

**RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK A TOOL IN SUPPORTING THE  
PROCESS OF FINANCING THE RURAL AREA-FEATURES, OBJECTIVES  
AND STRUCTURE**

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***Abstract:** Rural development networks emerged from the need to protect and support the community. The role of ERDN is to create and strengthen communication and exchange relationships between groups distinguished by different socio-economic status, ethnic and cultural differences. The objective of the research is to describe rural development network features, objectives and structure.*

**Key words:** rural development, network, structure, ERDN

**INTRODUCTION**

The European Union through expansion brought together states with different development structures. [3] The structures are approached from several scientific, geographic, ecologic, sociologic, economic perspectives, politics, rural planning. [2] The exchange of knowledge and experience, the way in which a problem is analyzed in a country, can create added value for all users, because the processes that take place in the rural environment have similarities with the processes that other European countries go through. [1]

The European Union supports network structures at European and national level that bring together LEADER groups, administrations and all the bodies involved in rural development.

Rural development networks emerged from the need to protect the community and rural heritage from urbanization. The factors that determined the development of the networks relate to the decline of agriculture and the rural economy, to migration and unbalanced age structures, to the globalization of markets and the influence of European markets. [4,5,9] The network is formed by a group of organizations that have similar goals and that identify common needs in the field in which they operate. It is defined by the sharing of information and ideas, learning from the experience of others, expertise and broad perspectives on rural approaches, the ability to collaborate effectively in identifying and solving community problems.

Since 2007, the institutional networks which will ensure the future cooperation through:

- the network from European rura area which will ensure rural development (led by the European Commission);
- national rural network, which will be implemented in each member state.

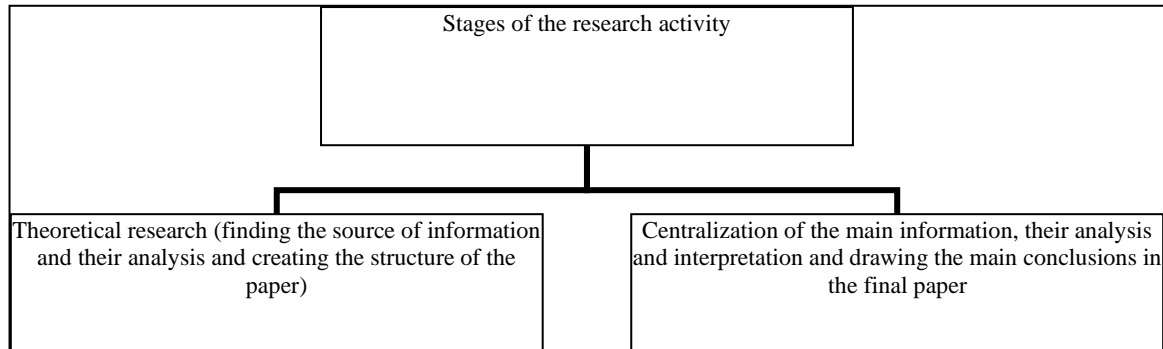
As part of the requirements of Regulation 1698/2005 (article 67), rural development networks established at national and European level support all aspects related to the implementation, evaluation and exchange of good practices from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), during the 2007-2013 programming period.

European networks contribute to European cohesion, facilitate the mobility of actors and ideas, facilitate communication, combat xenophobia, racism and offer expertise in understanding good practices. Rural development networks can be developed through

real and effective support and through partnership with all levels of government in the institutions of the European Union and in the Member States.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main purpose of the paper is to describe rural development network. In order to achieve the main purpose the focus was set on describing the features, objectives and structure of ERDN.



**Figure 1. Stages of the research activity**

### RESEARCH RESULTS

The European Union encourages long-term cooperation that leads to the formation of networks through which those from the rural area are interconnected because it ensures broad public information and increased interest in the modernization of the countryside, by developing the capacity for communication, collaboration and understanding of diversity.

The purpose of the networks is to create research, development and knowledge actions on topics of common interest, identified at regional, inter-regional and trans-national level.

Concretely, the network is created by a group of organizations, institutions that have similar goals and that identify a common need in the field in which they operate.

The role of the network [13,15] is to create and strengthen communication and exchange relationships between groups distinguished by different socio-economic status, ethnic and cultural differences. It establishes relationships between public institutions, government agencies, private agencies, non-profit organizations and those that can support change at the community level:

- trains the active participation and engagement of all members in understanding the community's problems and the economic, social, political consequences, in order to influence the decisions that affect their lives;

- of socialization by involving the main agents of socialization, authorities such as the school, the neighborhood, the church with the aim of mutual help, problem solving, integration and social action;

- integration of the measures of the Common Agricultural Policy for agriculture, forestry, environment, aimed at quality of life, economic diversification, increasing the efficiency of agricultural activities and promoting culture and traditions;

Networks have an essential role both in the mobility of specialists and in achieving European cohesion. [12] The exchange of ideas and cooperation contribute substantially to Europe's capacity for integration and cohesion. The creation of rural development networks can bring benefits such as:

- cooperation and collaboration skills;
- conflict management;
- the ability to progress and evolve.

The network works:

- as an incubator of ideas and projects;
- as an organized system of meetings and opportunities;
- as a sum of intersections and strategies of members taken as individuals.

The European network and the national networks have as objectives: [14]

- promoting the concept of sustainable rural development;
- cooperation in the field of rural heritage reuse;
- exchange of experience and rural development methods.

The means of achieving these objectives are cooperation projects, meetings and databases. The financing of the network is ensured through the funds of the Common Agricultural Policy and through the participation in projects with European financing.

The major benefits of the operation of rural development networks are represented by the fact that the people involved in the networks put together information, knowledge, expertise, resources, with the aim of solving a common problem.

The specific objectives of the rural development network are to promote at the European level high quality standards in the agricultural and rural fields and to encourage a balanced and sustainable development between urban and rural field, between the built and the natural environment.

The benefits of the rural development network are obvious:

- exchange of information and expertise in collaboration with other similar national and European institutions;
- generating ideas and providing partners for collaborative projects;
- reflection on agricultural needs and policies;
- employment in professional development;
- development of joint projects, strategies and programs through the network;
- attracting financial support;
- development of modern technologies to encourage new forms of interaction

between groups.

All networks propose a concept, a mission, objectives, strategies, as well as an organizational system that establishes the operation way and the status of the members. Collaboration methods and financing methods must be established. The benefits and risks must be identified and analyzed in order to establish the mechanisms of harmonious development.

Most networks implement the following activities:

- information platforms;
- management of thematic content;
- the conceptual framework;
- documentation;
- contact with the authorities;
- promotion campaign;
- training and promotion;
- mobility;

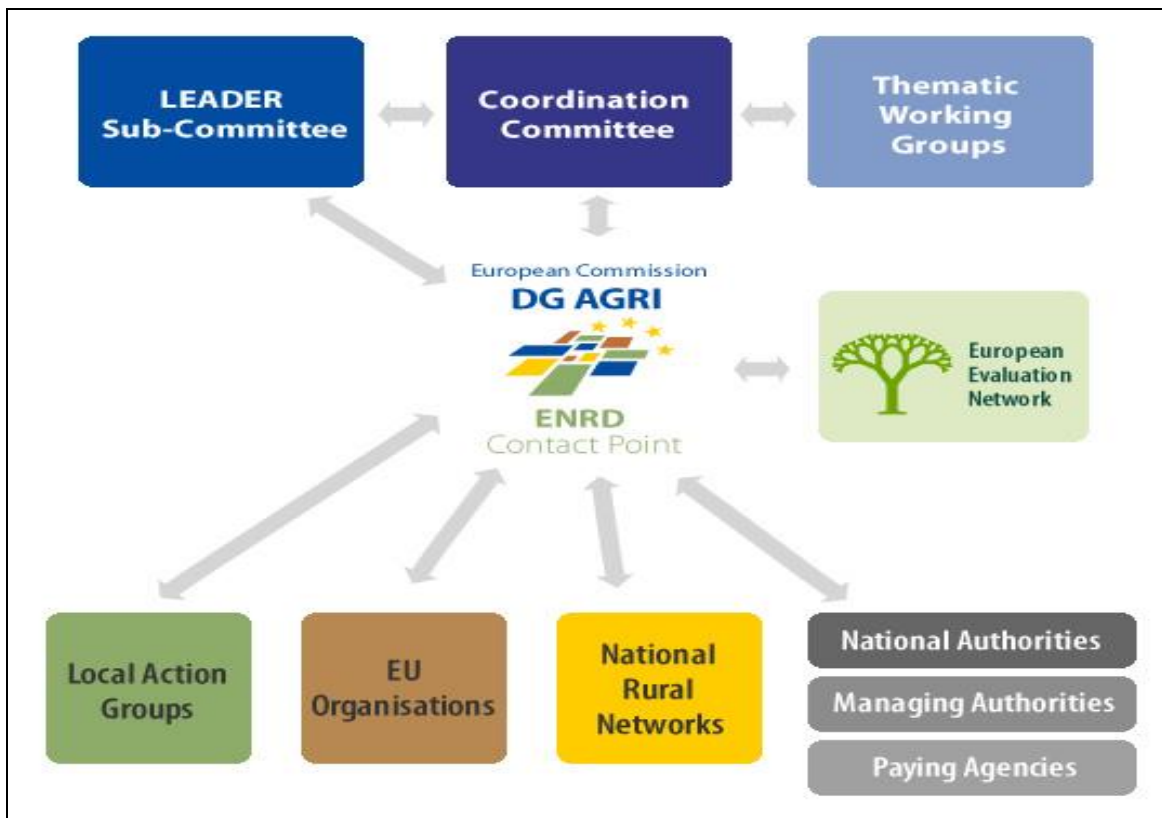
The establishment and compliance of these aspects contribute to the efficient functioning of a type of participatory partnership between the members of the network and, finally, to their imposing on the European market.

The launch of the *European Rural Development Network* (ERDN) [11] took place in Cyprus on October 16-17, 2008. The European Rural Development Network contributes to the implementation of rural development programs, with the following objectives:

- collecting, analyzing and disseminating information on community rural development models;

- the collection, dissemination and consolidation at community level of good practices of rural development;
- providing information regarding rural development in the countries of the European Union and in third countries;
- organization of actors involved in rural development;
- the formation of the network of experts to facilitate the exchange of experience, the implementation and evaluation of the rural development policy;
- supporting national networks and trans-national cooperation initiatives.

The activities of the network support actors and bodies involved in rural development, administrations and institutions, national networks and other structures of rural networks, interested organizations, local action groups.

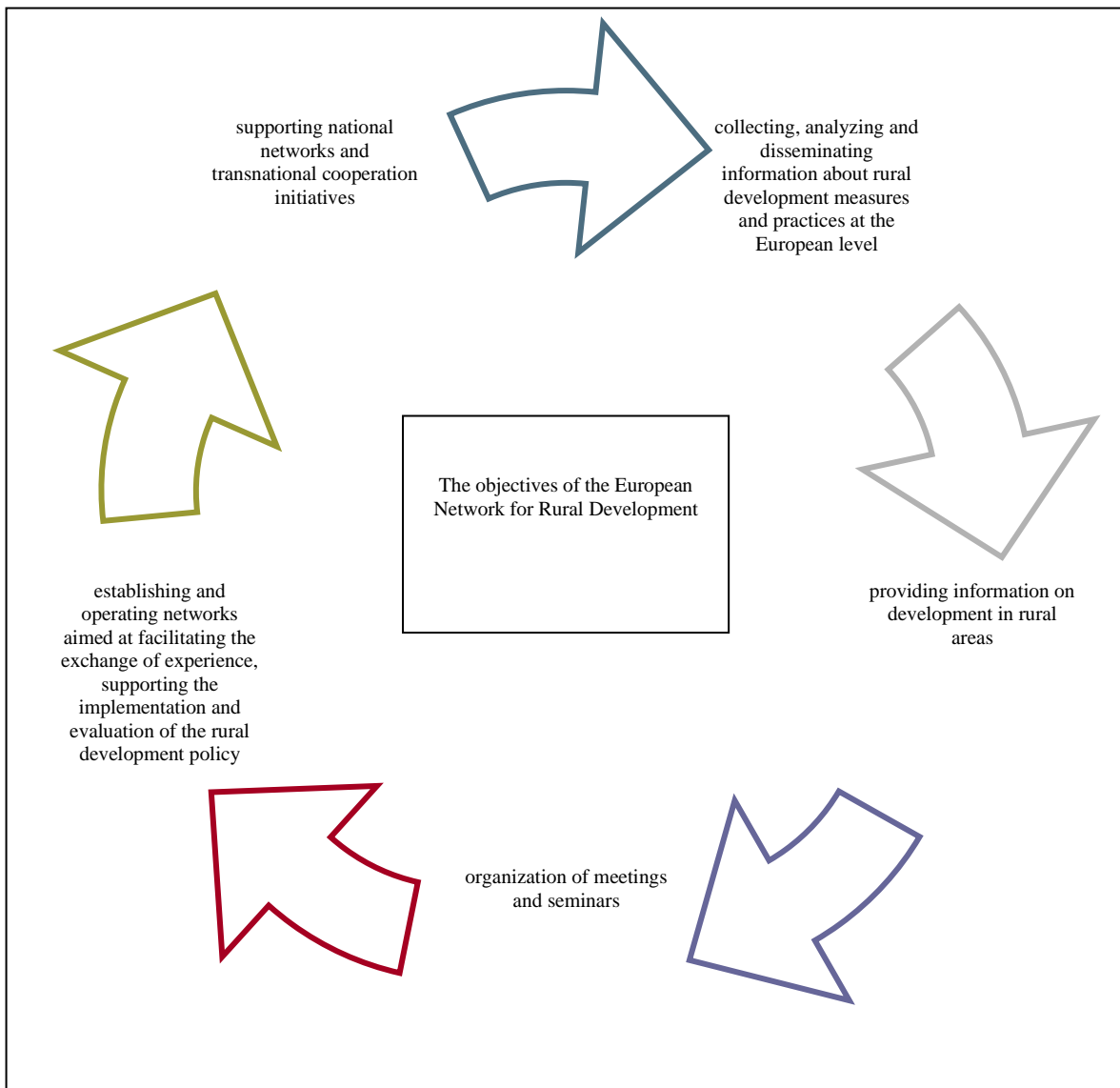


**Figure 2. The structure of the European Rural Development Network (ERDN)**

Source: Comisia Europeană, Rețeaua Europeană pentru Dezvoltare Rurală (REDR), <https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/ro/en-rd-presentation>

The objectives of the European Network for Rural Development are the following (figure 3):

- collecting, analyzing and disseminating information about rural development measures and practices at the European level;
- providing information on development in rural areas;
- organization of meetings and seminars;
- establishing and operating networks aimed at facilitating the exchange of experience, supporting the implementation and evaluation of the rural development policy;
- supporting the networks existent at national level.



**Figure 3. The objectives of the European Network for Rural Development**

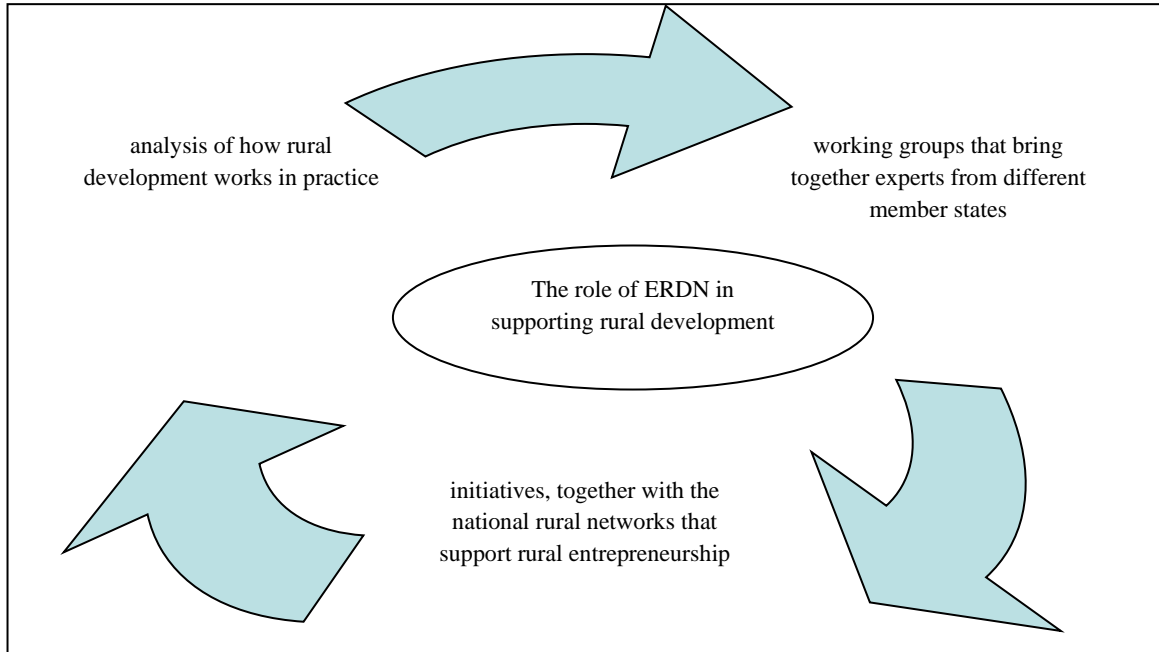
*Source: Comisia Europeană, Rețeaua Europeană pentru Dezvoltare Rurală (REDR)*

The role of ERDN in supporting rural development implies (figure 4): [10]

- working groups that bring together experts from different Member States to share their views on topics such as rural financing and EAFRD implementation mechanisms;
- initiatives, together with the national rural networks, in fields such as forestry or rural entrepreneurship;

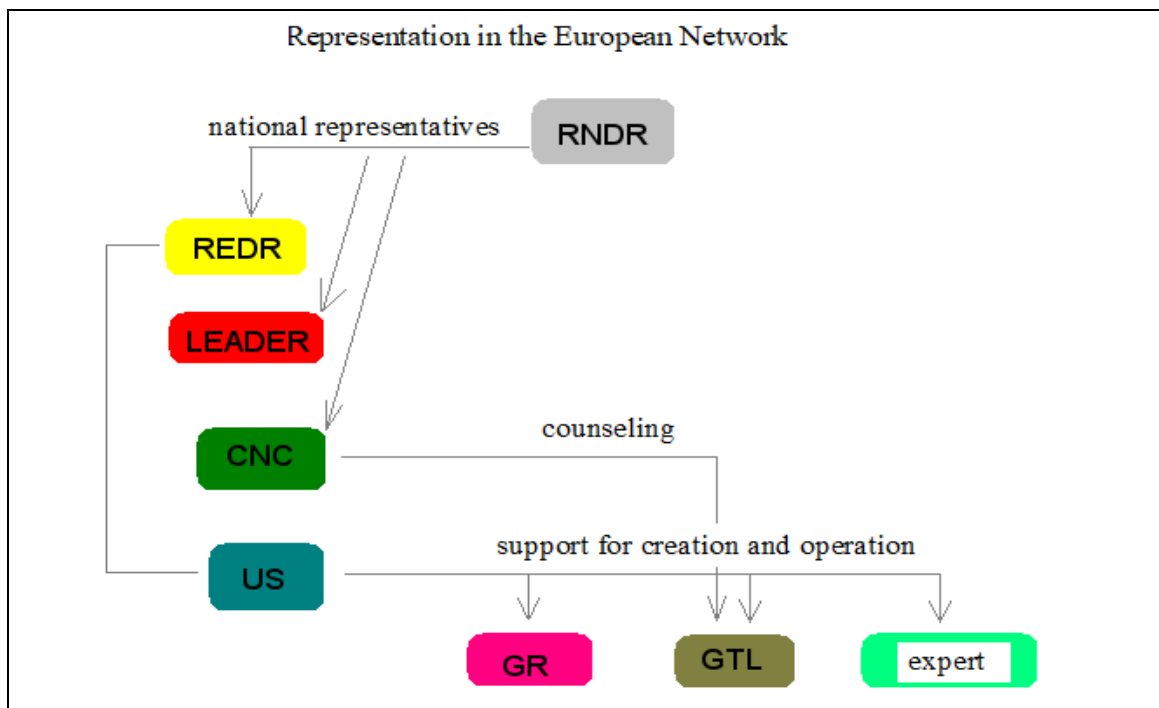
- analysis of how rural development works in practice.

The national networks will be represented in the ERDN Support Unit, the Coordination Committee and in the LEADER sub-committee, through national representatives who will be part of the structures of the European network (figure 5).



**Figure 4. The role of ERDN in supporting rural development**

Source: Comisia Europeană, Rețeaua Europeană pentru Dezvoltare Rurală (REDR)



**Figure 5. Representation in the European Network**

Source: Comisia Europeană, Rețeaua Europeană pentru Dezvoltare Rurală (REDR)

The connection between the ERDN and the other national networks will be made through the adoption of common work methods by the Support Units, through technical links between web pages and through specialized cooperation.

By establishing this structure, cooperation of all organizations in the field of rural development is desired and the focus of this cooperation on the analysis, forecasting and elaboration of strategies in the field of rural development, identification of concerns and common paths of action, exchange of experience and promotion of individual achievements.

The National Rural Development Network has as its general objective the dynamism of the actors' energy, grouping all the organizations and institutions that are involved in rural development [7] to promote an efficient flow of information, exchange of ideas and good practices and cooperation between the actors, in order to ensure:

- creation of an agricultural and forestry economy based on holdings that must go on the path of modernization; [6,8]
- the development of an agriculture that favors biodiversity, the preservation of the environment and the traditional rural landscape;
- improving the quality of life and economic development in rural areas;
- improving local governance in order to create and implement local development strategies.

The National Rural Development Network will group, at the national level, the organizations and authorities involved in the rural development process, according to art. 68 of EC Regulation no. 1698/2005. Thus, the participating public authorities have a share of 43% of the composition, the identified private partners have a weight of 57%, the investment sector in PNDR represented by professional associations in the field of production and processing of agricultural and forestry products, has a share of approx. 29% of the private partners. In the field of environmental protection, partners with national and international representativeness were selected, with a 19% share, organizations that promote sustainable development and support local initiative and that aim to capitalize on resources and support local initiatives in accordance with the framework provided by the program, totals about 29% of the selected private partners. The partner Rural Net was also included, which represents an association of over 20 NGOs active in the field of rural development, in different areas of the country, including the Rural Assistance Center, the Romanian Social Development Fund, and the Civitas Foundation for Civil Society, the Association of Regional Community Development, and the Resource Center for Romans Communities. Other representative private partners, including trade union organizations, bodies for the promotion of equal opportunities and associations that promote supporting the business environment, have a share of approximately 23% of the total of private partners.

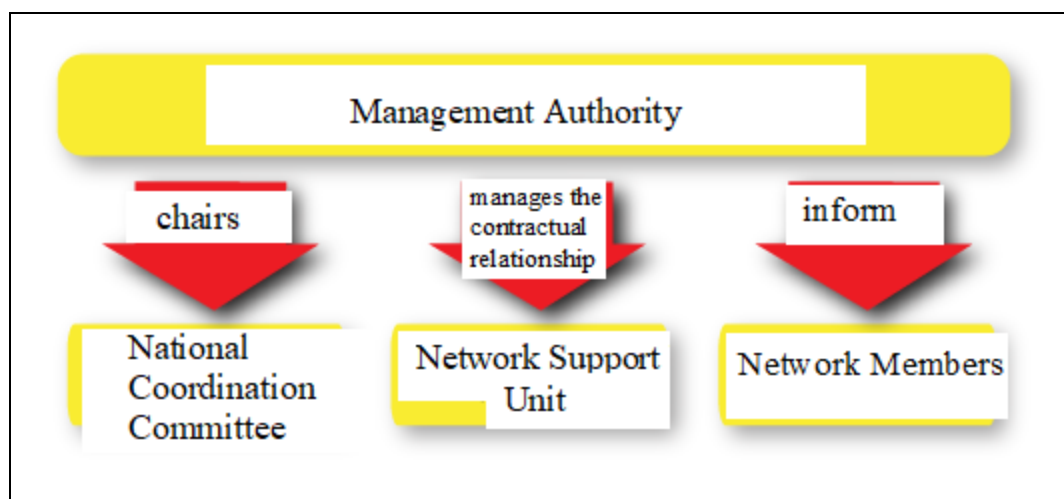
Within the Network, there are four main elements:

- The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, as the Management Authority for PNDR;
- The National Coordination Committee and a LEADER Working Group and Thematic Working Groups;
- Organizations that represent actors involved in rural development: these organizations are members of the Network;
- Network Support Unit.

The relationship between the four elements of the Network is:

- The Management Authority chairs the National NRDN Coordination Committee and handles the contractual relationship with the Network Support Unit together with the Payment Agency (figure 6);

- The member organizations of the Network maintain a permanent connection with their own members, with the Management Authority, USR and other local or regional public entities;
- The National Coordination Committee of NRDN represented by the members of the Network guides the activity of the Network and the Support Unit and advises the Management Authority;
- The NRDN Support Unit provides specialized support to all other elements and animates the entire Network.



**Figure 6. The relationship between the elements of the Network**  
 Source: Comisia Europeană, Rețeaua Europeană pentru Dezvoltare Rurală (REDR)

## CONCLUSIONS

Differences existent between rural areas have also become more pronounced as a result of the long-term evolution of globalization, information technology and climate change. Some of the rural areas are going through a transition process towards a "new rural economy", which involves less dependence on land exploitation activities, meaning the emergence of a more diversified economy that encompasses a whole range of activities specific to the productive industry sector and the one of services, favored by advances in information and social communication technology and more flexible working practices. In this context, new approaches to rural policy are needed, aimed at supporting the exploitation and capitalization of local resources, the local identification of needs and opportunities, and improving the competitiveness of rural areas by defining new economic functions other than agricultural production.

The NRDN provides support to the parties involved in rural development through:

- highlighting examples of successful rural development projects from the European Union;
- ensuring assistance for the National Rural Networks (NRN);
- promoting multiple cooperation (CTN) between Local Action Groups (LAGs) from different countries;
- providing analysis on relevant themes, including the wider benefits of agriculture, as well as on key topics such as forestry, rural entrepreneurship, social agriculture.

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