The Rural Policy Committee (YTR) is a cooperation body appointed by the Finnish Government which reconciles and coordinates rural development actions and promotes the efficient use of resources targeted to the rural areas. The Rural Policy Committee considered it important to take hold of the different types of international cooperation in the Finnish rural policy, which is why in spring 2009 a theme group on international affairs was set up to prepare a policy strategy for international rural policy cooperation.

This Policy Strategy for International Cooperation is the first in kind, and it targets the years 2010-2013. The strategy defines the objectives for international cooperation of the Rural Policy Committee and describes the forms and tools of the cooperation that is already being done.
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Summary

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Foreword

International activities are growing in importance, in various forms and on many different forums. Interaction allows to disseminate various kinds of learning and good practices. However, increased international cooperation also poses specific challenges for the comprehensive management of operations and all the contacts involved.

The Rural Policy Committee (YTR) is a cooperation body appointed by the Finnish Government which reconciles and coordinates rural development actions and promotes the efficient use of resources targeted to the rural areas. The Rural Policy Committee considered it important to take hold of the different types of international cooperation in the Finnish rural policy, which is why in spring 2009 a theme group on international affairs was set up to prepare a policy strategy for international rural policy cooperation. Besides the strategy, the theme group compiled information on international practices which already have been adopted to the Finnish rural policy or which should be considered for application. The group also analysed Finnish rural policy practices which may be suited for development into export products.

This Policy Strategy for International Cooperation is the first in kind, and it targets the years 2010-2013. The strategy defines the objectives for international cooperation of the Rural Policy Committee and describes the forms and tools of the cooperation that is already being done. The Rural Policy Committee implements the strategy by integrating international cooperation into the different types of work and through active participation in international activities on various forums. The achievements and development needs will be evaluated towards the end of the strategy period with the aim to revise the strategy and practices.

We believe that this strategy provides the readers with a useful information package on international rural policy cooperation as well as inspires them to get involved in this. Through joint efforts we can promote rural viability and well-being all round the world.

RURAL POLICY COMMITTEE

Jarmo Vaittinen
Permanent Secretary
Chair

Eero Uusitalo
Rural Counsellor
Secretary General
1. Summary

The Policy Strategy of the Rural Policy Committee aims for carefully planned and target-oriented international cooperation. The Strategy analyses the international activities currently under way and defines the objectives for international activities. International cooperation is based on reciprocity which produces value added to both parties and positive contributions to reaching the objectives set for rural development. The vision of the Rural Policy Committee for international cooperation in rural policy in 2020 is the following:

The Rural Policy Committee is an influential, active and competent actor in international rural policy that is founded on the place-based and horizontal approach and multi-level governance, with the aim to reinforce the viability of the countryside both nationally and internationally.

The Rural Policy Committee implements the strategy by integrating international cooperation into its different forms of work and by taking active part in international activities in various forums. The results and development needs will be evaluated in 2013 and the strategy will be revised on the basis of the experiences and assessments.

The general objectives of the Rural Policy Committee in international cooperation are

- Dissemination of information and knowledge on our own good practices.
- Utilisation of knowledge and expertise from other countries in Finnish rural policy.

- Improving the visibility of rural issues and influence of rural policy nationally and internationally.
- Assistance to the rural areas in internationalisation.
- Constructing rural policy as a policy sector of its own in different countries.

The concrete rural policy objectives include that

- Distribution of funds between the first and second pillar of the EU’s common agricultural policy is changed so that the funding for place-based development actions under the second pillar increases.
- Rural policy based on the new rural paradigm\(^1\) gains strength in different countries and in the EU policies.
- Multi-level and multi-sectoral governance is reinforced in the EU rural policy.
- Finnish actors participate more in constructing the EU rural policy. The number of Finnish officials working in EU institutions increases and the competence of Finnish experts in rural affairs in giving statements and making assessments is widely recognised.
- Broadly-based rural development is strongly integrated into the work programmes of the OECD Territorial Development Policy Committee.
- Broadly-based and sustainable rural policy is one of the perspectives to be accounted for in the work done in various UN working groups and programmes.

\(^1\) OECD calls the integrating, place-based and multi-sectoral approach as the new rural paradigm. Policy based on the new paradigm targets the rural areas and their various actors, population groups and industries with the aim to improve the competitiveness and capacity of the regions starting from their own circumstances. Study and utilisation of the still unused opportunities and resources in the rural areas is a high priority. In many countries as well as in the EU the rural policy still reflects the old paradigm, which is founded on agriculture and the reconditions for its development. In a growing share of the rural areas, however, this perspective has proven insufficient.
• Utilisation of Finnish rural policy competence and development approach based on the new paradigm increase in different countries.

• Rural development is again included in the agenda of the Council of Europe as a separate item.

• Rural issues are included in the agenda of the Nordic Council of Ministers on a permanent basis to ensure that the cooperation is continuous, systematic and target-oriented.

• Cooperation between the Nordic and Baltic countries in rural policy cooperation is reinforced step by step.

• New partnerships in rural policy cooperation among the Nordic countries are created between administrative bodies, municipalities and NGOs.

• International organisations which aim for place-based rural development are reinforced and they gain a recognised role of their own in international rural policy.

• The third sector participates as a partner in constructing the EU rural policy.

• Finnish rural development actors work in close interaction with the rural actors of the developing countries for mutual benefit.

• Finnish researchers are even more closely involved in international rural and rural policy research and other research work which impacts on rural policy.

• Research is being done on topic areas important for Finnish rural policy which benefit from international approach.

• The competence of Finnish experts in rural affairs in giving statements and making assessments is widely recognised in international organisations.

• Financial instruments which allow national and international cooperation on the local and regional level are available to rural areas also in the future.

• Leader methodology is strengthened and it is utilised more widely so that Leader becomes the most central tool in rural policy.

• Rural issues (including entrepreneurship) are more strongly incorporated in activities related to sister municipalities and in thematic cooperation.

• Migration to rural areas increases and immigrants are well integrated in the rural communities.
2. Background and general objectives of the Rural Policy Committee in international cooperation

The Rural Policy Committee set up a theme group on 10 March 2009 to analyse the objectives of international activities. The Rural Policy Committee and its theme groups have had international contacts for years, and the aim of the policy strategy is to achieve a more carefully planned, target oriented and broadly based approach to international cooperation. Compilation and dissemination of information on activities that are already on the way is important. Increased mutual awareness and setting of explicit objectives promote the advancement of international cooperation. This strategy describes how and with what kind of objectives the Rural Policy Committee participates in international activities.

In the vision for the Finnish countryside in 2020 of the fifth Rural Policy Programme 2009–2013 and the Government Report on Rural Policy submitted to the Parliament on 20 May 2009 it is stated that “The international links of actors have materially increased”. This document contributes to laying the foundation for action so that the vision will come true.

The vision of the Rural Policy Committee for international cooperation in rural policy in 2020 is the following:

The realisation of the vision calls for new kind of expertise, active participation in international cooperation and organisation of international events and material prepared for use in international contexts. Active participation in expert tasks which may be offered is an important part of this work.

In its international cooperation the Rural Policy Committee stresses reciprocity which produces added value to both parties. The aim is to disseminate information on the Committee’s own good practices and take advantage of information and expertise from other countries in Finnish rural policy. The long-term objective is to improve the visibility of rural issues and influence of rural policy nationally and internationally, assist the rural areas in internationalisation and construct rural policy as a policy sector of its own in different countries.

International activities contribute to reaching the rural development objectives. The means to this end include promoting cooperation and networking among different levels and partners, exchange of good practices and expertise with international partners and creating the conditions for the implementation of international projects. Increased awareness and deeper understanding of global rural issues and practices applied in different countries are of primary importance.

The Rural Policy Committee is an influential, active and competent actor in international rural policy that is founded on the place-based and horizontal approach and multi-level governance, with the aim to reinforce the viability of the countryside both nationally and internationally.
3. International organisations in rural policy

From the international perspective rural policy is still at the early stages of its evolution. This has been shown by the international rural policy research and dialogue, the range of regional and rural policy instruments applied in the EU, and the OECD Rural Policy Reviews on different countries. The rural policy of the EU is focused on agriculture and the environment, while the role of measures to improve the viability of the rural regions remains quite small. The country reviews show that national rural policies are being constructed in the majority of the EU countries, but in some countries rural policy is founded on the EU instruments only.

Various international organisations are constructing rural policies of their own. In this chapter we look into the work on rural policy done by different international organisations and define the objectives and actions of the Rural Policy Committee.

3.1 European Union and its institutions

The EU develops its rural areas under both the second pillar of the common agricultural policy and the cohesion policy. The Member States are already preparing for changes to be made in both the common agricultural policy and cohesion policy in the post 2013 period. In the highly complex EU-wide policy context any sudden changes are unlikely, but the policies are still under constant transition. Individual new measures are being created every now and then, but transfers from one policy sector to another are also possible. Changes to the Leader methodology from one programming period to another are an example of this.

The current change arises from the need to target the EU budget funds to the most important policy issues. Due to its large share in the total budget the agricultural budget has received special attention. This is why the DG Agri of the European Commission is under considerable pressures to prove the effectiveness of its policy actions and create tools for better regional targeting of the policies. There have been discussions about the transfer or better linkage of rural development measures to the cohesion policy framework, effectiveness of the agri-environmental measures and the international framework of agricultural trade.

In view of the Finnish rural policy it is important to recognise the differences in the relevance and focus of the second pillar of the common agricultural policy (rural development) and cohesion policy. The second pillar of the common agricultural policy has allowed to apply development measures that are smaller in scale as well as more specifically targeted than could have been possible under the structural fund programmes in the context of the cohesion policy. However, the share of the axes which are truly targeted to rural policy (axes 3 and 4) of the funds has been quite modest. The funds have been insufficient for achieving a regional balance or even for preventing the constant decline in rural services and well-being. In case of structural funds the main problem has been the too one-sided targeting of funds to population centres. This trend has been further reinforced through the national regional development programmes. In the future there is a growing need for development measures and funding targeted to the sparsely populated rural areas. Meeting this objective requires determined action and influence, both nationally and internationally.

The European Commission exercises the powers of initiative in the EU. Issues relating to rural development are dealt with at the Directorates-General for Agriculture and Regional Policy of the Commission. There has been some variation in the distribution of labour between the two in different programming periods. Finland’s Permanent Representation to the EU is in direct contact to the everyday work of the Commission, and it is very important that the Representation also follows the EU rural policy in a comprehensive way. Finland must be active and influence the EU rural policy because this is an important aspect of the Finnish rural policy.

The ratification of the Lisbon Treaty increased the influence of the European Parliament in the EU’s legislative work on rural affairs as well. Co-decision became the regular legislative procedure, which means that the European Parliament is an
equal legislator with the Council. The Lisbon Treaty also expanded the budget powers of the European Parliament to agricultural expenditure. In the Parliament there is an Intergroup on Mountains, Islands and Sparsely Populated Areas, with one member from Finland.

The Committee of Regions offers the regional and local communities the opportunity to make their voice heard in the preparation of EU policies and legislation. The Treaties obligate the Commission and Council to always hear the Committee of Regions when making new proposals on issues which impact on the regional or local levels. The European Parliament may also hear the Committee of Regions.

Objectives:

• Distribution of funds between the first and second pillar of the EU’s common agricultural policy is changed so that the funding for place-based development actions under the second pillar increases.

• Rural policy based on the new rural paradigm¹ gains strength in different countries and in the EU policies.

• Multi-level and multi-sectoral governance is reinforced in the EU rural policy.

• Finnish actors participate more in constructing the EU rural policy. The number of Finnish officials working in EU institutions increases and the competence of Finnish experts in rural affairs in giving statements and making assessments is widely recognised.

Actions:

• Provisions of sufficient information on rural policy from the Finnish perspective to the Finnish officials and politicians in the different EU institutions.

• More active and broader discussion on EU rural policy and its development in the Finnish rural network.

• Active participation in networks of experts within Europe which keep up the discussion on rural policy.

• Reinforcing the capacity to participate in the activity of the European Union through research, education and training, and various kinds of personnel exchange arrangements. For example, the University of Gloucestershire offers distance learning in a course entitled European Rural Development. Similarly, the Finnish Rural Studies should include sections on European practices and experiences.

• The theme group on sparsely populated rural areas of the Rural Policy Committee follows the work of the Intergroup on Mountains, Islands and Sparsely Populated Areas.

3.2 OECD

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) brings together the governments of 30 democratic states to deal with the economic, social and ecological challenges of globalisation. Since 1991 the OECD Rural Development Programme has produced analyses and guidelines related to the rural areas. Based on the analyses and Rural Policy Reviews conducted in various countries the OECD recommends that the new rural paradigm should be further reinforced.

The OECD studies and guidelines have had significant impacts on the way the Finnish rural policy has been constructed. The OECD has produced reference material and experiences of practices necessary in the development work on a new policy sector. In the context of the reviews of the Finnish rural policy in 1994 and 2008 the OECD has given recommendations on how our rural policy should be developed. The OECD invited a Finnish expert from the Rural Policy Committee network to participate in the working groups which conducted the Rural Policy Reviews of Scotland (2007) and Spain (2008). This cooperation should continue in the future.

The Working Party on Territorial Policy in Rural Areas (WPRUR) under the OECD Territorial
Development Policy Committee (TDPC) functions as the international discussion forum for rural issues. As a rule the WPRUR meets once a year to discuss, among other issues, the rural policy reviews under preparation, which also offer current information on the international trends. The current term of mandate of both the TDPC and WPRUR is 2010-2014.

The OECD organises a rural conference on a topical theme almost every year. The conference offers diverse information from different countries as well as opportunities for extensive networking.

The Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Programme at the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs and Local Development combines the development of employment to local development, with entrepreneurship, innovation and local partnership as the main tools. The main objective is job creation and, in particular, creating even better jobs. The highly varied and innovative development projects of the LEED Programme produce interesting material for the local action groups and offer opportunities for peer-to-peer development of activities in a global environment.

Objectives:

- Rural policy based on the new rural paradigm gains strength in different countries and in the EU policies.
- Broadly-based rural development is strongly integrated into the work programmes of the OECD Territorial Development Policy Committee.

Actions:

- Influencing the content of the Territorial Development Policy Committee’s work programmes through the Working Party on Territorial Policy in Rural Areas.
- Active participation by the Rural Policy Committee network in the work of the Working Party on Territorial Policy in Rural Areas and in steering its work through the bureau method.

- The Rural Policy Committee network is an active participant in international rural conferences and arranges Finnish experts as speakers in the conferences.

3.3 United Nations (UN)

The UN is a global inter-governmental cooperation organisation with 192 member states. The UN organisations have numerous programmes and measures which are targeted to the rural areas. The Food and Agriculture Organization FAO aims to improve the nutrition situation of the world and the standard of living of the growing world population. FAO has a broad perspective on rural development issues through livelihoods, natural resources and the environment, among other aspects. It is particularly concerned with the global food production, water, fish and forest resources, climate change, rural livelihoods and the position of women in the rural areas. Finland is active in FAO work as an independent state, together with the other Nordic countries as well as in the EU and OECD context. Finnish rural development experts, including the Rural Policy Committee network, have a great deal to offer to FAO activities, and to learn from these. FAO operates globally as well as in regional contexts. Finland promotes its own interests through the work in the European region, by influencing global decision and by making our expertise available to the organisation on the different levels of its work. In Finland the FAO activities are outlined by the FAO Committee. Besides this, the participation of rural development experts in FAO meetings when dealing with broad rural development issues is of great importance.

The United Nations Development Programme UNDP is the main actor in the financing and implementation of development work in the UN context. It is focused, in particular, on advancing democracy and good governance, combating environmental threats, and conflict prevention and recovery. The Development Programme has a role in the rural policy planning and related training in several new EU Member States. Experts from the Rural Policy Committee network have participated in cooperation in the context of the Development
Programme in the new Member States, and this is considered important in the future as well. These tasks have been particularly well suited for the application of international exchange of procedures. It is quite seldom that practices can be transferred directly from one country to another, but the difficulties and successes help to put the country's own problems and achievements into perspective, which improves the preconditions for creating even better practices for policies, administration and practical development work.

The UN Commission on Sustainable Development CSD is focused on advancing sustainable development and the implementation of the Agenda 21 adopted at the Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The agenda of the Commission on Sustainable Development for 2008-2009 included agriculture, rural development, land use, drought and desertification, and Africa. Members of the Rural Policy Committee network participated in the national working group on rural development, which prepared the Finnish positions for the work of the CSD. The working group also produced a brochure on good practices in Finland, where the Finnish rural policy system was presented as one example of our good practices. The involvement in this kind of work will continue in the future.

### 3.4 Council of Europe

The Council of Europe is a cooperation and human rights organisation with 47 member states. It aims to promote the cohesion of its member states, protect human rights and pluralistic democracy, improve the living conditions and promote human values. The rural campaign of the Council of Europe in 1987-1988 had a significant impact on the creation and development of the present type of rural policy in Finland.

#### Objectives:
- Rural development is again included in the agenda of the Council of Europe as a separate item.

#### Actions:
- The Rural Policy Committee follows the agenda of the Council of Europe and assumes an active role in case a new rural campaign is to be launched.

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<th>Objectives:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Broadly-based and sustainable rural policy is one of the perspectives to be accounted for in the work done in various UN working groups and programmes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Utilisation of Finnish rural policy competence and development approach based on the new paradigm increase in different countries.</td>
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<th>Actions:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Active follow-up of work done in UN working groups and programmes related to the rural areas and active search for and participation in the cooperation opportunities offered.</td>
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4. Nordic cooperation

The Nordic countries have a great deal in common relating both to the challenges and opportunities of the rural areas and the practices and means employed in rural policy. This offers good opportunities for exchange of experiences and learning from the practices of another country. Cooperation among the Nordic countries takes place in the context of the Nordic Council of Ministers as well as in bilateral collaboration among the NGOs, municipalities and researchers. The collaboration within the third sector and between municipalities and researchers is dealt with further chapters.

4.1 Nordic Council of Ministers

One of the four working groups under the Nordic Regional Policy Cooperation Programme 2009-2012 deals with rural development issues. The working group on rural areas functions as the steering group of the project Countryside of the Future. The aim of the seminars organised under the project is to exchange experiences and present good practices in the Nordic countries. The Rural Policy Committee network is active in the work of the group and in the preparation of rural seminars. Of the working groups and development programmes under the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Food Finland theme group of the Rural Policy Committee participated, for example, in the preparation of the New Nordic Food Programme for 2010-2014.

4.2 Bilateral cooperation

Bilateral cooperation is effective in revealing and highlighting the differences between the political traditions and thinking in different countries. Reflecting one’s own objectives and practices against this background may be an illuminating experience, which may even ease some of the imaginary obstacles to development work that used to be considered unavoidable political or administrative realities. It is most important for colleagues from different countries to meet each other to discuss and compare their practices and objectives.

There is a great deal of bilateral cooperation especially between Finland and Sweden. This cooperation involves the exchange of both information and good practices and methodologies. One useful example for Finland has been the statistical system applied in Sweden which allows to follow the development processes in rural areas.

More and more often the Nordic cooperation expands into collaboration in the whole Baltic Sea region. For example, the Nordic Association of Agricultural Scientists NUF increases cooperation and exchange of information between people working in the agriculture sectors of the Nordic and Baltic countries. In rural policy Finland has close contacts especially with Estonia, both in the administration and between NGOs and private citizens.

Objectives:

- Rural issues are included in the agenda of the Nordic Council of Ministers on a permanent basis to ensure that the cooperation is continuous, systematic and target-oriented.
- Cooperation between the Nordic and Baltic countries in rural policy cooperation is reinforced step by step.
- New partnerships in rural policy cooperation among the Nordic countries are created between administrative bodies, municipalities and NGOs.

Actions:

- Actors in the Rural Policy Committee network participate in the work of the working group on rural areas and, through this, contribute to increased and even closer Nordic cooperation.
- In Norway there are numerous well-functioning regional and rural policy practices, which is why the Rural Policy Committee launches regular meetings and exchange of information with the Norwegian rural experts.
- Comparisons between the Nordic countries and benchmarking information are utilised more efficiently in the development of the Finnish rural policy.
5. Third sector cooperation

The civic society is a necessary and important partner in rural development. Along with the cooperation between various authorities, international cooperation among the third sector actors in rural issues is reinforced. Alongside the sectoral organisations focused on agriculture and the environment in the EU context there is a need for organisations aiming at place-based rural development.

*The European Leader Association for Rural Development ELARD* founded in 1999 is comprised of about one thousand rural action groups. The 55 Finnish Leader groups belong to ELARD through their membership in the Village Action Association of Finland. *The European Rural Alliance ERA* set up in 2005 brings together national and European NGOs engaged in comprehensive and multi-sectoral rural development. The objective of the ERA is to promote discussion with both the European Commission and the authorities of the Member States. In 2010 the ERA had 14 members.

The purpose of the *European Rural Community Association ERCA* established in 2009 is to strengthen the voice of rural communities all over Europe. The objective is that all the 24 village action associations in Europe would join the ERCA. *Hela Norden Ska Leva HNSL (All Nordic regions shall live)* is a network focused on local development and civic action in the Nordic countries, which got started in 1994 and was organised as an association in 2008.

*The International Rural Network IRN* was officially established in 2003 as an international organisation which aims to exchange information and experiences and to create an international rural development network. The priorities include the empowerment of rural communities and their collaboration with the different levels of administration. A representative of the Rural Policy Committee network has participated and spoken in all three IRN rural conferences held in Scotland (2003), the United States (2005) and India (2009). The next conference is to be organised in Australia in 2012.

The theme group for tourism of the Rural Policy Committee has participated in the activity of the *European Federation for Farm and Village Tourism EuroGites*. Through this organisation we can get information about the trends in rural tourism and partner searches in, for example, the conferences organised every two years. The theme group on NGOs of the Rural Policy Committee participates in the European discussion on the organisation of services, state aids and competitive neutrality, for example, through the *European Council of Associations of General Interest CEDAG*, as well as follows the changes in the legislation on these issues.

**Objectives:**
- International organisations which aim for place-based rural development are reinforced and they gain a recognised role of their own in international rural policy.
- The third sector participates as a partner in constructing the EU rural policy.

**Actions:**
- Actors in the Rural Policy Committee network are active in international cooperation of the third sector and contribute to its further reinforcement.
6. Rural issues in development policy

The connections between the development policy and rural policy receive even more emphasis than before. Rural development has become a central issue on the agendas of several major actors in outlining development policies. Alleviating poverty and finding solutions to environmental and food problems are not considered possible without the rural development perspective. Rural development has a central position in the Finnish development policy guidelines and the collaboration between these policy sectors was also written down in the Government Report on Rural Policy submitted to the Finnish Parliament in spring 2009. The rural development cooperation network of the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs promotes consistency in dealing with the rural and agricultural issues in the Finnish development policy. There is a Counsellor for Rural Development in four Finnish Embassies.

In the majority of the developing countries agriculture is still the dominating livelihood in the rural areas, which is why the development of agriculture and the countryside cannot and should not be separated from each other. Instead, it is most important that the traditional and new rural policies are being applied side by side. Finland supports the development of agriculture and rural areas in the developing countries through bilateral projects, sectoral support, NGOs and international organisations. Finland has access to information and expertise of countries and utilises these in its own rural policy. The experiences of Finland and the developing countries on rural development bring value added to the development cooperation supported by Finland, which is why the interest of rural actors in participating in the different stages of development projects should be encouraged.

In development cooperation methods by which the rural residents are involved in the activities have been applied for a long time. However, there is a need for even more participatory development means which mobilise civic action. Constant efforts are being made to develop such means, and the Rural Policy Committee contributes to this work as well. Actors in the Rural Policy Committee network have participated in taking the Leader methodology to Mozambique, South Africa and Russian Karelia. There is a lot of common ground as well as significant differences in different countries, but Leader is a very flexible approach which commits several parties to work for a common goal. There is a great deal of development work to be done on this in the years to come.

The Finnish public sector carries out development cooperation through collaboration with the public sector of the partner country. The Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs finances several programmes which also support rural development. Now new types of development cooperation projects are being targeted to innovation environments and systems, where the rural areas have gained a central position and which offer new opportunities for taking advantage of the expertise of the Rural Policy Committee.

The Institutional Cooperation Instrument ICI allows the government institutes and agencies to participate in development cooperation. The objective of the projects is to strengthen the skills and know-how of government actors, such as ministries, institutes and universities. What the Rural Policy Committee sees here is the opportunity to strengthen the rural policy in different countries. Through the Finnish University Partnership for International Development UniPID the Finnish universities are involved in several development policy programmes and cooperation arrangements.

Objectives:

- Finnish rural development actors work in close interaction with the rural actors of the developing countries for mutual benefit.

Actions:

- Actors in the Rural Policy Committee are active in seeking the opportunities offered in the context of development cooperation and participating in them.
7. Research cooperation

Research which can be applied internationally and its utilisation are an essential element of rural policy preparation. International cooperation is an integral aspect of research and rural researchers have various kinds of international forums and research programmes. Finnish rural researchers are often invited as experts to the preparation processes in the EU and OECD. Even if it is quite small in size, the Finnish rural researcher network is internationally significant.

It is very important for Finland to participate in both the international rural policy research and research work that influences the rural policy. The international research field is becoming more and more competitive, while a growing share of the national research funding is also tied to extensive international co-financing schemes such as the Joint Programming envisaged in the EU. The decision on who gets involved in this kind of co-financing schemes and the projects under them (such as the ERA-NET projects which coordinate the research and development projects of different European states) is made by the national research financing organisations (the Academy of Finland) as well as government ministries. In the future it is going to be even more important that the representatives responsible for the national guidelines concerning, for example, the research framework programmes of the EU are active in proposing and promoting research financing for rural issues and ensuring that Finland gets to be a research partner.

Both researchers and those in various research management and policy tasks must be even more proactive than before to ensure that topic areas that are important for the Finnish rural policy and benefit from the international perspective are covered by the research efforts. This calls for the preparation of topics that are important for Finland and formulating these into research programmes and lobbying for them when preparing for the programme application processes. Several Finnish rural researchers are already working in international research programmes and universities are concluding cooperation agreements, which offers a good foundation for reaching the objectives. Finland participates in the financing of Nordic research and here we should also use influence so that important rural topics get selected.

The Rural Policy Committee encourages researchers and actors in different organisations and projects to set up Rural Ambassador rings with the aim to enhance the knowledge on the rural policies and related research in other countries as well as to improve the competence in international affairs of those involved. The Finnish Society for Rural Research and Development and Rural Policy Committee share a common development interest in this. Important personal international contacts are also constructed in various researcher associations (e.g. ESRS, NJF and IGU) through participation in the international activities of specific scientific fields.

The European Summer Academy organised by Euroacademy Association since 2002 is also a well-functioning concept for enhancing international competence and contacts. Actors in the Rural Policy Committee network have been active participants of the Academy, which in 2004 and 2010 was held in Finland (in Ilmajoki and Suomussalmi) by means of support from the Rural Policy Committee.

The theme group on tourism of the Rural Policy Committee is active in the Nordic and European networks of tourism researchers and their various events through, for example, the Finnish Association of Tourism Research. The information obtained is utilised in the development of Finnish rural tourism as well as passed on to development and business actors. In 2008–2010 the theme group participated in the Quality Boost for Tourism project with the particular aim of transferring innovations in rural tourism quality training and programmes to the creation of even better training on the European level. In the years to come the achievements of the projects will be put to practice in the tourism sector while keeping up the network of quality development actors in rural tourism.

Objectives:

- Finnish researchers are even more closely involved in international rural and rural policy research and other research work which impacts on rural policy.
• Research is being done on topic areas important for Finnish rural policy which benefit from international approach.

• The competence of Finnish experts in rural affairs in giving statements and making assessments is widely recognised in international organisations.

Actions:

• The aim of the Rural Policy Committee is that Finland would get involved in rural studies and their financing so that the Finnish competence in both rural research and rural policy will gain access to and be utilised on international arenas.

• Topics that are important for Finland are prepared and promoted for research programmes.

• The Rural Policy Committee contributes to the establishment of a common publication series of rural researchers, mainly in the English language, to improve the international visibility of Finnish rural research.

• Actors in the Rural Policy Committee network continue their active participation in the European Summer Academies.
8. Internationalisation and cooperation on the regional and local level

8.1 Opportunities through EU co-financed cooperation

Ideas and inspiration for regional and local development work is sought through international cooperation in, for example, new business opportunities, new operative models and practices and cultural cooperation. The EU development programmes have a central position in promoting international cooperation on the regional and local level.

The main instrument of the European Union for local rural development work is Leader, which also offers opportunities to seek partners for international cooperation. Leader is a highly appropriate and flexible rural development approach when it is truly being implemented from bottom up, taking advantage of collaboration among various actors on an equal standing. Leader is well suited for different types of rural areas, in both the developed and developing countries, and it can also be applied in urban areas.

During the programming period 2007–2013 the number of Leader groups in Europe is going to grow from 900 to almost 2 200 and in some countries, including Finland, the activities of the Leader groups cover all rural areas. Because of the very good results achieved it is well justified to further develop and reinforce the Leader methodology into an even more significant rural and, more generally, local regional development tool in international contexts. Rural policy needs a powerful tool that is capable of mobilising actors and committing expertise, responsibility, private funds and work input in the development work.

Financing for international cooperation on the local and regional level is also made available through programmes under the European Territorial Cooperation Objective (former Interreg) financed from the European Regional Development Fund and cooperation programmes under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument ENPI. European regional cooperation offers financing opportunities on three different levels: border regions, macro-regions (such as the Baltic Sea region and northern periphery) as well as Europe as a whole. Activities supported under the cross-border cooperation programmes are highly significant especially in promoting contacts among the neighbouring rural areas, while contributing to the viability of peripheral, rural border regions. For example, the Food Finland theme group participates in the Baltfood cooperation funded through the Baltic Sea Region Programme (www.baltfood.org), where 12 actors from six countries around the Baltic Sea disseminate good practices to boost development work in food enterprises, provide joint training programmes for companies and produce tools and materials needed in the development work. The ENPI programmes make funding available to cooperation along the Finnish-Russian border as well as allow and encourage rural municipalities to search for living and business opportunities through cross-border contacts.

The Europe for Citizens Programme 2007–2013 of the EU promotes active citizenship by giving the European citizens the opportunity to interact and participate in constructing a democratic, open and culturally diverse Europe. International cooperation brings together the members of local communities located in different parts of Europe to share and exchange experiences, views and values.

8.2 Sister municipalities

Sister municipalities have a long tradition in Finland. The friendship and collaboration agreements concluded over decades have made it possible for municipal residents to engage in international cooperation, often with towns and municipalities located in the neighbouring areas of Finland (Nordic countries, Estonia, Russia, countries which used to belong to the former Soviet Republic). Quite a few rural municipalities have sister municipalities in other regions or countries.

Various other forms of cooperation, such as different kinds of networks, have emerged alongside sister
municipalities, often offering especially to small municipalities an easy and cheap way to get involved in international cooperation. The number of agreements on sister municipalities has declined in recent years. In some cases it has been necessary to reassess and reprioritise the relationships due to municipal mergers to avoid overlaps and account for various economic considerations. However, there is still room for sister municipalities in the future, with more prominent focus especially on thematic cooperation.

8.3 International and multi-cultural municipalities – immigrants and countryside of the future

Successful integration of immigrants to local communities is not possible without sufficient competence in cultural diversity in the municipalities. In both the population centres and rural areas immigrants should be recognised as a new resource and indispensable population group, whose different kinds of backgrounds and needs must be taken into account in service provision.

The attractiveness of rural areas as target areas for immigration can be promoted by differentiating the integration practices and by providing information on the opportunities for living, working and recreational activities in the countryside. The organisations operating in the rural areas have an important role and mission in this work so that they can get immigrants involved in their activities. Immigrants who already live in the countryside may help in the integration of new immigrants and in their contacts with the authorities.

The third sector possesses excellent opportunities to complement the services offered by the public authorities. Voluntary action is the key especially in expanding the social network of immigrants to the whole surrounding countryside. Certain good tools for disseminating integration practices exist, such as the Integration Net initiative which allows the access to information on good integration practices among the EU Leader groups.

Objectives:

- Financial instruments which allow national and international cooperation on the local and regional level are available to rural areas also in the future.
- Leader methodology is strengthened and it is utilised more widely so that Leader becomes the most central tool in rural policy.
- Rural issues (including entrepreneurship) are more strongly incorporated in activities related to sister municipalities and in thematic cooperation.
- Migration to rural areas increases and immigrants are well integrated in the rural communities.

Actions:

- The Rural Policy Committee is active in the national development of the Leader methodology and contributes to expanding the utilisation of the methodology in international contexts.
- Actors in the Rural Policy Committee network participate in the work of the Leader subcommittee (LSC) of the European Commission, thus contributing to reinforcing the methodology in Europe.
- The Rural Policy Committee contributes to the financing of development projects which promote immigration to Finland and to the countryside and the attitudinal and functional preconditions for this.
9. Implementation and follow-up of the policy strategy

The Rural Policy Committee implements the Policy Strategy for International Cooperation by integrating international cooperation in its various forms of work and through active participation in international activities in various forums. The realisation of the objectives and actions of the strategy is promoted and followed at the meetings of the international network of the Rural Policy Committee comprised of the Secretary-General, Deputy Secretary-General, secretaries of the theme groups, and the coordinator and contact persons for international affairs, in most cases once a year in connection with the meeting of the Rural Policy Committee network. Information on international cooperation, cooperation partners and current events is compiled on the website of the Rural Policy Committee at www.ruralpolicy.fi.

Reporting on the progress made in international activities takes place annually at the meetings of the Rural Policy Committee after the network meeting. The achievements and development needs of the work are evaluated towards the end of the period 2010–2013 and the strategy and practices are revised on the basis of the results.
The Rural Policy Committee (YTR) is a cooperation body appointed by the Finnish Government which reconciles and coordinates rural development actions and promotes the efficient use of resources targeted to the rural areas. The Rural Policy Committee considered it important to take hold of the different types of international cooperation in the Finnish rural policy, which is why in spring 2009 a theme group on international affairs was set up to prepare a policy strategy for international rural policy cooperation.

This Policy Strategy for International Cooperation is the first in kind, and it targets the years 2010-2013. The strategy defines the objectives for international cooperation of the Rural Policy Committee and describes the forms and tools of the cooperation that is already being done.