BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

Intervention logic and evaluation framework
for 2014-2020 National Rural Networks

Good Practice Workshop
“National Rural Networks: How to show their benefits”
Rome (Italy), 10 and 11 April 2014
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1 INTRODUCTION

National rural networks (NRNs) have proved to be useful instruments of rural development policy in the period 2007 – 2013. Building on positive experiences, the EU foresees the establishment and operation of national rural networks also in the next programming period.

Rural networks represent specific EAFRD interventions implemented either within a particular Rural Development Programme (RDP) as national rural network – NRN or as a separate national rural network programme - NRNP. Rural networks operate in the context of programme territory (RDP or NRNP) and aim to enhance the involvement of stakeholders in the RDPs implementation, improve the quality of RDPs, inform the broader public about the benefits of the rural development policy and foster innovation in rural areas.

Since national rural networks are supported with the EAFRD, they are subject to evaluation as any other rural development intervention, in order to demonstrate their contribution to the EU rural policy objectives and to the development of rural areas.

To enhance capacities for the evaluation of rural networks, the Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development is organising a Good Practice Workshop, during which various rural development stakeholders (including representatives of national rural networks) will discuss and exchange experiences, information and knowledge on how achievements of rural networks and results/impacts of their activities can be assessed.

The following background document is developed to support the Good Practice Workshop by introducing the main elements of the intervention logic and the evaluation framework for national rural networks of 2014-2020.
2 NRN INTERVENTION LOGIC

2.1 What do we mean by ‘intervention logic’?

What is intervention logic?
The intervention logic of the national rural network, operating either within the RDP (NRN) or as separate programme (NRNP), is an essential cornerstone for its assessment. As outlined in the glossary of the common monitoring and evaluation framework (CMEF) of 2007-2013, an intervention logic:

“... represents a methodological instrument which establishes the logical link between programme objectives and the envisaged operational actions. It shows the conceptual link from an intervention’s input to its output and, subsequently, to its results and impacts. Thus, an intervention logic allows an assessment of a measure’s contribution to achieving its objectives”.

The above definition of the intervention logic can be illustrated with Error! Reference source not found.

When shall be the NRN intervention logic constructed and reviewed?
The NRN intervention logic is typically constructed at the time of drafting the NRNP or RDP. Optimally the NRN intervention logic should be also the subject of the ex ante evaluation checking on intervention logic’s relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and unintended factors.

Similarly to RDP, also NRN intervention logic can evolve over the time of the programme life cycle (NRNP or RDP) following the changes in the needs assessment within the programme territory. Therefore it shall be reviewed again when the evaluation takes place, minimally during the enhanced reporting on the programme implementation in 2017 and 2019 and during the ex post evaluation in 2024.
What needs to be considered in construction of NRN’s intervention logic?

The following issues shall be considered in the construction of the national rural networks’ intervention logic:

- Context and specific needs of the territory in which rural networks’ intervention logic is constructed;
- Common elements - objectives and tasks of rural networks as laid down in Regulation (EU) no 1305/2013, Art. 54.2;
- Specific elements - objectives and tasks of a concrete NRN (including the design the NRN action plan);

What is the context of national rural network and how to identify needs to be addressed by their interventions?

NRNs operate in context of rural areas. This context can be characterized with the set of context parameters, which helps to describe the situation of the territory, facilitates the analysis of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and the assessment/identification of needs to be addressed by rural network’s interventions. The following Figure 2 illustrates the context of rural networks:

Figure 2 Contextual situation of NRNs

Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, adapted according to the CMEF 2007-2013
As seen from Figure 2, there are certain differences which need to be taken in consideration in relation to rural networks’ context. While in case of NRNP the context relates to Members States with several RDPs, the NRN performs within the frame of concrete RDP and its contextual situation (Member States, regions).

There are a number of parameters that can describe the specific context in which rural networks might operate. The ‘Findings of the 2012 NRN mapping exercise: Final Synthesis Report’ outlines key characteristics with regards to the 2007-2013 network operation. These findings are the basis for the proposed set of common context parameters which can be used in the description of the rural networks’ context in the RDP or NRNP. The description of the context is the basis for the SWOT analysis and the identification of the needs of rural areas, which can be addressed through rural networks.

The proposed set of context parameters should help programme authorities and their partners to describe and understand the situation in which rural networks operate, to conduct the SWOT analysis and needs assessment. The set is not exhausted and can be completed with NRN’s specific context parameters taking in consideration the specificities of the territory, as well as expected added value of rural network.

The proposed context parameters for NRNs are:

- **Variety of rural development stakeholders**: Mapping of rural development stakeholder groups acting at local, regional and national levels, which might be existing and/or potential members of the national rural network, representing: (i) broader rural community; (ii) rural development programme beneficiaries as defined in the regulation and programmes, including those in relation to local action groups (LAGs); (iii) others, e.g. various NGOs, research and academia linked to rural development including those working in innovation related fields, etc.

- **Linkages between stakeholders**: Mapping of existing links and connections among stakeholders, including already established and planned cooperation projects and activities among participants of existing networks (internal links) and between networks (external links).

- **Level of decentralisation of rural networks’ operational structures**: Describing and analysing existing operational and coordination structures in which national rural networks are functioning, taking into consideration the national and regional levels and division of responsibilities (decentralisation).

- **Level of openness of the current national rural network**: Describing and analysing the openness of the current national rural network to the participation of a broader scope of rural stakeholders (e.g. through formal/informal membership; through the possibility to join the network on an on-going basis etc.) and the related rules which networks apply in this respect.

Additional context parameters specific for the NRN are:

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1. ENRD Contact Point (June 2013): ‘Findings of the 2012 NRN mapping exercise: Final Synthesis Report’
• **Structure & content of the RDP**, in which network will operate: Analysing measures and related financial allocations within the programme which will be linked to NRN activities2 and might foster or weaken them.

• **Analysis on the National Support Units – NSU** (e.g. whether the NSU is within the MA; or the NSU is delegated to ministerial agency/other public institutions; or the NSU is outsourced), highlighting strengths and weaknesses of the existing set up and lessons learned for the future.

The description of the national rural network’s context is the base for conducting the analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, which leads to the assessment of most relevant needs to be addressed with the national rural network’s interventions.

*What are the common elements for the construction of rural networks’ intervention logic?*

The common elements for the construction of national rural network’s intervention logic are:

- four **common NRN objectives**3 and
- seven **common groups of activities**4

Table 1 Objectives and groups of activities of NRNs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives of NRNs</th>
<th>Groups of activities of NRNs</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Networking by the national rural network shall aim to:</td>
<td>EAFRD support under Article 51(3) shall be used for the preparation and implementation of an action plan covering at least the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) increase the involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of rural development;</td>
<td>(i) activities regarding the collection of examples of projects covering all priorities of the rural development programmes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) improve the quality of implementation of rural development programmes;</td>
<td>(ii) activities regarding the facilitation of thematic and analytical exchanges between rural development stakeholders, sharing and dissemination of findings;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) inform the broader public and potential beneficiaries on rural development policy and funding opportunities;</td>
<td>(iii) activities regarding the provision of training and networking for local action groups and in particular technical assistance for inter-territorial and transnational co-operation, facilitation of co-operation among local action groups and the search of partners for the measure referred to in Article 35;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas.</td>
<td>(iv) activities regarding the provision of networking for advisors and innovation support services;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(v) activities regarding the sharing and dissemination of monitoring and evaluation findings;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(vi) a communication plan including publicity and information concerning the rural development programme in agreement with the Managing Authorities and information and communication activities aimed at a broader public;</td>
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<td>(vii) activities regarding the participation in and</td>
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</tbody>
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2 Only for NRN context analysis
3 Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art 54.2
4 Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art 54.3
Objectives of NRNs | Groups of activities of NRNs
---|---
| contribution to the European network for rural development.

The common network objectives and group of activities represent the basis for the design of the network intervention logic which can be complemented with network-specific objectives and groups of activities according to the Member State/Regional context.

Although not explicitly stated in the Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, certain direct and indirect links can be identified between common rural network’ objectives and groups of activities (see also the Part III, Tool box, chapter 2 in which the diagrams of the NRN intervention logic composed of common elements are presented). These links can be taken in consideration when constructing the programme-specific intervention logic.

Direct and indirect links between objectives and group of activities are observed as follows:

**The common network objective (a): “Increase the involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of rural development”** can be directly ensured through two common groups of activities of the NRN:

- Facilitation of thematic and analytical exchanges between rural development stakeholders, sharing and dissemination of findings;
- Provision of training and networking activities for local action groups and in particular technical assistance for inter-territorial and transnational co-operation, facilitation of cooperation among local action groups and the search of partners for the measure referred to in Article 355;

Thematic and analytical exchanges organised by rural network create the opportunity to discuss, share and disseminate various findings in the field of rural development among broad range of stakeholders and encourages their participation. The stakeholders’ involvement can happen in the form of working groups, forums, events, publications etc. Hence, the NRNs can also assist LAGs in organising various events, or creating effective platforms to involve a variety of rural development actors, including those outside of the RDP. While LAGs do organize various events for a broader public and encourage the participation of local networks and volunteers in LAG’s activities, this effort can be further strengthened through rural network’s actions. Cooperation projects create additional opportunities for the involvement of rural development stakeholders and often comprise a bigger range of activities than those implemented through local development strategies.

Besides the groups of activities which are directly linked to the increased involvement of stakeholders, the following groups of activities can be considered as contributing indirectly to the NRNs objective (a) (see Error! Reference source not found.):

- Communication plan including publicity and information concerning the rural development programme in agreement with the Managing Authorities and information and communication activities aimed at a broader public;
- Provision to participate in and contribute to the activities of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD);

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5 Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 35 on Co-operation
• Provision of training networking activities for advisors and innovation support services.

The common network objective (b): “Improve the quality of implementation of rural development programmes;” can be addressed through the implementation of the following group of activities:

• Share and disseminate monitoring and evaluation findings;
• Facilitate thematic and analytical exchanges between rural development stakeholders, sharing and disseminating findings linked to this exchange;
• Collect examples of projects covering all priorities of the rural development programmes.

Disseminating and sharing monitoring and evaluation findings among rural development stakeholders increases the knowledge on rural development as well as the awareness on the role of evaluation in steering and improving the programme. Similarly to this, the NRN can contribute to the improvement of RDPs by facilitating discussion and exchange among rural development stakeholders on various topics and themes linked to RDP implementation. RDP beneficiaries can also be involved in the RDP improvement through NRN collection, dissemination and promotion of projects.

Besides groups of activities that are directly linked to improving the quality of the implementation of RDPs, the following groups of activities can be seen as contributing indirectly to objective (b) (see Error! Reference source not found.):

• Provision of training and networking activities for local action groups and in particular technical assistance for inter-territorial and transnational co-operation, facilitation of co-operation among local action groups and the search of partners for the measure referred to in Article 36;
• Communication plan including publicity and information concerning the rural development programme in agreement with the Managing Authorities and information and communication activities aimed at a broader public;
• Provision of training networking activities for advisors and innovation support services.

The common network objective (c): “Inform the broader public and potential beneficiaries on rural development policy and funding opportunities”

The broader public and potential beneficiaries can be informed on the rural development policy and funding opportunities through:

• Communication plan including publicity and information concerning the rural development programme in agreement with the Managing Authorities and information and communication activities aimed at a broader public;
• Participation in and contribution to the activities of the ENRD.

The NRN communication plan and its activities are a key tool to better inform a broader public on the objectives of EU rural development policy and potential beneficiaries of RDP funding opportunities. In addition, events and information channels of the ENRD can also contribute to this effort through the provision of updated information on the implementation of the EU rural development policy and through exchange of information across Member States.
Besides of groups of activities directly linked to the information of broader public and potential RDP beneficiaries, the following group of activities can be seen as contributing indirectly to the NRN objective (c) (see Error! Reference source not found.):

- Share and disseminate monitoring and evaluation findings.

The common network objective (d): “Foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas” can be addressed through the following groups of activities:

- Provision of training and networking activities for advisors and innovation support services;
- Facilitation of thematic and analytical exchanges between rural development stakeholders, sharing and dissemination of findings;
- Collection of examples of projects covering all priorities of the rural development programmes.

NRNs can organize trainings and various networking activities for advisors focused on innovation in agriculture, forestry and other rural sectors concerned with the RDP. This can subsequently facilitate the establishment of EIP operational groups and the development of innovative projects. Thematic exchange among rural development stakeholders can also foster innovation in rural areas and promote innovative projects which are collected by the NRN covering all RD priorities.

Besides groups of activities that are directly linked to fostering innovation in agriculture, food processing, forestry and rural areas, the following groups of activities can be seen as contributing indirectly to the NRN objective (d), (see Error! Reference source not found.):

- Provision of training and networking activities for local action groups and in particular technical assistance for inter-territorial and transnational co-operation, facilitation of co-operation among local action groups and the search of partners for the measure referred to in Article 36

The overview of direct and indirect links between the common rural networks objectives and groups of activities is illustrated in Error! Reference source not found..

Table 2 Direct and indirect contributions to common NRN objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIONS UNDER NRN OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO OBJECTIVES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective 1</strong> Increase the involvement of stakeholders in the</td>
<td><strong>Objective 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>implementation of rural development</td>
<td>D⁶</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art 54 (3)(b)(iii) provision of training and networking for</td>
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<td>local action groups and in particular technical assistance for</td>
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<td>inter-territorial and transnational co-operation, facilitation</td>
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<td>of co-operation among local action groups and the search of</td>
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<td>partners for the measure referred to in Article 35</td>
<td>D⁶</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art 54 (3)(b)(ii) facilitation of thematic and analytical</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exchanges between rural development stakeholders, sharing and</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dissemination of findings</td>
<td>D</td>
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<td><strong>Objective 2</strong> Improve the</td>
<td><strong>Objective 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art 54 (3)(b)(v) sharing and dissemination of monitoring</td>
<td>D</td>
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<td>and evaluation findings</td>
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⁶ Direct effects
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<tr>
<th>ACTIONS UNDER NRN OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO OBJECTIVES</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Objective 1</td>
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<td>quality of implementation of RDP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art 54 (3)(b)(ii) facilitation of thematic and analytical exchanges between rural development stakeholders, sharing and dissemination of findings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Art 54 (3)(b)(i) collection of examples of projects covering all priorities of the rural development programmes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Objective 3 Inform the broader public and potential beneficiaries on rural development policy and funding opportunities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art 54 (3)(b)(vi) communication plan including publicity and information concerning the rural development programme in agreement with the Managing Authorities and information and communication activities aimed at a broader public</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art 54 (3)(b)(vii) participation in and contribution to the European network for rural development</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective 4 Foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Art 54 (3)(b)(iv) provision of networking for advisors and innovation support services</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art 54 (3)(b)(i) collection of examples of projects covering all priorities of the rural development programmes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art 54 (3)(b)(ii) facilitation of thematic and analytical exchanges between rural development stakeholders, sharing and dissemination of findings</td>
<td>D</td>
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</table>

*Source: the Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development*

**What needs to be considered in construction of the intervention logic for NRN and NRNP?**

As mentioned above, the common network objectives and groups of activities create the basis of the intervention logic of national rural networks, which is developed in different “modus operandum” in RDP national rural networks and in national rural network programmes.

**National rural networks**, programmed and implemented as technical assistance of rural development programmes, address specific networking needs identified in the single RDP territory which can be tackled through rural networks. The NRN intervention logic is part of a rural development programme (intervention logic within intervention logic) and therefore it is expected that the NRN outputs produced through the implementation of the NRN action plan and the results achieved in relation to the NRN objectives are contributing to the overall RDP impacts. This situation can be illustrated with Figure 3.

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7 Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 52
A national rural network programme (NRNP) represents the specific and self-standing intervention which targets specific needs of rural areas addressed through activities of rural networks. This includes also support to all those RDPs which belong to the NRNP area. NRNP is financed with separate budget, produces intermediate outputs, programme related results and can have an impact within its programme’s area on the quality of implementation of RDPs in concern. Outputs of the NRNP are produced with financial and other inputs through various groups of activities (e.g. no of trainings, no of participants, no of good practice exchanges etc.). The results of NRNP relate to the achievements of NRNP against the common and NRNP specific objectives. The impacts represent the NRNP effects in addressing the main networking needs of the area in relation to the overall common NRN objectives. Figure 3 can be adapted for specific NRNP situation as follows:

Figure 3 Intervention logic of the NRN

Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, adapted according to the CMEF 2007-2013
Besides results and impacts achieved by the national rural network, NRNs also can generate specific added value, as expected by rural development stakeholders. Various added values can be evoked by rural networks, mostly linked to the social capital, e.g. increase networking among RDP beneficiaries and other rural development stakeholders, enhanced capacities of rural development actors, enhancement of overall networking including involvement of existing informal networks in rural areas, or improved governance in rural areas. It is important that the opportunity to create the added value of networks is recognized by programme authorities and their partners and reflected in the programme-specific objectives, measures, activities and consequently also in the assessment of national rural networks outputs, results and impacts.

How to construct the national rural network’s intervention logic?

As said above, the basis for NRN’s intervention logic are the four common objectives and the proposed groups of actions, which are there to address needs through activities of national rural networks.

The common and programme-specific objectives of the RDP (or RDPs in the case of an NRNP) can be also part of the network’s intervention logic. Further on Member States might identify additional network-specific objectives and needs after the conduction of the SWOT analysis and needs
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assessment and which cannot be fully addressed by the common group activities proposed in legal framework. The common group of activities shall be completed with network-specific group of activities, which can relate either to common network’s objectives or to the network-specific objectives.

In the construction of the rural network’s intervention logic after description of the NRN context, SWOT analysis and needs assessment it is necessary to take the following steps:

- Review the common network (and RDP) objectives and groups of activities from the point of their relevance to address needs identified in context and SWOT analysis;
- Define and formulate network-specific objectives and groups of activities in case the identified needs cannot be addressed with common objectives and group of actions,
- Set up the hierarchy of NRN common and specific objectives – overall, specific and operational, reflecting identified needs,
- Consider sufficient inputs needed to achieve objectives,
- Develop NRN action plan
- Think of expected outputs, results, impacts.
- Construct network intervention logic composed of common and network-specific elements, including the formulation and designing the NRN action plan.

The rural development objectives are linked to CAP objectives and EU2020 targets at the higher hierarchical level. A special consideration shall be given to the RD priority 1 due to its special value for NRNs through fostering knowledge and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas and therefore closely linked to the common NRN’s objective: “Foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas”. Common NRN objectives can become overall NRN objectives, if is justified with the context and SWOT analysis and needs assessment. The same way the common NRN objectives and common group of activities can be complemented with the NRN specific objectives and activities if necessary.

In relation to the “other side” of the intervention logic (expected outputs, results and impacts) the common monitoring and evaluation system (CMES) of 2014 – 2020 alone will not provide enough information. There are three common output indicators in the list of common RD indicators12, namely:

- Number of thematic and analytical exchanges set up with the support of NRN
- Number of NRN communication tools
- Number of ENRD activities in which the NRN has participated

These three common indicators are established to measure the outputs which are expected to be produced with the group of common activities through NRNs. In contrast, expected results and impacts of NRN activities shall be defined by programme authorities/stakeholders as well the NRN impact indicators.

To sum up the NRN intervention logic will be composed of:

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12 Implementing act
• Common NRN objectives, groups of activities and outputs
• NRN-specific objectives and groups of activities
• NRN-specific expected outputs, results and impacts

To illustrate this, two examples of the construction of a NRN’s intervention logic are provided below.

**Box 1 Example of NRN intervention logic for new products and markets**

The first example of the intervention logic of the NRN is built around the need for innovation which would bring new products and markets. In this respect it is expected that the NRN will address this need and facilitate the promotion of innovation as the mean to generate new products and markets (overall programme-specific objective). NRN, through its activities will also foster the knowledge transfer and innovation especially with respect to RD priority 2, 3 and 6 (common objective linked to RD priorities).

*Expected NRN impact* will be new products and markets, in which NRN has played important facilitation role.

The NRN overall objectives will be implemented though the achievements of NRN specific objectives, namely:

A. *Common NRN objective*:

• Fostering innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas

B. *NRN specific objective*:

• Strengthen collaboration, exchange and networking among innovation projects carriers in rural areas through NRN

Expected specific results of the NRN activities is bigger number of innovative projects in rural areas as well as stronger network for innovation, which will facilitate faster and more effective transfer of knowledge and innovation.

The above objectives will be achieved through implementation of common groups of actions:

• facilitation of thematic and analytical exchanges between rural development stakeholders
• provision of networking activities for advisors and innovation support services
• provision of training and networking activities for LAGs
• collection of examples of projects

Expected NRN outputs are more thematic exchanges, databases of innovative projects available to public, more training on innovation.

The situation is explained in the figure below. Common elements are in blue color and programme-specific elements in green color.
Box 2 Example of NRN intervention logic for enhancing evaluation awareness

The second example of the intervention logic of the NRN is built around the need to recognize the importance of the evaluation in the design and implementation of RDPs and enhance the evaluation awareness of RD stakeholders. The overall objective for the NRN intervention is to increase the involvement of rural development stakeholders in the implementation of rural development. Expected NRN impact is that more RD stakeholders are actively using the evaluation results in the policy design due to activities of NRN.

The NRN overall objective will be implemented through the achievements of NRN specific objectives, namely:

A. **Common NRN objectives:**
   - Inform broader public on RD policy and funding opportunities,

B. **Programme-specific objective:**
   - Increase the involvement of rural development stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation.

Expected NRN specific results of the NRN activities is bigger number RD stakeholders participating in the evaluation activities. Above objectives will be achieved through implementation of common groups of actions:

- sharing and disseminating of monitoring and evaluation findings\(^{13}\)
- facilitation of thematic and analytical exchanges between rural development stakeholders\(^{14}\)
- provision of networking activities for advisors and innovation support services\(^{15}\)
- provision of training and networking activities for LAGs\(^{16}\)
- a communication plan including publicity and information concerning the RDP\(^{17}\)

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13 Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art 54 (3)(b)(v)
14 Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art 54 (3)(b)(viii)
15 Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art 54 (3)(b)(iv)
16 Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art 54(3)(b)(vii)
17 Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art 54 (3)(b)(vi)
Expected NRN outputs are more thematic exchanges on evaluation, and more training on evaluation for RD stakeholders and beneficiaries. The situation is explained in the figure below. Common elements are in blue color and programme-specific elements in green color.

Source: Evaluation Helpdesk, adapted according CMEF 2007-2013

There can be different intervention logics in the single programme (NRNP or RDP) for NRNs depending on identified needs, which can be addressed via common and network specific objectives and activities (e.g. both above examples can be combined).

There are some differences in constructing the intervention logic of national rural network programmes compare to national rural network in the RDP due to different “modus operandum” in their delivery.

NRN inside of the RDP is supporting one programme linked to the specific territory and its needs including those which can be addressed through networks, while NRNP, designed and implemented at the level of Member States supports several programmes, under the specific conditions, which might differ from each other. As in the case of NNR the intervention logic of the NRNP is composed of common and programme-specific elements in order to capture the varying situation of number RDPs in the MS.
How to define network-specific objectives?

Network-specific objectives shall be formulated in the SMART way and therefore they shall be Specific (using exact and concrete terminology), Measurable (progress and achievements being able to be measured with the means of indicators), Achievable (able to be achieved within the given time with the resources and support available), Relevant (able to have effect with the area of identified need) and Time-bound (framing the objective with time when it shall be achieved)\(^{18}\).

In another words, the formulation of objective shall express the concrete and realistic quantitative\(^ {19}\) and qualitative\(^ {20}\) change which is expected to happen during or after the programming period in the area of identified need and which can be measured with the means of indicators. In the formulation of programme-specific objectives, it shall be clear to which level of hierarchy of intervention they are linked: overall programme level, specific/priority level or measure, group of activities level.

As mentioned above, the definition of specific objectives for national rural networks starts with the identification of needs, which cannot be addressed with the common network objectives, and the formulation of expected changes in relation to these needs in the programming area (overall objectives), within the network objectives or at the level of beneficiaries (operational objectives). Network-specific objectives can be either achieved with the common group of activities\(^ {21}\) or also through network-specific activities.

The additional NRN objectives can be defined at the RDP or/and NRN level if the network has high political recognition and preference, e.g. enhancement of multilevel governance in rural areas through networks. In reality, NRN are more seen as supportive agent to accomplish the RDP objectives, which are already defined for all RDP measures.

Box 3 NRN specific objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of defining NRN specific objectives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The context description and needs assessment shows that apart of four common national rural network objectives there is a need to enhance evaluation capacities of rural development stakeholders in selected fields. This need is reflected with the network-specific objective which can be achieved with the common and network specific group of actions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Common groups of actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sharing and dissemination of monitoring and evaluation findings,</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Thematic and analytical exchanges between rural development stakeholders</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. Network specific group of actions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Evaluation trainings and seminars targeting broad scope of rural development stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Useful steps for formulating NRN specific objectives are presented in Error! Reference source not found..

\(^{18}\) http://www.iom.edu/About-IOM/Making-a-Difference/Community-Outreach/~/media/Files/About-20the-20IOM/SmartBites/Planning/P1-20SMART-20Objectives.ashx

\(^{19}\) Operational objectives at the level of outputs

\(^{20}\) Specific and overall objectives at the level of results and impacts

\(^{21}\) Regulation (EU) no 1305/2013, Art. 54.3
Identify the most important needs of rural areas which cannot be linked to common national rural networks objectives

Define the change which is expected in the area of identified need at the end of the programming period at each hierarchical level (programme, priority, measures/activities).

Formulate objectives for each level of intervention:
- **Overall objectives** expressing the broad qualitative change in relation to rural development policy (EU country, region), which are usually only achievable over the longer-term. Intervention shall contribute to this change.
- **Specific objectives** expressing the qualitative change within priority areas, usually achievable in the short-term. Intervention should make this change happen.
- **Operational objectives** expressing quantitative change in specific measures or group of activities. Intervention should deliver the identified quantitative change.

Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development
3 MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The common monitoring and evaluation system (CMES) establishes the common evaluation elements used in the evaluation of rural development programmes, including those implemented through national rural networks. The common elements for evaluation of national rural networks are:

- **Intervention logic** of national rural networks, composed of hierarchy of objectives and action plan/measures (both common and network specific) (see the Part II, chapter 1)

- **Common evaluation question (CEQ) for NRN** (see Error! Reference source not found.) included in the CMES linked to policy objectives. The aim of the CEQ is to focus the evaluation of national rural network effects towards policy;

- **Programme-specific evaluation questions (PSEQs) for national rural network**, are formulated by rural development stakeholders at the time of programme/action plan design or also later during the evaluation to capture NRN effects and contributions towards RDP objectives or specific field of interest (e.g. delivery of network etc.);

- **Common indicators**, which for national rural networks are commonly set up for output level. There are three common output indicators to measure outputs of national rural networks (see Error! Reference source not found.);

- **Programme-specific indicators for national rural network** are linked to specific network’s outputs, results and impacts. The programme-specific indicators are designed to answer PSEQs or also answer CEQ, in case the common output indicators are not sufficient or suitable.

The NRN monitoring and evaluation framework starts with the common elements linked to common parts of the NRN intervention logic and is complemented with programme-specific elements.

Common and programme-specific evaluation elements and their use in the evaluation of national rural network are discussed in following chapters in order to ensure the common approach towards the assessment of their results and impacts, as well as to achieve sufficient comparability in evaluation. The guidance documents complement legal proposals and implementing acts, and have a non-binding character.

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22 Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art 54(2):
### Table 3 Common Evaluation Questions for NRNs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OTHER RDP ASPECTS</th>
<th>POLICY OBJECTIVE</th>
<th>EVALUATION QUESTION RELATED OTHER ASPECTS OF RDP</th>
<th>JUDGEMENT CRITERIA</th>
<th>COMMON RD INDICATORS</th>
<th>ADDITIONAL INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| National rural networks (NRN) | Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art 54(2): | 1. To what extent has the national rural network contributed to achieving the objectives laid down in Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art 54(2)? | - Number and types of stakeholders involved in RDP implementation has increased  
- The quality of implementation of the RDP has been improved through the activities of the NRN, e.g.:  
  - Improved capacity of RDP beneficiaries  
  - Improved evaluation awareness  
  - Lessons from evaluations are taken into account in programme implementation  
  - Broader public and potential beneficiaries are aware of the rural development policy and funding opportunities through activities of the NRN  
  - Innovation in agriculture, food production forestry and rural areas has been fostered by the NRN | - Number of thematic and analytical exchanges set up with the support of NRN  
- Number of NRN communication tools  
- Number of ENRD activities in which the NRN has participated | - Number of stakeholders (by type) participating in the implementation of the RDP due to activities of the NRN (including those through LAGs)  
- Number of RDP modifications based on evaluation findings and recommendations from thematic working groups organized by the NRN  
- % of RDP implemented projects encouraged by NRN(P) activities  
- Number persons that have been informed about the rural development policy and funding opportunities through the NRN communication tools  
- % of innovative projects encouraged by NRN out of the total number of innovative projects supported by the RDP(s) |
**Triangular relationship between objectives, evaluation questions and indicators**

There is a triangular relationship between policy objectives, evaluation questions and indicators, as illustrated in Error! Reference source not found. It is important to appraise thoroughly the consistency among them before the assessment starts. This includes ensuring the common definition of key terms used in all three elements, the usability of indicators to measure achievements against objectives, and their ability to answer evaluation questions.

![Figure 6 Triangle of objectives, evaluation questions and indicators](image)

**The role of evaluation questions in the evaluation of rural networks**

**Evaluation questions** define the focus of evaluations in relation to policy objectives and help to demonstrate the progress, impact, achievements, effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of rural development policy. EQ used in evaluation of national rural networks are usually cause–effect questions: they call for identification of changes which happen due to NRN interventions.

Evaluation questions are further specified with the judgment criteria, which underline the expected success of network’s interventions and link evaluation questions with indicators. This linkage facilitates the development of sound evaluation design and selection of evaluation methods enabling the formulation of robust answers based on qualitative and quantitative evidence.

**Types of evaluation questions**

As mentioned above there are common evaluation questions (CEQ) and programme-specific evaluation questions (PSEQ) applied in the evaluation of national rural networks.

**CEQs** are designed by the EC to be commonly applied across all EU Member States with the aim to:

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23 Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art 54 (1); Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 Art 68 (a)
Guidelines for the evaluation of national rural networks – PART II

- **Demonstrate the contribution of network's interventions** in addressing the specific needs of rural areas,
- **Support evaluation of the EU rural development policies**. helping to evaluate effects of national rural network’s interventions towards network’s objectives
- **Encourage programme bodies and other stakeholders to assess results and impacts** of national rural networks.
- **Enhance comparability of evaluation results in relation to national rural networks across Europe.**

**PSEQs** are designed by NRN Authorities (MAs) with the aim to:

- **Demonstrate the contribution of network-specific interventions** in addressing the identified specific needs of the programme territory.
- **Support evaluation of programme-specific interventions in relation to NRNs**. PSEQs focus the evaluation on programme-specific interventions and their contribution towards NRN-specific objectives.
- **Encourage programme bodies and other RD stakeholders to assess NRN’s results and impacts**. PSEQs ask for NRN results and impacts of programme-specific NRN’s interventions.

**CEQ and proposed judgment criteria**

There is **one** CEQ defined within the EU common monitoring and evaluation system of 2014-2020$^{25}$ linked to the NRN. It belongs to the group of CEQs, which relate to other aspects of RDP together with the CEQs for technical assistance, the complementarities and synergies among rural development priorities and focus areas supported within the programmes (operational performance):

“To what extent has the national rural network contributed to achieving the objectives laid down in Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art 54(2)?”

This CEQ is further specified with the suggested judgment criteria (non-binding)$^{26}$.

- Number and types of stakeholders involved in RDP implementation has increased
- The quality of implementation of the RDP has been improved through the activities of the NRN, e.g.
  - Improved capacity of RDP beneficiaries
  - Improved evaluation awareness
  - Lessons from evaluations are taken into account in programme implementation
- Broader public and potential beneficiaries are aware of the rural development policy and funding opportunities through activities of the NRN

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$^{24}$ Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art 54(2):

$^{25}$ Implementing act

$^{26}$ Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for RDPs 2014-2020: WD Common evaluation questions for RDPs 2014-2020
• Innovation in agriculture, food production forestry and rural areas has been fostered by the NRN

Apart of CEQ directly linked to NRN, all CEQs related to RD priorities/focus areas can be used in the evaluation of NRN in case NRN activities contribute to RD priorities/focus areas objectives.

The CEQ related to NRNs together with CEQs for other aspects of the RDP will be answered to present the evaluation results in the 2017 and 2019 enhanced AIRs and in the ex post evaluation.

Having in mind one of four NRN related common objectives: “Improve the quality of implementation of rural development programmes », any of common evaluation questions which relate to EU level objectives can be addressed in the evaluation of NRN if they are part of NRN intervention logic.

Box 4 Example of evaluation questions for NRNs

NRN intervention logic contains objective for focus area 1A “Fostering innovation, cooperation, and the development of the knowledge base in rural areas”. In such a case the common evaluation question linked to the objective of focus area 1A can be used in the NRN assessment in the following format:

« To what extent have NRN interventions supported innovation, cooperation and the development of the knowledge base in rural areas? »

How to design the PSEQs for NRNs?

PSEQ always relate to the programme-specific specific evaluation needs, and they are developed in case:

• Achievements of the common policy objectives cannot be fully assessed with the help of the CEQ;
• NRN intervention logic contains the programme-specific objectives.

The approach applied in the development of PSEQs in relation to NRNs is similar as the one used in the RDP evaluation and it is as follows:

(1) Development of programme-specific evaluation questions linked to common objectives for NRN in case the CEQ does not cover specific NRN evaluation needs ,

(2) Development of PSEQs linked to network specific objectives,

(3) Development of the judgment criteria linked to PSEQs specifying the expected success of the intervention and focusing on the type of information to be collected in provision of answers.

The formulation of PSEQs relates to:

A. The level of the objective in the hierarchy;
B. The formulation of the objective;

27 CEQ related to EU headline targets and CAP objectives
C. The means to achieve objective;
D. The means to answer the evaluation question.

**The level of the objective in the hierarchy**
The level of the objective in the hierarchy is linked to the particular level in the intervention logic: the level of outputs, results or the level of impacts. It is expected that a national rural network will contribute to expected change in the programme area, involving an increase, improvement, enhancement, mitigation or similar effect.

The NRN results and impacts are subject of the evaluation. The practice in the NRNP design of 2007-2013 has shown that their intervention logic has included various priorities or axes, where it was expected to achieve specific programme results. Therefore evaluation questions had to be formulated at this level in similar pattern as in case of NRN within RDP.

At the level of measure-activity outputs linked to NRN, the formulation of evaluation question should allow for quantification of obtained outputs against inputs of the NRN intervention, for example:

- “How many of immediate outputs with respect to target variable have been obtained though NRN activities?”

At the level results (linked to NRN common and specific objectives) the evaluation questions shall be formulated like result level question and should express the effects of the network on the group of beneficiaries, for example:

- “To what extent the change in the target variable within the group of beneficiaries happened due to NRN activities?”

At the level of impacts linked to NRN, the formulation of evaluation question should allow for attributions of observed changes to the intervention in the programme area, for example:

- “To what extent has the NRN contributed to the observed change in the target variable in the programme area?”

**The formulation and the content of the objective**
The formulation and the content of the objective should be considered when formulating the programme-specific questions. The same terminology shall be used in the question as in the objective. For example, if the network programme seeks to address need through an “improvement” within a relevant area, the word containing the direction of change (i.e. “improvement”) should be used in formulation of the evaluation question (see Error! Reference source not found.).
Box 5 Example of a NRN PSEQs contributing to a RDP objective

For example, in the case of an NRNP which aims to improve the quality of implementation of RDPs so as contributing to halting the loss of biodiversity. The programme-specific evaluation question linked to this NRN-specific objective is “To which extent the NRNP has contributed to the improvement of RDPs in halting the loss of biodiversity?”. The figure below, illustrates the links between objectives and evaluation questions.

![Diagram showing links between objectives and evaluation questions]

The means to achieve objectives
The means to achieve objectives should also be clear, for example workshops, interviews or databases (see Error! Reference source not found.).

Box 6 Example of means to achieve objectives

The objective presented in Box 7 will be achieved with the following means:

Common activities:
- Collection of examples of projects which help to maintain, increase the biodiversity
- Establishment and maintenance of thematic exchanges focused on biodiversity loss

Programme-specific activities:
- Activities facilitating the biodiversity mapping systems and transfer of good practice in this area

The evidence to answer the evaluation question outline in Box 7 can be collected using quantitative and qualitative approaches.

The means to answer the evaluation question and their availability
The means to answer the evaluation question and their availability should also be clear when formulating it, for example which indicators will be used to measure the effects, which data shall be collected in using these indicators, which additional information are needed to answer the questions and if they are available on cost effective way.

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29 EU 2020 headline target: Halting the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services in the EU 2020 and restoring them in so far as feasible

30 Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 54.3
Box 7 Objectives of the Spanish NRNP

The Spanish NRNP defines as one of its objectives “To strengthen the programming and implementation capabilities of the Rural Development Programmes”. Breaking this objective down further:

- The objective is a specific objective in the objective hierarchy and is intended to produce results within the group of programme beneficiaries.
- The formulation of the objective indicates that in this case a positive change within the group of programme participants (strengthening) in the capabilities in two explicit domains (programming, i.e. in the capability to deliver a high quality document, and implementing, i.e. the capability to deliver a programme on time, compliant to the programme rules and with the intended outputs and results).
- The identification of the means to achieve the objective assumes the existence of activities (trainings, meetings, studies) that made a difference in the capabilities of stakeholders.
- Changes in capacities can be measured by;
  - participation in activities, such as trainings, meetings (data extracted from monitoring systems), assuming that attendance leads to increased capabilities of the persons attending;
  - stakeholder satisfaction (data extracted by surveys) assuming that higher levels of satisfaction indicates strengthened capability;
  - enhanced interaction amongst relevant authorities (e.g. between Managing Authority, Paying Agency and Commission) (extracted by system environment analysis) assuming that enhanced interaction indicates enhanced capabilities.

The above steps indicate the recommended approach in formulating evaluation questions and the means of answering it.

In line with text above and building on the two examples of intervention logic of chapter 2 the programme-specific evaluation questions would be as shown in Error! Reference source not found. and Error! Reference source not found..
Figure 7 PSEQs linked to hierarchy of objectives of intervention logic on innovation [CO: common objectives, PSO: programme-specific objectives]

Needs: enhance the innovation in rural areas

CO: Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas and in relation to FAs of RD priority 2, 3 and 6 of the RDP through NRN

PSO: Strengthen collaboration, exchange and networking among innovation projects carriers in rural areas through NRN

CO: Art 54 (2)(d) Foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas

PSEQ: To what extent has the NRN contributed to development of new products/markets based on innovative projects?

PSEQ: To what extent were innovative projects developed and transferred due to NRN activities (incl. innovation networks inside of NRN)

Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development
After reviewing CEQs and formulating PSEQs it is necessary to examine common indicators, develop programme-specific indicators whenever necessary and identify additional information important to answer evaluation questions.

The role of indicators in evaluating network programmes

**Definition, role and use of indicators in evaluation of NRNPs**

The assessment of national rural networks is done with the means of indicators. Indicators are measurements units, which accompany objectives and evaluation questions in mutual consistency at each level of national rural network’s intervention logic and are used to measure:

- programme outputs - immediate quantitative change within activities carried out by programme beneficiaries;
- programme results – immediate quantitative or qualitative change observed within the group of programme beneficiaries;
- programme impacts – long term quantitative or qualitative change observed within the programme area.
Common indicators for NRNs
The common monitoring and evaluation system for 2014-2020 lays down the three common indicators for national rural networks at output level, namely:

- Number of thematic and analytical exchanges set up with the support of NRN
- Number of NRN communication tools
- Number of ENRD activities in which the NRN has participated

Fiches developed by DG AGRI for above output indicators can be found in the Tool box (chapter 1).

Programme-specific indicators in the assessment of NRNs
It is obvious that the above common output indicators, which are directly linked to the groups of common activities of national rural networks as laid down in legal framework, are not sufficient to assess all NRN outputs and none of NRN results and impacts as outlined in the NRN intervention logic. In case the NRN will accommodate programme-specific groups of activities, it will be necessary to develop also programme-specific output indicators.

The programme-specific result indicators will allow the assessment of achievements of NRNs against NRN specific objectives\(^{31}\) as well as against the EU and RDP specific objectives, to which they contribute. Working document - Common evaluation questions for rural development programmes 2014 - 2020 is proposing to collect additional information to measure achievements of NRNs against each of the common NRN objectives\(^{32}\) as follows:

Table 4 Common NRN objectives and suggested additional information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common NRN objective</th>
<th>Suggested additional information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase the involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of rural development</td>
<td>1. Number of stakeholders (by type) participating in the implementation of the RDP due to activities of the NRN (including those through LAGs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve the quality of implementation of rural development programmes</td>
<td>2. Number of RDP modifications based on evaluation findings and recommendations from thematic working groups organized by the NRN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform the broader public and potential beneficiaries on rural development policy and funding opportunities</td>
<td>3. % of RDP implemented projects encouraged by NRN(P) activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas</td>
<td>4. Number persons that have been informed about the rural development policy and funding opportunities through the NRN communication tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. % of innovative projects encouraged by NRN out of the total number of innovative projects supported by the RDP(s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

\(^{31}\) Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 54.2

\(^{32}\) Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 54.2
Any of proposed additional information can be used as the programme-specific result indicator, if above common NRN objectives are part of the NRN intervention logic as specific objectives.

However NRNs can develop their own result as well as impact indicators. To illustrate this, examples of NRN intervention logic mentioned in Part II, Chapter 2 can be used.

**Box 8 Examples of impact, result and output indicators for the NRN intervention logic for innovation**

The NRN through the interventions supporting knowledge transfer and innovation facilitates the generation of new products and markets based on innovative projects encouraged through NRN activities in agriculture, forestry and rural areas. This expected NRN impact can be measured with the means of following impact indicators:

- Number of new products and markets based on innovative projects in agriculture, forestry and rural areas (net out for NRN),
- Number of patents, prototypes developed/implemented in agriculture and forestry (net out for NRN);

The expected results of the NRN interventions are: more innovative projects, stronger innovation network enabling transfer of knowledge and innovation and can be measured with the means of result indicator:

- % of innovative projects facilitated (developed and transferred) due to NRN activities

The expected outputs of NRN activities are more thematic exchanges, databases of innovative projects available to public, more training on innovation and can be measured with common output indicator:

- Number of thematic and analytical exchanges set up with the support of NRN, out of it number of trainings on innovation
- Number of communication tools with specific focus on databases of innovative projects available to public.

**Box 9 Examples of impact, result and output indicators for NRN intervention logic for evaluation awareness**

The NRN through its interventions facilitates the development of awareness of RD stakeholders on evaluation’s role in RDP design. This expected NRN impact can be measured with the means of following impact indicators:

- Number of RD stakeholders broken down by types (programme authorities, members of monitoring committees, socio-economic partners), which use evaluation findings to improve design and implementation of rural development programmes due to NRN activities (thematic exchanges, committees, groups and events)

The expected result of the NRN interventions is more stakeholders participating in RDP evaluation. This can be measured with the means of result indicator:

- Number of RD stakeholders broken down by types participating in the evaluation of RDP due to NRN activities

The expected outputs of NRN activities are more thematic exchanges on monitoring and evaluation and more training on evaluation for RD stakeholders and beneficiaries. This can be measured with common output indicator:

- Number of thematic and analytical exchanges set up with the support of NRN, out of it number of trainings on evaluation
- Number of communication tools (events and publications) with specific focus on evaluation to be used in training, thematic groups and for RD beneficiaries.
Programme-specific indicators have been used in most cases in the assessment of NRNP in 2007 - 2013, as illustrated in Error! Reference source not found..

Box 10 Examples of result indicators of the Italian NRNP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NRNP of Italy - examples of result indicators</th>
<th>Result indicators:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific objectives:</td>
<td>% RDP that has been reoriented and/or redefined as a result of NRN activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1 Supporting administrations in improving the performance of RDP</td>
<td>% users having had access to the system of networks and shared databases created and reached by the information products produced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2 To promote the connection between institutions and partnership in the implementation of rural development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How the programme-specific indicators shall be developed?**

The following criteria shall be considered when developing programme-specific indicators:

- Triangular consistency of indicators with policy objectives and evaluation questions
- SMARTness of indicators
- Usability of indicators in the NRN assessment

**Triangular consistency of indicators with policy objectives and evaluation questions**

The programme-specific indicators similarly to the common indicators shall be developed in the triangular consistency with policy objectives and evaluation questions, mostly to programme-specific. However there can be cases when the programme-specific indicators can be also linked to common policy objectives in case the common output indicators are not able to capture all possible effects, e.g. this way all programme-specific result indicators can be linked to the common NRN objectives.

**SMARTness of indicators**

Programme-specific indicators as well as common indicators shall be developed in line with the SMART criteria. This means they shall be developed in SMART way, meaning they shall be **specific** (does the indicator fit to capture effects?), **measurable** (should be developed in a format of a measurement unit and should be able to accompany with it), **attainable** (data shall be available), **relevant** (for the policy in concern, linked to policy objective) and **time-bounded** (able to provide measurement in the time of intervention).

**Usability in the NRN assessment**

There can be very fancy indicators developed and still not possible to use in the assessment of NRN. Before choosing the indicators, it is important to examine whether it is possible to collect data and information in the cost effective way. The data collection represents the biggest portion of the evaluation therefore the proportionality issue shall be tackled when developing indicators. If the
budget of the programme is relatively small, it is probably un realistic to use indicators which require large and expensive data collection.

Evaluation design, methods and data

A robust evaluation design is a prerequisite for the defining of indicators, identifying data sources and collecting data. Data management and collection depend on which evaluation design has been chosen and which analytical methods will be applied in the assessment. In the evaluation of NRN, it is advisable to chose the quasi-experimental or non-experimental evaluation design. Using the counterfactual analysis is also advisable and possible.

Quasi-experimental design uses the individual data and is the most effective in generating results that are much more accurate than those applied at aggregated samples. A crucial issue is to identify a group of programme participants and a group of programme non-participants that are statistically identical in the absence of the programme. If the two groups are identical, then any difference in outcomes must be due to the programme.

Non experimental evaluation design can be used when it is not possible to identify a suitable control group through application of quasi-experimental methods. Under this design programme participants are compared with programme non-participants using statistical methods to account for differences between the two groups.

In terms of evaluation methods the suitable combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is the most appropriate approach. Although the cost effectiveness is often a dominant factor in the selection of methods, there should not be the trade-off between cost and evaluation quality and priority shall be given to those methods which can generate the robust evaluation results. This is illustrated in the MTEs of the NRNP of Spain, Germany and Italy, as summarized during the 2012 ‘Good Practice Workshop of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development’33. (See Toolbox, Annex 4 available evaluation methods)

The examples of methods which can be used in the evaluation of national networks are described in the Part II of this document in chapter 4.

When assessing NRNs, it is important to consider how the variable being measured will influence how data is collected:

- **Data related to participation and satisfaction**, collected through assessment sheets, questionnaires, etc. directly at network activities.
- **Data related to opinions and connections**, collected through interviews, surveys, self-assessment tools, focus groups, etc. through the routine work of stakeholders.
- **Data related to broad governance**, collected either through social network analysis, visualising a change in the network’s relationships, or through indirect evidence, such as through an increase in cooperation becoming manifest in an institution or memorandum of understanding, induced by network activities.

**Error! Reference source not found.** draws a link between the suitability of different variables measured at output, result and impact level and types of data:

**Table 5 Link between the suitability of different variables measured at output, result and impact level and types of data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Intervention logic level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Output</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data related to participation and satisfaction</td>
<td>Highly suitable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data related to opinions and self-assessment</td>
<td>Partly suitable (highlighting durability of perceptions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data related to governance in the broader sense</td>
<td>Not suitable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development*

As previously discussed, NRNs are complex social structures and often involve opaque relations and processes. Common evaluation challenges such as response and confirmation bias (such as being receptive to opinions or facts which confirm one’s point of view), non-responsiveness of some groups, oversimplification) should be considered with more rigour than in a standard RDP evaluation. Individual’s opinions carry a larger burden of proof than do objectively verifiable facts.
1 Common output indicator fiches for NRNs


O.24 Number of thematic and analytical exchanges set up with the support of NRN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title and definition</th>
<th>Measures concerned</th>
<th>Source of data, timing of reporting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of thematic and analytical exchanges set up with the support of NRN by type</td>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>NRN reporting on an annual basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reported when completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This indicator counts the total number of thematic and analytical exchanges set up broken down by:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nr of thematic working groups set up;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nr of consultations (e.g. between MA and NRN stakeholders on programme modifications…);</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Others (trainings, web forum…).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of these total nr thematic and analytical exchanges set up, it is counted how many:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are focused on sharing and disseminating M&amp;E findings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are devoted to advisors and/or innovation support services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are devoted to LAG including support to cooperation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

O.25 Number of NRN communication tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title and definition</th>
<th>Measures concerned</th>
<th>Source of data, timing of reporting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nr of NRN communication tools (by type)</td>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>NRN reporting on an annual basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reported when completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That indicator is broken down as following:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Total event organized (seminars, conference, field trips…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nr of Publications: leaflets, newsletters, magazines… issued by the NRN including e-publications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nr of other NRN communication tools used to communicate RDP to broader public (e.g. website, social media…)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nr of projects examples collected and disseminated by NRN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From project databases, nr of projects identifies, collected, documented and disseminated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of these total Nr of events organized, publications and other communication tools, it is counted how many:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are focused on sharing and disseminating M&amp;E findings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Are devoted to advisors and/or innovation support services</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Are devoted to LAG including support to cooperation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

O.26 Number of ENRD activities in which the NRN has participated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title and definition</th>
<th>Measure concerned</th>
<th>Source of data, timing of reporting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nr of ENRD activities in which the NRN has participated</td>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>NRN reporting on an annual basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reported when completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This indicator counts all ENRD activities in which the NRN has participated and out of those in which the NRN actively contributed (e.g. through presentations, facilitation of working groups, poster sessions, displays etc.).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
2 Common NRN objectives, groups of actions and indicators, and the links between them

The following diagrams show the links between common NRN objectives, common groups of actions, common output indicators and proposed results indicators linked to common objectives.

Figure 9 NRN Objective1, relevant groups of actions and indicators

Figure 10 NRN Objective2, relevant groups of actions and indicators

Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development
Figure 11 NRN Objective 3, relevant groups of actions and indicators

- **NRN objective**
  - Art 54 (2)(c) inform the broader public and potential beneficiaries on rural development policy and funding opportunities
  - Result: Number of persons that have been informed about RD policy and funding opportunities through the NRN communication tools

- **NRN action plan**
  - Art 54 (3)(b)(vi) communication plan including publicity and information concerning the rural development programme in agreement with the Managing Authorities and information and communication activities aimed at a broader public
  - Output: Nr of NRN communication tools (by type)

  - Art 54 (3)(b)(vii) participation in and contribution to the European network for rural development
  - Output: Nr of ENRD activities in which the NRN has participated

Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

Figure 12 NRN Objective 4, relevant groups of actions and indicators

- **NRN objective**
  - Art 54 (2)(d) foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas
  - Result: % of innovative projects encouraged by NRN out of the total number of innovative projects supported by RDP(s)

- **NRN action plan**
  - Art 54 (3)(b)(v) provision of networking for advisors and innovation support services
  - Output: total Nr of events organized and publications which are devoted to advisors and innovation support services

  - Art 54 (3)(b)(ii) facilitation of thematic and analytical exchanges between rural development stakeholders, sharing and dissemination of findings
  - Output: nr thematic and analytical exchanges set up which are devoted to advisors and innovation support services

  - Art 54 (3)(b)(i) collection of examples of projects covering all priorities of the rural development programmes
  - Output: Nr of projects examples collected and disseminated by NRN which are devoted to advisors and innovation support services

Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development