

# HOW TO EFFECTIVELY SUPPORT LEARNING AND INNOVATION NETWORKS

**Document for the 1st afternoon session**  
**FINAL SOLINSA CONFERENCE, BRUSSELS, 3 DECEMBER 2013**

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## MAIN RESULTS: ISSUES TO PROMPT DISCUSSION

### Kinds of support

- Support measures for learning and innovation networks can be both external to and internal to the LINSAs
- External measures are dominantly financial (grants and loans) but also there is significant policy support (for example in land use planning and in agriculture) and support for knowledge and information (including education and research).
- Main problem areas with external support are that it can compromise the objectives of the LINSAs, can be seen as restrictive in what a LINSAs can do can be bureaucratic and can be short term, limiting strategic development.
- Some LINSAs wish to remain independent of external support so that they are not limited by it.
- Internal support measures include finance (membership fees, sales of goods and services and fees for advice). But in general, internal support is 'softer' including animation, facilitation, organisation and importantly, internal knowledge exchange and volunteering. Of these, volunteering is particularly important.
- Internally, knowledge exchange can be informal and tacit associated with social innovation and also technical or economic innovation
- The balance between external and internal support varies greatly between LINSAs and there is also a great variation on in terms of whether support is used in a planned way, or is opportunistic
- External measures are dominantly *financial* (grants and loans) but also there is significant *policy support* (for example in land use planning and in agriculture) and support for *knowledge and information* (including research).

### Operational issues

- LINSAs that are closely related to *conventional agriculture* benefit most from (agricultural) policy support.
- More innovative and multifunctional LINSAs fit less easily into policy 'pigeon holes'.
- Some sustainable innovations actually are at variance with mainstream policy
- Cost-effectiveness is not always an objective of LINSAs: they may not be seen as businesses but as 'movements'. Much voluntary effort also remains un-costed.
- The understanding of effectiveness varies between LINSAs, depending on the value systems used. It is broadly interpreted. Some LINSAs see independence from state support as a prerequisite for effectiveness. Etc.

## Evaluation

- Evaluation criteria for effectiveness often remain unstated or implicit.
- Only a minority of LINSAs have measurable effectiveness criteria and outcomes measures (for example sustainability indicators).
- Evaluation for LINSAs is often informal and implicit (personal reflections, gut feelings), which can be quite partial.
- Formal and predetermined evaluation criteria can stifle innovation.
- LINSAs can have multiple objectives that may not be entirely compatible in conventional evaluation terms

## A Stepwise approach to support LINSAs

We suggest structuring the supporting activities of the supportive persons, in four steps:

- First step: identification of LINSAs, establishing trust between Innovation broker and LINSAs, and understanding its characteristics.
- Second step: joint analysis of needs, negotiation of collaboration, and formalising of the objective of the supporting activities.
- Third step: carrying out the supporting activities.
- Fourth step: evaluation of the activities, and possible definition of a new set of objectives.

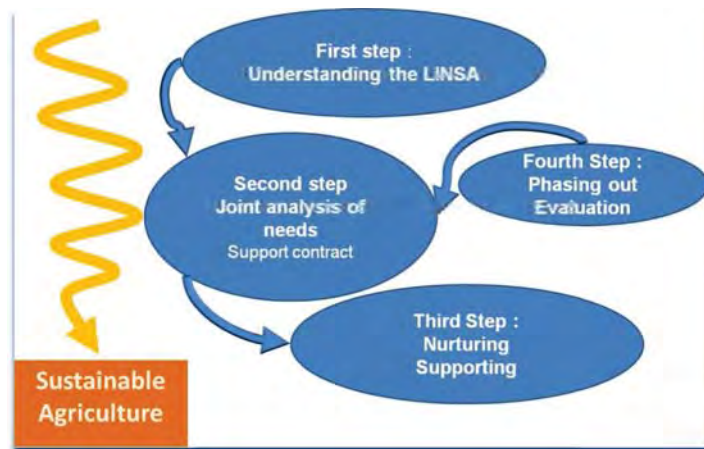


Fig 1: Four steps to support LINSAs

## Four types of supporting activities

- Purposefully catalysing innovation through bringing together actors and facilitating their interaction, in order to facilitate the emergence of new LINSAs (innovation brokering)
- Helping established LINSAs to lead strategic reflection, develop their communication and assess their leadership. These actions can be led with the whole LINSAs, subgroups, the board or only the leaders.
- Connecting LINSAs and establish a network of LINSAs in order to facilitate mutual learning from multi-actor perspectives, to disseminate innovations and to enable constructive and controversial discussions.
- Participating to a supportive persons' network by sharing experiences and developing training methods in order to improve participative interventions, understanding processes in networks and create analytical tools as accelerators for intervention.

## MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS: ISSUES TO PROMPT DISCUSSION.

### The nature of support for LINSAs

- seek to target Pillar II of CAP at sustainable agriculture;
- get help with governance arrangements;
- get assistance with strategic development and have a proper strategy for dissemination
- seek to enlist political support;
- money that is used for multiple purposes simultaneously can be particularly cost effective;
- use seed funding to unlock volunteer support;
- make funding as long-term as possible;
- avoid over dependence on external 'subsidy as this can stifle innovation;

### Supporting LINSAs processes

- develop network, co-operation projects and other forms of capacity building;
- develop partnership working with like-minded groups;
- build organisational capacity;
- keep organisational complexity to a minimum;
- minimise bureaucratic structures;
- improve communication;
- seek to minimise uncertainty (but do try new things);



- make discussions full and open and be receptive to new ideas;
- try and ensure that good monitoring systems are in place;

### Support for LINSAs goods and services

- develop good communications and media representation;
- develop a clear public image;
- ensure visibility;
- develop official recognition;
- develop efficient and ethical business methods;
- seek to secure certification for sustainable methods and quality products;
- develop clear brand identity;
- stress the wider benefits of the LINSAs to individual communities and to society as a whole;

### Support for social and human capital in LINSAs

- harmonise values;
- build individual capacity;
- study clubs can be particularly good at raising social capital;
- nurture social innovation as well as technical and economic innovation;
- develop trust;

### Support for learning and innovation for LINSAs

- be innovative with new ideas;
- develop both formal and informal learning
- develop clear brokerage for innovation;
- develop learning for innovation;
- develop new areas of learning rather than rely on just what is available in the conventional AKIS;
- use technical support in a targeted way;
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## A SET OF QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE ABOVE THAT CAN FORM A QUESTIONNAIRE TO PARTICIPANTS

- How can the current Common Agricultural Policy best support sustainable agriculture?
- What mechanisms of support best ensure the continued success of LINSAs?
- How can new mechanisms of learning and innovation for sustainable agriculture best be developed?
- How important are evaluation mechanisms for LINSAs and what should these be?
- Should LINSAs be fully embraced within agricultural policy or should they remain independent of it?