



Rural Evaluation News
Number 5 - October 2010

The newsletter of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

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Working paper on Capturing impacts of Leader and of measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas

Ulrike Weinspach, John Grieve

Both in academic and political debate, there is currently a growing interest in exploring policies and practices that enhance well-being rather than economic growth. The standard approaches measuring economic progress solely in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are judged by some experts in the field as being inadequate to assess human well-being e.g. as in the Stiglitz report to the French government. This does not mean that economic indicators are not legitimate or useful, but it does mean that they need to be considered alongside other indicators and that these other indicators should encompass concerns such as sustainability, well-being and Quality of Life.

Various approaches to defining Quality of Life exist. Some are linked to subjective well-being while others are built on people's ability to achieve specific goals and values and on some basic human entitlements that support this ability. These include considerations such as democratic rights, public health, education, employment and participation in society.

Rural Development measures delivered under the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) and in particular those which adopt the Leader approach aim to improve the Quality of Life in rural areas and to make these areas more attractive for future generations. When it comes to assessing the effects of such interventions however, a clearer understanding of what Quality of Life entails in these rural areas is needed.

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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What is the focus of the working paper?

The working paper on *Capturing impacts of Leader and of measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas* disseminated by the Helpdesk of the Evaluation Expert Network in July 2010 is targeted primarily at practitioners involved in the evaluation of the 2007-2013 RDPs. It should provide a resource for evaluators and responsible administrations to guide their evaluation activities in:

- how to **define Quality of Life** in terms relevant to the RDP and Leader; and
- how to identify, define and categorise a set of **expected impacts**.

The working paper proposes a **framework of reference**, which provides a conceptual model in order to assess Quality of Life in the context of RDPs and to capture a set of impacts.

Based on state-of-the-art methodologies and current practices in the Member States the working paper suggests a **three-step approach**. This approach is practical and also takes into account the resources available for evaluation. The working paper complements the CMEF guidance notes and other CMEF related methodological guidance, in particular the working paper on “Approaches for assessing the impacts of the RDPs in the context of multiple intervening factors” and further operationalises the assessment of impacts which are related to Leader and measures to improve the Quality of Life in rural areas.

What is meant by ‘Quality of Life’ in the context of the Rural Development Programmes?

Under the Council Regulation (EC) N° 1698/2005, rural development policy for 2007 to 2013 is structured along three thematic and one horizontal axes. Axes 1, 2 and 3 are focused on improving the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry, the environment and countryside, and the quality of life in rural areas and the diversification of the rural economy respectively. Whereas Axis 4 is devoted to the implementation of rural development through the application of the Leader territorial approach.

Measures to improve Quality of Life should make rural areas more attractive by addressing economic and social issues, rural depopulation, enhancing human potential

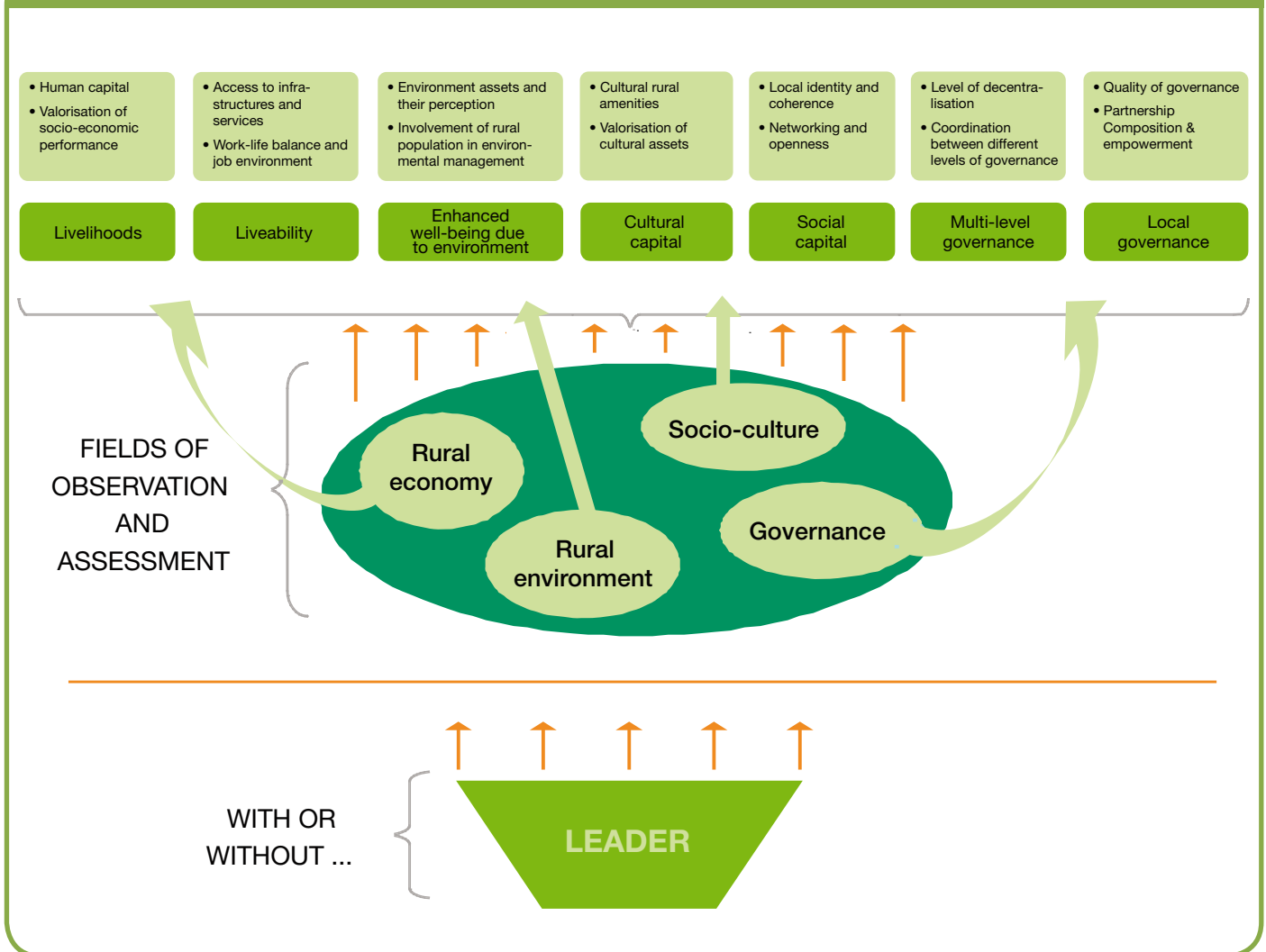
and support for measures relating to the broader rural economy. The mainstreaming of the Leader approach in the current programming period encourages the implementation of such measures through local development strategies. Taken together the measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas and the Leader method provide a means of achieving sustainable rural development, more sustainable livelihoods and enhanced Quality of Life and liveability in rural areas.

Dimensions of Quality of Life and expected impacts of RDP measures

Previous RDP evaluation experience shows that Quality of Life may be considered in terms of four dimensions or ‘fields of observation’. These include rural economy, socio-cultural issues as well as environmental issues as the main categories of expected impacts. Governance has been defined as a fourth dimension reflecting its importance in the successful implementation of the Leader approach and the vital contribution which good governance makes to an enhanced Quality of Life. The working paper further defines these four dimensions through seven impact categories which are highlighted in italics below:

- **The rural economy dimension** includes the impact categories of *liveability* (encompassing services, environmental quality and social networks that make rural areas places in which people want to live) as well as *livelihoods* (how people gain their live and diversify their land-based and other activities);
- **The socio-cultural dimension** includes the categories of *social capital* (which is about local identity and coherence, networking and openness for new ideas); and *cultural capital* (which deals with the enhancement of cultural amenities/heritage as well as the valorisation of these, e.g. through cultural events);
- **The environmental dimension** covers *improved environmental services, amenities and their perception*; and finally
- **The governance dimension** includes impact categories relating to *multi-level governance* (dealing with the level of decentralisation and coordination between different levels, local, regional, national and EU levels); and the *local governance category* (reflecting issues such as local empowerment and partnership composition, transparency and conflict management).

Figure 1: Defining assessment criteria for the 4 dimensions of Quality of Life



Source: Helpdesk of the Evaluation Expert Network

These seven impact categories are then further defined through 14 assessment criteria, i.e. each impact category is further broken down into two assessment criteria. For example the *livelihoods* category comprises the two assessment criteria 'human capital' and 'valorisation of economic performance', the *liveability* category includes the assessment criteria 'access to infrastructure and services' and 'work-life balance and job environment' etc. The linkages between the fields of observation, the

impact categories and the assessment criteria are shown in the figure above.

Leader is considered as a means to improving Quality of Life, not least because it is extensively utilised in the delivery of Axis 3 measures. Its contribution to planning and to mobilising local and territorial actors has therefore been integrated to the governance field of observation.

3 steps for assessing the impact on Quality of Life

The Working Paper suggests a 3 step approach, which is closely interlinked with the CMEF indicators and evaluation questions (see figure 2 below).

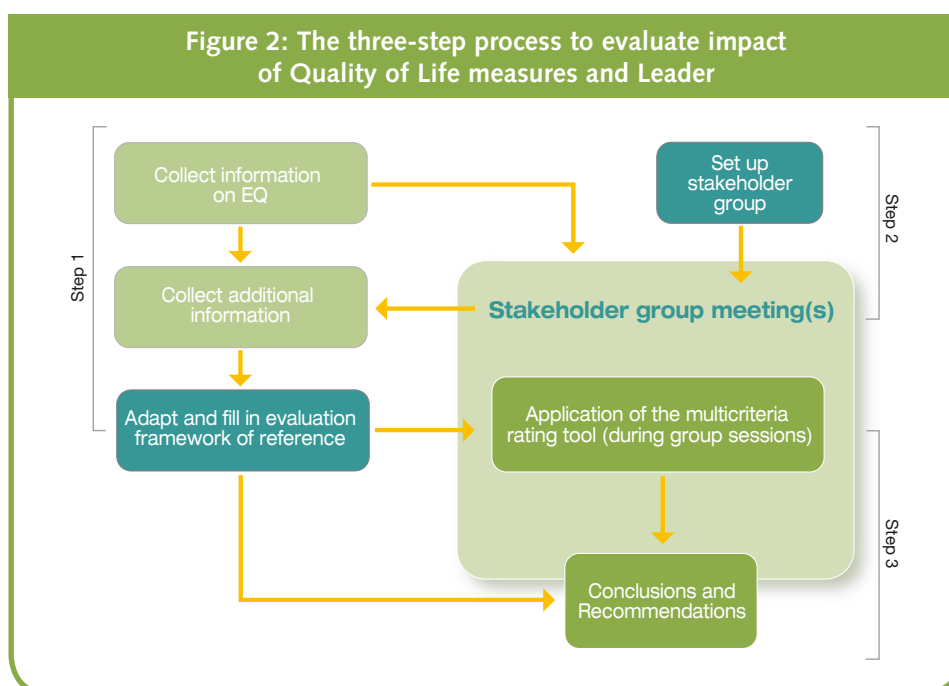
- Step 1. Adapt and complete a framework of reference:** This means that based on the monitoring data reported against the CMEF indicators several tables of assessment criteria and indicators should be adapted according to the specificities of the programme in order to gather and structure the available information. These tables relate each impact category to the relevant evaluation questions, judgment criteria and the suggested impact indicators. The exercise of filling in these tables will help to prepare for the next steps.
- Step 2. Organise a series of focus group meetings** (round tables) with a selected panel of stakeholders at programme level (Managing Authorities, Local Action Group executives, private stakeholders, main beneficiaries of measures etc). During these meetings the various assessment criteria will be discussed and complementary qualitative information will be collected.
- Step 3. Use a multi-criteria ranking tool:** During this final step, the above mentioned stakeholders or focus

group members are asked to provide their judgment for each assessment criterion. These will be consolidated by the group and reflect progress in terms of the baseline situation (presented in the RDP document or where necessary reconstructed in parts by retrospective assessment). In order to facilitate this step one suggestion is to use a multi-criteria ranking tool.

This three-step process has been designed so that it may either be implemented in full, or elements may be drawn from it to inform the mid-term evaluations which are already underway. It integrates stakeholders' perceptions into the evaluation process and the relational character of the exercise makes it possible to compare impacts across different European regions. Relative changes can be more easily compared than absolute attributes. A certain measure may for example engender more positive impacts in certain regions whereas in others it may have performed less well. If such a difference materialises, the contextual factors which may have caused it may thus be taken into account and can be further explored.

Suggested methods and tools for the assessment of impacts

Some impacts of Axis 3 and Axis 4 measures can be directly measured by applying quantitative methods; others need interpretation, others systemic or network analysis. On the other hand, a well informed and methodologically well grounded expert opinion can make analysis much more insightful or acute than it might be if based merely on quantitative data collection. Therefore the working paper suggests a mixed approach based on the collection of quantitative and qualitative information, and on external assessment as well as on insiders' internal perceptions and judgements, primary and secondary analysis. Such a combined approach will facilitate the generation of quantitative results comparable at EU level along with qualitative analysis and interpretation.



An overview on methods and tools

The working paper provides a rapid overview of different methods and tools that are considered to be relevant to appraise Quality of Life and to assess the expected impacts. By means of examples it illustrates how improvements in the four Quality of Life dimensions can be captured drawing on the range of appropriate evaluation methods. For each of the methods and tools further references and internet addresses are provided.

A framework of reference to support information gathering and structuring

The framework relates each impact category to appropriate evaluation questions, judgement criteria and indicators. Specific evaluation questions operationalise the generic evaluation questions laid down in the CMEF.

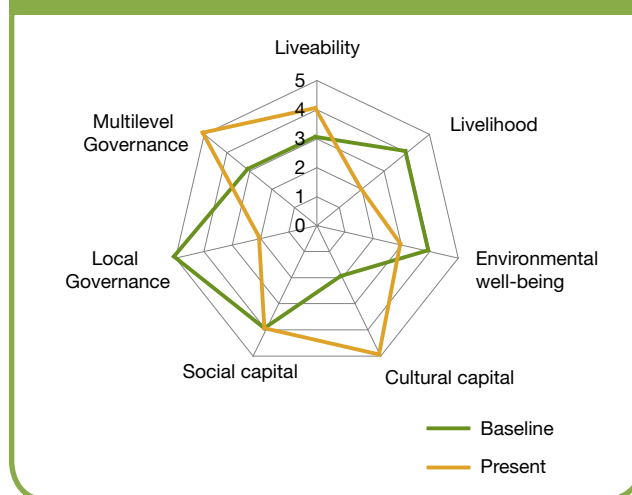
When completing the framework it is recommended to rely as much as possible on the existing data sources, e.g. the monitoring information recorded against the CMEF indicators, other Managing Authority data, management or evaluation documents e.g. participatory self assessments undertaken by Leader LAGs. Where a need for further information is identified, this information can be collected through surveys, stakeholder interviews and case studies. Ideally this should come from a variety of sources, embody a variety of viewpoints and perspectives, and reflect data on states as well as on trends.

A multi-criteria rating tool to streamline judgement and validation

Stakeholder (or focus) group members are asked to provide their judgement(s) against each impact criterion as defined in the agreed framework of reference. The rating is usually done over a scale from 0 to 5. Five would represent the imagined state of greatest impact (excellence) while 0 would represent a complete lack of impact/failure. Finally, the scores for each of the evaluation questions are summed up over the judgement criteria and for each of the 7 impact categories.

The rating is carried out during a stakeholder workshop, summarizing all the information and data gathered. Parallel small groups can focus on the rating of specific categories. In order to get robust results, the same category can be rated by two small groups in parallel. Should very divergent ratings be awarded, this should stimulate discussion and ultimately a renegotiation of the score.

Figure 3: The web-profile – a fictional example



Source: Helpdesk of the Evaluation Expert Network

Any judgement on programme success or failure hinges on the difference between present and baseline results. However, if the multi-criteria rating was not carried out at the outset of programme delivery, there will be no baseline. The missing baseline can be replaced, to a certain extent, by the appraisal of the past state as imagined by the stakeholders involved, this is however conditional on the involvement of sufficient stakeholders who are sufficiently informed about the reference period.

The suggested methods and tools as well as the 3 step methodology provide a source of inspiration for evaluators and responsible administrations to guide their evaluation activities. The suggested tools and methods can be handled in a flexible way in order to respond to the specificities of the Rural Development Programmes and of the programme areas where they will be applied.

Find out more

- o Read the [Working paper on Capturing the impacts of Leader and measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas](#)

Please feel free to contact the authors with any comments or suggestions in relation to the subject.
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Evaluating the National Rural Networks - options and constraints

Angelos Sanopoulos

The National Rural Networks (NRNs) are an essential component for the Member States in order to support the efficient and effective implementation of their Rural Development Programmes. In the Council Regulation 1698/2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development a National Rural Network for each Member State is foreseen, bringing together all institutions involved in rural development. In accordance with Article 66(3) of the Regulation, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain decided to launch numerous Regional Rural Development Programmes. Consistently they took up the additional option of having a specific National Rural Network Programme (NRNP) for the establishment and operation of their networks.

These 4 NRNPs dispose of budgets ranging between approx. 7 (Germany) and 90 (Italy) million euros, and therefore have quite different possibilities at their avail. At the same time, NRNs in the rest of the countries operate in the framework of the Programmes' Technical Assistance, and are subject to a rather tighter financial base.

Evaluation requirements 2007-2013

NRNPs and the NRNs (financed from technical assistance) are both subject to EU monitoring and evaluation procedures (ex ante, mid-term, ex post in the framework of ongoing evaluation), which are carried out at programme level. NRNPs are undergoing standard, full scale programme evaluation, as for all "regular" RDPs. NRNs on the other hand are evaluated in the context of technical assistance activities, and are hence assessed in a less extensive manner.

Consequently, the difference between the evaluation of the NRNP and the NRN is not so much in scope but rather in resources and frame.

While the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) provides useful and extensive guidance for the monitoring and evaluation of rural development interventions for the programming period 2007-2013, it does not contain a specific intervention logic, indicators and evaluation questions designed for the NRNPs or NRNs.

The Evaluation Helpdesk of the Evaluation Expert Network has therefore developed the working paper "Evaluation of National Rural Network Programmes" which aims to support the evaluators and Managing Authorities in conducting the mid-term evaluation of the NRNPs in 2010 and to provide inspiration for the evaluation of other National Rural Networks. The paper was presented to Member States' representatives at the July 2010 meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee.

Complementary to this working paper, the NRN Monitoring Initiative of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) is providing a "NRN Self-Assessment Tool-Kit" as a support for improving the implementation of the NRNs through better management and performance.

What's in a network?

Network programmes in general are designed differently from classical development programmes in so far as they do not have a pronounced "transmitter-receiver" architecture. Paraphrasing Metcalfe's law on (internet) networks (i.e. the value of a network is proportional to the square of the number of its members), one could claim that network programmes consisting of a single programme authority as a "transmitter" and a solid body of beneficiaries as "receivers" would be of little added value, since they would ignore the network specificities discussed below.

Networks are like the surface of water - the programme intervention is the drop of water hitting the surface, but what counts is the expansion of the circular waves afterwards.



In order to establish a sound methodological approach for the evaluation of rural development networks, it is crucial to delve a little further into methods and tools from other scientific areas, e.g.

- Graph theory provides a formal framework for the visualisation of a network by the definition of nodes (i.e. actors and stakeholders) and edges (i.e. relations between them).
- Social Network Analysis helps to identify a number of “**network properties**”.

In this light networks can be generally described as “decentralised structures”; which implies that a “lot of things” happen without the intervention of a central authority. Furthermore, they accommodate “real life” stakeholders and their interactions, which existed before the programme and are likely to continue after the programme has ended. It is essential to facilitate these interactions, which are necessary for the operation of the NRNs and the NRNPs in the long term. Last but not least, network programmes produce specific “network effects”, which are sometimes intangible, and make monitoring possible only with the engagement of “proxies” (e.g. number of participants at a seminar as a proxy for network density).

The definition of “network properties” is however not an end in itself; it is rather a way of recognising and detecting substantial gaps in the suitability of the programme objectives to “capture” the network dimension of the given NRNP and give hints for the selection of suitable indicators.

Finding solutions for evaluating the networks

An important step in the evaluation of the NRNPs is the formulation and use of Evaluation Questions (EQs) that capture the specificities of the given programme. All of the analysed NRNPs have based their EQs on the CMEF, in particular the horizontal and the LEADER (Axis 4) ones. However, an a priori examination of the horizontal EQs of the CMEF shows also that they neglect important network properties, such as the mentioned interactions between stakeholders. In this respect Axis 4 EQs provide a more solid base, since LEADER is incorporating the network dimension by definition. However also this set of questions shows some shortcomings in terms of network suitability. The NRNPs are therefore asked to formulate additional EQs that cover network properties.

Examples of Evaluation Questions in the Spanish NRNP:

- To what extent has the programme improved the **coordination among stakeholders** in the Rural Development Programmes?
- To what extent has the programme strengthened the **capacity of reflection and analysis** regarding the problems of rural areas?
- To what extent has the programme enhanced the **involvement and participation of various actors** in the rural areas?

Once appropriate Evaluation Questions have been formulated by the NRNPs two key issues remain:

1. What indicators will provide the information for answering the questions adequately?
2. What are the best tools for gathering that information?

With regard to the first question, the analysed 4 NRNPs display a comprehensive set of output, result and impact indicators, which will offer an extensive insight into the performance of the programmes. For example Italy uses an elaborate logical structure ranging from objective (e.g. Obj. 1 “improving governance”), to corresponding activity (1.1 support administration in the RDP implementation), produced output (1.1.1 Analyses, studies and related activities) and related result (1.1.1 Capacity to improve process programming and management).

Nevertheless, these indicators somehow tend to disregard the processes and the qualities evolving at the horizontal level within the network. For example decentralisation tendencies or the intensification of interactions among stakeholders are hardly captured. To capture these dimensions, additional information is required and in most cases it cannot be retrieved from what is usually registered in the monitoring system. It is therefore one of the crucial tasks for the evaluators to complement these data-sets by choosing proper tools for data-collection and analysis.

This brings us to the second question, which concerns the tools to get the information. At the time of finalising the working paper (July 2010) the evaluators of the NRNPs had not yet finalized their evaluation designs.

Consequently a large number of tools and methods had been listed, while little information was available on which one will be effectively applied during the mid-term evaluation. While the tools listed included many different approaches (e.g. multi-criteria analysis, scenario analysis, cost-benefit analysis, shift & share analysis, input – output model etc.), it was likely that the evaluators would also have to rely on qualitative information tools (interviews, surveys etc.); sometimes sacrificing representativeness for the sake of depth and explaining power.

While it is beyond the scope of the working paper to suggest a specific method for the assessment of each NRNP, it recommended that at least the following guiding questions should be answered when selecting the method for the assessment of NRNPs: (1) To what extent is the method suitable for evaluating results, as the mainstay of the mid-term evaluation? (2) To what extent can the method capture “network properties”, as the main characteristic of the NRNPs and NRNs?

Find out more

- o Read the [Working Paper on the Evaluation of National Rural Network Programmes](#)
- o For further information about the ENRD “Self-Assessment Tool-Kit”, consult the ENRD website. <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/>
- o For information about the four National Rural Network Programmes, visit the dedicated page on the rural evaluation website. http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/whos-who/national-evaluation-networks/en/national-evaluation-networks_home_en.cfm
- o For information about the National Rural Networks, view http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/national-rural-networks/nrn-information/en/nrn-information_home_en.cfm

Conclusions and recommendations

1. Each national rural network is unique in its structure, density of relations and operating environment.
2. Networks are made up of numerous “real life”actors and stakeholders; the evaluations should properly capture the different stakeholders as well as their interactions.
3. Evaluation methods and tools which apply to “standard” operational programmes might not be able to analyse properly the “network properties”.
4. Proposed tools and methodologies should be adapted to the programme budget and resources. Self-assessment procedures directly capturing the horizontal movements within the networks (i.e. among stakeholders) should be introduced.
5. The mid-term evaluation of the NRNPs can be the test-bed for more comprehensive network evaluation in the future; NRNs on the other hand might need to develop more “smart tools” due to their limited resources. A structured exchange and documentation of evaluation experiences in both environments should take place.
6. The cornerstones for the ex post evaluation scheduled for after 2013 must be set at this stage; hence a link between results and impacts must be established. Logical implications between results and impacts exist and should be made plausible.

Evaluation Questions as part of Mid-Term Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes

Hannes Wimmer

The mid-term evaluation (MTE) of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) in 2010 constitutes a milestone in the ongoing evaluation process. It is a decisive time for Managing Authorities (MAs) in the Member States to reflect on the implementation of the programmes and to draw conclusions for current and future programming periods. Independent evaluators in all Member States will assess the efficiency and effectiveness of funding allocated to each of the 94 RDPs and investigate the extent to which set targets have been reached. The Commission's evaluation questions set out in the Handbook of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, Guidance Note B, Chapter 8 are of particular importance as part of this process.

Questions play an important role in society – they encourage those on the receiving end to provide specific information on matters, to recall facts or to disclose opinions. In science, research questions frequently initiate processes that eventually bring forth scientific insights, or assist in guiding investigations. Such questions typically concern the relationships between the conditions for and the effects of processes in nature or society.

In rural development, the funding programmes are the research subject. Consequently, the authorities, who bear responsibility for such programmes, are encouraged to answer the questions raised by a superordinate institution, namely the European Commission. This is carried out through scientific impact research. Finally, the questions are not answered by the MAs themselves, but investigated by independently commissioned evaluators. This is in line with the principle of keeping programme implementation and evaluation strictly separate.

Evaluation questions: A means to define the focus of evaluation

On a programme level evaluation questions form an essential part of tenders for evaluators. They inform tendering teams on clients' (MAs) expectations regarding evaluation and thus form the basis for methodological evaluation concepts.



Relevance of questions: Programme interests vs. citizens' interests

The relevance and added value of common evaluation questions are often not immediately apparent to programme authorities: Initially the Commission's evaluation questions merely play a minor role in guiding programmes, as less complex data available on an ongoing basis (such as paying agency statistics) is usually sufficient for this purpose. The Commission's questions, in contrast, focus mainly on programme impacts, which require a more complex methodology and tend to be more costly and/or time-consuming to analyse. Also, a certain time lag from the investment of funds is unavoidable before such questions can be answered satisfactorily. Finally the CMEF's common evaluation questions are also a means of justifying programme expenditure vis-à-vis the citizens of the Union.

Scope and content focus of evaluation questions

Common evaluation questions are frequently perceived as being "too complex and extensive". In fact the large number

of evaluation questions (156 questions) occasionally gives rise to uncertainties as to whether they in fact need to be answered as part of the mid-term evaluation. In this context the Commission has clearly stated that it expects all the questions to be answered, where relevant measures have in fact been activated. However, the Commission welcomes comments on the quality of the evaluation questions as part of the mid-term evaluation. However, such comments or suggestions for alternative wordings can only be made in addition to what is already stated. The existing set of common evaluation questions should be accepted as given and answered in the first place.

In relation to the number of evaluation questions, it should be noted that rural development involves the assessment of a broad spectrum of measures, which are sometimes implemented in an integrated manner. The “Explanatory notes to the common evaluation questions and recommendations on mid-term evaluation reporting” by the Evaluation Helpdesk give details on the scope and use of evaluation questions during the mid-term evaluation and provide explanations on the main working steps for answering these questions. An example shows how the outline structure already provided for the mid-term evaluation report can be operationalized in practice and how the evaluation questions can be usefully assembled.

Definitions at EU and programme levels

Complex terms contained in the evaluation questions (such as competitiveness, quality of life etc.) present conceptual challenges for programme authorities and evaluators. While the last programming period contained a defined set of questions, evaluation criteria, indicators and definitions prescribed at EU level, in the current programming period programme authorities and evaluators are expected to go a step further and contribute even more to a comprehensive definition of the content of evaluation questions. The mid-term evaluation will show the extent to which programme authorities and evaluators have been able to fulfil this requirement and whether comparability can be ensured.

Common evaluation questions vs. programme specific questions

For the Commission the collection of common evaluation questions serves as an anchor and the “smallest common denominator” in synthesising the mid-term evaluations. The common evaluation questions therefore represent a good point of departure for comparing programme impacts. Even though evaluation reports for individual programmes, including annexes, may sometimes be very lengthy, the evaluation questions establish an analytical grid that makes evaluation

results accessible. The answers allow the chain of arguments to be traced back all the way to the data, thus ensuring that core statements of programme evaluation can be transferred to a European level.

Programme specific evaluation questions may be defined by MAs. Relevant questions should cover the particularities of the individual programme, while also investigating areas that appear to be especially relevant from the programme stakeholders’ perspective. Where evaluation questions are defined at a programme level, stakeholders will naturally identify more closely with the questions. At the same time the activity of defining questions encourages reflective processes that significantly contribute to strengthening the “evaluation culture”.

However, MAs frequently tend to emphasise questions with an exclusive implementation focus both at the output and the results levels. Questions on impacts then lose priority, and there is the risk that evaluators may be reduced to providing mere administrative support rather than independent impact evaluation. In order to avoid this problem and to improve comparability, programme specific evaluation questions should only complete common evaluation questions, but not replace them fully.

Conclusions

In view of the complexity of the mid-term evaluation task it is a much under-appreciated fact that evaluators for 94 Rural Development Programmes will concurrently start to analyse their programmes on the basis of pre-defined common evaluation questions. As part of the mid-term evaluation, both the programme authorities and the Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission will endeavour to establish the impacts of Rural Development Programmes and to draw conclusions for their future implementation and the new programming period. A further challenge for Member States and the Commission will ultimately be to demonstrate the added value of European funding programmes.

Find out more

- o [“Explanatory notes to the common evaluation questions and recommendations on mid-term evaluation reporting”](#).

Please feel free to contact the author with any comments or suggestions in relation to the subject.
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News in Brief

Fifth meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee

The fifth meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee took place on 2 July 2010 in Brussels and focused on several issues of high interest for the Member States when carrying out their mid-term evaluations (MTE).

Final findings of the “Leader and Quality of Life” Thematic Working Group of the Evaluation Expert Network were discussed with the Member States’ representatives

- This working paper explores possible ways of how to capture the impact of Leader and of measures to improve the Quality of Life in rural areas. The intermediary results of this working paper had been shared with the Member States representatives and Evaluation Expert Committee members already in the first half of 2010. In July the final findings were presented and Member States have been encouraged to field-test the approach during the MTE or the ex post. The final version of the working paper has now been published. For the full details read article on page 1.

Working paper on the “Evaluation of National Rural Network Programmes” shows evaluation approaches of four Member States, which had opted to have a National Rural Network Programme (NRNP)

- As these Member States (Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain) are required to evaluate their NRNPs under the same framework as all the other programmes, the working paper is intended to provide methodological support on how to capture the impacts of networks. In this respect the working paper also provides useful information for the other National Rural Networks (NRNs) which are, as clarified during the Evaluation Expert Committee meeting, required to evaluate their networks financed from technical assistance. One delegate from Italy gave a presentation about the approach to the evaluation of their Rural Network Programme. For further information about the Working Paper, read the article on page 6.

Activities concerning the assessment of the CMEF introduced by the Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development and the Evaluation Helpdesk An eye-catching and stimulating mindmap reflected the results and suggestions of the round table on “First experiences from the implementation of the CMEF”, which took place at the previous meet-



Photo: courtesy of Evaluation Helpdesk

The CMEF mindmap was presented to delegates at the Fifth meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee, 2 July 2010

ing of the Evaluation Expert Committee. This was followed by a presentation of the preliminary findings on the update of the SWOT analysis of the CMEF and the ongoing evaluation systems. The SWOT report will be available at the end of this year.

Explanatory notes to the Common Evaluation Questions (EQs) and recommendations on MTE reporting give Member States the last indications for conducting the MTE

- The discussions concerned practical challenges to answer EQs (e.g. when impacts are not yet observable) and how to structure the MTE report. A delegate from Germany presented a concrete approach of developing the MTE report. For further details, read the article on page 9.

Issues concerning the availability and accessibility of Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN) data clarified by the Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development

- The presentation by an official from Unit AGRI-L3 “Microeconomic analysis of EU Agricultural holdings” raised interesting discussions regarding the various provisions concerning confidentiality and access to data at national level, the use of the data by the EC and inclusion of additional variables to enhance the tool. For further information about FADN, consult the website: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rica/index_en.cfm

Next meeting of Evaluation Expert Committee is tentatively scheduled for 26 November 2010.

News in Brief

RuDI Rural Development Impacts research project

Simone Schiller, Kerstin Hülemeyer

Objectives and scope of the RuDI project

The 7th Framework Programme funded research project 'Assessing the Impacts of Rural Development Policies (incl. LEADER)' (RuDI)¹, which was carried out from February 2008 to October 2010, followed the rationale of looking at the Rural Development Policy cycle as a whole. It argued that the different phases of the policy process – namely design, delivery and evaluation – have a critical influence on programme impacts. It concluded that in this respect, a more thorough review of this process can provide valuable information in helping to ensure effective and efficient future support for rural development at the European level. It is this element of 'process', termed as the "forgotten middle", which was the main research focus of the project.

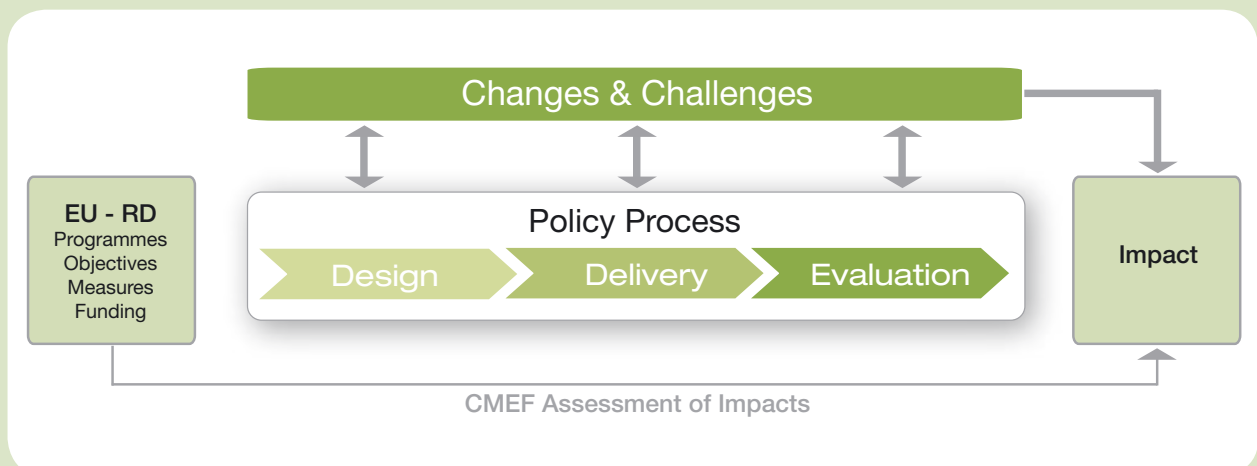
The overarching aim of the RuDI research work was to understand the impacts of Rural Development Policy processes at both national and regional levels within the 2007 to 2013 programming period. It looked beyond the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) in order to offer a wider and deeper analysis of the effects of Rural Development Policy, which included an examination of key institutional, social and capacity building processes and opportunities.

Rural Development Impacts – 20 European Case Studies

A key outcome of the research work are 20 case studies which were carried out in different Member States. These case studies provide a deeper understanding of how rural development policies and programmes actually work within their respective regional and local contexts. Each case study focuses on one specific challenge that rural development is currently facing in the European Union. The themes include: policy coordination at regional level, new delivery mechanisms for agri-environmental schemes, sustaining marginal rural areas or Leader mainstreaming.

Furthermore, the case studies reflect approaches to policy evaluation beyond the CMEF which are based on qualitative methods, use territorial approaches or focus on a specific aspect of rural development and emphasise in particular 'soft' or qualitative impacts. They provide valuable insights into policy process effects and illustrate good practice, and also in some cases more controversial examples of Rural Development Policy implementation which show for example a lack of institutional capacity or trust among stakeholders. All of the case studies are available at <http://www.rudi-europe.net/70.html>

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Source: RuDI project

Extended Policy Brief – main findings and policy recommendations

Based on a comparative analysis of the different policy processes in the 27 EU Member States and the case studies, the RuDi consortium has published its first “Extended Policy Brief”. The paper comes just in time to feed into the ongoing debate about the future of Rural Development Policy in the European Union.

The Policy Brief is divided into four main sections:

- Designing better policy at EU and national levels for the coming funding period
- Improving policy delivery both in the current and future funding periods
- Improving the evaluation of RD policies and supporting institutional learning
- In what direction should the future RD policy go? Key challenges for rural development

Each section summarises key findings and makes policy recommendations. These include:

- take a more strongly objective-led approach to policy;

- increase the degree of stakeholder participation in all aspects of programme design, delivery and evaluation;
- reach stronger policy coordination between different EU and national funds and;
- overcome sectoral boundaries in the delivery system of rural policy.

Opportunities for improvements in the evaluation of RD policies and support for institutional learning are also reflected in the paper. One example highlighted is transnational mutual learning platforms between national and regional authorities. The paper concludes with an outline of the key challenges – which include giving more consideration to the core needs of rural regions as well as making better use of evaluation results – to be tackled by rural development in the future.

The Policy Brief is available in 11 languages (English, German, Italian, Greek, Swedish, Estonian, Czech, Slovenian, Polish, French and Spanish) and is downloadable at:

http://www.rudi-europe.net/rudi_conference.html



RuDi team at the final conference in Brussels, 15th June 2010



Photo: courtesy of RuDi

Find out more

- o Contact RuDi project coordinator Simone Schiller schiller@ifls.de

News in Brief

Evaluation Expert Network's website is live!

On the 1st of July the Evaluation Expert Network launched a more elaborate and revamped public website at <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation>. A provisional website had already been set up in 2008 containing basic information about the network and its activities. The new website offers a one-stop-shop for evaluation stakeholders in the Member States and brings a number of improved services, amongst others:

- More up to date information about the activities of the Evaluation Helpdesk and its thematic work as well as links to evaluation-related events from the ENRD Event's Calendar.
- Detailed information on evaluation methodologies and complementary information on specific indicators (High Nature Value, GVA etc).
- Latest available information about the evaluation processes in the Member States (ex ante, mid-term, etc).
- A specific page dedicated to the National Evaluation Networks in Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain.
- An extended thematic FAQs section with links to relevant documents and websites.
- A glossary of 72 terms related to evaluation and rural development.

In the coming weeks and months, more content will be added to the website as the methodological work of the Evaluation Helpdesk progresses. Moreover, before the end of the year, the website will also be available



in French and German. The website should provide a useful information platform for anyone working in the field of the evaluation of Rural Development Programmes in the EU.

The Evaluation Helpdesk welcomes feedback and queries from all users of the website via the 'Contact Us' page.

Find out more

- o Add the welcome page to your favourites!
<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation>

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The Evaluation Helpdesk works under the supervision of Unit L.4 (Evaluation of measures applicable to agriculture, studies) of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development.

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