

final thoughts...



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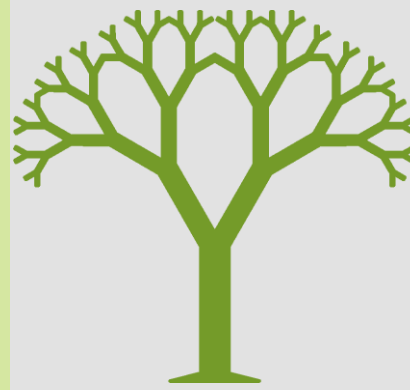
João Paulo Costa (JPC)
Managing Authority, Portugal



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Evaluator, Spain



European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

Good Practice Workshop National Rural Network Programmes



FB: The network is essential for information and good practice dissemination between German Regions. To continue networking, the NRNPS will be set up again in the next programming period.

FA: The added value is undoubtedly the creation of networks among stakeholders outside and inside the rural world...

RPG: At national and regional level, there is more interest in methodologies and current practice, the EU level is more concerned about policy issues (e.g. maintenance of the fund).....the Helpdesk products tend to reach us too late since they need EC approval...

JPC: Certainly today, I am learning a lot and the quantity of information is overwhelming me. I cannot describe a specific need, since the Portuguese NRNP is still in the starting phase.

What is the added value of NRNPs and how would you promote them to rural stakeholders?

RPG: The NRNP creates a platform for debate about rural areas. Compared to the previous programming period, discussions are wide ranging, involving more stakeholders....public, civil or sectorial organisations active in rural development.

JPC: The NRNP has the challenge and duty to improve the capacity of local stakeholders to intervene in rural areas, to improve the quality of life...

FB: The Evaluation Helpdesk has a role in supporting evaluators in the evaluation of networks, as it is different from the evaluation of RD programmes and experiences and capacities are rather limited.

What can the Evaluation Helpdesk do to support you in your evaluation activities?

FA: Transnational networking and exchanges are very important to share experiences and build up capacities. ...there is a need for a formal structure to ensure the continuity. Evaluation Helpdesk can set up working groups around specific topics and organise regular meetings.

FA: There is still a lot of work to do on indicators for evaluating networks, especially with the view to the next programming period. The meeting was very important for the exchange of views with other participants...

In a few words, what is the key message for you from the exchange session?

JPC: The selection of information is the key message for me: "what is really important to focus on as a network"... to be effective and support capacity building in rural areas, not just produce noise, that is what matters...

FB: Monitoring and evaluation of networks shall be improved; nevertheless I see no need for any kind of standardisation.

RPG: The peer review of intervention logic of NRNPs was very useful. With a view to the next programming period it will be very important to have better a intervention logic developed jointly by evaluator and Managing Authority to map out what shall be achieved and how.

"Good Practice NRNPs" webpage, click [here](#)

main focus >>>
Brussels, 7 February 2012

Purpose of the Workshop

- **Exchange experiences and views** on the evaluation of NRNPs;
- **Discuss lessons learned** and draw proposals for the **impact assessment** of NRNPs (NRNs) for ongoing and **ex post** evaluations;
- **Identify and assess** approaches used for the **assessment of rural development networks, their properties, added value and the impact** on rural policies and rural areas;
- **Use** the workshop outcomes for the **update of the Working Paper** (2010) on the Evaluation of National Rural Network Programmes.

back to basics >>>

Why do we have Network Programmes?

The official answer is usually quite simple. Referring to the European Council Regulation 1698/2005 and its articles 66 and 68, each EU Member State has to establish a National Rural Network grouping organisations and administrations involved in rural development. The financial means allocated from the Rural Development Programme (RDP) technical assistance budget shall be dedicated to support activities carried out by the National Rural Network. In addition, Member States with several regional programmes may support the establishment and operation of their National Rural Networks with a specific programme.

However apart from the legal acts, the effort of the European Union to introduce wide scale networking among a broad spectrum of rural policy beneficiaries (and potentially also other rural actors) can be justified by the very positive experiences of networking among local action groups under the Leader approach but also by worldwide and historical experience of various rural networks, which were able to build massive social capital as well as various network properties for the overall good of their members.

Is further assistance needed for their evaluation?
Does the programme instrument used in National Rural Networks of multiregional Members States bring specific added value? Does it help to enhance their activities, their accumulated social capital or governance in their rural areas? Does it help to foster practical implementation of the rural policy in the EU countries? Or is it rather an additional administrative burden imposed on Member States which just has to be delivered? Can this be assessed and evaluated? Similar questions are usually asked by those who are

dealing with the current rural networks either from the perspective of implementing their activities or evaluating their outputs, results and possibly impacts. Impacts in particular pose challenges for all evaluation stakeholders and even more for evaluators assessing National Rural Network Programmes (NRNPs), mainly because the existing Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework does not provide sufficient guidance in this respect. In order to facilitate the work of evaluators during the Mid-Term Evaluation the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development organised in 2010 a workshop with evaluation stakeholders from the four National Rural Network Programmes (Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain) and published a Working Paper on their evaluation. In this Working Paper several key issues have been tackled, such as CMEF challenges for the assessment of NRNPs, formulation of the programme intervention logic, including main results and impacts, programme-specific evaluation questions, data collection and the establishment of a monitoring system among others.

- Countries with NRNPs
- GERMANY
 - ITALY
 - PORTUGAL
 - SPAIN

The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the official views of the European Commission.

set the scene >>>

MTE : first experiences in evaluating NRNPs

... during the Mid-Term Evaluation has shown different approaches for assessing NRNPs by countries. They mainly stayed at output or result level, and did not deal sufficiently with programme impacts since they were hard to identify and connect to the overall EU rural development policy objectives. The evaluation methods used were rather simple and in most cases could not answer more complex questions i.e. governance issues, building capacities and social capital, involvement of rural actors, transfer of knowledge, etc.

In the absence of sufficient CMEF guidance, the support provided was not considered effective enough. That is why the Evaluation Helpdesk has decided to provide further assistance to evaluation stakeholders of NRNPs in their assessment and organised another workshop in February 2012. An update of the Working Paper will follow shortly.

For further information, click [here](#)



Some highlights...

- There are only 4 National Rural Network Programmes.
- They are small and intangible.
- They are very different from each other budgetwise.
- They have a unique intervention logic, programme objectives and programme-specific indicators and evaluation questions.
- Networking is seen as a sharing of experiences and good practices in implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

introductory session >>>

What is the Added Value of Network Programmes?

This question was debated by the participants in small groups of countries before presenting the findings in a plenary session.

Improvement of networking culture and capacity

Increased participation of local stakeholders

Cross sector collaboration

Tool to transfer know how between programming periods

Better organised exchange and sharing of knowledge

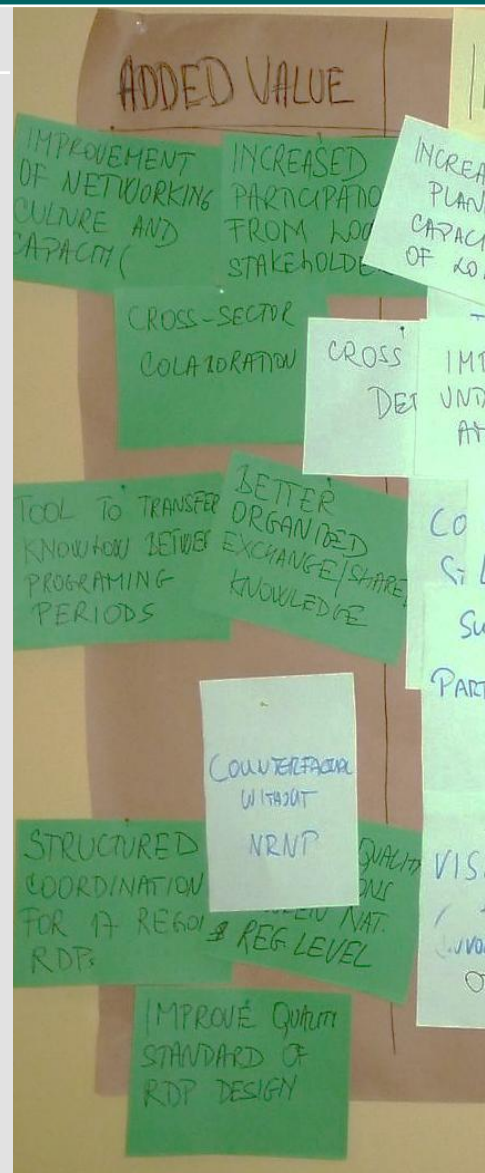
Structured coordination for Regional programmes

Improved quality of interactions between national and regional levels

Improve quality standards of RD design

Some open questions remain...

- Is the programme instrument applied for NRNPs a useful tool compared to NRNs, which are "just" using action plans?
- How do we identify core common and specific features, as there is such a huge diversity among networks?
- Is the intervention logic also a good basis for the evaluation of NRNs?
- Are there only networks for beneficiaries of RDPs? Or should networks be seen as wider platforms for rural areas as such, including people living in urban regions? (e.g. schools in urban areas, etc.)?
- How to build on the current experience of NRNPs and increase capacities for the new programming period 2014 – 2020?
- Can NRNPs increase the visibility of rural development?
- Is the involvement of rural actors important for the NRNPs?
- Is it possible to conduct counterfactual analysis of NRNPs?



exchange session >>>

A closer look at the Intervention Logic of NRNPs

Evaluators of NRNPs were asked to look at diagrams of intervention logic of another network programme and give their opinion on the composition and possible evaluation approach. Here is an excerpt of their general and specific observations.

German evaluator about the Spanish NRNP

- Large NRNP
- 3 general objectives
- Attempt to reach non rural areas
- Indicator set to measure the success of the programme for each general objective
- Indicators clearly linked to objectives;
- Some result indicators cannot provide relevant information, e.g. "improvement of knowledge in rural areas";
- A similar problem with the result indicator "increase of governance", since the term is not properly defined. In Germany governance is closely linked to local action groups and measured via improvement in quality project application;
- Another challenging result indicator: "rate of transferable and feasible exchange of innovation experiences and good practices"; this causes methodological problems on how to measure transfer of practice.

Spanish Evaluator about the Italian NRNP

- Good intervention logic
- Sometimes indicators do not relate to objectives
- In some cases, unclear how indicators can be measured
- Measurement of result indicator "Good practice transfer" is distinguished from "Good practice communication", which deals more with storage of good practice instead of sharing knowledge;
- The results indicator "% of NRN's output utilized" is measured via "customer satisfaction", using methods such as surveys/interviews, also linked to the output indicator: "number of outputs used". These are divided according different kinds of outputs and the various kinds of benefits for participants of NRNP activities. The data were broken down by type of rural actors reached (public/private bodies, regional/local levels, new/repeated participants, etc.).

Italian evaluator about the German Network

- Cross-cutting indicators to measure different objectives
- Different status for the same indicator inside the intervention logic
- Very small NRNP thus evaluation is limited
- Main target group: local action groups or interest groups
- In some cases, unclear distinction between objectives and indicators, e.g. the increase of governance is not an indicator, but rather an objective;
- Importance of indicating the method and the source of information for indicators;
- Formulation of indicators should follow the SMART approach;
- Evaluation is closely linked to the activities of the NRNP, mainly looking at "how many of envisaged target groups are reached"
- For indicator "economic and social partners involved" there must be a clear distinction between those who "take part" (just attending activities) and those who "are involved" (actively contributing to the outcome of activities, e.g. drafting documents). To monitor this, case studies, telephone interviews or networking analysis are carried out.

next steps >>>

March 2012:

Draft of the updated Working Paper on the evaluation of NRNPs

April 2012:

Feedback from the workshop participants

7 May 2012:

Follow-up workshop during the ENRD event in Finland on the added value of networks

12 June 2012:

Presentation of the final working paper during the Evaluation Expert Committee meeting

The results of this Good Practice Workshop will feed into the CMEF review working group of DG for Agriculture and Rural Development, which will develop inputs for the implementing acts for the new programming period.



analytical session >>>

Addressing the assessment of impacts of National Rural Network Programmes

In small working groups, participants discussed the potential impacts indicators for NRNPs

Suggested impact

- Improving stakeholders capacity to intervene in rural areas
- Increased planning capacity for local development
- Increased capacity to design the new RDP and administrative capacity
- Improved understanding and interaction among various rural sectors
- Generation of cross sector debate
- Creation of sustainable partnerships
- Inter-regional and intra-regional cooperation (EC, state, LAG, MA)
- Networking plus institutional cooperation development
- Developing of common standards and common language
- Increased knowledge production (interdisciplinary to policy needs)
- Generation of knowledge for public administration
- Increase of rural innovation
- Increased visibility of rural development

Proposed methods to measure impact indicators

- Various quantitative and qualitative methods, using measurement of results also for assessment of impacts
- In depth case studies/thematic studies
- Surveys including customer satisfaction surveys applying "before and after" approach

Read the 2010 Working Paper

