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The European Evaluation Network for Rural Development (Under the guidance of DG AGRI - Unit L4)

Good Practice Workshop

The *ex ante* evaluation of SWOT analysis and needs assessment

[Link to the event](#)



Introduction

The Good Practice Workshop (GPW) on “The *ex ante* evaluation of SWOT analysis and needs assessment” took place on 27 and 28 May 2013 in Prague, and was hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) of the Czech Republic. 60 participants (Managing Authorities, SWOT experts, *ex ante* evaluators and officers of the European Commission) from 15 countries participated with the objectives to:

- Exchange experiences on SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis and needs assessment (NA);
- Develop understanding on common issues raised in the *ex ante* evaluation;
- Identify lessons learned from the improvement of the SWOT analysis, NA and intervention logic before finalising the Rural Development Programme (RDP).



Main focus: **SWOT and needs assessment:** Prerequisite for sound intervention logic

In the diagnostic phase of the programme cycle, the SWOT and NA are not only a prerequisite for developing sound intervention logic; but they are also an integral part of it. **Therefore, they help:**

- To match the RDP to the needs of the area;
- To fit the RDP into the bigger picture concerning its specific contribution among other public interventions in the same area;
- To set the foundation for showing the RDP achievements through sharper indicator-based information and monitoring systems.

The SWOT and NA constitute two distinctive and consecutive steps in the programming process. The SWOT in particular should be a comprehensive narrative about the area based on significant context indicators. It is also recommended to follow the logic of the three CAP objectives: viable food production, sustainable management of natural resources and climate action, and balanced territorial development.

The NA has to be presented according to the logic of the six Rural Development (RD) priorities and the three cross-cutting themes set at EU level by attributing to the identified need the relevant priority/focus area.

A link to the Strategic Environmental Assessment in line with the parts of the SWOT referring to the state of environment in the programming area should also be considered.

Within this framework, the *ex ante* evaluator should have an intrinsic knowledge of the programming area and the concerned sectors/value chains. A sound *ex ante* eva-

luation of the SWOT and NA should balance out the presentation of the baseline situation in quantitative terms with elaborating the main environmental, geographic and socio-economic patterns by interweaving the individual data into a meaningful narrative about the area, its people, their concerns and development needs.

For assessing the SWOT analysis: We recommend using a set of evaluation questions and answering each of these questions in three distinctive steps:

- *Description:* What is the finding?
- *Judgment:* What is the evaluator's opinion on the meaningful and rigour of the finding?
- *Recommendation:* What should be changed and improved as a result?

For assessing the NA: We propose to make the link back to the SWOT analysis and forward to the programme strategy:

1. Summary presentation of the needs for each of the focus areas (overview);
2. Rationale: the gap between the imagined 'ideal' and the perceived state of affairs (link back to the SWOT);
3. Intended goal and possible solution paths (link forward to the expected outcome and measures which would make the gap smaller or disappear).

The *ex ante* evaluator's look on the SWOT analysis and NA should lay the foundations for a more responsive and more effective programme without imposing oneself to doing the programming officer's work.





Strategic programming and *ex ante* evaluation: requirements and expectations

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Ignacio Seoane and Christophe Derzelle (DG Agriculture and Rural Development) introduced the role and tasks of the *ex ante* evaluation, as well as the expectations that the European Commission has on it.

ROLE AND TASKS

The Managing Authority (MA) is the responsible body for the *ex ante*, which has to be submitted with the RDP. It has to envisage coordination with other programmes. In detail, the *ex ante* has:

- To improve the quality of the programme assessing the completeness and consistency of the SWOT analysis;
- To verify that the NA is structured along the six RD priorities and 18 focus areas, and that it addresses certain needs of particular sectors, stakeholders and territories;
- To overall assess the internal and external coherence of the programme strategy and objectives;
- To establish the baseline indicators of the programme (both context indicators and realistic targets) and to show its achievements (*ex ante* acting as a first base for M&E system).

EXPECTATIONS OF THE EC

The *ex ante* evaluation has:

- To respect the legal requirements (art. 9, 48 and 84 of the repealing Regulation EC No 1083/2006 2004/0163);
- To ensure a constant interaction between MA and evaluators, and ensure a wide consultation process with stakeholders;
- To ensure the capitalisation of previous experiences (e.g. previous evaluations, findings and analysis);
- To identify the needs from a logical justification based on the SWOT analysis.



Survey

In preparation of the GPW, a survey was sent to MA and evaluators to explore the challenges faced, solution adopted and lessons learned from the development of the SWOT analysis, NA and *ex ante* evaluation.

Some findings of the survey are:

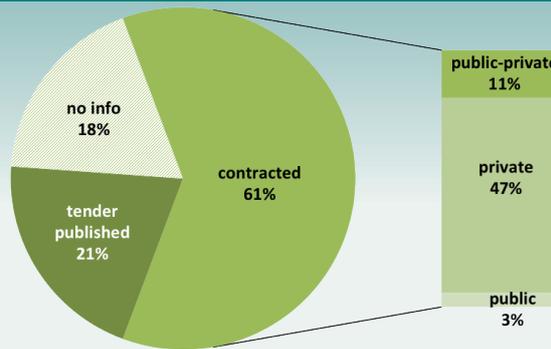
- The SWOT analysis is based on quantitative methods whereas the NA is driven by more qualitative approaches and consultations.**
 - Indicators are used to underpin the findings of the SWOT;
 - Qualitative methods are applied when insufficient quantitative data is available.
- Only an *ex ante* evaluation contracted at an early stage allows for an interactive approach between *ex ante* and programme design.**
 - Respondents highlighted this as a positive feature that improved the overall process and helped to enhance the results.
- Most of the SWOT are structured around rural development priorities. But also other solutions are used to structure the SWOT.**
 - SWOT are built around focus areas;
 - SWOT are built for each of the cross-cutting issues;
 - SWOT is developed for all Common Strategic Framework (CSF) programmes.
- Common Context Indicators (CCIs) are used from the initial stages of the SWOT analysis and NA.**
 - Respondents also mentioned the use of proxy indicators to overcome data gaps on CCI (especially in the field of agriculture and forestry productivity).



State of play of *ex ante* evaluations by May 2013

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TENDERING AND TYPE OF CONTRACT



- Most of the contracted *ex ante* evaluations were contracted to private consortia;
- 37% of the contracted *ex ante* evaluations were assigned to evaluators previously contracted and 21% to new evaluators.

Source: Evaluation Helpdesk (information based on 88 RDP)

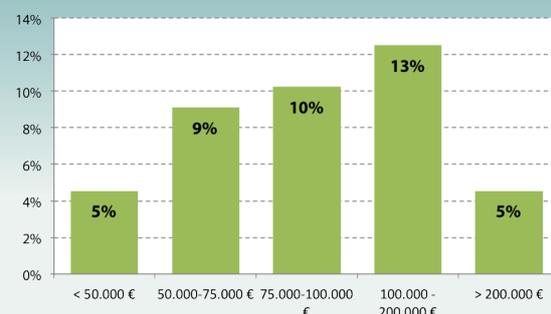
CONTRACT START AND DURATION



- The majority of the *ex ante* evaluations started during the fourth quarter of 2012;
- Most of the contracts evaluation have an expected duration of 10-12 months, (15%); or of 13-18 months (11%); Only a minority has a duration inferior to 9 months or superior to 19 months (3%).

Source: Evaluation Helpdesk (information based on 41 RDP)

BUDGET FOR EX ANTE EVALUATION 2014-2020



- The budgets for the *ex ante* evaluation have a high variability due to the duration and tasks of the contracts and the size of the RDP.

Source: Evaluation Helpdesk (information based on 52 RDP)



Sharing experiences and identifying challenges on SWOT and NA

Four case studies (Finland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Germany) showed the approach used to conduct the SWOT analysis and NA, and the main lessons learned.

FINLAND

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SARI RANNANPÄÄ
Consultant at
Avaintaito Osuuskunta

- The work to develop the SWOT was carried on by several **internal working groups** (WG) in the MoA and, since it started very early (the CCIs were not yet available) it was **largely based on studies** previously commissioned by the MoA;
- One SWOT analysis was developed by each WG, structured along the **three types of rural areas**. One summary SWOT analysis was developed afterwards;
- Stakeholders were **deeply involved** providing feedback in the process (also through an online platform);
- Some stakeholders participated in several WGs in order to **ensure consistency** among the discussed themes;
- Difficulties encountered were the **large amount of details** to handle, and the fact that some **horizontal issues** were crossing administrative boundaries.

HUNGARY

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JUDIT HABUDA
Rural Development
expert

- An **external expert** was hired to carry out an **evidence based SWOT analysis** and **capacity building** for stakeholders;
- To develop the SWOT, one WG for each RD priority was established. Afterwards, the findings of each WG were **translated** in one summary SWOT table;
- Although a **wide participation** of stakeholders was achieved, the **outcomes** of the WGs were sometimes **rather general**;
- Further work is still necessary to **stabilise the set of context indicators** and establish guidance on how they should be used.

CZECH REP.

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JAROSLAV PRAZAN
Czech Institute of
Agric. Economics

- **8 WGs** (1 for each RD priority, 1 on Less Favoured Areas and 1 on forestry) **were established** and outcomes translated into one SWOT summary table;
- The needs were identified assuming to **change** the weak points of the SWOT into strengths, in order to meet opportunities and face threats;
- Stakeholders did **not have enough experience** and data was not fully available from the beginning;
- The main lessons learned were to **train stakeholders from the beginning ensuring their participation**, and **to start data collection at early stages** ensuring a continuous data flow.

GERMANY

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DIETMAR WELZ
Consultant at
BonnEval

- In several German Länder a **joint socio-economic, SWOT analysis and NA** were carried out to coordinate the interventions across CSF funds;
- The main limitation was the **diverging interpretation** of priorities and needs among programmes;
- The **main benefits** were to be able to earlier identify thematic, sectorial or regional gaps in funding and to identify potentials for creating synergies;
- CSF based analysis and programming could be seen as an **eye-opener** to a more coherent policy framework.



Questions & Answers to the EC

During the GPW, participants raised several questions to the officials of the EC on SWOT analysis, NA and ex ante evaluation.

Some of these questions (and answers) are:

1. **In which part of the SWOT should Member State (MS) reflect the context indicators that were used?**
 - The RDP must contain an analytical table with the values of all context indicators used (common and programme specific indicators);
 - A draft structure for this analytical table was provided to MS during the last EXCO (30th of April 2013) and it will be soon expanded to include programme-specific indicators.
2. **How should the SWOT analysis and NA be structured in the RDP to be submitted to the EC?**
 - The EC expects one SWOT per RDP. To get to this result, MAs can organize their process as they consider it most appropriate (intermediate analysis by 3 CAP objectives, 6 RD priorities, etc.);
 - The NA should be structured following the 6 RD priorities and focus areas, and the three cross-cutting themes;
 - In each case, it is required to ensure consistency between the SWOT analysis and the NA;
 - The working document on "*Elements of strategic programming for the period 2014-2020 (6-7 December 2012)*" illustrates a template for the presentation of the SWOT analysis and NA in the RDP;
 - It is recommended to contact the respective Desk Officer once the first draft of the SWOT and NA is developed.
3. **How should the ex ante evaluation be presented in the RDP?**
 - The full *ex ante* evaluation report should be presented as an Annex to the RDP;
 - The RDP text itself should include a chapter on *ex ante* that provides a description of the overall process, an overview of the recommendations of the *ex ante* evaluator and a brief description of how they have been addressed.
4. **Is the EC expecting an ex ante evaluation report based on evaluation questions?**
 - The *ex ante* report should address all evaluation subjects defined in the Regulations, such as the contribution of the RDP to the EU2020 strategy, the coherence and consistency of the RDP with other CSF funds, the partnership agreement, Pillar 1 of the CAP and other EU and national policy instrument, etc;
 - The "*Guidelines for the ex ante evaluation of 2014-2020 RDPs*" suggest evaluation questions for each of these subjects as an advisable approach to conduct the *ex ante* evaluation; however, the use of evaluation questions is not mandatory.



OUTCOMES OF THE GROUP WORK:

Participants' recommendations on key challenges in SWOT, NA and ex ante evaluation

Participants of the GPW were asked to identify the main challenges in developing the SWOT analysis, NA and ex ante evaluation. Based on their inputs, 5 WG were established with the aim of providing recommendations on the identified cluster of challenges.

HOW TO PRIORITIZE NEEDS BASED ON THE SWOT AND HOW TO LINK THEM TO THE STRATEGY?

- 1) Conduct the situation analysis to cover all the objectives and priorities as a starting point for the prioritization of needs.
- 2) Prioritize those needs that can only be addressed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) bearing in mind limited resources and conflicting goals.
- 3) Preferably use participatory methods (involvement of stakeholders) rather than technical tools (e.g. multi-criteria-analysis or cost-benefit-analysis) when prioritizing the needs.
- 4) Use a transparent process explaining the different focus groups organised (per regions, themes, etc.) and their frequency, and how the achievements are transmitted to other levels of the process.
- 5) Do NOT prioritize needs based on purely expert-based political decisions!

HOW TO REFLECT THE DIFFERENT CHARACTERISTICS OF TERRITORIES IN THE ANALYSIS (SWOT)?

- 1) Develop an analysis of the current situation, which enables to have a good and detailed understanding of the territory identifying its issues.
- 2) Reflect the differences of the territories in the situation analysis, preferably when they have substantial relevance for the development of the overall strategy of the RDP.
- 3) Use the SWOT analysis as a structuring tool to break down the complexity of the situation analysis.
- 4) Do NOT only present the matrix of the SWOT without any narrative synthesis which illustrates the various options that the SWOT analysis implies.
- 5) Do NOT develop an unreflected SWOT analysis, which is merely a list of topics and regional differences and which is not based on the situation analysis.

HOW TO ENSURE A GOOD COOPERATION BETWEEN EX ANTE EVALUATOR, MANAGING AUTHORITY AND SWOT EXPERTS AND RD STAKEHOLDERS?

- 1) MA should have an active role in leading and managing the process, even if it decides to outsource the drafting of the intervention logic to another entity. In this respect, the evaluator should not be the one who builds the intervention logic, but rather one who can assist the MA with capacity building and technical advice.
- 2) The composition of the WG has to be strategically defined, by identifying the stakeholders who are willing to participate (e.g. make a list of organisations interested in a particular issue and assess their interest in participating) and by balancing dominant groups using participative methods which help identifying compromises within the group.
- 3) Do NOT involve stakeholders in discussions regarding issues that are not relevant for them or on topics they do not have expertise in.

HOW TO USE CONTEXT INDICATORS / DATA IN THE SWOT?

- 1) CCIs are used to provide clear evidence of the situation in the territory. Therefore, use CCIs in the situation analysis or as a cross-checking tool if the conclusions of an already existing SWOT were not based on them.
- 3) Look at regional trends when defining needs (EU targets are not sufficient as reference points to set the needs).
- 4) Regarding data availability, make sure to start with an extensive research on all the data sources to have a clear overview on the available data. In case of data gaps, use proxy indicators.
- 5) To ensure access to data, a good cooperation among data providers and a continuous information flow among them and evaluators and practitioners is needed.
- 6) Do NOT consider context indicators as the only tool to describe the baseline situation of the territory.

HOW TO STRUCTURE THE SWOT ANALYSIS?

- 1) Use context indicators and evidence based summary reports to conduct the situation analysis which is the reference to build the SWOT analysis.
- 3) Interaction among stakeholders is of particular importance for building the SWOT because they have a comprehensive picture on the purposes and expected outcomes of the SWOT.
- 2) One SWOT can be developed along each of the 6 RD priorities and each of the three horizontal themes (with or without a specific focus per focus area), but the overall outcomes have to be translated into one summary SWOT analysis.
- 3) The SWOT offers the rationale for the justification of the selection or rejection of focus areas.
- 4) Do NOT develop a SWOT analysis of 500 pages!