs may consider integrating Smart Village activities into the priorities of their Local Development Strategy and ensure that there are sufficient resources to support emerging initiatives by local communities. They may also go one step further and take 'ownership' of the whole process by playing an active role in the development of Smart Village initiatives from the outset (starting with awareness-raising in local communities about SV) and in each and every stage of the process.

The level of LAG engagement will depend on the local context, the size of their territories, population and resources, the needs of the local population and communities, as well as the existing number of activities of other local stakeholders in the SV. LAGs involved in working with SV can focus on important elements such as strategic animation, social innovation and

community engagement which are at the core of the Smart Villages approach.

TRANSITIONS – A KEY ASPECT OF THE SMART VILLAGES APPROACH

The idea of a process of transition – towards the application of digital and other solutions, more empowered rural communities and new services, more local innovation and new knowledge networks – is central to the Smart Villages approach. In different EU Member States, LAGs are at different stages of this transition. In [Romania](#), Local Action Groups are working together to define what the Smart Villages approach will mean for them in the next programming period, in [Sweden](#) a LAG has made Smart Villages the core of its activities, in [Finland](#) LAGs participate in a [Smart Villages competition](#), and in [Catalunya](#) LAGs scaled up their Smart Villages initiatives through cooperation.

- [Explore a collection of Smart Villages projects](#) (including those which are LEADER supported).
- Explore a large collection of Smart Village projects and initiatives [here](#).

The process followed by Smart Villages can also be viewed as a series of specific steps/types of activities building on one another, where each step can be an important prerequisite to the next – starting from establishing local needs to implementing investments and scaling them up (see diagram). Depending on the local context and the 'maturity' of the local initiatives, the LAG may get involved in these activities from the beginning or start supporting an existing activity.

For instance, in some LAG territories the relevant needs may be known and capacities and ideas already available, but the feasibility of these ideas need testing – in this context the LAG can support the preparation of technical/feasibility studies or draw on further research capacities.

In other contexts, pilot projects may already have been completed and the task relates more to implementing the first investments and scaling up. For other Local Action Groups and LAG territories, the ideas, needs and capacities are yet to be developed and explored before any further activities can be launched.



5. ENRD RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- [LEADER Resources](#): Your gateway to the LEADER knowledge gathered on the ENRD website
- [LEADER Innovation](#)
- The [LEADER Thematic Lab on Working with Smart Villages](#) - event page (with various presentations on different levels of LEADER support to SV from four EU Member States)
- The [Smart Villages Portal](#)
- [How can LEADER/CLLD support Smart Villages?](#) A briefing exploring the potential role of LEADER/CLLD in supporting the implementation of the Smart Villages concept (prepared by the ENRD Thematic Group on Smart Villages)
- [How to support Smart Villages strategies which effectively empower rural communities?](#) Preliminary orientations on how to support Smart Villages – both now and in the future