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

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INTERVIEW

“From programme implementation to programme evaluation, a change of perspective...” Interview with Adelina Dos Reis

INTERVIEWED BY VALÉRIE DUMONT

A couple of days ago, we had the opportunity to meet Adelina Dos Reis who has become the new Head of Unit responsible for Evaluation of measures applicable to agriculture; studies (AGRI L.4) in the Directorate-General Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission. We asked her a couple of questions related to her new functions, her past experiences and the future role of evaluation in rural development.



You start your assignment in a very busy period as the next programming period is being actively designed and the current one is getting to an end. We would like to know from your perspective as a former Head of Unit of a Geographic Desk more directly in contact with the Member States, which changes or achievements did the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) bring?

I have been involved in rural development from the very beginning; I have been a witness of the evolution. In my opinion, the

CMEF is one of most useful tools in implementing rural development. It has brought the Member States to really consider what they wanted to achieve with the subsidies and not only to see them as a “shopping list”. Most Member States have accepted and integrated this new approach as they could easily figure out how useful this framework could be for themselves. When a programme has to be modified the first thing to do is to think about why this needs to be done and how; and most of all how can the planned objectives still be reached with the modification. At first, the Member States overlooked

the indicator part of their programme while modifying it but very soon they understood the logic behind and realized that it was not just a demand-led approach but rather a way to help them reach their objectives and verify where they stood. In that respect, I think that all involved have managed to use this framework in an efficient and effective way. It was also very new to us as we did not have such a tool in the past. As I said earlier, I think that most Member States felt really concerned and took the whole process

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Adelina Dos Reis - Head of Unit - DG AGRIL4

seriously despite any political agenda. I would even add that Managing Authorities used this process to give even more substance to their message while addressing their political level to convince them that the development logic and the objectives set up were the real issues to tackle.

Another advantage that I have noticed over the years, for both the European Commis-

This is the real concept of ongoing evaluation: being useful.

sion services and the Managing Authorities, is that we are better able to show the benefits achieved through implementing our RDPs. Another important aspect was the support that Managing Authorities received in this period to help them in implementing the CMEF; they were not left alone and this has been very positive for them.

Considering your extensive experience in rural development and the particular focus you put into evaluation now, what are the most important lessons learned from this programming period for the next one?

This is a very important question that needs thorough reflection. I would select the following two points:

First, there is the concentration of development efforts where one has to figure out what needs to be done and the way it has to be done. This concentration of efforts is even more solid as it relies on a SWOT analysis, a needs assessment and an ex ante evaluation which are really the base for the whole process to continue working in the future. Apart from being a tool it also has a pedagogical dimension as it took some time for the Managing Authorities to be used to it and accept it. On top of this, taking into account the economic crisis and the fact that resources are not unlimited, Managing Authorities and the political level have realized that the evaluation framework could be a way for them to justify their political choices – as they could not subsidize everything they had to concentrate their efforts on one or the other issue.

Second is the contribution of ongoing evaluation; the idea that it does not take three years anymore to realize what has been achieved, what has failed, or what needs to be improved or better targeted, or even what has been the problem and why.

Ongoing evaluation allows for refining the objectives and I believe this is of utmost importance. As the programming period is spread over an extended period of time, circumstances change as we have experienced it in the last years. Even if the SWOT analysis is complete and coherent or the intervention logic is valid in a given year, this does not mean that the situation will remain unchanged three years later. This is where ongoing evaluation intervenes in re-adjusting what is not going well according to the initial plan. Without ongoing evaluation, you realize it too late.

This is in my opinion, one of the key lessons learned from this programming period for the next one. Of course one should not underestimate the ex post evaluation but there again ongoing evaluation prepares a good ex post evaluation. If nothing has been implemented beforehand, if no data is available, if no methods have been developed, the ex post evaluation cannot be carried out. Thanks to ongoing evaluation, gaps can be identified earlier and even filled up through a better data collection or methods.

Many of the Managing Authorities I had the chance to work with considered ongoing evaluation very seriously. They organized case studies, targeted research for some measures and finally adapted the measures according to the results of their work. Some have even organized on-site surveys among stakeholders from administration bodies on the simplification of the procedures in order to improve the objective of some measure. We met with them every year and they were telling us about their experience which I have always found very interesting. In the end, this is the real concept of ongoing evaluation: being useful. This is not a brochure or an abstract concept imposed to Member States but rather a useful tool that is fully integrated in the implementation process.

What will be the weight of rural development evaluation in the future?

I think we are on the right track and Member States have perfectly understood that evaluation is a tool to better target policy orientation; they have also understood that if no valid argument is put forward, no further development of the rural areas is possible. In fact, justification is the backbone of policy orientation.

The best way to justify your policy is to show that the objectives that were fixed have been reached. Money efficiency needs to be demonstrated there as this is taxpayers' money that has been used to help rural areas and its population. This is the reason why indicators are very important, as they help showing how money has been used. Otherwise budgetary authorities may be tempted to think that if a particular use of the money cannot be justified, then the money is not needed.

Understanding weight as a "burden" also merits some consideration. I think that we have made efforts to really simplify and refine the whole system. We drew lessons from the past, for instance using the already available data to lighten the administrative burden within the Managing Authorities and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the evaluation system. Once evaluation is integrated as a tool, it should not represent any further burden as it is a cost-benefit relation.

What are the major priorities that you intend to give to your work in the coming year?

First of all, I want to get to know my unit as this is a new type of work for me both in terms of content and persons. When I say my unit, I also include the Evaluation Helpdesk that I would like to get to know more and that I am planning to visit before the summer. But most of all, I would like to get to know the members of the Evaluation Expert Committee. It is the first time in my career that I will be chairing such a meeting and I believe this will be a very rewarding experience. I have had the opportunity to deal with Member States in the past and I have realized that we are all working towards the same objectives, we want to find common solutions and answers. In that respect I am very eager to meet them.

The second priority will be to reach the objectives of my unit which were fixed for 2013. We have many evaluations under process and we have to launch new ones that were planned and have been approved by our General Director in the evaluation plan for 2013. It is a very practical task but this needs to be achieved as well.

The third one is of course linked to all the contributions for 2014-2020, for instance the minimum requirements for the Evaluation Plan for the RDPs; the elaboration of the corresponding guidelines and other aspects linked to rural development. We are very much involved in developing the legal texts for the RDPs and of course evaluation in particular.

A fourth priority on a rather medium term is the preparation and reflections that we have been carrying out and will continue on the evaluation strategy of the CAP as a whole as foreseen in the regulation under article 110. This represents a big challenge as for the first time we will have to examine both pillars in order to evaluate the overall impact of the CAP. This is challenging and very interesting at the same time.

Linked to the future challenges, we have to set up a new task called coordination of the European Parliament Pilot Projects. Unfortunately, I cannot tell much about this at this stage but will keep you informed!

BIOGRAPHY

Adelina Dos Reis is a Portuguese national born in Angola who studied Political Science and also followed a Master of Accountancy, Audit and Finance. She speaks perfect French and English. She is married and is the happy mother of 2 children. She started her professional career in the European Commission in 1986 in the Directorate-General Financial Control and in Directorate-General Regional Policy. She has been involved in a range of programmes within the European Commission, particularly those related to regional and rural policy. She is not a newcomer in rural development as she was the Head of Unit of a Geographic Desk in charge of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) for Cyprus, Greece, Ireland and the United Kingdom as well as Deputy Head of Unit dealing with RDPs for other countries. Despite a very busy agenda and a total commitment to her work and co-workers, Ms. Dos Reis manages to dedicate some time to music and cycling regularly. Her favorite quote is from the internationally praised Nelson Mandela: "It always seems impossible until it is done. Let's do it".



EVALUATOR'S PERSPECTIVE



Improving SWOT and needs assessment as a basis to develop a sound RDP intervention logic

WRITTEN BY ROBERT LUKESCH

Most people are familiar with a simplified model of the water cycle: Surface water drains into water courses such as brooks, rivers and streams, which eventually flow into our seas and oceans. From there water evaporates, and forms clouds which precipitate rain, hail and snow back to the earth, thus initiating a new cycle. This circular model is taught to us in our early schooldays but is a useful picture for a range of complex phenomena, such as the intervention logic governing the cycle of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs).



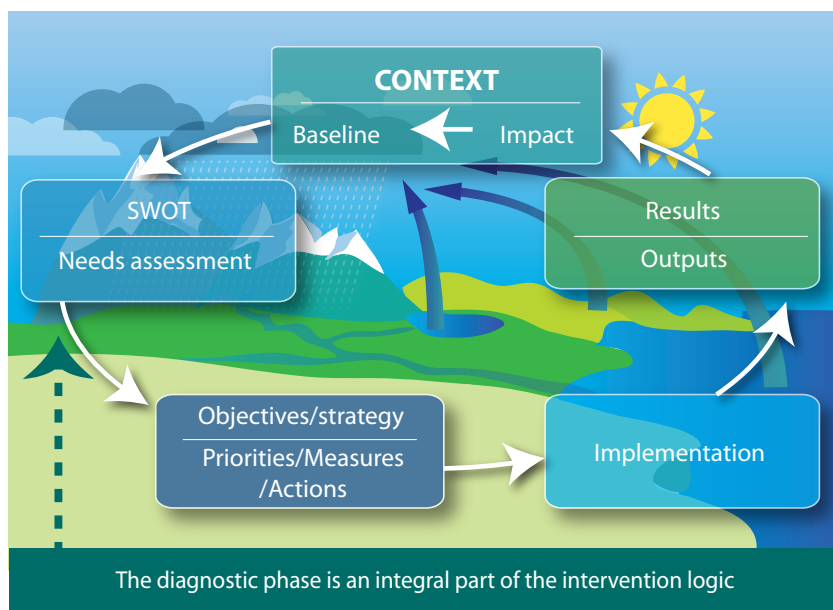
WHY SWOT, WHY INTERVENTION LOGIC?

The SWOT and needs assessment, which together form the diagnostic phase of the programme cycle, are the prerequisites of a sound intervention logic, not least because they are an integral part of it, in the same way as the upper courses of a river catchment are part of the entire water cycle.

An intervention logic is the rationale for public intervention and investment. It demonstrates how taxpayers' money will eventually generate public benefits (often referred to as 'public goods'), regardless of whom the direct beneficiaries might be. A justification for intervention is based on the ability of potential beneficiaries to make investments and conduct actions which, following the intervention logic, will generate public benefits. Justification is also based on the fact that in the absence of intervention such activities would not be undertaken by either the private or the non-profit sector.

THE ROLE AND FOCUS OF THE EX ANTE EVALUATION OF THE SWOT AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The *ex ante* evaluation of the SWOT and needs assessment constitutes the first



of the three main steps in the overall *ex ante* evaluation process, which is intertwined with the programming process (see the box below).

The SWOT and needs assessment are two distinctive steps in the diagnostic process. The needs assessment can be considered as the interface which

The threefold role of *ex ante* evaluation in the design of Rural Development Programmes:

- To match the RDP to the needs of the area (to make it relevant and effective);
- To fit the RDP into the bigger picture (concerning its specific contribution amongst other public interventions in the same area);
- To set the foundation for showing the RDP's achievements (through sharpening the indicator-based information and monitoring systems).

translates the situation analysis of the territory, an appraisal of the agricultural, food and forestry sector, and the environmental state of affairs, into the programme strategy.

The European Commission's Working Paper "Elements of strategic programming for the period 2014-2020" lays down the requirements of how to present the SWOT and needs assessment (see box).

To keep the planning process manageable and consistent, the Managing Authority (MA) is well advised to put in place a core team of generalists to bring together input from various domain experts, under each of the three main objectives and the six Rural Development priorities. Such a two-tier work organization should be mirrored by the team of *ex ante* evaluators.

THE METHODOLOGICAL FRAME

The *ex ante* evaluation of the SWOT and the needs assessment should address three key questions:

a) Do the programme makers really grasp the reality in the concerned area?

The situational analysis may appear utterly coherent and understandable. Yet, it will be inaccurate if it does not properly reflect the reality in the concerned area. It is therefore indispensable that the *ex ante* evaluator has excellent knowledge of the sectorial, environmental and territorial development

The **SWOT** shall consist of:

- An overall description (quantitative and qualitative) of the situation of the programming area concerned, based on significant Common Context Indicators. It should be a comprehensive narrative about the area and the situation as a whole. It is recommended to follow the logic of the three CAP objectives, namely viable food production, sustainable management of natural resources and climate action, and balanced territorial development.
- Four sections dedicated to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, featuring the most significant common and programme-specific indicators.

The **needs assessment** shall be presented by attributing each need identified to the relevant priority/focus area or cross-cutting theme (environment, climate and innovation).

challenges of the area concerned. The evaluator should ask:

- Does the SWOT provide an understandable and realistic picture of the geographical area, the sectors involved, the potential target groups, the state of the environment and the heterogeneity and imbalances which need to be addressed by development measures? Does it make the appropriate distinctions?
- What is the evidence base for the SWOT? Are all common context indicators covered? Are the programme specific indicators as SMART¹ as they can be?

b) How coherent is the diagnosis internally and externally?

For assessing the completeness and

¹ Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound

coherence of the SWOT and needs assessment, we propose to use the methodological framework described on page 6.

The questions posed in the upper central and upper right box cannot be assessed during the first stage of *ex ante* evaluation. They need to be answered, at earliest during the second step of the evaluation, in the light of the whole intervention logic (including strategic priorities and measures), and of the situation analysis carried out for other public programmes, particularly the European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds.

c) How has the diagnostic process been organised?

Stakeholder involvement is a core principle of the Partnership Agreement and all the programming processes in the five ESI

Assessment of the SWOT and needs assessment: pointers for desk officers

WRITTEN BY ZÉLIE PEPIETTE

The Helpdesk doesn't only interact with Member States and external stakeholders! On Thursday 13th June, the Evaluation Helpdesk and AGRI L4 ran a session for AGRI rural development desk officers entitled "Assessment of the SWOT and needs assessment: pointers for desk officers" which aimed to clarify the role of desk officers in the process of RDP preparation, to consider criteria on which to assess the SWOT and needs

assessment, and to provide desk officers with support to carry out this task.

The session included feedback from Alkmini Katsada, one of the desk officers who attended the Good Practice Workshop in Prague, an astute and insightful presentation from one of the rural development directors, Mihail Dumitru, on the role of desk officers in programme preparation, an overview of

the concept and purpose of the SWOT and needs assessment, what is expected, and how to work towards this by Zélie Peppiette, and a presentation from Eric Nieto of the Evaluation Helpdesk of suggested guiding questions to help in the assessment process. The well-attended and good-humoured session provided an opportunity to air many questions, and generated some appreciative feedback.



Funds. As well as the Managing Authority, other stakeholders should be systematically consulted with (beyond the scope of potential beneficiaries), such as implementing agencies and related experts, social and economic actors, and other public authorities and civil society representatives. Accompanied by clear and targeted information, their involvement may range from periodic consultation meetings to structured participation in focus groups and web-based interaction.

Therefore the evaluator should examine how the SWOT and needs assessment have been prepared. The evaluator can do this by asking the Managing Authority to give a concise description of the consultation process's methodological design. The description should include:

- Who was invited and who has participated, from the outset to the writing of the programme?
- To what extent did the design of the participative process enable (or inhibit) relevant actors' involvement?
- Have the interests of specific groups been taken into account?

FEATURES OF A WELL-FORMED EX ANTE EVALUATION OF THE SWOT AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Look at the links!

The SWOT should be a vivid narra-

Participation cannot be staged as a mechanical process. The essence of participation is the experience of being surprised. Participation and stakeholder involvement is about grasping the whole picture, about finding out what otherwise would not have been seen or would not have been seen in exactly the same way. Much too often the real potential of a programme is not utilised because the programme makers compile a menu of measures from one period to the next one, without looking at new challenges emerging, or considering the potential scope of alternative measures the EU regulation offers.

tive, highlighting relevant quantitative and qualitative information. It should present a comprehensive picture about the state of affairs in the programming area. Rarely can quantitative data or qualitative description achieve this in isolation.

Disconnected statements disguise important inter-linkages or ignore contradictions. It is not the contradiction *per se* which are significant; life is full of contradictions. Problems occur if contradictions are left without explanation. Reflecting apparent contradictions is often rewarding, as it may lead the exploring spirit off the beaten track, towards innovative solutions.

Structure the findings!

For the SWOT: We recommend establishing a common set of evaluation questions and answering each of these

questions in three distinctive steps:

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

For the needs assessment: The format we propose helps the reader to make the link back to the SWOT analysis and forward to the programme strategy. The structure should be repeated for each focus area. The *ex ante* evaluator could suggest the following to the programme makers:

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

The *ex ante* evaluator, an appreciative critic

The *ex ante* evaluator's assessment of the SWOT and needs assessment should lay the foundations for a more responsive and more effective programme. He or she should urge for in-depth analysis based on appropriate distinctions, should call for a sound information base featuring SMART indicators and relevant baseline values, and should make the diagnosis as clear as possible.

However the evaluator should also be pragmatic and remain focused on the

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING THE SWOT IN RESPECT OF COMPLETENESS AND COHERENCE

	UPSTREAM	DOWNSTREAM	LATERAL
External coherence	Does the SWOT cover all the EU objectives / priorities?	Are all the identified and prioritised needs translated into the strategy?	Is there any (in-) consistency with the SWOT and needs assessments carried out for other programmes?
Internal coherence	Are all the identified needs covered by the SWOT?	Are there any relevant SWOT findings not translated into needs?	Are there contradictions and inter-linkages in the SWOT and needs assessment which are not commented on?

essentials. The *ex ante* exercise should not involve pedantic criticism or impose one's views on the programme officer. Rather the *ex ante* exercise is about providing an austere, unspoilt external view, with an appreciative spirit and sincere intentions.



FIND OUT MORE

- > Working Paper Elements of strategic programming for the period 2014-2020
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/sfc2014/doc/wp_prog.pdf
- > Guidelines for the *ex ante* evaluation of 2014-2020 RDPs
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=7797A2AE-91CD-8D82-C9DB-D30E043439F1

Good Practice Workshop – The *ex ante* evaluation of SWOT analysis and needs assessment

In Prague on the 27th and 28th May 2013, the Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development, in close collaboration with the Czech Republic's Ministry of Agriculture, held a Good Practice Workshop entitled "The *ex ante* evaluation of SWOT and needs assessment – prerequisite for a sound RDP intervention logic".

The workshop was well attended, with 60 representatives from 15 Member

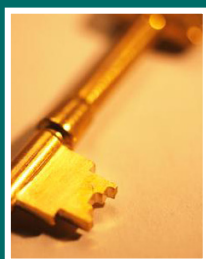
States participating, including Managing Authorities, evaluators, Paying Agencies and the European Commission. The objectives of the workshop were to discuss and exchange experiences on the SWOT analysis and needs assessment, to develop an understanding on common issues raised by the *ex ante* evaluation and to identify lessons learnt in order to enhance the quality of the SWOT analysis, needs assessment and intervention logic before finalizing an RDP.

The European Commission representatives outlined the legal requirements for the SWOT analysis, needs assessment, intervention logic and *ex ante* evaluation, and provided an overview of the state of play amongst Member States in the preparation of Partnership Agreements and RDPs for the next programming period. Robert Lukesch from the Evaluation Helpdesk informed participants about the core methodological and quality principles behind the implementation of the SWOT analysis and needs assessment, which are essential elements in the development of quality RDPs. Additionally, four case studies (Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany and Finland) were presented in order to illustrate different approaches applied when conducting the SWOT and needs assessment, the main issues raised from the *ex ante* evaluation feedback and the lessons learnt during the process.

During an open space session, participants discussed in working groups the specific challenges faced in the development of the SWOT analysis, needs assessment and the *ex ante* evaluation, and in a plenary session they presented practices they had identified to overcome difficulties.

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





MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY FOR 2014-2020

What you should know about the Evaluation Plan

WRITTEN BY VALÉRIE DUMONT



OVERALL OBJECTIVES

To ensure that sufficient and appropriate evaluation activities are undertaken and resources are available in particular:

- To provide the information needed for programme steering and to feed the enhanced Annual Implementation Report (AIR) in 2017;
- To provide the information needed to demonstrate interim progress to objectives and to feed the enhanced AIR in 2019;
- To ensure that data required for evaluation purposes is available at the right time in the appropriate format;
- To ensure that some minimum consistent evaluation results are provided for all Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) at key points, to allow aggregation across the EU of certain key information as specified in the legal framework.

1

OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSE OF THE EP

- Based on the overall EP objectives (see above).
- May also include additional specific programme-related objectives if the Managing Authority (MA) considers it as appropriate.

2

GOVERNANCE AND COORDINATION

- A brief description of the organisation of the monitoring and evaluation system for the RDP;
- Identification of the main bodies involved and their responsibilities;
- Explanation on how to organise the coordination of evaluation activities with RDP implementation.

3

EVALUATION TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES

- An indicative description of the evaluation topics and activities planned for the programming period to support effective implementation and achievement of objectives, and to report on programme achievement including (but not limited to) fulfilment of EU requirements.
- Coverage of the activities needed to ensure an adequate evaluation of the objectives of each of the RD priorities and any programme-specific elements (including the assessment of result and impact indicator values and analysis of net effects, thematic issues, and cross-cutting issues).
- Planned support for evaluation at LAG level.

4

DATA AND INFORMATION

- Any specific additional activities needed to fulfil the requirements of the monitoring and evaluation system.
- Descriptions of methodologies are NOT required.
- A description of the system to record, maintain, manage and report statistical information on RDP implementation and the provision of monitoring data for evaluation purposes.
- Identification of various data sources to be used.
- Identification of data gaps, potential bottlenecks and/or potential institutional issues related to obtaining the necessary data, and propose solutions.
- Although the systems may still be in the process of development while the RDP is being drafted, the section should

demonstrate the necessary planning has been done and that the work is underway to ensure that appropriate data management systems will be operational in due time.

5

TIMELINE

- Major milestones during the programming period (production of evaluation results for the enhanced AIR in 2017 and 2019 and the *ex post* evaluation).
- An indicative outline of the timing needed to ensure the availability of the necessary results on time.

6

COMMUNICATION

- Description on how the results of the evaluation activities will be made

available to the various target recipients (stakeholders, policymakers, etc.).

- Identification of the information channels and information needs for the different target groups.
- Description of the mechanisms established to follow-up on the use of evaluation results.

7

RESOURCES

- Description of the resources needed and foreseen to implement the plan (including an indication of administrative capacity, data financial resources and IT needs).
- Description of the capacity building activities foreseen to implement the EP properly.



FIND OUT MORE

- > Common Provision Regulation (CPR) Article 49(1) and 49(2)
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/pdf/2014/proposals/regulation/general/amended_general_proposal_22042013_en.pdf
- > Rural Development Regulation (RDR) Article 9
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/legal-proposals/com627/627_en.pdf

THEMATIC WORKING GROUP OF THE EVALUATION EXPERT NETWORK

In May 2012 the Evaluation Expert Network organised a Good Practice Workshop entitled "From Ongoing Evaluation towards the Evaluation Plan". One of the key messages from the workshop was that an Evaluation Plan (EP) could serve as an effective tool for Managing Authorities (MAs) to plan their evaluation activities during the programming period.

In March 2013, a Thematic Working Group composed of selected experts with extensive knowledge in evaluation and European Commission representatives was formed, with the purpose of developing non-binding guidelines and recommendations to MAs in response to the following challenges:

- Building and drafting the EP as part of the RDP;
- Implementing rural development evaluation, and;
- Reporting on the EP in the Annual Implementation Report (AIR).


In May 2013, a draft was presented to a sounding board composed of members of the Evaluation Expert Committee to ensure that the guidelines address the needs of the main target audience (MAs, Evaluators, Steering

Groups, Paying Agencies, Evaluation Units, etc.). At the next Evaluation Expert Committee meeting in June, the Evaluation Helpdesk will present a second draft of the guidelines in order to gather all comments from Member States' delegates. A final draft will be available on the website of the Evaluation Expert Network later in the summer.



French Managing Authorities get together in Paris on May 16th, 2013

WRITTEN BY **KATALIN KOLOS**


 The day was hosted by the Managing Authority in charge of the Mainland Rural Development Programme (PDRH - Programme de Développement Rural Hexagonal), with the support of the Association of French Regions (ARF). The aim of the meeting was to present the Evaluation Helpdesk's activities, to answer open questions on evaluation and to introduce the 2014-2020 common evaluation framework. The agenda was established by the French Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development on the basis of questions raised by EAFRD managers at regional and central levels. Representatives from regional authorities who will take on programming responsibilities for the 2014-2020 period were also invited to attend. Over 80 participants learnt more about the programming, monitoring and evaluation features of the new rural development programme.

Speakers from the European Commission and the Evaluation Helpdesk set the scene and explained the various mechanisms governing EAFRD, by answering questions from participants on such topics as the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF), the Partnership Agreement, the Indicators Plan, the design of Rural Development Programmes, the *ex ante* evaluation logical framework, the Strategic Environmental Assessment, the Evaluation Plan, and the Annual Implementation Report.

Some issues are yet to be resolved, but the day's exchanges helped to clarify many aspects of the future programming period, and to highlight elements of simplification compared to the current programme.

Expert mission to Croatia

WRITTEN BY **JELA TVRDONOVA**

 On 1st of July 2013 Croatia will become the 28th Member State of the European Union. The Croat Managing Authority (MA) has to develop and submit their draft Rural Development Programme (RDP) for 2014-2020 to the Commission for consultation like all the other MS. In the process of drafting the RDP, the MA is revising their draft SWOT and needs assessment based on feedback received from the *ex ante* evaluator. The SWOT and needs assessment will guide decisions on the programme's strategy, intervention logic and the choice of rural development measures.

During consultation, Croat rural development stakeholders expressed a desire to exchange information with public actors involved in the preparation of RDPs in other Member States.

The European Commission seeks to support candidate countries in the application and enforcement of EU legislation

through an instrument entitled 'Technical Assistance and Information Exchange' (TAIEX). In collaboration with the Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, TAIEX

prepared a two-day mission, which took place on 5th and 6th June 2013 in Zagreb.

During the mission, two representatives from the Austrian RDP's MA, Markus Hopfner (Deputy Head of the MA) and Otto Hofer (Head of Evaluation Unit), shared the Austrian experiences in the design and *ex ante* evaluation of the programme, with a specific focus on the SWOT analysis, needs assessment, establishment of the intervention logic and set-up of the indicator plan.

A series of practical examples and interactive exercises organised by Helpdesk staff enabled the Croat MA representatives to learn from Austrian experiences, discuss their own challenges and identify solutions in the development of the programme's intervention logic, linked to the SWOT analysis and needs assessment. Discussions also focused on the development of a sound indicator plan to measure the RDP's performance during and after the programming period.

In total 25 participants engaged in the mission, from various departments of the current IPARD MA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance in Rural Development) and the future RDP MA, Evaluation Unit, Paying Agency, Monitoring Committee and evaluators. The organizers received very positive feedback from participants at the end of the mission.





Good Practice Workshop - Specific challenges in using common RD indicators at regional level

WRITTEN BY **ENRIQUE NIETO**



A Good Practice Workshop (GPW) was organized by the Evaluation Helpdesk in close cooperation with the Istituto Nazionale di Economia Agraria (INEA) and the Ministero delle Politiche Agricole Alimentari e Forestali of Italy. A total of 59 participants from 10 countries attended, representing the Evaluation Expert Committee, Managing Authorities, evaluators, data providers and the European Commission (EC).

The meeting aimed to discuss specific challenges in the use of common indicators in regional RDPs, and in particular to assess the availability of regional information to report against Common Context Indicators (CCIs), and the feasibility and transferability of appropriate approaches to bridge potential data gaps.

Representatives from the European Commission outlined the role of CCIs in delivering compliance with the 2014-2020

programming period's legal requirements. Three case studies (Italy, Spain and Portugal – Azores) highlighted the main challenges faced by regional RDPs in providing data on certain context indicators (e.g. HNV, FBI, Water quality) as well as approaches applied to overcome challenges (e.g. the use of the National Rural Network as the coordination body for data collection, the conduction of specific *ad hoc* studies, etc.).

Through an interactive working session, the main challenges in collecting regional data were discussed and a series of recommendations to enhance the availability of CCI data were developed by participants.

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

External Event: The 7th Evaluation Subcommittee meeting in Spain

WRITTEN BY **ENRIQUE NIETO**



On 25th March 2013, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment of Spain hosted the 7th Evaluation Subcommittee meeting in Madrid.

The meeting involved 42 participants, including representatives of Spanish RDP Managing Authorities (MAs), evaluators, other Ministry representatives, the Evaluation Helpdesk and the European Commission (EC).

The meeting aimed to present the main outcomes from the Good Practice Workshop on 6th and 7th March 2013 in Rome, and to provide further information regarding the use of Common Context Indicators (CCIs) and proxy indicators in Spain. Representatives of the EC and the Evaluation Helpdesk were invited to provide technical support.

In the first part of the meeting, Paloma Cortes, from Unit L.2 of DG AGRI, presented an overview on the availability of data for Common Context Indicators in all Spanish regions, clarified the definition of rural typologies applied by the EC, and presented the draft tool for CCI data extraction. The presentation was followed by a Questions and Answers session where participants had the opportunity to raise open issues on the topics presented. In particular, the EC provided more exten-

sive explanation regarding the definition of specific CCIs and the methodologies for their calculation.

Enrique Nieto presented the content of the draft working paper "Defining proxy indicators for Rural Development Programmes", developed by the Evaluation Helpdesk in cooperation with Unit L.2 of DG AGRI. The draft definition of proxy indicators for the 2014-2020 programming period, examples of proxy indicators applied in different RDP contexts, and an indicative tool for the identification of quality proxy indicators, were all presented. Participants provided feedback and outlined specific issues in need of further clarification from the document. Their input was used for the development of the final version of the document which was shared with all Member States during the 15th Evaluation Expert Committee meeting of the 30th April 2013.

The concept of proxy indicators was generally well accepted and considered a suitable approach to overcome many of the CCI data gaps found across Spanish regions. Furthermore, MAs agreed on the organization of working groups in order to identify adequate proxy indicators which could be applied by all the Spanish regions.

The 14th and 15th meetings of the Evaluation Expert Committee

WRITTEN BY MARGOT VAN SOETENDAEL



Representatives from Member States, officials from the European Commission and staff of the Evaluation Helpdesk met in Brussels on the 20th March and 30th April 2013 for the fourteenth and fifteenth meetings of the Evaluation Expert Committee. This article reports on some of the key topics discussed and the main achievements arising from the meetings.

Common Context Indicators (CCIs)

For the 2014-2020 programming period Member States are now equipped with:

1. An exhaustive list of CCIs;
2. A database including the values of CCIs;
3. An extraction tool to facilitate the compilation of CCI tables for the new Rural Development Programmes (RDPs);
4. A working paper on the utilisation of CCI proxy indicators when dealing with data gaps.

Member States were involved in discussing the relevance of the proposed list of CCIs, the level of detail to be included in the database and the data gaps for some CCIs.

The outcomes from the [6th Good Practice Workshop "Choosing and using context indicators for Rural Development"](#), held in Lisbon on 15th November 2012, fed into the consultation process and provided guidance on the practical use of CCIs during SWOT analysis, needs assessment and the RDP's *ex ante* evaluation.

Evaluation Plan, minimum requirements and guidance.

The Evaluation Plan (EP) is a new element to be submitted by Member States as part of their 2014-2020 RDP. The EP builds on the experience of ongoing evaluation gained during the current programming period, and will help ensure

that Member States plan and manage evaluation activities in a timely fashion for the forthcoming programming period. The implementing act for the Rural Development Regulation (RDR) will specify the EP's minimum requirements which need to be met in order for the RDP to be approved. A discussion between Member States and the Commission over the proposed minimum requirements started in late 2012, and the development of EP guidelines by a Thematic Working Group of the Evaluation Helpdesk kicked off in early 2013. The guidelines will support Member States to:

1. Draft the EP as a chapter of the RDP;
2. Implement the EP in practice;
3. Report on evaluation activities.

The guidelines are of a non-binding nature. A draft version will be shared with Member States by the end of June, although finalisation can only be after publication of the implementing act.

Good Practice Workshops organised by the Evaluation Helpdesk

The outcomes of the Good Practice Workshop "[Specific challenges in using common RD indicators at regional level](#)", held in Rome on 6th – 7th March 2013, and an invitation to the Good Practice Workshop "[Experiences with preparation of the SWOT analysis, needs assessment and ex ante evaluation – the prerequisite for a sound RDP intervention logic](#)", held in Prague on 27th and 28th May 2013, were communicated to the members of the Committee.



FIND OUT MORE

> For further information on the two Good Practice Workshops, please visit the section on our [website](#)

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

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