WORKSHOP REPORT OF WORKSHOP SERIES 2

How Smart Villages is supported outside of Europe – Creating synergies & cooperation (2/6)

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TITLE OF WORKSHOP: How Smart Villages is supported outside of Europe – Creating synergies & cooperation (2/6)

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BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE SESSION

The purpose of this workshop was to present Smart Villages initiatives outside of Europe and open up a discussion on how synergies could be created between the EU Smart Villages initiative and other Smart Village support projects in the World, ultimately leading to mutual learning about smart approaches at international, national and local levels. Smart Villages is not only an 'attractive' concept in Europe but also in other parts of the World. A few years ago, if one searched 'Smart Villages' on the Internet mostly 'records' from India came up as a result (where Smart Village is a concept adopted by national, state and local governments). Most recently, two important initiatives have emerged to support Smart Villages in the South Caucasus by the World Bank and in Asia and the Pacific by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The World Bank has conducted an analytical and advisory project in the South Caucasus to improve awareness on, and support development of Smart Village pilots in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia. The FAO's Digital Village Initiative (DVI) aims to promote digital innovations to support inclusive, gender-sensitive rural development and sustainable agri-food transformation to meet Agenda 2030 goals.

PRESENTATIONS

Erik Caldwell Johnson (World Bank, Senior Social Development Specialist), The World Bank's Smart Villages approach in Rural development.

Following the definition and global examples of Smart Villages and interventions and key elements of the successful Smart Villages approaches World Bank (WB) presented their Smart Village assessment methods in the South Caucasus (namely in Georgia, Azerbai jan and Armenia). World Bank's **Smart Village readiness index** in Azerbaijan is a framework viewing the villages as spatial clusters and drawing on big data and national open data sources to rank village clusters with common characteristics as the most versus the least ready to apply smart village approaches. One approach of the future Smart Villages programme could be the use of the readiness index to target villages. Next steps are: digital connectivity, training, engaging citizens, financing. The main results of a program of support for Smart Villages in these areas in the future might be: 1) Have improved economic opportunities 2) Improved services and satisfied citizens

Valentina Jug (FAO, Digital Agriculture Initiative), Digital villages initiative in Europe and Central Asia

In rural areas digital division is striking, lack of broadband and digital skills is a key problem. Digital technologies have the capacity to radically transform the disadvantages that rural areas are facing. FAO has launched a Digital Villages initiative to revitalise rural areas. FAO's sustainable method to choose the potential of rural areas for the digital transformation such as identification of candidate villages, readiness assessment tool, DVI Roadmap, DVI transformation. The readiness assessment tool is based on 17 criteria that look at digital ecosystem, strategic context and leadership and governance of a rural community. The DVI is community led approach to rural development and guided by principles of inclusion, collaboration, and empowerment. Village twinning was inspired by the EU'S town twinning. DVI pilot countries are: Albania, Moldova, Turkey, Kosovo.

KEY QUESTIONS

1) **Sustainability of the smart solutions** (focused on digital technologies) in 5 - 10 - 15 years vs. commitment at the level of the rural communities, e.g. management capacity, particularly between the several services deployed.
2) Opinion of the participant who was a LAG manager was asked about the **relation between community led approaches and deployment of digital technologies**, having as a basis the objectives of sustainable development.
3) **Selection of the villages** to take these kinds of development approaches forward. (e.g. which are the priority criteria, how can it be known that a village is prepared to be engaged in a smart village or digital village transformation).
4) **Experience brought by the WB and FAO from other regions**
5) **Next steps for FAO and WB**

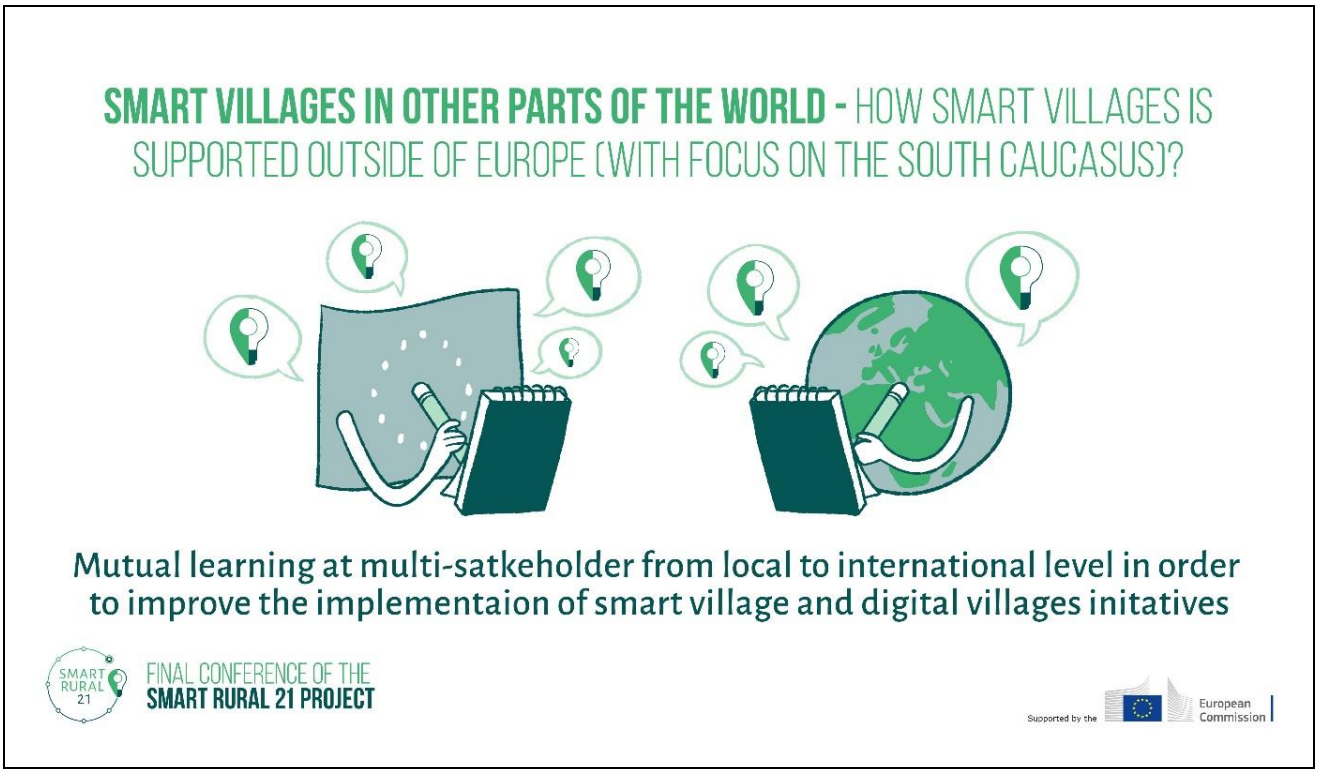
MAIN DISCUSSION POINTS: DILEMMAS, QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

- Different Smart Village approaches are needed in different countries and different approaches in implementing these initiatives can be used within a given country. Not only different across countries but within each country - it always depends on the context.
- **Data** is perceived as a driver to implement Smart Villages.
- When **selecting smart villages, connectivity** is a quite important criteria, complementing existing initiatives and not to start from scratch, having a good leader is also very important.
- **Need of coordination** on a national, regional and local level is key
- **Mutual learning and exchange of experience** between villages is very important.
- WB and FAO are implementing Smart Villages and Digital Villages **capitalising on the experiences from EU** but also from other regions of the world.

- **Need for clear policy frameworks** and respective delivery mechanisms - a structured tool (effective and efficient) for all the different contexts (political, social, cultural, economic) - there are different entry points.
- **Need for a close link between service providers and policy level** (and authorities responsible for the implementation of Smart villages and Digital Villages). Service providers should not be looking only to business objectives but also have a commitment to serve rural communities.
- **Sustainability** is a very important concept and should always be taken seriously (environmental especially). **Need to look further than digitalisation** when talking about Smart Villages - even if the approach is focused in the deployment of digital solutions, the **people are always at the centre of the approach.**
- Next steps for FAO and WB: **bridge the urban and rural divide, economic opportunities, improved services, sustainable development**. It is going to depend on the level of commitment of all the involved in the implementation of SV and DG Important to have roadmaps with well-defined objectives and well-defined support and responsibilities.

KEY MESSAGE FROM THE PLENARY

Mutual learning should continue through a multi-stakeholder approach from local to international levels in order to improve the implementation of Smart Villages and digital village initiatives.



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