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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EUROPEAN EVALUATION NETWORK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT Rural Evaluation

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GUIDANCE

The *ex post* evaluation of Rural Development Programmes 2007 - 2013

WRITTEN BY JELA TVRDONOVA

At the moment, the EU Member States are living through a very hectic period. On the one hand they are finalising new Rural Development Programmes for the 2014-2020 programming period, while at the same time still implementing the "old" 2007-2013 RDP. Bearing in mind the n+2 rule, the Managing Authorities will have to complete all rural development expenditure under the "old RDP" before December 2015, and submit the report of its *ex post* evaluation by the end of 2016.



The ***ex post* evaluation** of the RDP is the final stand-alone component of the **ongoing evaluation** process, the culmination of all the monitoring and evaluation activities conducted throughout the programme implementation period.

The *ex post* evaluation will be conducted at a point when it should be possible to **assess programme impacts and achievements** with the funds spent. It should justify the programme budget and enhance the **transparency and accountability** of **EU rural policy** to stakeholders and taxpayers at European, national and regional levels. The *ex post* evaluation also provides the opportunity

to see whether the policy was designed and implemented appropriately to address the **most relevant needs** in the programme area.

The *ex post* evaluation is an important **policy learning tool**, as the evaluation results should be used to **improve the design, quality and implementation of future RDPs**. Even though the *ex post* evaluation is conducted at the end of a programming period, when the new policy is already drawn up and partly implemented, it has a significant role in bridging the old and new programming periods. Recommendations as well as factors of success and failure identified through the *ex post* evaluation of 2007-

2013 RDPs, can be used in programme steering or can lead to modifications of the new programmes. This may be the case especially in relation to measures implemented in both programmes. The findings of the *ex post* evaluation can also be used in the preparation of the enhanced Annual Implementation Reports in 2017 and 2019. In addition, the *ex post* evaluation can be used to validate / finalise the baseline values that are set for the 2014-2020 programming period, since the *ex ante* evaluations were conducted before information for 2013 was available. Thus there are several ways in which the *ex post* evaluation of the 2007-2013

continued on page 2



RDPs can be used to improve the quality of the 2014-2020 programmes.

Upon the request of the EU Member States and under the authority of European Commission, the Evaluation Helpdesk has established a **Thematic Working Group** composed of independent evaluation experts, members of the Evaluation Expert Committee and European Commission staff to develop **guidelines for the ex post evaluation of 2007-2013 Rural Development Programmes**. After a series of meetings, consultations on draft texts and in-depth discussions within the Thematic Working Group, the Evaluation Helpdesk will present the final version of the guidelines during the 20th meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee on 17 June 2014 in Brussels.

The guidelines as a whole are non binding, but they highlight the legally binding requirements and complement them with non-binding recommendations and suggestions.

The guidelines have been developed with the **aim of helping the various groups of evaluation stakeholders** (Managing Authorities, evaluators, officials within DG Agriculture and Rural Development concerned with 2007-2013 RDPs, members of Monitoring Committees, paying

agencies, programme beneficiaries, etc.), involved in *ex post* evaluation of RDPs to:

- save resources by providing ready-to-use tools,
- produce better and sounder evaluations, and
- arrive at more meaningful aggregations of evaluation findings at the EU level.

The *ex post* evaluation **guidelines consist** of a common introduction and three parts, which can each be used as a stand-alone document, but are interlinked through cross-references in the text.

The Introduction explains the purpose of the *ex post* evaluation and introduces the guidelines, specifying its target groups and content. The Introduction also discusses the scope of the evaluation starting with the policy objectives (EU, national, regional) as the rationale for evaluation, explaining the focus of the evaluation on relevance, effectiveness and achievements in relation to policy objectives, efficiency, programme results and impacts, factors affecting success or failure, and lessons learned for future policy design. The Introduction also restates the legal requirements regarding the scope and content of the *ex post* evaluation and outlines the common and programme-specific evaluation elements (common intervention logic, common and

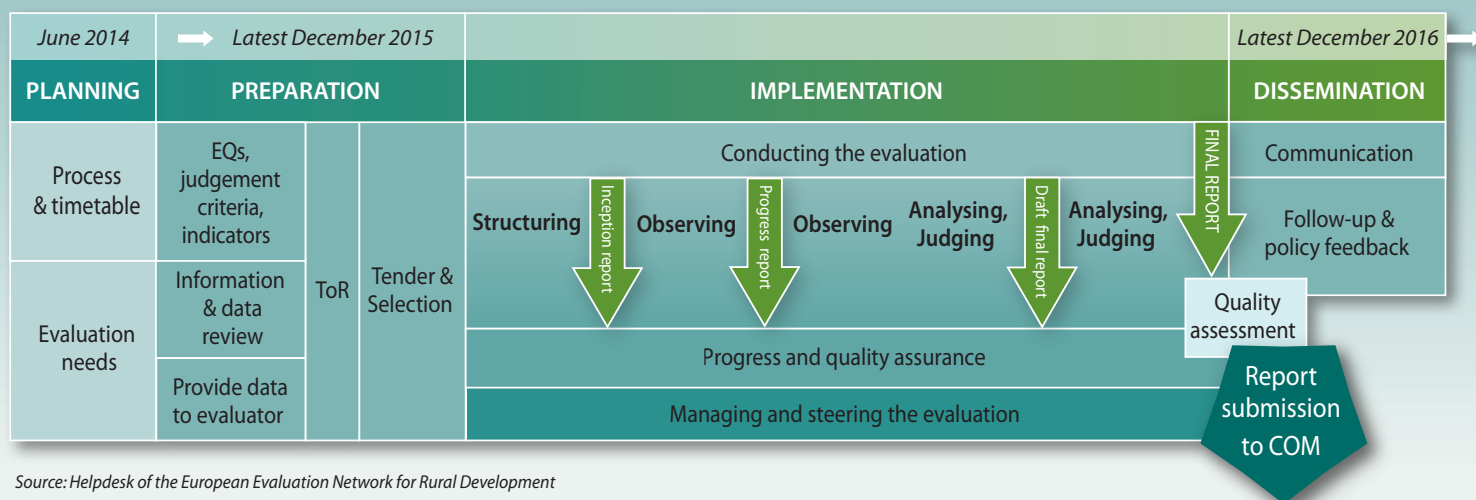
programme-specific evaluation questions and indicators).

Part I of the *ex post* evaluation guidelines is mainly targeted at Managing Authorities and focuses on the steering and management of the *ex post* evaluation process, providing practical guidance on its key steps (planning, implementing and disseminating), the role and tasks of various evaluation stakeholders and timing-related issues (Figure 1). It highlights the importance of careful preparation, such as ensuring that the necessary data is available for the evaluator.

Part II targets mainly evaluators, but RDP Managing Authorities can find useful information here for the preparation of terms of reference to select the evaluator, as well as for planning, preparing and steering the *ex post* evaluation. In addition Part II can help the broader range of evaluation stakeholders (Monitoring Committees, evaluation steering groups) in reading the *ex post* evaluation report and assessing its quality. Part II covers issues in relation to intervention logic, evaluation questions, indicators, evaluation methods and data (Figure 2).

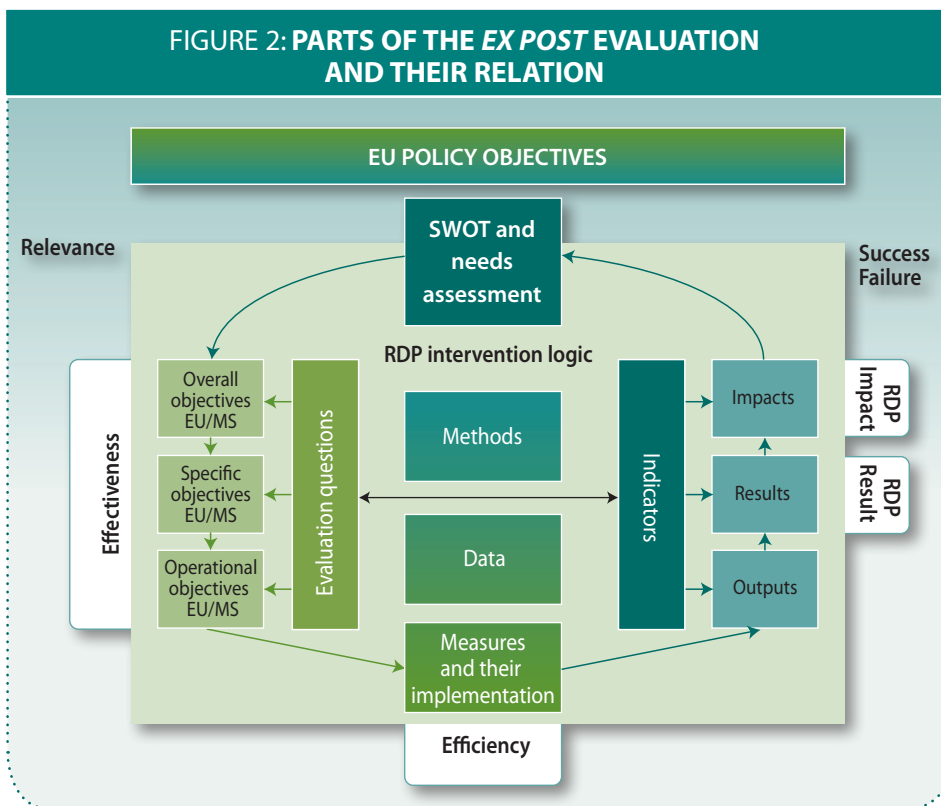
Chapter 1 on **intervention logic** highlights its role in the *ex post* evaluation of the programme and provides guidance

FIGURE 1: STEPS, TASKS AND TIMETABLE RELATED TO THE EX POST EVALUATION



Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

FIGURE 2: PARTS OF THE EX POST EVALUATION AND THEIR RELATION



for the review of the intervention logic. Various issues are tackled in this chapter, such as the coherence between objectives, inputs, expected outputs, results and impacts, relevance in relation to addressing needs, expected and unexpected side effects of interventions, and expected effectiveness and efficiency prior to the evaluation being undertaken. The chapter also provides examples of various types of intervention logic and how their assessment should be approached.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to **evaluation questions, which are** one of the main evaluation elements and tools to conduct the *ex post* evaluation. The chapter explains the purpose and role of evaluation questions and judgement criteria in evaluation, and their links to indicators; it introduces a revised set of common evaluation questions developed for use in the *ex post* evaluation, provides advice for developing programme-specific evaluation questions and gives guidance on how to use and answer evaluation questions in the *ex post* evaluation.

Chapter 3 explains the purpose and role of **indicators** in evaluation, discusses the CMEF indicators and describes how to develop programme-specific indicators. The chapter also provides advice on how to use indicators in the *ex post* evaluation, including linking indicators to policy objectives and evaluation questions, balancing importance and measurability, screening indicators from the point of view of data requirements, etc.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to **evaluation methods** appropriate for the *ex post* evaluation. The chapter starts with a description of programme effects (direct and indirect) and highlights the importance of using counterfactuals in assessing them. It discusses the distinction between programme results and impacts, factors which might distort the

estimation of programme effects and approaches for separating them from genuine programme effects. The chapter also gives details of various categories of evaluation design, explains quantitative and qualitative methods, and provides guidance on how to choose them to achieve a robust assessment of RDP results and impacts. In addition the chapter suggests possible approaches for calculation of the programme's net effects in relation to each of the RDP axes.

Chapter 5 deals with the proper use of **qualitative and quantitative data and information**, necessary for the assessment of programme results and impacts. It also discusses the challenges of data management and collection and describes the role of various institutions in it.

Each of the above chapters contains sub-chapters, in which specificities in relation to the *ex post* evaluation of technical assistance and national rural networks are discussed.

PART III is the Toolbox, which contains practical instruments for conducting the *ex post* evaluation. Both Managing Authorities and evaluators can find useful tools for carrying out their specific tasks in this section. The Toolbox includes: intervention logic diagrams for each RDP axis, the revised set of common evaluation questions, an outline of an *ex post* evaluation report, an example of the quality assessment grid for an evaluation report, an example outline for the terms of reference, a table for retro-planning of *ex post* evaluation, proposed Leader-specific additional indicators, examples of various methods, and a tool for the identification of data sources for evaluation.



FIND OUT MORE

> "Guidelines for the *ex post* evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs", June 2014, Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development.



Revision of the common evaluation questions for 2007-2013 RDPs

WRITTEN BY **ENRIQUE NIETO**

Evaluation questions (EQs) play a crucial role in defining the focus of evaluation in line with rural development objectives, and demonstrating the results, impacts, achievements, effectiveness and efficiency of the policy. The EQs also serve as a basis for establishing what kind of information needs to be used to ensure that by answering the EQs, the evaluators are able to capture and reflect the intended effects of the RDP interventions.



For the 2007-2013 programming period, 19 horizontal and 136 measure-related common evaluation questions (CEQs) were included in the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF Guidance Note B) to be used by all the EU Member States in the evaluation of their RDPs.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF CEQs?

As part of the CMEF, the role of the CEQs is to help to:

- Ensure that the evaluation of the effects of RDP interventions is linked to the EU rural development policy objectives.
- Demonstrate the contribution of EU rural development interventions to addressing the needs of the RDP territory.
- Enhance comparability of evaluation results across the EU as part of a commonly applied evaluation system in all Member States / regions.
- Encourage programming authorities and other RD stakeholders to assess results and impacts helping to justify EU policy implementation and support EU policy formulation.

To capture achievements of programme-specific objectives and particular aspects of RDPs which cannot be addressed with the common set of questions, Managing Authorities can define additional **programme-specific evaluation questions (PSEQs)**.

WHY DO THE CEQs NEED TO BE REVISED?

Past experiences (mainly the mid-term evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs (MTE)) have shown that evaluators had difficulties in providing robust answers to the large set of CEQs set out in Guidance note B of the CMEF handbook. Other difficulties were caused by inconsistencies which appeared between the RDP intervention logic (hierarchy of objectives), CEQs, and common indicators and which led to the development of a range of different and non-comparable answers and also to less robust evaluation conclusions and recommendations. In addition, duplication and overlaps between questions, as well as unclear definition of some terms used in the questions were also reported as challenging. These weaknesses in the formulation of the questions also hampered the aggregation of the evaluation results at EU level. Hence, it was decided to review and revise the CEQs to reduce the overall number, ensure clear formulation and a direct link to policy objectives and common indicators.

Improving the set of CEQs before the *ex post* evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs starts, offers the opportunity for substantial improvements compared to the MTE in conducting the assessment of RDP impacts and achievements in relation to policy objectives and responds

to the need to address the main challenges in using the CEQs in the evaluation of Rural Development Programmes.

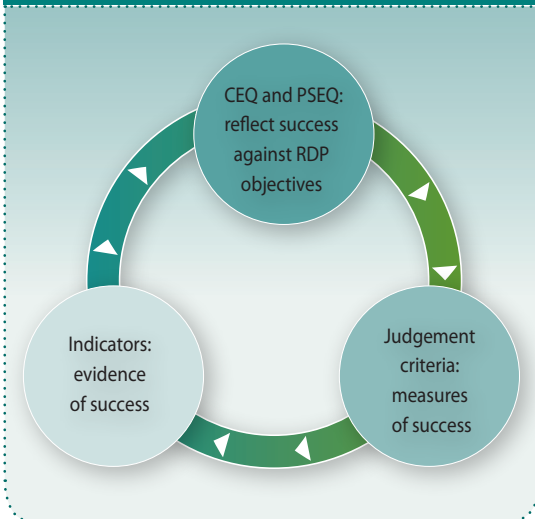
THE REVISED SET OF COMMON EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The joint efforts of the Member States and the European Commission in revising the set of CEQs should lead to the enhancement of RDP evaluation, and provide a comprehensive evidence-based decision-making tool for MAs and evaluators to improve rural development policy.

The original set of CEQs has been simplified and reduced from the original set of 155 questions to a manageable number of 24 CEQs that fulfils the minimum needs for the *ex post* evaluation at EU level. The lessons learned from the MTE exercise were taken into consideration in the revision. In the proposed set, the CEQs are directly and consistently linked to the rural development objectives and common indicators, an approach that was also applied to develop the CEQs of 2014-2020. The implementation of this similar approach also provides continuity in the evaluation approach between programming periods.

The set of 24 CEQs for the *ex post* evaluation of the 2007-2013 RDPs gives scope to MAs to develop programme-

FIGURE 3: TRIANGULAR CONSISTENCY OF EQs, JUDGEMENT CRITERIA AND INDICATORS



specific evaluation questions that go beyond the minimum evaluation essentials needed at EU level. MAs will

need to capture through appropriate programme-specific questions all additional issues which are of relevance for the programming area and which are specifically tackled by their programmes. This is an important exercise that needs to be thought through carefully from the beginning of the *ex post* evaluation process. Careful preparation will help to ensure that appropriate data is available on time to draw relevant conclusions.

The proposed CEQs are classified into three groups: programme-related CEQs (related to Lisbon objectives, Community strategic priorities, Health Check, technical assistance, NRNs and efficiency), measure-related CEQs, and Leader-related CEQs. The set of common questions are shown in the table 1 (page 6).

CEQs should be answered with the help of judgment criteria and evidence

will be provided through common indicators. Judgement criteria clarify the success of programme interventions, link the evaluation question with indicators and information to be collected and enable the design of robust methodological approaches to formulate answers based on qualitative and quantitative evidence. The common indicators included in the CMEF have to be used in this process, but where they are not sufficient, additional indicators can be developed to answer the CEQs.

The "Guidelines for the *ex post* evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs", developed by the Evaluation Helpdesk in collaboration with the European Commission and the Member States, provide further information on the revised set of CEQs, and additional hints on the role and use of evaluation questions, judgement criteria and indicators for the *ex post* evaluation of RDPs, including the development of

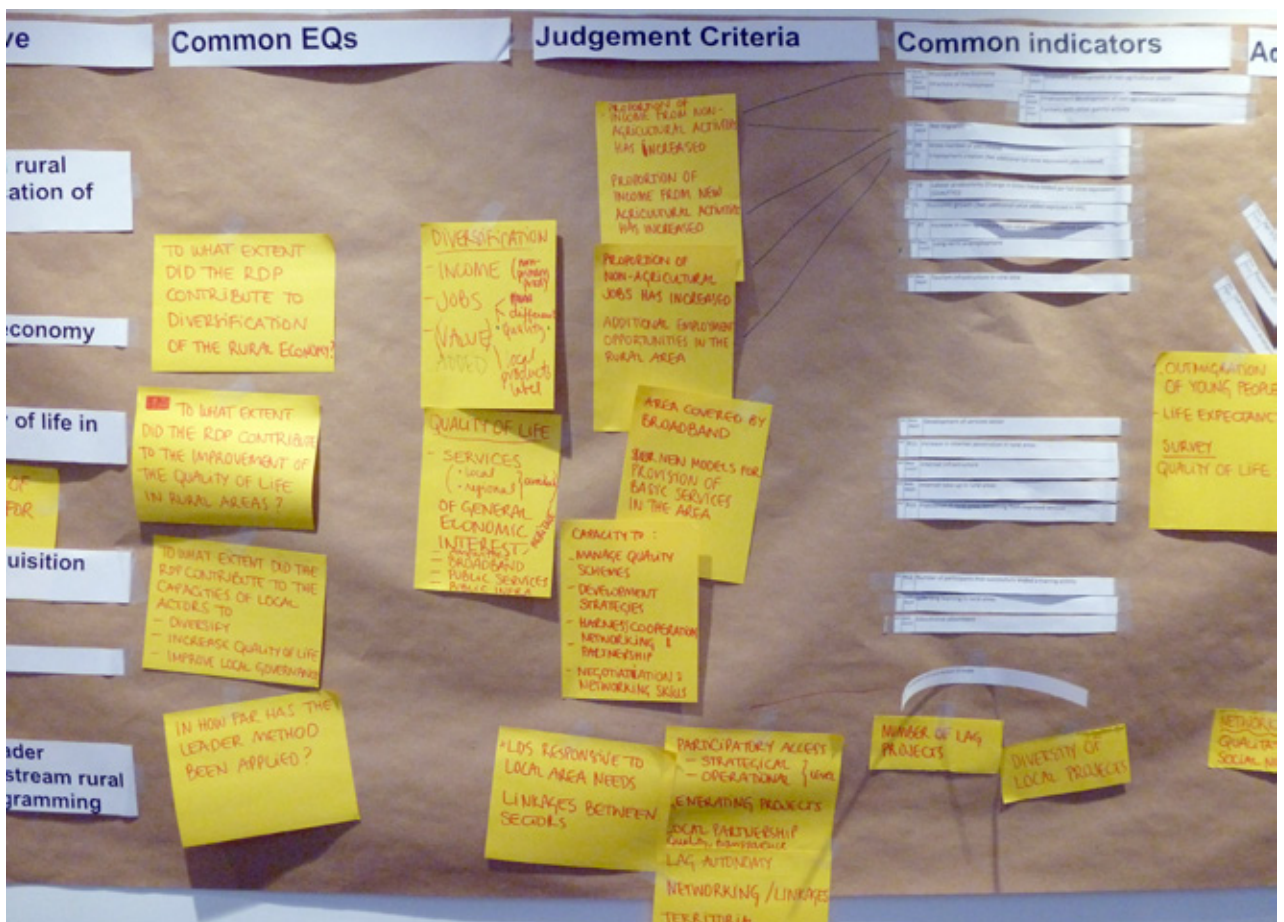


TABLE 1: COMMON EVALUATION QUESTIONS

**PROGRAMME-RELATED
CEQs**

1. To what extent has the RDP contributed to the growth of the whole rural economy? (Lisbon objective; related impact indicators 1: Economic growth and 3: Labour productivity)
2. To what extent has the RDP contributed to employment creation? (Lisbon objective; related impact indicator 2: Employment creation)
3. To what extent has the RDP contributed to protect and enhance natural resources and landscape including, biodiversity and HNV farming and forestry? (Community strategic priority, Biodiversity is also a Health Check objective; related impact indicators 4: Farmland Bird Index, 5: High Nature Value Farming and Forestry and 6: Water quality)
4. To what extent has the RDP contributed to the supply of renewable energy? (Health Check objective; related impact indicator 7: Increase in production of renewable energy)
5. To what extent has the RDP contributed to improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector? (Community strategic priority)
6. To what extent has the RDP accompanied restructuring of the dairy sector? (Health Check objective)
7. To what extent has the RDP contributed to climate change mitigation and adaptation? (Health Check objective)
8. To what extent has the RDP contributed to improvement of water management (quality, use and quantity)? (Health Check objective)

9. To what extent has the RDP contributed to improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of the rural economy? (Community strategic priority)
10. To what extent has the RDP contributed to introduction of innovative approaches? (Health Check objective)
11. To what extent has the RDP contributed to creation of access to broadband internet (including upgrading)? (Health Check objective)
12. To what extent has the NRN contributed to RDP objectives?
13. To what extent has the TA contributed to RDP objectives?
14. How efficiently have the resources allocated to the RDP been used in relation to achieving the intended outputs?

MEASURE-RELATED CEQs

For each of the Axis 1 measures included in the RDP:

15. How and to what extent has the measure contributed to improving the competitiveness of the beneficiaries?

(Where relevant, the answers to this CEQ should be presented so that the contribution to the competitiveness of the agriculture and forestry sectors can be seen separately)

For each of the Axis 2 measures included in the RDP:

16. How and to what extent has the measure contributed to improving the environmental situation?

For each of the Axis 3 measures (Article 52(a) of 1698/2005) included in the RDP:

17. How and to what extent has the measure contributed to the economic diversification of the beneficiaries?

For each of the Axis 3 measures (Article 52(b) of 1698/2005) included in the RDP:

18. How and to what extent has the measure contributed to the improving the quality of life of beneficiaries?

For each of the Axis 3 measures (Article 52(c) and (d) of 1698/2005) included in the RDP:

19. To what extent has the measure enhanced beneficiaries' capacities to improve economic diversification and quality of life in rural areas?

For each measure included in Axis 1-3 of the RDP:

20. What other effects, including those related to other objectives/axes, are linked to the implementation of this measure (indirect, positive/negative effects on beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries, local level)?

**AXIS 4 (LEADER)
RELATED CEQs**

21. To what extent has the RDP contributed to building local capacities for employment and diversification through Leader? (Community strategic priority)
22. To what extent have LAGs contributed to achieving the objectives of the local strategy and the RDP?
23. To what extent has the Leader approach been implemented?
24. To what extent has the implementation of the Leader approach contributed to improving local governance? (Community strategic priority)

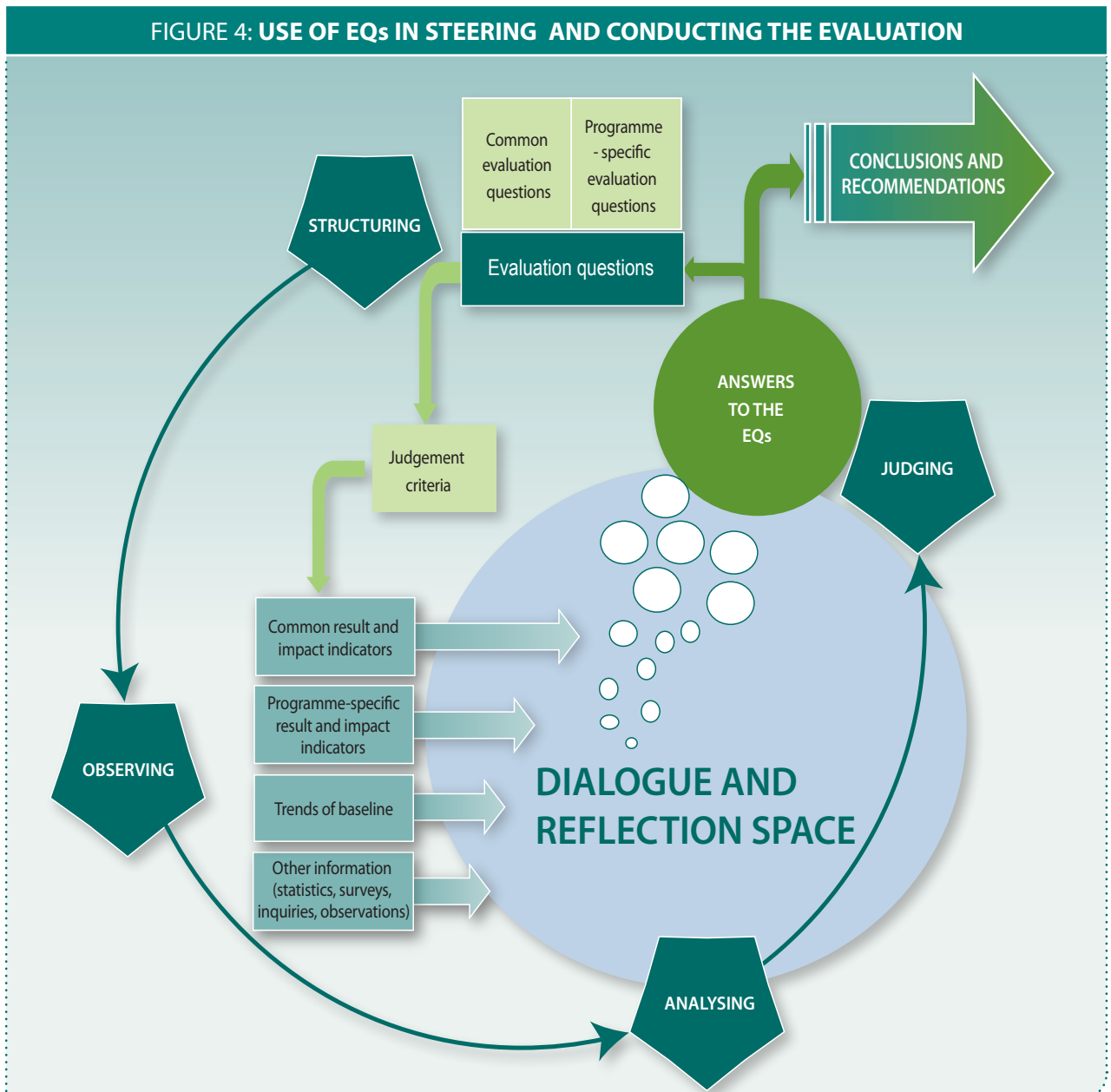
programme-specific evaluation questions and judgement criteria. The guidelines will shortly be available on the Evaluation Expert Network's website.

COMMON EVALUATION QUESTIONS SUPPORT THE EVALUATION PROCESS IN ALL ITS PHASES...

CEQs and PSEQs represent a key part of the terms of reference for evaluations.

They support MAs in planning the evaluation to ensure that all the necessary steps are taken to equip the evaluator with the resources to work effectively throughout all evaluation phases. It is advisable to apply a retro planning approach, starting with the timing of the final evaluation report and work backwards to see what is required at each evaluation stage. CEQs and PSEQs support MAs and evaluators work through all the evaluation phases (structuring,

observing, analysing and judging). When structuring the evaluation, the EQs, judgement criteria and indicators should be reviewed and tested their mutual consistency. This will determine what is needed to be done in terms of additional information gathering (observing) to provide sound analysis (analysing), answer the evaluation questions and draw relevant conclusions and recommendations (judging). This process is illustrated in the figure 4.



Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development



THE MAKING OF THE COMMON MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM 2014-2020

IT STARTED WITH A SIMPLE



The development of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation System for rural development for 2014-2020 (CMES) has been based on a careful assessment and review of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework of the 2007-2013 programming period. The aim of this process was to develop an improved system adapted to the needs of the new period.

A major challenge throughout the working process was to create a sense of shared ownership of, and responsibility for the system. Between March 2010 and spring 2014 a series of exchange meetings (workshops, stakeholder conference, focus groups, etc.) took place both at the EU and Member State level. The input received from discussions between representatives of the Evaluation Expert Committee, stakeholders, the European Commission and Networks (European Evaluation

THE USEFULNESS OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION has been subject to intensive discussions between evaluation stakeholders. In this respect it was essential to identify what evaluation-related aspects are important for evaluation stakeholders at both the Member State and EU level. Three common goals were formulated (1) Assess the effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of RD policy interventions; (2) Contribute to better targeted support for rural development; (3) Establish common learning processes. Moreover, in order to make the system more practical and useful for programme authorities, new components were introduced: The evaluation plan should support Managing Authorities in establishing evaluation as a strategic tool for programme steering; the Operations Database should set the corner stone for feasible and systematic data-collection at the output level.

MORE FOCUS ON ANALYSIS AND JUDGEMENT RATHER THAN ON INDICATORS / DATA. By designing each RDP around an intervention logic showing which rural development priorities and focus areas are included, and how measures are planned to contribute to each of the selected focus areas, a solid basis for evaluation has been established. Guidance relates evaluation questions, judgement criteria and indicators together and shows how to move from the set of collected indicator data to conclusions and recommendations. Further guidance on using appropriate methods and analysis will be provided in due course.

MORE FOCUS ON RESULTS AND IMPACTS is a need that is addressed through the establishment of a well-defined set of common result and impact indicators, which corresponds to the RDP objectives and focus areas. These, together with programme-specific indicators where required will enable evaluators to assess RDP effects on beneficiaries and the territory, and to describe the programme's contribution to EU rural development priorities, to the CAP objectives and to EU2020 objectives.

PROPORTIONALITY of the new system has been considered first in reducing compulsory common elements (indicators, EQs) and secondly through clarifying the links between data and results to make better use of resources. For impact and context indicators Managing Authorities and evaluators can now make use of a lot of Eurostat data, although for regional programmes some effort is still required to gather the respective data at the regional level. The legal backing for Managing Authorities and evaluators to ask for information from beneficiaries for the purpose of monitoring and evaluation (e.g. through applications forms, surveys etc.) should ensure access to beneficiary information. The fact that evaluation topics are outlined already in the evaluation plan should help to make all efforts for monitoring and evaluation as targeted as possible, reducing unnecessary effort.



WRITTEN BY HANNES WIMMER

MIND-MAP...

Network, European Network for Rural Development) contributed to the development of the legislative framework and related support and guidance documents. Overall, most stakeholders appreciated being involved in the discussions and showed continuous interest in participating in the working process.

The starting point was a mind-map (see below) which was drawn up to show the comments by representatives of Mem-

ber States during the Evaluation Expert Committee meeting in March 2010. This mind-map visualises what evaluation stakeholders wanted from the revision of the CMEF and identified those areas (highlighted in yellow circles), that according to them required particular attention.

Now that the Common Monitoring and Evaluation System for 2014-2020 has been enshrined in the legislative acts, it is a good moment to compare the needs expressed by the stakeholders in this mind map with the final outcome of the process:



SIMPLIFICATION of monitoring and evaluation has been achieved through reducing the common compulsory elements and giving greater flexibility to Member States to use the system to meet their own needs: the number of common indicators and evaluation questions has been considerably reduced and streamlined. The new system also relies on common EU-data sources in order to make data collection and analysis for programme authorities and evaluators more straightforward. The Operations Database will simplify the aggregation of information for the Annual Implementation Reports, and facilitate programme evaluation.

TIMING of evaluation has been adapted in order to make evaluation results more relevant for programme management and steering, while still focusing on the identification of RDPs' achievements. The aspects covered by the former mid-term evaluation are now split across two enhanced Annual Implementation Reports (AIR), which in 2017 will focus on programme results and improvement of RDP design and implementation, whereas in 2019 programme impacts, achievements and contribution to EU2020 objectives will be assessed.

EVALUATION DURING THE PROGRAMMING PERIOD has been strengthened through a new instrument: the evaluation plan makes the former concept of ongoing evaluation more tangible. In this practical document Managing Authorities will specify the main elements needed for conducting evaluation during the programming period (e.g. by outlining evaluation activities and topics, timeline, resources etc.). In this way, monitoring and evaluation are built-in to the programmes right from the beginning. Throughout programme implementation, Managing Authorities have scope to fine-tune and concretize their evaluation activities as needed.

NETWORKING, CAPACITY BUILDING & SUPPORT concerning monitoring and evaluation will continue both at EU and Member State level and will be supported through relevant instruments. European Networks will help to exchange information and methods. Technical support will be reinforced to help all evaluation stakeholders to fulfil their roles. Guidance related to the new Common Monitoring and Evaluation System (intervention logic, ex ante evaluation, evaluation plan etc.) is already available at the start of the new programmes some of it in 9 languages, and further guidance will be developed, when needed.



EXPERTS' OPINIONS

Let's give the floor to some *ex ante* evaluators

WRITTEN BY **VALERIE DUMONT**

The EU Member States are currently putting a lot of effort in finalising their 2014 -2020 Rural Development Programme(s) and submitting them to the Commission. The Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Expert Network for Rural Development has conducted interviews with 4 evaluators in charge of carrying out the *ex ante* evaluations for the following Member States: Belgium (Vlaanderen), Croatia, Estonia and Spain (Murcia).

Have you already submitted the *ex ante* evaluation report to the Managing Authority?



REIN DESSERS

*Idea Consult
Senior consultant*

Yes, we already submitted the *ex ante* evaluation to the Managing Authority.



MORTEN KVISTGAARD

*Evaluator EU
Senior consultant*

A draft and a preliminary final report were submitted respectively in late October and November 2013. A final *ex ante* report will be submitted by end of May.



LIINA KIRSIPUU

*Ernst & Young Baltic
Consultant*

The final version of *ex-ante* evaluation report was submitted to the Managing Authority on 4 April 2014.



RICARDO PEDRAZ GONZALEZ

*Red2Red
Consultant*

We have not submitted our *ex ante* evaluation yet.



If not what still needs to be done?



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By the end of May 2014, a final draft will be submitted with a list of recommendations that have still not been addressed after the revision of the draft RDP. Accordingly, the executive summary will be revised. The SEA draft report was submitted for discussions in the inter-ministerial SEA committee; a revised report will be ready for public consultation on May 16. The consultation period will last for a month. The SEA final report is expected by June 30.



We are currently translating the final document into English. We will then submit the final report to the Ministry of Agriculture in official format according to the terms of the contract.



EAFRD programming is still ongoing. The Partnership Agreement was sent on April 22 and therefore the Spanish Managing Authorities have time to prepare the programming up until July 22. The Spanish National Rural Development Framework is expected to be soon sent to the Commission as per Regulation (EU) N° 1305/2013, Art. 6(3). To ensure a good execution of the projects and achievement of the objectives, the MAs are currently defining the measures to include in their RDPs and they are refining RDP strategies and performance frameworks. Last but not least, they also need to ensure coordination and complementarities with other ESI funds' Managing Authorities.

Which were the major findings of the *ex ante* evaluation of your RDP?



- Flanders chose to push forward four strategic themes (young farmers, innovation and training, resilience and preservation of the agricultural sector and quality and vitality of the countryside), however ultimately the available budget was not allocated equally among the themes.
- The Flemish RDP meets the EC recommendations on the development of the Partnership Agreement and contributes to the EU2020 objectives related to knowledge, innovation, climate and energy. The RDP is also consistent with the Flemish policy regarding the environment, space, agriculture and rural development although the RDP role in the Flemish RD policy is not explicit.
- As for the Flemish RDP, we believe that there are a number of interesting new measures that specifically meet Flanders' needs (e.g. innovation support for pioneers, organisation of zero fertilisation in Natura2000 areas and phosphate mining). Various measures constitute a stimulus for cooperation between farmers. We welcome the reform of the agri-environment-climate measure aimed at protecting species and water quality. We however have some doubts on whether investment in young farmers is enough.
- For new measures, we underline the importance of communicating with, and informing potential beneficiaries on time to ensure the support is effectively taken up. For some ecological measures, a strong proactive policy regarding the farmers and forest owners will be necessary to achieve the ambitious targets. This is also true for the new Leader LAGs and new collaboration areas (outside Leader), which need to be sufficiently supported in drafting their Local Development Strategies (LDS).
- The SEA shows that the Flemish RDP will mainly generate positive environmental effects although the positive effect on local air quality and climate change will strongly be reduced as some energy investments are no longer supported by the EAFRD. Nevertheless these investments lead to the global objectives of increasing the share of renewable energy and it would therefore be necessary to review the support for renewable energy to align the different support mechanisms from the various policy domains.



- The linkage between the situation analysis, SWOT and the needs assessment and the measure design was weak.
- There was no explicit relationship between measure design (scope and scale) and budgets.
- There was no quantification of planned outputs at measure and sub-measure level.

Which were the major findings of the *ex ante* evaluation of your RDP?



- The evaluation team concluded that the general RDP objectives were in line with the CAP objectives as well as compliant with the development needs of the Estonian rural and agricultural sector.
- The set objectives are accurate, well grounded in the situation analysis and SWOT.
- In the final report, the evaluation team pointed out the necessity to further improve the situation analysis and the SWOT related to priorities 4 and 5.
- Major findings related to the intervention logic of the RDP and efficiency of the proposed indicator system.
- Concerning the definitions of the objectives, the evaluation team highlighted that not all the objectives meet the SMART-criteria. They pointed out that the objectives should be specific and measurable in order to assess the relevance of proposed measures and to evaluate the results and impacts of the programme.



- Communication in general, data and draft exchange are very smooth and easy. It seems the MAs take into account most of our recommendations and appreciate the evidence-based improvements.
- In relation to the assessment and prioritization of needs, the *ex ante* evaluation recommended to extract those needs which are justifiable with the situation and SWOT analysis.
- Issues related to the low professional qualifications in the agricultural sector, or critical points of the programme in relation to environmental issues were highlighted in the *ex ante* evaluation.
- We have worked closely with the Managing Authority in the estimation of the indicators and the baselines of different measures. We have calculated the historical unit costs of the different actions implemented to serve as the bases for the estimation of the milestones and targets, especially for those actions which are linked to the performance framework.
- Finally, we collaborated with the Managing Authority in facilitating the exchange of information and collaboration with the different stakeholders involved in the programme. Furthermore, we have analysed the results of the surveys and different thematic working groups conducted and synthesized the outcomes of the public consultation process.

How did the Managing Authorities and programme drafters address them?



We have not seen yet the final programme and we still do not know if the MA addressed all our findings from the *ex ante* evaluation.



Many recommendations and comments were addressed by the Ministry of Agriculture. However the quantification of targets, the prioritization of needs and the links between actions and needs could still be improved.



The MA acknowledged the findings and recommendations in most of the cases. However, some issues remained unsolved as both the evaluation team and the MA/programmers stood on their grounds.



Our proceeding was, firstly to send several *ex ante* recommendations to Managing Authorities and people in charge of programming. It was done as a first step, even before the programming phase. After that, the MAs started to work on several parts and analyses of their RDPs that we received, explored and evaluated afterwards. We have submitted several recommendations that they have reasoned and taken into consideration at least to some extent. We are now working on finishing our work as evaluators, assessing recommendations and fulfilment of requirements.

How would you describe the communication with programme drafters?



Communication was very good. As the evaluators were involved at an early stage, the draft programme resulted from an interactive and iterative process between the programme drafter, the different MAs and the evaluator. The approach used in the programme preparation was very participative as a large group of stakeholders was consulted. The situation analysis and SWOT have been carried out in detail and substantiated with research data.



The communication and cooperation have been good.



Communication with the programme drafters has been mutually cooperative throughout the programming process. Cooperation included several meetings with the programme drafters (workshop of strategic planning and intervention logic, discussions on the evaluation team's recommendations and programme drafters' comments/explanations/answers, etc). Evaluators have submitted several draft reports of the *ex ante* evaluation which have been thoroughly discussed through question and answer sessions between the evaluators and the programme drafters. Evaluators were participating in most of the RDP steering committee meetings and a representative of the MA participated in the evaluation experts' panel discussion. Therefore, in our opinion the communication process has been effective and has given possibilities to get and share information in a efficient way.



In general, the process has been practical and productive. We hope that the whole process will result in more consistent and reliable programmes.

In summer 2012 the Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development published the guidelines for the *ex ante* evaluation of 2014-2020 RDPs, in order to facilitate the work of the Managing Authorities, evaluators and other related stakeholders in this exercise. How did the Helpdesk succeed in its effort? Have you been able to use the guidelines? If yes, which parts of the guidelines were the most useful for you?



We started the process quite early and therefore we could not make use of the guidelines which came too late as far as we are concerned.



Both the *ex ante* team as well as the Ministry of Agriculture have used the guidelines very much, both regarding the *ex ante* as such and the SEA. The comments about the guidelines were positive, even though it is likely that not many read them from beginning to end. They were mainly used as a reference handbook for finding answers to specific questions.



The major role of the Helpdesk in our work has been through the preparation of the guidelines for RDP evaluation, although it would have been preferable to use the final version of the guidelines in the evaluation process (coincident and complementary with all the relevant official documents and fiches of EC) instead of the draft document. We have used the proposed evaluation report structure and worked through the whole guidance document in order to get the most relevant and accurate results out of the evaluation process, matching the specific needs of RDP programming. It was useful to get information on good and bad practices concerning different phases and topics of evaluation, which are presented in the guidelines.



The guidelines were really useful. It clearly defined the way Managing Authorities were able to tender. It organised technical tasks and it also offered several methodological instruments to be used during *ex ante* evaluation. So, as far as we know, the guidelines came out at the right moment and in a useful way. The most useful and practical part has been the "suggested evaluation questions". We also think as very useful the order that the guidelines proposed to tackle every issue to develop the *ex ante* evaluation. Both elements are followed closely.

Good Practice Workshop – Rome (Italy) 10-11 April 2014



The Evaluation Helpdesk organized a Good Practice Workshop (GPW) on “**National rural networks: How to show their benefits**” in close collaboration with the *Istituto Nazionale di Economia Agraria* – INEA and the *Ministero delle politiche agricole alimentari e forestali* of Italy. The GPW took place on the 10 & 11 April 2014 in Rome (Italy) attracting a total of 55 participants from 17 different EU Member States including representatives of national rural networks (NRNs), evaluators, MAs, the Contact Point of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and European Commission representatives.

The event aimed to facilitate the exchange of good practice in the evaluation of national rural networks and 2007-2013 national rural network programmes (NRNP) and to identify the main challenges and solutions in the evaluation of networks’ activities and their added value in the implementation of rural development policy and the enhancement of networking in rural areas.

The European Commission representatives provided an overview of the regulatory framework for NRNs in the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 programming periods, emphasizing the common NRN objectives and groups of actions laid down in the recently adopted rural development regulation (Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013). Also, they explained the evaluation framework for NRNs, elaborating on the minimum requirements for the *ex post* evaluation and the Common Monitoring and Evaluation System for NRNs of the 2014-2020 programming period.

The Evaluation Helpdesk presented to the participants experiences with the NRNP mid-term assessment and explained the main differences and complementarities between self-assessment and evaluation of NRNs. The presentation of the ENRD Contact Point discussed the role played by the NRNs in the evaluation of the RDPs. These two presentations helped to achieve a common understanding among the participants on the two processes and to reflect on the importance of NRNs in evaluation.

Three case studies on the evaluation of NRNs- from Italy, Sweden, and Scotland- completed the above reflections and showcased the evaluation framework applied for NRNs of 2007-2013. They highlighted the main challenges and lessons learned to conduct meaningful *ex post* evaluations in 2016. The additional case study of Wallonia (Belgium) explained the approach for the network’s self-assessment demonstrating that counterfactuals can also be applied in

WRITTEN BY **ENRIQUE NIETO**



this exercise. In a reflection round, participants used the case studies to share experiences and discuss the most important issues to be considered for the preparation and implementation of quality *ex post* evaluations including the elements that should be part of the *ex post* evaluation framework of NRNs.

On the second day of the GPW, the Evaluation Helpdesk presented the structure and the content of the “Guidelines for the evaluation of NRNs 2014-2020” which are currently under preparation. In a short Q&A session, participants had the opportunity to comment on the proposed structure and provide feedback on the chapters on NRN intervention logic and evaluation framework, which had been circulated in the background document of GPW.

Through an interactive working session, participants put into practice all the aspects tackled throughout the GPW. In groups they developed aspects of an intervention logic for the 2014-2020 NRNs, linking the common objectives and actions and developing network specific ones. At the same time, each group discussed elements for a comprehensive and robust monitoring and evaluation framework for 2014-2020 NRNs.



FIND OUT MORE

> All the information, presentations and outcomes of the Good Practice Workshop are available [here](#)

The 19th meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee



Two topics dominated the agenda of the 19th meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee (18 March, Brussels): draft guidelines for the *ex post* evaluation of the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programmes, and progress on the legal framework for the monitoring and evaluation of the CAP post- 2013. The representatives from the Member States were also briefed about the outcomes of the ninth Good Practice Workshop of the Evaluation Helpdesk on climate change (10-11 February, Larnaca, Cyprus), the preparation of the tenth Good Practice Workshop on evaluation of national rural networks to be held in Rome, Italy on 10-11 April, the organization of an evaluation conference in Athens, Greece on 15-16 May and the evaluation of investment support under rural development which is expected to be completed for November 2014.

PRESENTATION AND INTERACTIVE WORK ON THE DRAFT GUIDELINES FOR THE *EX POST* EVALUATION

The draft guidelines for the *ex post* evaluation of the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programmes, produced by a Thematic Working Group of the Evaluation Helpdesk at the request of the Member States and under the authority of the European Commission, were presented to the delegates. Experts from the Evaluation Helpdesk gave a presentation about the state of play of the guidelines as well as on the next steps to be achieved, in particular on Part II (mainly for evaluators) dealing with the intervention logic, evaluation questions, indicators and evaluation methods. A week prior to the meeting the delegates had received parts of the draft version of the guidelines and were invited to provide their feedback during an interactive group session. A sounding board of delegates was also invited to the Thematic Working Group meeting the next day in order to have a direct exchange with the drafting experts. The guidelines will be ready by the end of June 2014.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION 2014-2020

The 19th meeting provided another opportunity for the representatives of the Member States to discuss various elements of the future Common Monitoring and Evaluation System for 2014-2020.

Delegates received information about the last update of the draft implementing rules related to Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013, Article 110 "Monitoring and evaluation of the CAP", the latest drafts of the implementing and delegated acts for rural development (Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013), the last changes in the final set of fiches for

result and target indicators, and an overview of the guidance material produced for rural development programming and evaluation.

The data item list for Pillar II's Operations Database 2014-2020 was presented by Christophe Derzelle (DG AGRI Unit H.3) providing information on the data needed for each operation implemented through the Rural Development Programmes and the main data sources. Zélie Peppiette (DG AGRI Unit E.4) then explained how to use the information from the Operations Database for evaluation purposes, particularly for calculating values for the complementary result indicators, for identifying and quantifying secondary effects of operations and for validating progress to targets where values are based on forecasts.

OUTCOMES OF THE GOOD PRACTICE WORKSHOP ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Enrique Nieto provided feedback on the Good Practice Workshop on climate change which was organised by the Evaluation Helpdesk, in cooperation with the Cypriot national rural network and the Ministry of Agriculture, on 10-11 February 2014. The workshop had provided an opportunity to discuss and exchange experiences about the main challenges related to evaluation of climate change mitigation and adaptation, and, with a view to the new programming period, the participants also took a first look at how the 2014-2020 measures may relate to climate change mitigation and adaptation (See related article on News 12).

The next meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee is planned to take place on 17 June 2014.



FIND OUT MORE

> [Links to regulation and GPW webpage](#)

A very BIG thank you...

... to everyone with whom I've worked during the last four and a half years.

On 1st June, I will be leaving DG AGRI's evaluation unit, although I'm staying within DG AGRI, and will be working as the assistant to our Deputy Director General responsible for rural development, Mihail Dumitru.

It's been a great privilege to be part of the group developing the CAP Common Monitoring and Evaluation System. Through the ExCo, RDC, stakeholder meetings, Good Practice Workshop and on countless other occasions, I've come into contact with many different people who have all contributed to the exercise.

From the early days of reviewing the existing CMEF, to putting the final touches to the implementing acts and

preparing guidance documents for the new system, the process has been marked by people's willingness to get involved, to participate in a constructive atmosphere, and to tackle the considerable challenges, often under pressure, with good humour. As much as the highly professional contributions, I have appreciated the personal contacts, the opportunity to get to know people, and to spend time together: although it's been hard work, there have been fun moments too, and I have many good memories which will stay with me.

I feel that the evaluation network is not just a concept, or an exchange of documents, but that it's a living entity made up of real and interesting people, communicating with each other. I'm proud to be a part of it, and proud of its achievements, and I hope that you are too.

What can I say, other than a very **BIG thank you**, and I hope to see you around!

WRITTEN BY **ZELIE PEPIETTE**



Your feedback is welcome

We welcome your feedback on the content presented in this newsletter 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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European Evaluation Network
for Rural Development

Website:

<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/>

Newsletter Editorial Team: Valérie Dumont, Peter Schneidewind, Margot Van Soetendael and Enrique Nieto.

Graphic design: Daniel Renders, Anita Cortés.

Contributors: Rein Dessers, Valérie Dumont, Morten Kvistgaard, Liina Kirsipuu, Enrique Nieto, Ricardo Pedraz, Zélie Peppiette, Peter Schneidewind, Jela Tvrdonova, Margot Van Soetendael, Hannes Wimmer.

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Evaluation Helpdesk

260 Chaussée Saint-Pierre – B-1040 Brussels
Tel: +32 (0)2 736 18 90
E-mail: info@ruralevaluation.eu