



Rural Evaluation News
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The newsletter of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

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An editorial commentary from the Commission following the first "Monitoring and Evaluation for CAP post-2013" stakeholder conference in September • Feedback from the conference, selected topics discussed during the workshop sessions as well as the next steps in the institutional decision making process • Findings about the monitoring and evaluation system and process coming from an assessment of the mid-term evaluation reports • First outcomes of the Helpdesk research about approaches in the Member States to the ongoing evaluation of the Rural Development Programmes • News in brief about the meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee last June.

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Building a monitoring and evaluation system for the CAP, together

Leo Maier

The preparation of the policy framework for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) after 2013 is currently underway. This month has seen the presentation of the legislative proposals by the European Commission. The future CAP is called upon to respond to important economic, environmental and social challenges and to demonstrate the achievements to the overall EU objectives set out in Europe 2020, the EU Biodiversity Strategy and other strategy documents.

Europe 2020 is a 10-year strategy proposed by the European Commission on 3 March 2010 for reviving the economy of the European Union. It aims at smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, with greater coordination of national and European policy.

[Europe 2020 – Official EU Site](#)

For an even more effective and efficient CAP, a robust evaluation and monitoring system is needed to measure and assess the policy outcomes. For Pillar II we started the reflection about the future monitoring and evaluation system already in 2010 with a series of activities:

- As from spring 2010 several reflections with Member States on the future of the monitoring and evaluation system have taken place in the context of the **Evaluation Expert Committee for rural development**: a round table on Member States' experiences with the implementation of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework – CMEF (March 2010) resulting in the creation of a mind map; discussions about the results of a SWOT analysis of the CMEF (July 2010); discussions

Continued on ►

Your feedback is welcome

This newsletter is intended to be applicable, accessible and user-friendly for anybody dealing with the evaluation of Rural Development Programmes and measures in the EU. We therefore welcome your feedback on the content presented and we would encourage you to provide suggestions regarding appropriate articles or regular features. Please send us your comments to: info@ruralevaluation.eu

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on the principles and objectives for the post-2013 monitoring and evaluation framework (November 2010); and exchanges on the main lessons learned from the mid-term evaluation of the Rural Development Programmes (July 2011).

- In autumn 2010 **Focus Group discussions** were organized by the Evaluation Helpdesk who investigated Member States' needs and expectations regarding a future monitoring and evaluation framework. The findings were summarized and presented to the Evaluation Expert Committee in November 2010.
- In October 2010 an internal **working group for the review of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF)** was established within the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development.
- In June 2011 the lessons from the **assessment of the mid-term evaluation reports** were presented to the Evaluation Expert Committee, including an in-depth analysis of the evaluators' conclusions on monitoring and evaluation for the second half of the programming period.

All of these activities have brought us recurrent and consistent messages about the strengths and weaknesses of the CMEF, and the areas where a revision is most needed.

In order to validate and further develop this body of knowledge, and to include the stakeholders from Pillar I into the discussions, the European Commission invited 230 representatives from the Member States to Brussels on 20-21 September 2011. The aim of the stakeholder conference on "**Monitoring and Evaluation for CAP post-2013**" was to develop a shared understanding of the key principles of a future monitoring and evaluation system for both pillars and to kick-off a longer-term development process, which should translate the needs into concrete actions. These efforts are intended to lead us to a more efficient, useful and commonly owned monitoring and evaluation system for the CAP post-2013.

This newsletter puts the spotlight on a few of the recent activities: the stakeholder conference and its follow-up, the lessons learned from the mid-term evaluation, and an analysis of how ongoing evaluation is implemented in the Member States. The outcomes of these activities create a better understanding of how monitoring and evaluation can be improved in the second half of the programming period, and allow us to draw valuable lessons for the monitoring and evaluation system post-2013.

Leo Maier

*Head of the Evaluation and Studies Unit
Directorate General Agriculture
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European Commission*

Stakeholder conference on monitoring and evaluation CAP post-2013



Maylis Campbell / Hannes Wimmer

On 20 and 21 September 2011, more than 200 representatives of ministries of agriculture, paying agencies, statistical offices, evaluators, NGOs and academics from all 27 Member States met together with representatives of the European Commission and other EU institutions in Brussels for the first "Monitoring and Evaluation for CAP post-2013" stakeholder conference, organised by the Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development.

The conference took place as part of an ongoing process of preparing the monitoring and evaluation system for post-2013. It was the first time that the Commission brought together stakeholders from rural development

with others with wider responsibilities for the first pillar of the CAP to reflect jointly on monitoring and evaluation for the CAP post-2013 (See box "*Towards assessment 1st and 2nd pillars under one framework*").

Ongoing dialogue with the Member States and other stakeholders was identified as an important element in order to build on the existing body of knowledge, and to generate a sense of shared ownership of, and responsibility for the monitoring and evaluation system.

Seeking common ground around strategic questions

For one and a half days in a series of interactive working sessions the participants exchanged experiences about the current monitoring and evaluation systems, their expectations for a new system, its success factors and the key development areas to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation post-2013. Finally, the question of how to guarantee a good follow-up of the conference was also discussed.

A successful monitoring and evaluation system should achieve...

According to the participants, a successful monitoring and evaluation system should achieve two things: a net improvement in policy performance through contributing to better design and implementation of the policy; and demonstration of policy achievements in relation to the whole spectrum of impacts at EU and national levels.

...and should be based on...

Three clear principles:

- **Simplification of the existing monitoring and evaluation system** based on clear common policy objectives and sound intervention logic for the policy. Policy outcomes should be assessed with fewer and better common (EU level) indicators. The administrative burden should be reduced (e.g. through harmonisation of requirements between pillars and funds), and there was agreement on the benefits of continuity of elements of the current system ("don't re-invent the wheel") as well as a strong call for stability throughout the implementation period. Cost effectiveness of implementation should be taken into account.
- **Effective use of evaluation results** calls for the comparability and transparency of data and results. Harmonised and better defined methodologies must be supported by a good and consistent set of data. Appropriate timing of evaluation activities is required to ensure that results can be used for policy design. Proportionality, together with flexibility to adapt to regional requirements may further strengthen relevance and use of evaluation results at Member State level.
- **Ownership of monitoring and evaluation activities** based on involving stakeholders throughout the development and implementation of the system. There should be an open dialogue and exchange between Commission services, Member States and evaluation stakeholders. In addition, the capacity for monitoring and evaluation should be built up.

Photo: courtesy of European Commission



José Manuel Silva Rodriguez, Director General for Agriculture and Rural Development, European Commission during his opening address at the stakeholder conference, Brussels, 20 September 2011.

"We will have a more effective system, and a better chance of meeting needs and expectations, if we draw on the experience and opinions of all those involved, whether as data providers, users, policy makers, or beneficiaries."

Silva Rodriguez

Towards assessing 1st and 2nd pillars under one framework

The CAP has a two pillar structure (1st pillar direct support entirely funded by the EU; 2nd pillar rural development measures co-financed by the Member States). There have so far been very different approaches for monitoring and evaluating each pillar:

- **1st pillar** - various tools in place for monitoring agricultural markets and for evaluating the effects of different policy instruments, essentially all done at EU level, organised by the European Commission.
- **2nd pillar** - the CMEF relies on information collected and evaluated by programme authorities at programme level, complemented by EU level aggregation and synthesis.

For post-2013 a framework that can show results and impacts and justify expenditure for both pillars of the CAP, using streamlined and consistent approaches where appropriate is envisaged.

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/index_en.htm

Therefore we need to focus on...

The ideas emerging on the areas to focus on to create a successful M&E system were drawn together in a collective mind map. Participants voted for their main concerns, which lead to four themes emerging as the top priorities:

1. **Simplification and proportionality:** How to define who needs what and when? How to balance the utility of the information against the resources needed to create it?
2. **Good and better integrated data:** Can we make better use of already existing data systems? How can we get time series? Environmental data requirements.
3. **Timing of evaluations:** How to ensure a link between evaluation and the policy cycle at EU and Member State level?
4. **Methodologies:** How far to prescribe methodologies, and how far to be flexible? This is related to what should be aggregated/demonstrated at EU level. How to foster methodological innovation?

Work started on...

On the second day of the conference, in response to the question “**what do I want to explore now to implement monitoring and evaluation of CAP post-2013**”, twenty-four topics were suggested by the participants and discussed during “open space” workshop sessions. The findings of three of these sessions are outlined in the text boxes as they seem particularly relevant for current activities of the Evaluation Expert Network.

Fuller information about the 24 workshop discussions (covering topics such as evaluating Leader, environmental services, competitiveness, employment in rural areas, reporting, simplification, etc.) at the stakeholder conference can be found in the conference record which will shortly be available at http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eval/index_en.htm.

Round table discussions during “Monitoring and Evaluation for CAP post-2013” stakeholder conference, 21 September 2011.



Photo: courtesy of European Commission

The session on **the concept and approach of ongoing evaluation** concluded that a vibrant and promising future for ongoing evaluation exists, however it needs to be further developed. The current activities are not sufficient. E.g. data should be collected more consistently and adequately to inform the policy process.

Participants’ recommendations: The current CMEF guidelines on ongoing evaluation are too vague and more detailed guidelines should be developed. The European Commission and the Evaluation Helpdesk should screen the situation among the Member States in order to provide an overview on the practices and develop new, more detailed guidelines, based on the findings. (See article on page 9 about recent research carried out by the Evaluation Helpdesk on this topic.)

The session on **linkages between monitoring and evaluation of the two pillars** and the Structural Funds concluded that while the “less complex” 1st pillar interventions are currently evaluated according to a rolling 6 year cycle, the “more complex” 2nd pillar measures are evaluated at fixed points in the programming period: *ex ante*, medium term and *ex post*. Some specific challenges are: How to define the overall and specific objectives of the foreseen “partnership contracts” for the 2nd pillar? How to take account of local and territorial impacts in the 1st pillar evaluations? How to find the proper balance between a more integrated evaluation between the funds and pillars, and a more specific approach in 2nd pillar?

Participants’ recommendations: Do less comprehensive evaluation but more in-depth analysis of the relevant issues in 2nd pillar. Case studies are important for both pillars. Synergies should be developed between monitoring and evaluation of the funds but also to assess the regional and local impact of 1st pillar. For some issues (e.g. climate change, greening) a cross-cutting evaluation could be done for both pillars at the same time. Synergies and learning from what works in each system (1st, 2nd pillars and other funds) is useful but creating a hybrid system which would not suit anyone should be avoided.

The session on **capacity building in monitoring & evaluation - roles, responsibility and supporting activities** concluded that evaluation should not only measure effects of interventions but it also has an important governance role. In order to improve evaluation capacity, Member States should be supported by a “carrot/stick approach”: incentives for capacity building from the European Commission should be combined with the Member States’ responsibility for investing in capacity building as well as into better communication and use of evaluation results.

Participants’ recommendations: Find new tools to communicate evaluation results to all evaluation actors and to build capacity. Networking is of key importance in capacity building. Evaluation should therefore become a mandatory subject of National Rural Networks in liaison with the European Evaluation Network. Increase the importance of ongoing evaluation in order to facilitate capacity building.

Next steps

The “**Monitoring and Evaluation for CAP post-2013 stakeholder conference**” was the start of a process which will be interwoven with the adoption of the post-2013 legal framework over the next couple of years. On 12th October, the European Commission presented a [set of legal proposals for the CAP for the period 2014-2020](#). These follow the budget and main policy orientations for all EU spending policies, including the CAP, outlined in the Commission proposal for the [Multiannual Financial Framework \(MFF\) for 2014-2020](#) and the [Commission Communication on the CAP towards 2020](#).

In the EU institutional decision making process the European Parliament and the Council will determine the final shape of the regulatory framework for the CAP 2014-2020. Much of the detail, however, in particular on technical aspects, will be spelled out in implementing acts to be adopted later. The Commission is keen to involve relevant stakeholders, governmental and non-governmental, in the ongoing discussions on the development of the monitoring and evaluation system.

To keep up the momentum of the conference and continue the open dialogue, there are plans to maintain discussions with all stakeholders using a variety of channels.



Photo: courtesy of European Commission

“The outcomes are the result of our joint efforts, and provide a solid basis for future work.”

Tassos Haniotis

Closing address by Tassos Haniotis, Director of the Directorate for Economic analysis, perspectives and evaluations, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, European Commission.

Existing structures will be exploited such as Management Committees, the Evaluation Expert Committee, thematic groups of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, working groups of the European Network for Rural Development and the expert group on the Information System for Agricultural Market Management and Monitoring (ISAMM). Smaller groups could be used to concentrate on specific issues, such as IT applications. Although most existing groups have a mandate relating to either the first or the second pillar, ways of bringing together those working on the first and second pillars more often will be explored. It is envisaged that a second stakeholder meeting may take place shortly after the basic regulations have been adopted. This would help to maintain overall coherence and direction for the subsequent stages of finalising implementing acts and preparing guidance documents. Using such a participative, partnership and multidisciplinary approach gives a better chance of developing a solid system for monitoring and evaluating the CAP that responds to the needs of all stakeholders, at whatever level, and can clearly demonstrate the policy’s achievements to the wider world.

Find out more

- o [Conference record and newsletter](#)
- o [Conference methodology](#)
- o [Multiannual Financial Framework \(MFF\) for 2014-2020](#)
- o [Commission Communication on the CAP towards 2020](#)
- o [Legal proposals for the CAP after 2013](#)



The mid-term evaluation reports and the CMEF: What can we learn about the monitoring and evaluation system and process?

Hannes Wimmer / Margot Van Soetendael

In early 2011, desk officers at the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development carried out an assessment of the mid-term evaluation (MTE) reports of the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), submitted by the Member States at the end of 2010. On this basis, the Helpdesk has prepared an overview of the main findings regarding the monitoring and evaluation system and process.

To allow for a comparison between the reports, they were checked by the Evaluation Helpdesk against 18 criteria. These criteria were related to the compliance of the MTE reports with the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF), the robustness of the methods used and the reliability of the conclusions and recommendations.

To what extent are Member States using the CMEF versus programme-specific assessment for the mid-term evaluations?

The vast majority of MTE reports follow the indicative outline of an MTE report as presented in [Guidance note B of the CMEF Handbook \(chapter 7\)](#). Out of the seven suggested sections for an MTE report (executive summary, introduction, evaluation context, methodological approach, programme description, answers to evaluation questions, conclusions and recommendations) the sections “introduction” and “description of programme, measures and budget” are found to be the most complete, whereas the sections “evaluation context” and “answers to evaluation questions” were considered as relatively incomplete when checked against the elements listed in the indicative outline.

Nearly three quarters of the MTE reports assess the programme’s progress against targets at output and result levels. A minority of evaluations do this only at the output level (14%), or do not assess the targets (17%) in an appropriate manner. In the latter case, the assessment of the programme’s progress is either difficult to follow or is not done correctly (e.g. only assessment of changes in the baselines).

The set of common indicators is in most cases used as the main basis to answer the Common Evaluation Questions and to measure impacts of the Rural Development Programmes. 49% of the MTEs apply the full set of CMEF output, result and impact indicators. 35% use mainly output and result indicators and a very small percentage of reports use only output indicators or do not give any clear reference to indicators.

Nearly half of the MTEs make systematic use of programme-specific indicators, in order to take better account of the specificity of the programme area. A further 17% of the MTEs use programme-specific indicators to some extent whereas 34% of them do not apply programme-specific indicators.

The vast majority of MTEs (88%) provide answers to the Common Evaluation Questions both measure-specific and horizontal. However, within this group, the completeness of the answers depends on the progress in programme implementation: evaluators have excluded answers to evaluation questions for measures which were late in implementation. Only a very small percentage of MTEs (3%) do not tackle the Common Evaluation Questions at all. In these cases, it is stated that answering the evaluation questions is envisaged for the *ex post* evaluation or during an eventual update of the MTE. 38% of the MTEs systematically apply programme-specific evaluation questions.

Answers to horizontal evaluation questions are sometimes very brief and generic, without clear reference to methodology, judgement criteria and evidence. A number of evaluators interpret these questions as a synthesis of measure-specific evaluation questions or group them according to specific topics or thematic areas (e.g. employment, economic development and cohesion, sustainable development and agriculture, etc.).

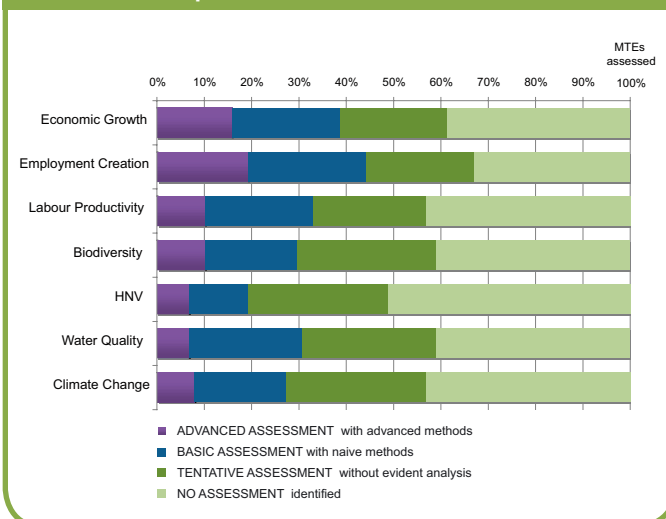
How advanced are the evaluation methods used for assessing the programme’s results and impacts?

More than three quarters of the MTEs apply a balanced mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. Nearly a tenth of the MTEs relied primarily on qualitative methods such as focus groups, interviews and case studies. Another tenth of MTE reports are primarily based on quantitative methods such as analysis of monitoring data, models, surveys and statistics.

The evaluation methods and data sources are in most cases described in detail at both measure and programme level.

The assessment of the seven impact indicators provides a mixed picture: Across all seven impact indicators on average in 42% of the reports no evaluation of impact indicators takes place, in 27% the assessment is only tentative without evident analysis. A basic assessment of the impact indicators with naïve methods takes place in 21% whereas an advanced assessment with advanced methods is observed in 11% of the MTE reports.

Figure 1: Assessment level of the seven CMEF impact indicators in the MTEs



Source: Helpdesk of the Evaluation Expert Network

Data availability is the main problem mentioned in the MTE reports. 80% of the MTE reports indicate problems in data availability and to a lower degree (34%) also in data quality. The early timing of the MTE is mentioned in nearly 36% of the reports as a problem whereas methodological problems are referred to in a third of the reports.

The three socio-economic indicators are on the whole assessed more often than the four environmental indicators. Out of the three socio-economic indicators, “employment creation” and “economic growth” are assessed more often than “labour productivity”. As for the four environmental indicators, High Nature Value (HNV) is assessed the least often: nearly half of the reports analysed did not provide a value for this impact indicator.

A rigorous evaluation of impacts, with counterfactual analysis and the netting out of effects, is considered in at least a fifth of the MTEs. This comprises the use of advanced counterfactual methods (e.g. Propensity Score Matching - PSM, Difference-in-differences DiD analysis) or

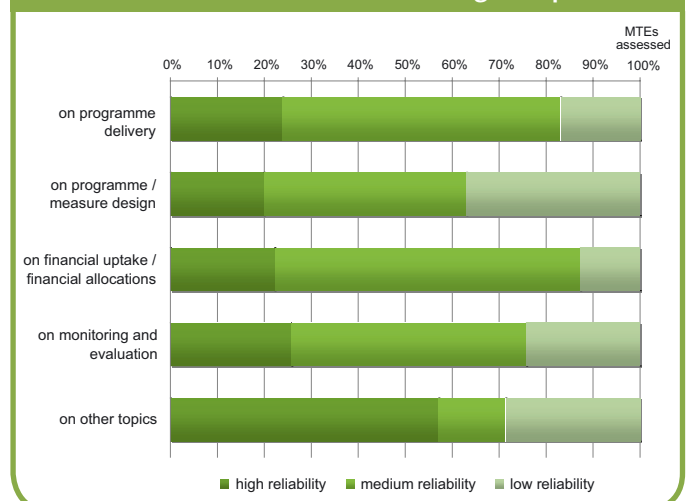
calculation of the net effects of the programme (deadweight and multiplier effects mainly) at least for some indicators or measures. Another fifth of the MTEs uses naïve methods in conducting the counterfactual analysis (e.g. unmatched samples of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries) or calculates net effects (e.g. deadweight effect) only on the basis of questionnaires to beneficiaries. More than half of the programmes do not consider counterfactuals and net effects at this stage, although some of them envisage it for the *ex post*.

Do the applied evaluation methods lead to robust conclusions and recommendations?

The conclusions and recommendations of MTE reports are particularly dense and detailed at the operational level. Most of the MTEs provide detailed recommendations on programme delivery (80%), uptake of the programme (70%) and programme/measure design (69%). A smaller, but still majority share (63%) provide specific conclusions and recommendations on monitoring and evaluation.

The reliability of conclusions and recommendations, in terms of the methods used and the evidence provided, differs according to topics. The best reliability (i.e. medium or high) is observed in the conclusions and recommendations on the “programme delivery” (59%) and “financial uptake” (55%). This reliability level results from a good empirical knowledge on these topics and their good coverage through additional information sources, such as interviews and focus groups. A fairly high reliability has also been achieved for the conclusions and recommendations on “monitoring and evaluation”. With respect to the topic “programme and measure/design”, the reliability of the conclusions and recommendations has been considered relatively low.

Figure 2: Reliability level of MTEs' conclusions and recommendations according to topic



Source: Helpdesk of the Evaluation Expert Network

What conclusions can we draw from this assessment?

The common elements in the mid-term evaluation reports submitted in 2010 are clearly visible. The evaluators generally follow the structure proposed by the European Commission, adopt the indicator set defined in the CMEF, and make a serious effort to answer the Common Evaluation Questions. However, the degree of coverage of these depends on the programme's progress and the data availability. Overall, the picture is more convincing at output and result level in comparison to the level of impacts.

Optional **programme-specific elements (indicators, evaluation questions) are used to a relatively low extent** and are often presented in an unclear manner. In many cases the reports do not distinguish between programme-specific and common elements (e.g. absence of overview tables in the reports) which has a negative implication on the clarity and comparability of the findings. There is evidence that the rather modest application of programme-specific elements is due to the predominance of the common requirements (e.g. the high number of common indicators and evaluation questions). It will be particularly interesting to learn from those programmes, that did apply programme-specific elements in their mid-term evaluations, in how far these increased the relevance and use of evaluation results.

Fulfilling the requirements of the CMEF goes hand in hand with achieving high levels of methodological quality. Advanced evaluation methods are mostly used by MTEs which also achieve a high level of CMEF compliance: Few MTEs that opted for an alternative approach were convincing in terms of their methodological quality. Beyond specific weaknesses, the concept of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework has overall established a clear benchmark for Member States to develop a sound and effective evaluation of their Rural Development Programmes.

Even within the common framework evaluators do use a broad mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, and apply in some cases triangulation of different methods. However, the application of complex quantitative methods and the calculation of counterfactuals and net effects are rather infrequent. This has to be seen in the light of the 80% of the MTE reports, which mention problems in data availability. The collection of additional (qualitative) information through evaluators has in many cases been used as a way to overcome these limitations. In this respect, it needs to be emphasized that more specific guidance on the application of qualitative methods (beyond questionnaires and personal interviews) would be beneficial.

The information contained in the MTE reports is very detailed at the operational level, whereas key messages and strategic recommendations are often missing. Detailed conclusions and recommendations at the axis and measure level prevail at the cost of conclusions and recommendations for the overall programme level (i.e. strategy). This may be partly due to the rare assessment of impacts as programmes were late in implementation or data was not available.

A cross-analysis of the expenditure rates with the MTE reports shows, that **the relationship between programme progress and quality of the MTE is almost negligible.** The progress of the programme (in terms of realised expenditure) has very little influence on the methodological quality of the MTEs. A working hypothesis has been that the resources available for evaluation might have a greater influence on the quality. However, this could not yet be verified for EU27 as the information on the available resources is not available.

Conclusions and recommendations of the MTEs are in general based on evidence, which shows that the evaluators made a very serious effort to draw valid conclusions about their programme and to give recommendations, which are relevant to ongoing evaluation. However, the robustness of the methodology varies substantially across different topics. Conclusions and recommendations on programme and measure/design would be improved if they were more closely rooted in a thorough assessment of impacts.

The general impression is, that the **MTE will be used in many cases to prepare a proper assessment of programme impacts for the ex post evaluation.** At mid-term the quality of the assessment of impacts in particular for the environmental indicators is often still tentative and naïve and the results of the MTE should therefore be used to fine-tune the instruments for data collection, storage and processing for the ongoing and the ex post evaluation. In this respect, the MTE has a key function for ongoing evaluation where the conclusions and recommendations in particular with regard to monitoring and evaluation need to be followed up and translated into practice.

Find out more

- o [The Handbook on Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework](#)

Practical approaches to implement ongoing evaluation of EU Rural Development Programmes

Jela Tvrdonova

The concept and approach to the ongoing evaluation of Rural Development Programmes (RDP) 2007-2013 was a topic for discussion during one of the open space sessions at the recent “Monitoring and Evaluation for CAP post-2013” stakeholder conference. The conclusion was that there is a real need for research to find out about current practices across the 27 Member States so that more detailed guidelines can be developed to implement ongoing evaluation more effectively. During the summer, the Evaluation Helpdesk embarked on some research through its network of experts and the preliminary findings are presented below.

Background

In accordance with Article 86 of Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005 on support for Rural Development by the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development, Member States have to establish a system of ongoing evaluation for each RDP. The principles, legal requirements, overall concept and main tasks of the ongoing evaluation of RDPs are described in Guidance Note B of the [Handbook of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework](#).

The latest research of the Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development is exploring the various approaches of the Managing Authorities in the EU-27 to ongoing evaluation in the implementation of RDPs (the research was carried out on a sample of 36 RDPs¹). For this purpose those responsible for ongoing evaluation - Managing Authorities and/or external evaluators - were interviewed. The interviews covered the following topics in relation to ongoing evaluation:

- Organisational aspects
- Allocation of resources
- Evaluation tasks
- Interaction of the evaluator with programme delivery
- Achievements of ongoing evaluation
- Role of ongoing evaluation in conducting the MTE
- Key lessons learned

¹ All national RDPs and a selected number of regional programmes: Belgium Wallonia and Flanders, Portugal Continent, United Kingdom - Wales and Scotland, Germany - Hesse, Rheinland-Palatinate, Saxony-Anhalt, Spain - Asturias, Navarre, Castile and León, Italy - Bolzano, Piedmont, Aosta Valley.

Organization and resources for ongoing evaluation

Preliminary findings of this research show that the organisation of ongoing evaluation has adopted different solutions.

In the majority of programmes analysed, outsourcing the ongoing evaluation of the RDPs to independent evaluators was chosen and where this was the case, either public agencies/institutions (e.g. Slovakia, Latvia, Estonia) or private companies/consortia specialised in evaluation were contracted (e.g. Cyprus, Finland, Bolzano IT, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Scotland and Wales UK). In several cases, the contract also included the mid-term evaluation MTE (e.g. Slovakia, Czech Republic, Bolzano IT, Scotland and Wales UK), and the authorities will tender the *ex post* separately. In only a few cases one single contractor will cover all major evaluation tasks i.e. *ex ante*, ongoing, mid-term and *ex post* (e.g. Rheinland-Palatinate DE, Portugal, Finland).

There were points of divergence among the interviewees in judging the different contracting arrangements: in some instances having one evaluator for all tasks was seen as an advantage to continuously build the evaluation knowledge and capacity, whereas in other countries it was considered to be a disadvantage in that only one point of view is provided at different stages of the programme implementation.

The so-called “**in-house**” solution was also apparent in a number of countries/regions: in this design, all tasks related to ongoing evaluation were managed and implemented by:

- Managing Authority or other departments of the Ministry of Agriculture (e.g. Saxony DE, Piedmont IT);
- Secretariats of the Monitoring Committee (e.g. Estonia);
- or various state agencies funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, or incorporated into its structure (e.g. Denmark).

In the “in-house” solution the main evaluation tasks (e.g. MTE) were coordinated by the Managing Authorities, but contracted to external evaluators through one or several separate contracts, depending on the themes or Axes (one contract for Axis 1 and 3 and another for Axis 2) (e.g. Greece, Saxony DE, Estonia).

The length of contract for ongoing evaluation varies considerably from one programme to the next: in most of the programmes analysed multi-annual arrangements have been launched, ranging from 24 to 36 months (e.g. Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania) and with a date starting in 2008 or 2009. The contracts in several cases last until the end of 2013 (e.g. Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia). In cases for which the *ex post* evaluation is also part of the contract, the evaluator has been contracted until the end of 2015/2016 (e.g. Piedmont IT, Rheinland-Palatinate DE, Finland, Portugal).

The resources allocated by Managing Authorities varied from 0,25 full time equivalent (FTE) per annum in Luxembourg and 0,24 FTE per annum in Slovakia to 14 FTE per annum for Axis 2 and 5 FTE per annum for Axis 1, 3 and 4 in Estonia. A range of 2 to 4 FTE per annum was observed in the majority of cases. Managing Authorities in general followed the trend to invest less resources in-house if the ongoing evaluation was outsourced to an external evaluator.

The resources for ongoing evaluation were considered to be adequate by the officials who were interviewed. However, in some instances it was found that the MTE evaluator lacked the financial resources to conduct a proper assessment of impacts. This was the case if the data sources had not been identified, set-up, managed and monitored by the Managing Authority right from the start of the programme or during the ongoing evaluation.

Coordination of ongoing evaluation

In order to **steer ongoing evaluation and coordinate the evaluation tasks**, various arrangements are in place across the EU. In about a third of the programmes analysed a **Steering Group** was established as recommended in the CMEF ([CMEF Guidance Note B, part 5.1 “Setting up the evaluation system”](#)). This group is usually composed of Managing Authority representatives, (measure managers/coordinators) and in most cases also includes representatives of the paying agencies or implementing bodies. In a few cases, representatives of other ministries (Romania), or national statistical offices (Cyprus, Romania), as well as research institutes and universities (Cyprus, Finland, Piedmont IT) are present. The Steering Group typically meets once a year or more in the case of urgent matters. The most important tasks include:

- identifying data gaps and sources;
- preparation and approval of the evaluation plan;
- proposing programme-specific evaluation questions;
- reviewing terms of reference for external evaluator;
- discussing annual progress reports and various evaluation reports and recommendations;
- preparation and organisation of capacity building activities;
- proposing and discussing various studies and research material.

In some of the programmes analysed for which a Steering Group has not been established, alternative coordinating bodies were set up to carry out similar tasks:

- Commission for management and control in Bulgaria (with Managing Authority and Monitoring Committee members);
- An ad hoc coordination group in Czech Republic (with Managing Authority, Paying Agency, national statistics, research and academia), and in Denmark, Saxony DE and Luxembourg (with measure managers only in these latter cases);
- Executive working group in Slovakia, (established by the evaluator, composed of Managing Authority, Paying Agency, evaluator and ad hoc participants).

In a few cases, the Monitoring Committee is also seen as a structure appropriate to coordinate evaluation tasks (Hungary, Latvia). However in several of the programme areas assessed it was felt that the coordination of evaluation and regular communication among evaluation stakeholders is still not considered as important for successful ongoing evaluation.

Besides this first snapshot of results, the full analysis of the interviews on ongoing evaluation will explore in more detail the content of the evaluation tasks, the interaction of evaluators with delivery bodies, the role of capacity building in the context of ongoing evaluation, the achievements and the key lessons learned. The full working paper will become available towards the end of 2011.

Find out more

- o [Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1698/2005 of 20 September on support for Rural Development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development \(EAFRD\)](#)

News in Brief

The 7th meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee

Maylis Campbell

Representatives from the Member States, officials from the European Commission and the Evaluation Helpdesk met in Brussels on 16 June to discuss the mid-term evaluation (MTE) of the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) and the future orientation of rural development policy post-2013.

The first overview findings of the MTE were presented to the Member States. Evaluation methodologies, conclusions and recommendations (see *related article on page 6 of this newsletter*) and the assessment of National Rural Network Programmes were discussed in more detail.

Through interactive group work the delegates were invited to reflect on the main lessons learned from the MTE of the RDPs, which should be taken into account in the course of the ongoing and *ex post* evaluations, and to specify what needs to be done at programme level and EU level. The following issues were harvested from the discussions:

EU level – clearer guidance on preparation of evaluation reports, support with data collection and IT systems, increase networking and provide more good practice, reduce number of evaluation questions and indicators but improve links between them, adjust timing of evaluations, review the methods & responsibility for the assessment of impacts.

Programme level – adjust timing of MTE to the level of RDP uptake, link ongoing evaluation to other evaluation tasks, better establishment of intervention logic, improve data collection and management, apply robust evaluation methods, better use of evaluation results, improved governance of evaluation, more cooperation with stakeholders and more resources for evaluation.

Looking ahead to the orientation of rural development post-2013, the European Commission outlined the objectives and potential priority areas for RD policy post-2013, and the linkages with [EU 2020](#) and other EU policies. Some first thoughts on target indicators, including criteria for the selection of suitable indicators, implications and possible examples were presented. Regarding the policy time frame, the Commission announced that the legal proposals would be published in October 2011 (see *link under 'Find out more'*) and negotiations would then begin with the Council and European Parliament under the



Photo courtesy of Maylis Campbell

A lively discussion among delegates during group work at the Evaluation Expert Committee meeting in Brussels, June 2011.

co-decision procedure. The drafting of the programmes would be expected to begin in 2013. Finally, some details were provided about the organisation of the “Monitoring and Evaluation for CAP post-2013 stakeholder conference” in September 2011. (See *related article on page 2 of this newsletter*.)

The next meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee will take place on 27 October 2011.

Find out more

- o [Legal proposals for the CAP after 2013](#)

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The contents of this newsletter do not necessarily express the official views of the European Commission.