

HOW CAN SOCIAL INNOVATION SUPPORT "THE FUTURE OF FOOD AND FARMING"? POLICY BRIEF, JANUARY 2018



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The observations made and conclusions drawn in this Policy Brief are informed by the current state of evidence compiled in the SIMRA project (Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas), funded under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. The evolving evidence base is interpreted with respect to the aims and content of the EC Communication on the Common Agricultural Policy post-2020, "The Future of Food and Farming", and a principal recommendation made, repeated below.

Recommendation:

A mandatory cross-cutting principle for social innovation to be applied in relation to any Member States' suite of measures in their RDPs, alongside the wider application of CLLD.

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INTRODUCTION

It is a widely shared aspiration that rural societies, rural economies and rural environments should be more resilient, innovative and adaptive and deliver more to the EU's strategic aims. Based upon evidence emerging, we believe that smarter and more effective policies to support social innovation in rural areas have a vital contribution to make to this aspiration, and that social innovation is insufficiently articulated in the EC Communication on the Common Agricultural Policy post-2020, on "The Future of Food and Farming". We propose that this should change in the coming CAP legislative proposals. Not only can social innovation contribute significantly to social and economic aspects of rural development, but it can also contribute to social learning which adds value to technical innovation and in enhancing environmental outcomes through supporting collaborative action. Social innovation can provide a catalytic role to improve outcomes both where markets are weak and where public services are compromised. Social innovation is not an end in itself; it is a highly important but often underdeveloped means to the achievement of many of the key goals of an enhanced CAP.

With constrained accessibility, often poor-quality land, and a weak local economy, coupled with the effects of austerity on central and local government spending, some of the more remote and marginalised communities struggle to become more vibrant places, but they are also often home to spirited people who have a strong desire to improve their livelihoods and wellbeing. Social innovation can help rebuild such places. We also recognise the considerable achievements of collaborative approaches to major environmental concerns such as biodiversity loss and water quality, which are often structured around social innovations. From the supranational level of the European Commission to the smallest municipality, novel practices and policies for social innovation can make a positive difference. Below we show how.

First, what do we mean by social innovation?

We define social innovation as "the reconfiguring of social practices in response to societal challenges which seeks to enhance outcomes on societal wellbeing and necessarily includes the engagement of third sector actors." We see social innovation as different from institutional innovation which includes new policies and laws, with the third sector- civil society- playing a central role, often in partnership or association with public and private sector agency. Social innovation can take many forms, from social enterprises, to multi-service centres, to environmental partnerships to enhance water quality or biodiversity, to local level development trusts and community owned bodies which have sought to fill gaps left by public or private sector withdrawal or to exploit opportunities. Social innovation provides a powerful means to address social exclusion and disadvantage, can strengthen social capital, and drive place-based development. It is a powerful manifestation of the principle of Community Led Local Development (CLLD). However, it often needs policy help to kick start its potential and nurture its growth.

Second, some examples of social innovation driving positive outcomes

Take the example of care farming. It can offer opportunities for business diversification; it can provide better services at lower cost than the public sector; and it can enhance the experience of those cared for. How can this come about? The carers do not have to work within complex bureaucracies; there are real benefits to those needing care from contact with nature and animals and there are real benefits to making farms more resilient by enterprise diversification. Whether dealing with young, very old or disabled people, care farms have an excellent record of provision of high quality services in many Member States.

Delivering the European Union objective of better water quality and biodiversity can often best be done at landscape or catchment scale. Voluntary partnership in which land managers are empowered has merged as the optimum means to enhance outcomes. Empathetic advisors who can support social learning processes among land managers are also important, as are supportive policy means.

Services do not need to be lost when markets fail, or the public sector withdraws. Social enterprise can also underpin rural wellbeing by providing community services often in multipurpose hubs. There are cases of former pubs becoming hubs that provide meeting rooms, post offices, doctor's surgeries, even spaces for religious meetings. And with services for visitors, community development trusts or their proxies can provide vital tourism infrastructure to sit alongside and synergise with commercial developments.

- → Discover more examples of social innovation visiting SIMRA's database here
- → Discover SIMRA's brochure collecting examples of social innovation here

Third, what can we learn from recent experiences of social innovation?

Below, we describe factors that give rise to social innovation; then constraining factors. Then we move on to how policy can enhance enabling factors and reduce constraining factors.

The enabling factors

A bottom up trigger event is often what initiates social innovation. In remote communities the threat of closure of a key public or private service can lead people to challenge the prospect of decline by acting together and decisively to avert the problem. Rather than allowing the last shop in the village to close, it can become a social enterprise. When local public transport services have reduced to a trickle, community owned minibuses can plug the mobility gap. When the village pub closes it can be taken on by a community enterprise to become a service hub. These are real community-led bottom up responses that show the capacity of civil society actors to innovate. They are authentic manifestations of Community Led Local Development.

Other trigger events occur when various agencies come together with land managers to address concerns about, say, biodiversity or water quality, delivering on the EU Biodiversity Strategy, and the Water Framework Directive. In the Netherlands, there are well-developed collaborative schemes that link local communities to environmental management on farms. In other parts of Europe, catchment-level partnerships have created collaborative approaches to improve water quality and reduce soil loss.

Some social innovations take advantage of opportunities which are too good to ignore. In South Tyrol, Italy, farm women are collaborating in a cooperative enterprise to provide care services for the very young and the very old. In the UK, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 has created scope for public assets to be transferred to community groups and a number of transfers have occurred to create community buildings and land for food and leisure facilities. These bottom-up opportunities return power into communities which have become active social innovators, but whose efforts still often need financial and other support to come to fruition in order to maximise their potential.

The realisation of opportunity would appear to be heavily influenced by local leadership and local people's trust in that leadership and social capital. Enhancing leadership skills and enhancing social capital are likely to increase rural communities' capacities to make good strategic choices and bring social or environmental projects to a good conclusion.

The realisation of social innovations at local level often depends on appropriate institutional architecture and policy support. If there are no measures in the RDP for collaborative schemes for environmental improvement, they are most unlikely to arise, unless other funding sources are provided at national level. A trend towards greater responsibility of Member States in defining placebased intervention potentially allows more targeting of collaborative approaches. Many communitybased actions depend on supporting institutions at national or local level which may or may not depend on European Community support. Their facilitating role with respect to enhanced delivery of rural development programmes needs to be better understood.

The constraining factors

Trust and social capital in rural areas cannot be taken for granted. They are likely to be influenced by many factors, including recent histories, relationships between land managers and institutions and many more. Both can be nurtured through co-production of strategies and collaborative capacity building and through respect for local knowledge.

Many land managers and people in rural areas are frustrated at the regulation and bureaucracy associated with rural policy delivery. It undermines their respect for institutions. Reducing the regulatory burden and allowing more creativity and innovation in actions, for example under results-based measures, is likely to be a powerful source for enhanced outcomes. Such results-based approaches are likely to need collaboration and social innovation and can be assisted by policy nudges.

Many actors and innovators on the ground point to an absence of coherent policies as a constraint on their actions. Rural people's social and economic wellbeing and that of the environment depend to a significant degree on their ability to tread a consistent and understood path through regulatory mazes and policy opportunities.

In the delivery of Rural Development Programmes, there are major differences in national level, regional and local institutions between countries. These can facilitate delivery of EU policy aims, hinder, obstruct or even render irrelevant the efforts of the RDPs. We believe there is merit in the compulsory inclusion of a cross cutting principle for social innovation in the strategic plans of Member States, which provides a key building block to help overcome the constraining factors on achieving enhanced rural development outcomes.



Fourth, where has policy helped?

Much social innovation is rooted in community-oriented individuals who associate together to enhance the common good. Policy can step in to give such activities support to increase impact by upscaling the activity or increase others uptake of the innovation through effective dissemination or policy design. Historically, this is exactly what LEADER has delivered, supporting the principle of bottom up Community Led Local Development. It is what some of the most effective catchment management partnerships have achieved through collaborative action. The fundamental orientation of the policy is to nurture and enable grass roots activity to increase the speed or scale of uptake. Policy can operate in ways to mitigate the constraining factors and to encourage the enabling factors that contribute to success in social innovation. The case for the RDP as a policy accelerator for social innovation is justified by past achievements.

Fifth, how can social innovation policy be better developed to enhance positive outcomes?

Ultimately, the solution to technical, production, market and environmental challenges resides in the capabilities and creativity of land managers, scientists, advisers and supporting institutions working together. The SIMRA project is currently investigating the scope for effective result and impact indicators for social innovation and will collaborate with the European Commission and the Evaluation Helpdesk in this process.

The Cork 2.0 Declaration intimated a determination to strengthen CLLD and interest groups have strongly endorsed these principles. While the "Future of Food and Farming" communication identifies the core challenges, the future development of policy and regulations could go further in emphasising the role of social innovation in providing potentially effective responses. Below we quote from "The Future of Food and Farming" and indicate where we believe social innovation can assist in enhancing policy impact.





From the Future of Food and Farming	The potential of social innovation
"Important efforts still need to be done to facilitate the access of farmers to knowledge" FFF:4	Social learning and collaboration, and farmer to farmer learning, including informal networks, may be crucial to this task.
"Land-based measures are pivotal to achieving the environmental and climate-related goals of the EU, and farmers are the primary economic agents in delivering these important societal goals" FFF:5	Where impact effectiveness depends on collaboration, as in biodiversity and water quality enhancement, collaborative partnerships provide a suitable form of social innovation to drive such goals.
"Bringing research and innovation out of the labs and onto the fields and markets; fully connecting farmers and the countryside to the digital economy; and contributing to the European Commission's agenda on migration." FFF:7	Connecting actors is key to social innovation. SIMRA is working on case studies of good practices
"In particular there is a need to invest in skills, public services, infrastructure and capacity building in order to generate vibrant rural communities." FFF:7	Evidence form SIMRA confirms the core importance of skills and recognises the need to improve skills and build capacity in social innovation, backed by policy assistance in areas where skills and capacities are weakest.
"(We)favour integrated and innovative approaches and render the policy framework more adaptive and innovation friendly." FFF:10	SIMRA cases point to the need for embedding local understanding in policy design and ceding power to practice experts and local agency as means of enhancing outcomes and impact.
"To fulfil these objectives the agricultural sector and the EU rural areas will need to be better linked to human capital development and research and support for innovation will need to be stepped up." FFF:11	The innovation challenge Support for social innovation is crucial for enhancing human capital and promoting innovation.
"Rural Development Policy, has an important role to play to promote rural jobs and growth as well as to preserve the environmental quality of rural areas." FFF:20	Social enterprises are a particular form of social innovation, addressing issues such as social care, employment training, waste and recycling and many others. The growth of social enterprise in rural areas offers a significant means of increasing employment and addressing environmental concerns.
"The Commission is committed to reinforcing support for rural communities and local authorities that wish to develop Smart Villages through capacity building, investments, innovation support, networking as well as through the provision of innovative financing tools for improving skills, services and infrastructure." FFF:21	The Smart Villages idea recognises the particular strengths of some places where the capacity for social innovation is high. We need to better understand the means of transferring best practice in which actions well designed support for social innovation is likely to have a clear role.
"There is a need for better synergy and coordination with municipal authorities and local agencies to fully mobilise rural potential." FFF:21	We see new place-based partnerships as crucial forms of social innovation in supporting CLLD. These provide a forum for social innovation.

- We conclude that social innovation can provide a highly valuable means for delivering the objectives for the future CAP, but stress that its role needs stronger recognition, mandatory inclusion and targeted policy support.
- We reiterate that there is a place for social innovation in rural community services and for engendering social learning and supporting collaborative environmental management in topics such as catchment management and biodiversity partnerships, and in better meeting the development needs of marginal areas.

Accordingly, the new legislative framework should include:

A mandatory cross-cutting principle for social innovation to be used in relation to any nationally designed measure of the RDP, alongside the wider application of CLLD. Social innovation thereby provides a policy accelerator for any specified measure of the RDP to be used at the discretion of Member States, complementing other initiatives such as Smart Villages, results-based measures at ecosystem and catchment scale, and of especial relevance in marginalised rural areas.



SIMRA (Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas) is a four-year project (2016-2020) funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme under Grant Agreement No 677622. It aims to advance understanding of social innovation and innovative governance in agriculture, forestry and rural development, and how it can be boosted, in marginalised rural areas across Europe and around the Mediterranean, including non-EU countries.

For the SIMRA consortium, social innovation refers to "the reconfiguring of social practices, in response to societal challenges, which seeks to enhance outcomes" on societal well-being and necessarily includes the engagement of civil society actors". This Policy Brief is produced from the SIMRA Project, by the team working on 'Policy and practice: analysis and recommendations for policy-makers, stakeholders and end-users'.

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