



European Evaluation Network
for Rural Development



European Commission
Agriculture and Rural Development

SYNTHESIS REPORT ON FOCUS GROUP RESULTS 2011

APRIL 2012

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The European Evaluation Network for Rural Development (abbreviated to “Evaluation Expert Network”) operates under the responsibility of the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development. The overall aim of the Network is to increase the usefulness of evaluation as a tool for improving the formulation and implementation of rural development policies by helping to establish good practice and capacity building in the evaluation of Rural Development Programmes up until 2013.

Additional information about the activities of the Evaluation Expert Network and its Evaluation Helpdesk is available on the Internet through the Europa server (<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/>)

**SYNTHESIS REPORT ON
FOCUS GROUP RESULTS
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEQs	Common Evaluation Questions
CMEF	Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
FADN	Farm Accountancy Data Network
FG	Focus Group
LAG	Local Action Group / Leader
MA	Managing Authority
MS	Member States
MTE	Mid-Term Evaluation
MC	Monitoring Committee
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NRN	National Rural Networks
PA	Paying Agency
RDP	Rural Development Programme

1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout 2010 all Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) underwent a comprehensive mid-term evaluation. For several months evaluators, Managing Authority officials, national statistics offices and beneficiaries were engaged in a demanding exercise of designing an evaluation, collecting data, analysing information and finally providing answers to the crucial questions: Did our programme perform well and meet its objectives? What is the outcome? And at what cost did it come?

By the end of 2010, **94 Evaluation Reports** had been delivered to the European Commission, including many findings, conclusions and recommendations on programme design, single measures, programme performance and, last but not least, monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

Putting these recommendations into practice is not a trivial task; they can be methodologically demanding, time-sensitive and are sometimes complex. In late 2011 the Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development organised **Focus Groups (FGs) in 24 Member States** and gave them the task of exploring how the mid-term evaluations' recommendations on monitoring and evaluation are addressed throughout Europe.

In order to prepare the discussions, the Geographic Experts of the Helpdesk prepared an **inventory of recommendations** specifically on M&E and organised, together with the Managing Authorities of the Rural Development Programmes, half day meetings to discuss the relevant recommendations, assess their complexity and urgency, prioritise them and finally define some practical steps for putting them into good use.

The findings of the Focus Groups in relation to M&E of RDPs have been summarized in **country specific reports** that have been shared with the respective Managing Authorities and responsible Geographic Desks of DG Agriculture and Rural Development in late 2011/early 2012. The synthesized findings of this report have been presented to the Member States on 19 January 2012 at the Evaluation Expert Committee Meeting in Brussels. This report seeks to distil from the Focus Group discussions the **main trends** and to identify the **most common priorities** across the countries. Inevitably, some of the Focus Groups specificities got lost in the synthesizing process and are only reflected in the country specific reports.

2 TASKS AND REALISATION OF THE 2011 FOCUS GROUPS

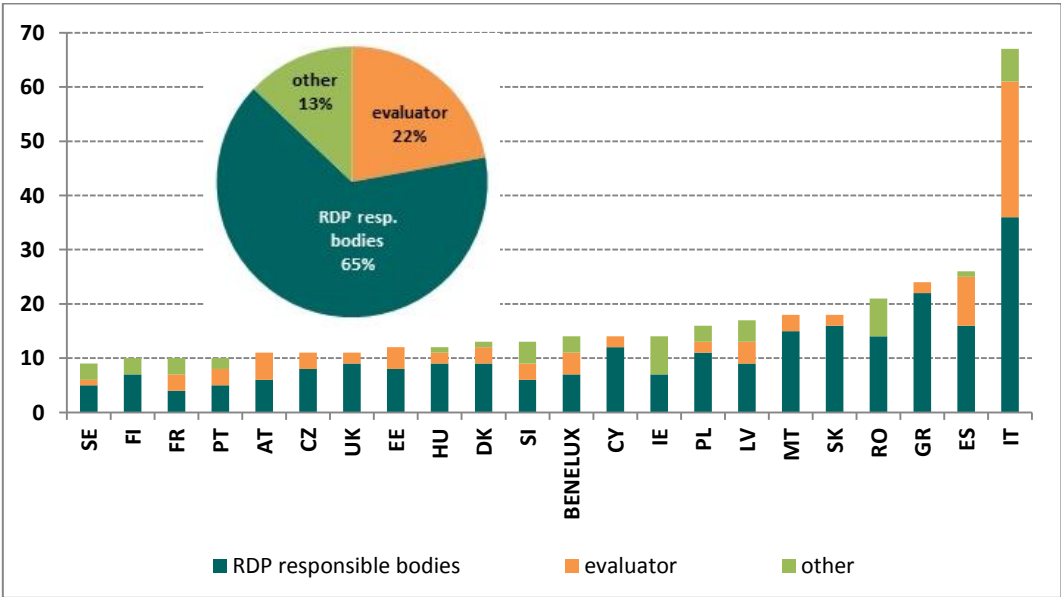
As part of a yearly exercise, from **October 2011 to December 2012**, the Geographic Experts of the Evaluation Helpdesk organized Focus Groups in 24 Member States (except Germany, Lithuania and Bulgaria) to collect needs, ideas, opinions and experiences of evaluation stakeholders. The topic of the 2011 Focus Groups was: The mid-term evaluations’ **recommendations on monitoring and evaluation** and their follow-up in the context of ongoing evaluation. The key questions were: What are the main practical recommendations? How will they be addressed in the current programming period and beyond? How can the Helpdesk and other relevant actors support the improvement of monitoring and evaluation of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) in the future?

The Focus Groups in 2011 were **different** from the previous years in so far as the topic chosen was of direct relevance for the RDPs and thus more practical issues could be discussed. Moreover, EC Desk Officers also participated in some of the meetings. Bringing together the stakeholders in evaluation with the EC desk officers and fostering exchange is a new approach which will be extended in future.

2.1 Who participated in the Focus Groups?

In total, **370 persons** participated in the Focus Group meetings to discuss the mid-term evaluation recommendations. The size and composition of the Focus Groups in the Member States is presented in Figure 1: the category “RDP responsible bodies” includes Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, National Rural Network representatives, Monitoring Committee members and implementing bodies. The category ‘other’ includes EC desk officers, experts from research institutes, data providers and other evaluation stakeholders. Looking at the size of each group, a minimum of 10 participants was reached (with the exception of Sweden with 9 participants) and even in some small Member States, (e.g. Malta and Slovakia), up to 18 stakeholders participated. This gives some indication of an increasing interest to actively discuss and contribute to evaluation topics. In Italy, the Focus Group meeting was combined with an event organized by the Ministry of Agriculture Food and Forestry Policies which dealt with the feedback letters to MTE reports of DG AGRI desk officers and therefore it reached a size of 67 participants for 21 regional programmes.

Figure 1: Focus Group size and composition in the Member States



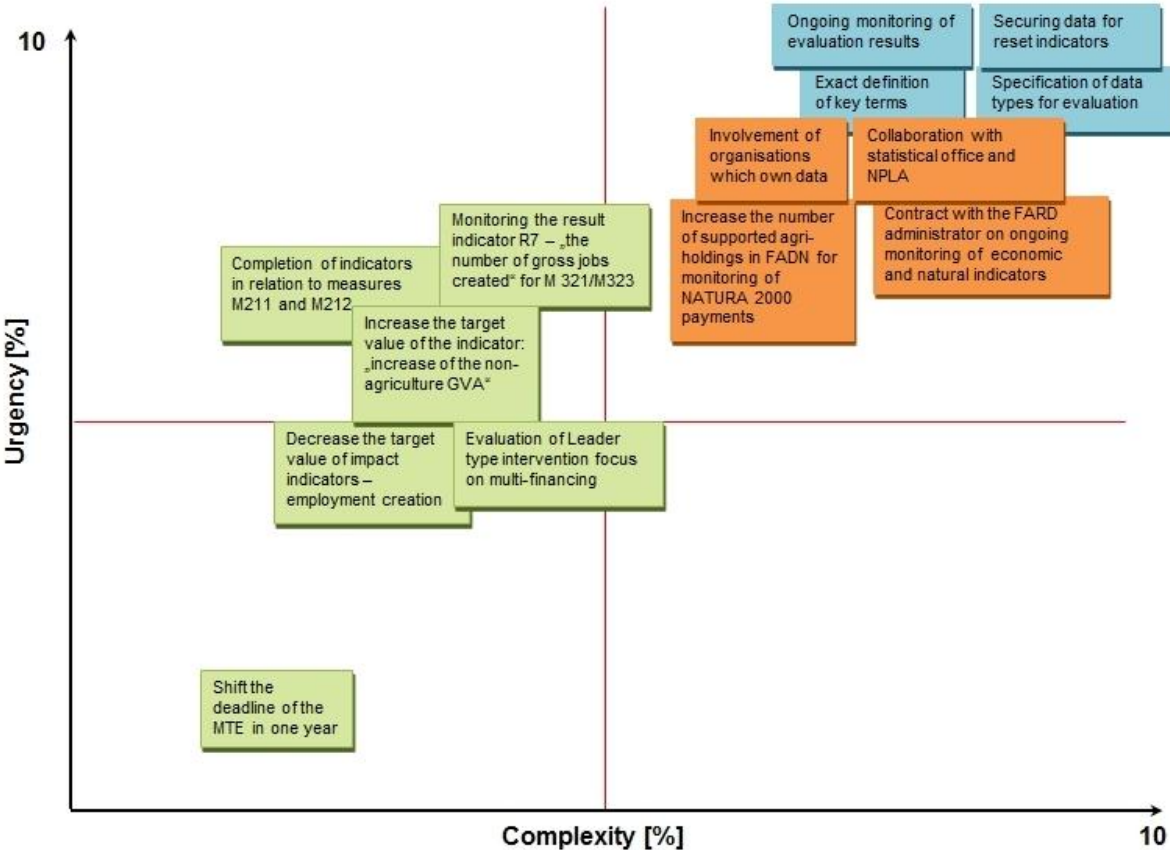
New for 2011 was the involvement of EC desk officers in the following Focus Groups: ES, FR, PL, PT, and BENELUX (four programmes including Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, the Netherlands and Luxembourg). This was seen as a unique opportunity to build up relationships between the RDP evaluators, Managing Authorities of different Member States and the European Commission. Taking a closer look at the composition of the Focus Groups, the category 'RDP responsible bodies' is most prevalent (65%) and the participation of evaluators is observed in almost all of the Focus Groups (with the exception of Finland, Ireland and Romania).

2.2 Specific method used to conduct the Focus Groups

The Helpdesk prepared a common methodology to facilitate the Focus Groups, assist the participants and – last but not least – delivered comparable results across the Member States. This step-by-step methodology comprised an introductory part giving an EU-wide picture on monitoring and evaluation recommendations, an interactive session aiming at the prioritisation of the specific programme recommendations, a group work session for the formulation of guiding questions and a final step for the definition of solutions and best practices. In detail, the method used included the following steps.

- ▶ The meetings were animated by the **Geographic Experts** of the Evaluation Helpdesk in an interactive way based on a common methodology.
- ▶ A core element of the method consisted in a **compilation** of relevant MTE recommendations derived from the MTE report and the feedback letter sent by the EC desk officer.
- ▶ In advance of the focus group meeting, the Geographic Experts prepared an **inventory of MTE recommendations** on monitoring and evaluation. This was not the case in multi-programme Focus Groups in IT, ES, PT, and BENELUX where relevant recommendations across the programmes were compiled during the workshop.
- ▶ The full list of recommendations on monitoring and evaluation from MTEs formed the basis of the discussion. The participants of the FGs **discussed the complexity and urgency** of this (long) list of recommendations. The recommendations were scored against the urgency and complexity criteria and plotted graphically using a Cartesian diagram. The groups then prioritised the recommendations to be further discussed during the meeting. Accordingly, only selected recommendations (a short list of the most relevant ones) have been taken into further consideration by the FGs.

Figure 2: Example of complexity and urgency plot of MTE recommendations in Czech Focus Group



3 FOCUS GROUPS' FINDINGS

3.1 Synthesizing the findings

This section describes how the Focus Group findings (often interrelated in nature and addressing a number of issues) have been processed and synthesised in order to provide answers to the following questions: What are the most relevant recommendations identified by the Focus Groups? What is the overall progress in addressing the challenges posed by the recommendations?

As a **first step**, all recommendations listed by the Focus Groups were collected in a table. Information on the priorities set by the Focus Groups was included.

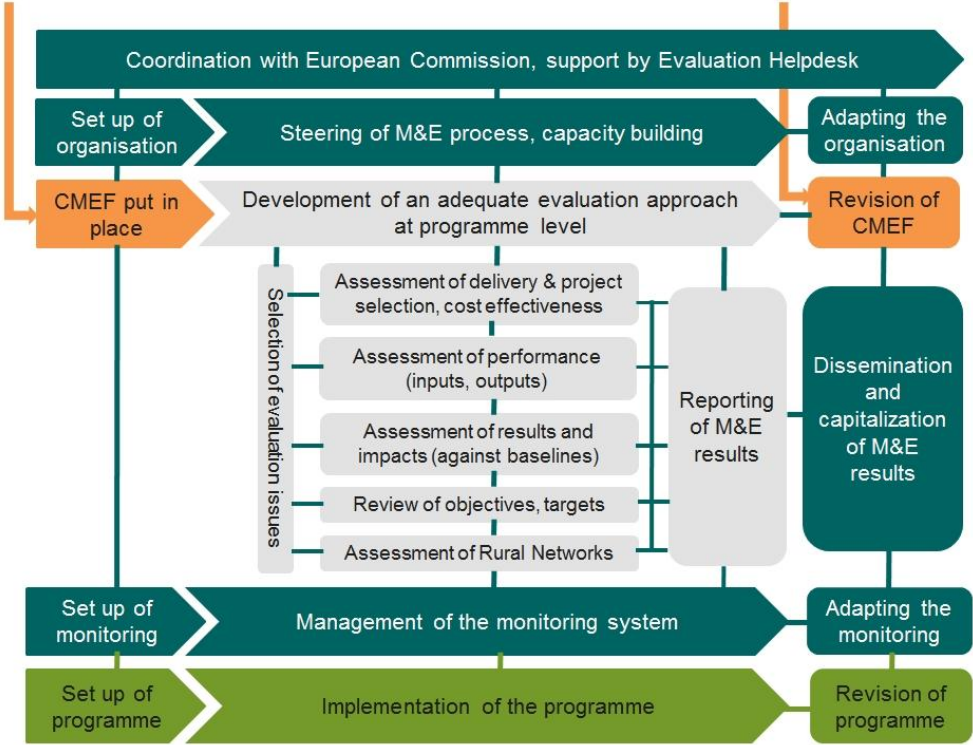
As a **second step**, the recommendations were grouped and rationalised around common themes. In this step the main activity fields, that are considered to be necessary to monitor and evaluate a programme in the programme cycle, were used as a conceptual basis. These M&E twelve activity fields represent the “**building blocks**” to establish and conduct a sound monitoring and evaluation system at programme level.

The twelve main M&E activity fields are:

1. Organisational settings & resourcing (e.g. allocation of human resources in M&E)
2. Steering of ongoing evaluation process, provision of accompanying capacity building in M&E
3. Develop an adequate evaluation approach at programme level
4. Design and management of the monitoring system
5. Assessment of delivery and project selection; cost effectiveness of delivery
6. Assessment of programme performance (input, outputs)
7. Assessment of results & impacts
8. Review of programme objectives and targets
9. Assessment of other specific issues such as National Rural Networks
10. Reporting
11. Dissemination and capitalization of evaluation results
12. Coordination with European Commission, support by Evaluation Helpdesk

Figure 3 below outlines all main M&E activities during the RDP programme cycle and their interrelations during the programme implementation (highlighted in green).

Figure 3: Main activity fields in the programme cycle to monitor and evaluate a Rural Development Programme



The **major processes** are presented (in blue) at the top, bottom and right side of the diagram, they include (i) the design and management of the monitoring system; (ii) the steering of the ongoing evaluation process including capacity building; and (iii) communication and coordination with the European Commission and iv) dissemination and capitalisation of evaluation results.

In the middle of the diagram **major issues** related to the evaluation exercise (in grey) are presented, i.e. the development of an adequate evaluation approach for the programme in its specific operating environment which is strongly interlinked with evaluation issues such as the assessment of the delivery system, the assessment of the programme performance or the assessment of results and impacts.

The guiding Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) represents a cornerstone in this activity landscape (in red).

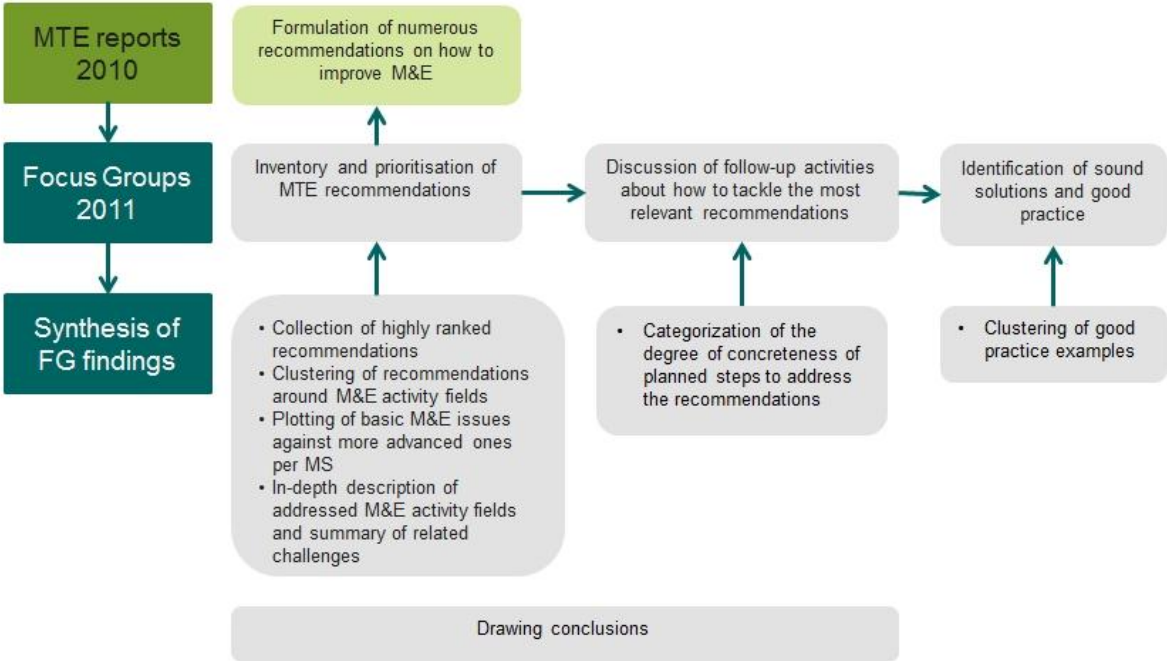
In the **next step** the extracted recommendations have been referenced (in iterative steps) to the twelve M&E activity fields. As a result the number of recommendations per activity field were identified and provided a good picture about the challenges the Focus Groups’ stakeholders are facing in setting up and conducting monitoring and evaluation (e.g. more of a focus on basic organisational challenges or on advanced result & impact challenges). Here a **consistent picture** on the “development status” could be given.

Furthermore, the **progress achieved** in the implementation of the recommendations was systematically assessed. To this end, the concreteness of planned steps to implement the recommendations has been appraised by means of an ordinal scale (high, middle, low concreteness). It was assessed to what extent the content of the follow-up activity is clear; if a responsible body exists and if a time plan was established. However, the information on follow-up activities was unbalanced and gives only a first indication about the state of implementation. This is also the case as regards the collection of good practice approaches. One has to keep in mind that the Focus Group exercise was

limited in time, in some cases several RDP programmes were treated at the same event. Moreover, the starting points differed among the Focus Groups.

To summarize the following figure outlines the working steps taken to carry out the synthesis of FG findings (based on the 2010 MTE reports).

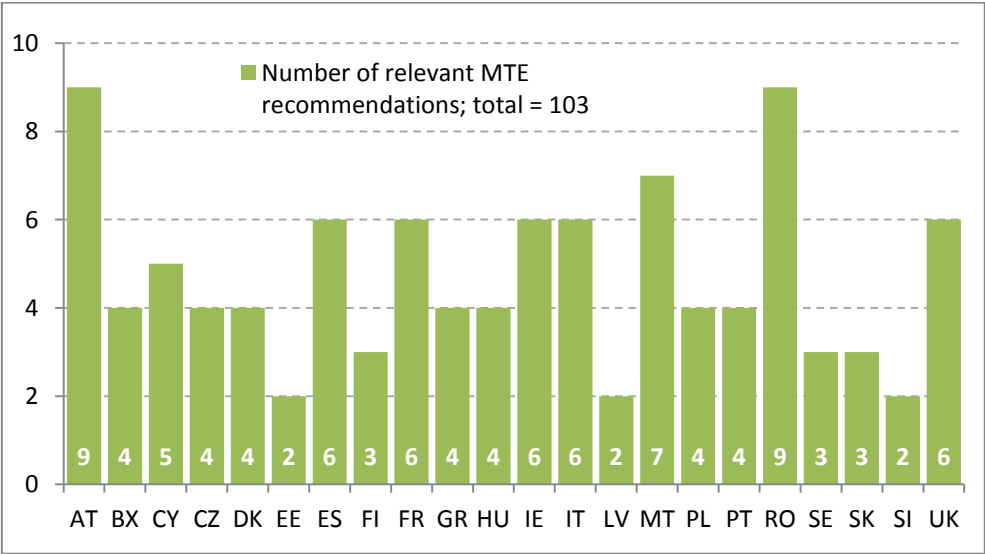
Figure 4: Working steps



3.2 Findings on number and type of recommendation

More than **100 recommendations** related to the specific issue of M&E were identified by the FGs as being the most relevant ones. This number is a subset of the full list of recommendations contained in the MTE reports (which may exceed 1,000). Between 2 and 9 recommendations were highly ranked by the Focus Groups.

Figure 5: Number of most relevant MTE recommendations per Focus Group



While each Rural Development Programme is unique in its native operating environment, some M&E activity fields were addressed very prominently throughout all FGs. The **most prominent and top priority M&E activity fields** across Focus Groups were the following (the number of related recommendations is indicated in brackets):

- ▶ Steering of the ongoing M&E process, provision of accompanying capacity building (16)
- ▶ Develop an adequate evaluation approach at programme level (23)
- ▶ Design and management of the monitoring system (21)
- ▶ Assessment of results & impacts (against baselines) (25)

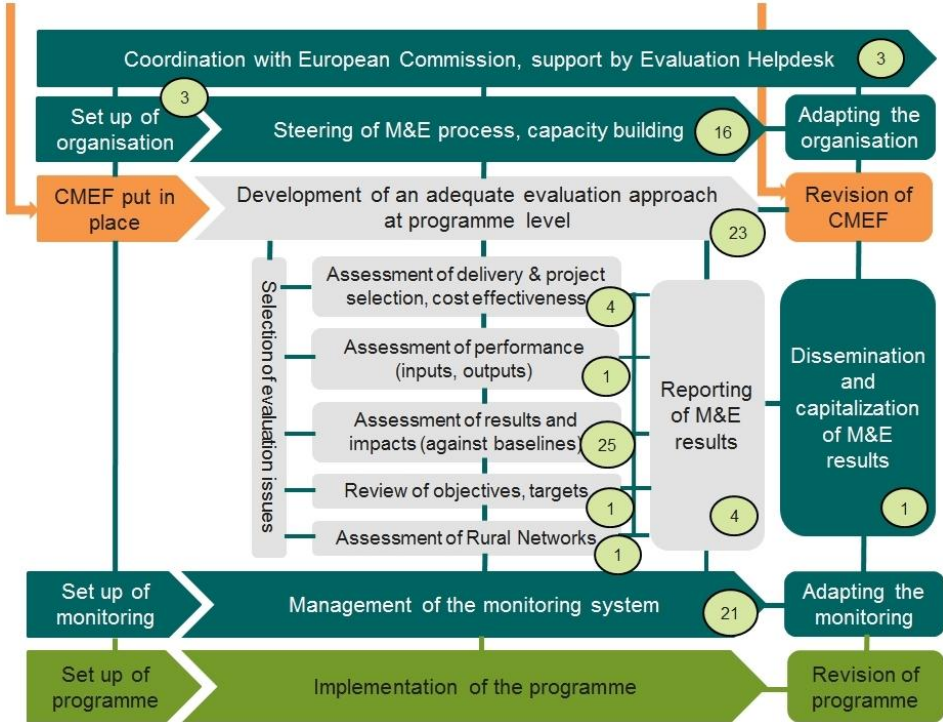
The proper assessment of results and impacts of RDP implementation is a **major evaluation topic** and high on the agenda of the Focus Groups. Most of the recommendations relate to that issue. However, the **fundamental prerequisites** for an effective M&E were also frequently addressed, i.e. the steering process, capacity building and setting up monitoring systems.

Important in a specific programme context were the following M&E activity fields (from highest to lowest):

- ▶ Assessment of delivery and project selection; cost effectiveness of delivery (4)
- ▶ Reporting (4)
- ▶ Organisational settings and resourcing (3)
- ▶ Coordination with the European Commission, Support by Evaluation Helpdesk (3)
- ▶ Assessment of programme performance (1)
- ▶ Review of objectives and targets (1)
- ▶ Assessment of other specific issues such as National Rural Networks (1)
- ▶ Dissemination and capitalization of evaluation results (1)

The number of recommendations referenced to the M&E activity fields is presented in the following figure.

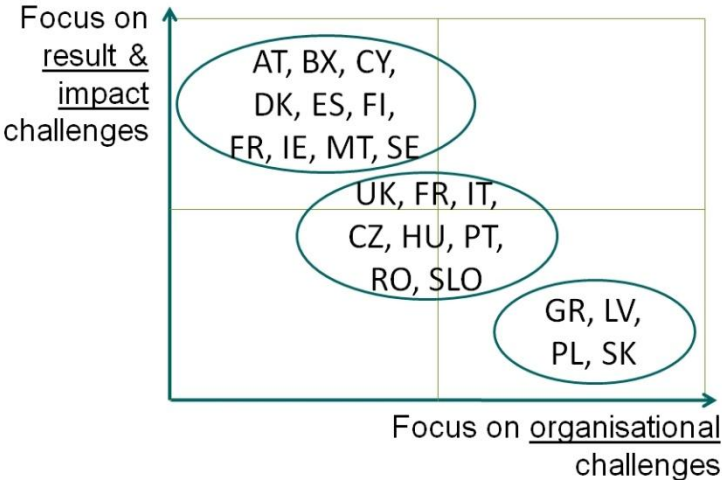
Figure 6: Number of recommendations per M&E activity field



Interestingly, the **four M&E activity fields** that were most frequently addressed by FG recommendations are related to two topics. On the one hand, they address **basic** (but still complex) **processes** which form the groundwork for the evaluation exercise (steering of the ongoing evaluation process and the design and management of the monitoring system). On the other hand, many recommendations address more **advanced methodological issues** of the evaluation exercise such as the assessment of results and impacts. This is a clear indication that even in an advanced stage of programme implementation basic tasks in M&E are still a challenge for some programmes, and methodological questions are not the main concern. Monitoring is still a demanding and complex challenge that should not be underestimated. The M&E activity fields as well as related recommendations and challenges are described in more detail in section 3.3.

Recommendations can thus be related to **basic organisational processes** forming the groundwork for the evaluation exercise and to more **advanced methodological issues**. When **plotting** the different FG findings by recommendations related to organisational challenges against result and impact related recommendations, **three clusters** emerge. These are presented in Figure 7. A **first group** of Member States addressed **primarily organisational challenges** such as organisational settings, steering of the M&E process and management of the monitoring system. This group of a limited number of countries is indicated in the lower-right sector of the Cartesian diagram. A **second group** of Member States focused primarily on **result and impact challenges**. They identified recommendations on developing an adequate evaluation approach and assessment of results and impacts as high priority. As implementation of the programme advances a shift of focus to evaluation of results & impacts can be expected. This second group of Member States – shown in the upper-left sector – is in line with this expectation. Most of the countries belong to this group. An **in-between** group in the middle of the diagram tackled a **combination** of basic and methodological challenges in conducting a sound monitoring and evaluation system. This is the second biggest group of countries.

Figure 7: Scope of discussion of M&E challenges



This grouping of Member States to basic and more advanced M&E challenges, as illustrated above, represents a simplified picture of Focus Group findings. The exact mix of recommendations per country and per M&R activity field is demonstrated in the following table.

Table 1: Number of recommendations per Focus Group, clustered by type of activity field

M&E activity fields	Number of recommendations per Focus Group																				Total per activity field		
	AT	BX(*)	CY	CZ	DK	EE	ES	FI	FR	GR	HU	IE	IT	LV	MT	PL	PT	RO	SE	SI		SK	UK
1. Organisational settings & resourcing	1								1	1													3
2. Steering of ongoing evaluation process, accompanying capacity building			1	1						1	1	1	2	1		1	1	3	1		2		16
3. Development of an adequate evaluation approach	2	2	1	1			1	2	3		1	2	1		2		1	1	1	1		1	23
4. Management of the monitoring system	1	1	1	1	1		1		1	2	1		1	1		1	2	3		1	1	1	21
5. Assessment of delivery and project selection; cost effectiveness of delivery	1												1		1							1	4
6. Assessment of performance (input, outputs)												1											1
7. Assessment of results & impacts (against baselines)	3	1	2		3	2	3				1	2	1		2			2	1			2	25
8. Review of objectives and targets							1																1
9. Assessment of other specific issues such as National Rural Networks	1																						1
10. Reporting				1											2							1	4
11. Dissemination and capitalization of evaluation results																1							1
12. Coordination with EC, Support by Evaluation Helpdesk								1	1							1							3
Total per FG	9	4	5	4	4	2	6	3	6	4	4	6	6	2	7	4	4	9	3	2	3	6	103
(*) BX means BENELUX, including RDPs of BE_Flanders, BE_Wallonia, Netherlands, Luxembourg																							
Green color indicates the four M&E activity fields with the highest number of recommendations																							

3.3 In-depth description of monitoring and evaluation activity fields and related challenges

During the course of the synthesis work the numerous recommendations selected by the Focus groups were grouped around twelve M&E activity fields (see table 1 above) and – if proved to be useful – in sub activity fields. In the following section the challenges related to each of the M&E activity field are summarized. In addition the Focus Group specific findings are listed in order to provide an authentic picture of FG findings.

The order in which the M&E activity fields are presented corresponds with table 1.

#1.	Organisational settings and resourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Allocate sufficient human resources/budget in M&E ▶ Increase human capacities in evaluation within MA ▶ Adapt evaluation activities in line with newly identified needs ▶ Manage objectivity of evaluation
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This is a specific issue in a limited number of Focus Groups. It addresses the improved initial organisation and resourcing of the evaluation process.

- ▶ Allocate sufficient human resources in monitoring, evaluation studies and reports (GR).
- ▶ Allocate sufficient funding for evaluation to make it meaningful (PL).
- ▶ Increase human capacities in evaluation within MA, and provide training for the MA staff (CZ).
- ▶ Adapt the resources to the requirements: Increase available resources (human, research) to carry out in-depth studies on the impacts. Set up evaluation teams made up of different types of people (i.e. evaluators and researchers) and make specific financing possibilities for researchers available (instead of including researchers only in the steering committees) (FR).
- ▶ Clarify the need for more external evaluators in order to exclude partiality (AT).

#2. Steering of ongoing evaluation process, provision of accompanying capacity building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Increase human capacities in evaluation within MA ▶ Strengthen governance regarding evaluation (Steering Group and evaluation plan) ▶ Guarantee information flows, cooperation and consultation between evaluation stakeholders
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This is one of the major issues relevant for at least sixteen Focus Groups. It addresses the improved governance of the evaluation process through establishing Steering Groups and evaluation plans, enhanced inter-institutional cooperation, better involvement of Monitoring Committee members and provision of training.

Detailed list of recommendations:

- ▶ Improve **capacities** of MA and MC members, including **training** on CMEF or dissemination of best practice in order to promote and enhance the evaluation culture, focus more on the ongoing evaluation and its effective management, e.g. via establishing a **Steering Group** for this purpose, and prepare detailed evaluation plans with tasks and content (GR).
- ▶ Strengthen governance and ongoing evaluation management: Develop **effective tools for better governance of the evaluation process**. Improve integration between persons in charge of different steps of delivery and evaluation processes. Improve the (operational) planning and better define evaluation products and their use (including dissemination) (IT).
- ▶ Improve **inter-institutional cooperation** to ensure better RDP evaluation and consequently implementation (LV).
- ▶ Strengthen links between evaluation and programming e.g. through the preparation of **evaluation plans** including specific themes (long-term perspective but flexibility to react as needed) (PL).
- ▶ Improve settings to perform **subsequent thematic evaluation** by the MA, especially in order to determine the impact of implementation of certain measures with a significant weight in the programme (improve procurement procedures; organize training of personnel in order to improve their capacity to carry out thematic evaluation) (RO).
- ▶ Strengthen the **participation process** at all levels of the management in order to consolidate the evaluation process (better information exchange and the dialogue between actors involved) (RO).
- ▶ Improve the **institutional backstopping** for the evaluation exercise including involvement and cooperation with data providers (e.g. statistical office, Farm Accountancy Data Network - FADN administrator) in order to secure the data continuity until the end of the programming

period (e.g. the MA needs to set up cooperation with the Czech Statistical Office and NLPA, which have access to very important data for RDP evaluation purposes) (CZ).

- ▶ To improve **capacities** of MA and MC members, including training on CMEF or dissemination of best practice in order to promote and enhance the evaluation culture (PT).
- ▶ Improve the **information flow** between all MC members (RO).
- ▶ Set up an evaluation plan for the entire programme period: In order to be able to use all existing evaluation data, time for preparation is needed. When the next programming period starts in 2014 there should be a plan for evaluation covering the entire period (SE).
- ▶ Create a **Steering Group** to improve the communication and coordination between institutions involved in monitoring and data collection for the CMEF indicators including contextual ones, which was not the case up to now for water quality, biodiversity, climate change, High Nature Value (SK).
- ▶ Build up **close cooperation and consultation** between implementing agencies and government departments involved in the design and implementation of policies for environmental protection in order to achieve a coherent approach for the next programming period (CY).
- ▶ Provide **training** to Local Action Groups – LAGs - to support implementation of monitoring and evaluation framework (IE).
- ▶ Increase the **involvement of the Monitoring Committee members** in the professional management and steering of the programme. Until now its role in evaluation was quite limited and steps must be taken to enhance this in the future especially in connection with building evaluation capacities among evaluations stakeholders as well developing the evaluation culture and enhance the role of evaluation in utilising public funds within the country (SK).
- ▶ Strengthen the **capacity building** in the Managing Authority (HU).

#3.	Develop an adequate evaluation approach at programme level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Establish a sound evaluation architecture ▶ Apply full set of common indicators ▶ Complement common indicators by programme specific ones in Axes 3 and 4 ▶ Unburden and simplify the future CMEF
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This presents one of the two most prominent issues relevant in all MS, it addresses the **fundamental design** of the evaluation – in response to the CMEF requirements – in terms of choosing the appropriate type of evaluation (management vs. impact evaluation, qualitative vs. quantitative evaluation) and forming a causal chain of evaluation questions and related indicators and analysis tools.

Various thematic sub activity fields of recommendations were identified:

- ▶ Establishing a **sound evaluation architecture** in terms of evaluation questions and indicators
- ▶ **Axis specific recommendations**, e.g. full implementation of all agri-environmental indicators, establish specific LAG reporting.
- ▶ **Cross programme and cross funds' approaches.**
- ▶ **Proposals in view of the CMEF revision** such as **unburden and simplify the CMEF**, reduction of predesigned evaluation questions, reduce the importance of the quantitative indicators, allow limited evaluation of small measures.

Sub activity field “sound evaluation architecture”

- ▶ Overcome the **lack of causality** in the CMEF between the CEQs and the indicators, develop strong links between EQs and indicators and develop programme specific (result) indicators where the common indicators are not providing sufficient information to answer the (common) EQs (BENELUX).
- ▶ Further **definition of key terms** such as restructuring, innovation, products with higher added value, quality of life etc., with the aim to prepare, manage and evaluate the programme. These issues were not tackled in-depth before the MTE, which caused major misunderstanding between the MA and evaluators. The definitions need to be prepared before specification of indicators (CZ).
- ▶ Improve the **quality of the evaluation question** by improved composition of Steering Groups (including different skills) and go beyond the concept of evaluation as "quantification of indicators" (IT).
- ▶ Do not limit the evaluation to the analysis of programme uptake, performance and outputs but undertake a **real evaluation** based on a sound methodology (MT).
- ▶ Further elaborate the **evaluation approach in view of the ex post evaluation**: establish intervention logic, employ the full set of indicators based on solid data sources and collection systems, address all evaluation questions by sound evaluation methods, carry out proper impact assessment (MT).
- ▶ Focus more on the **assessment of multiplier effects** from single actions (one activity creating multiple utilities for the local actors/local area), how to promote and how to measure it. This recommendation was formulated as an important need by stakeholders during the Focus Group, rather than a clearly stated recommendation in the MTE (SE).
- ▶ Further development of the **indicator set** used in the evaluation of the RDP (AT).
- ▶ Assure the **comparability** of mid-term with the following *ex ante* evaluation (e.g. maintaining existing data collection and evaluation practices) (AT).
- ▶ **Adapt common indicators** to the social and economic context. Some common indicators do not fit into the specific context of the RDP (especially those related to the economic and social impacts), Nevertheless, collecting and creating such specific indicators would require more human resources and increase administrative workload (RO).
- ▶ Develop indicators at **very early stage** of programme implementation in line with CMEF standards, supported by most appropriate measurement units, data collection and calculation methods. Already at the phase of the preparing the next evaluation framework, the construction of the system for data collection should be known: e.g. application forms, shall be adjusted to the requirements of data collections, how to involve statistics, what evaluation models, surveys and case studies shall be applied (PT).
- ▶ **Adjust indicators and targets**: There is an identified priority to improve the meaningfulness of indicators and targets, particularly those relating to the environment and climate change (Axis 2). The identification of indicators which can realistically be measured is important, their justification must be considered, and account must be taken of qualitative factors. Work is underway to adjust a number of indicators and targets and it needs to be concluded. A number of MAs had already undertaken work in this area through their ongoing evaluation of the RDP and there was a desire to share experience and knowledge (UK).
- ▶ Implement independent ongoing evaluation on efficiency and effectiveness of those **measures which might be relevant in the next programming period** (based on the methods proposed by the MTE) (HU).

Sub activity field “axis specific recommendations”

- ▶ Axis 2: Ensure **full implementation** of full range of **agri-environmental and NATURA 2000 indicators** which are both complex and urgent. The perceived gaps, data collection difficulties and required improvements all contributed to this high priority (IE).
- ▶ Axis 3 and 4: Establish a system of indicators for **reporting by LAGs** on implementation of the LEADER approach, which will enable a thorough assessment of results and impact of implementation. Also to define appropriate indicators that would directly measure the improvement of quality of life in rural areas (in particular measures 311, 322) (SI).
- ▶ Axis 3 and 4: **Complement** EU Common Indicators with development of qualitative data tools, including case studies and primary research, to assess performance of Axes 3 and 4 measures (IE).

Sub activity field “cross programme and cross funds’ approaches”

- ▶ Ensure **transversality** of evaluation: Harmonize monitoring practices between the different funds (for instance by developing a network of people in charge of evaluation for the different programmes). Plan for more transversal questions which would not be only linked to each measure (FR).
- ▶ Clarify the usefulness to **centralize** the calculation of output and result indicators (for annual progress reporting) at Member State level across all regionalised EAFRD programmes (ES).
- ▶ Axis 3: The need for a better "planning / coordination" between the **Structural Funds and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development interventions** in rural areas and a specific "territorial approach" to focus and prioritize the funding projects in rural areas. Develop a strategic framework to ensure coherent and targeted policy for rural development (CY).

Sub activity field “proposals in view of the CMEF revision”

- ▶ Achieve a **better balance** between programme specific evaluation needs and CMEF evaluation needs: streamline the CMEF for the next programming period and create room for a more bottom-up approach (BENELUX).
- ▶ The number of **obligatory indicators** for Member States has to be reduced. In the CMEF there should be only a few key and comparable indicators (FI).
- ▶ **Unburden, simplify and introduce more balance** in the CMEF: Reduce the number of compulsory evaluation questions and leave some flexibility for Managing Authorities to define their own questions; Work towards a simplification of the indicators (and better relevance of these indicators) (FR).
- ▶ **Reduce the importance of the quantitative indicators** and restore the qualitative approach at the centre of the evaluation approach notably for the evaluation of the effects and impacts. Make a better distinction between monitoring and evaluation (and stress the importance of a qualitative approach for evaluation) (FR).
- ▶ Allow **limited evaluation** of small measures with small budgets; accept alternative ‘measuring’ of impacts, for instance a mixed quantitative / qualitative approach (BENELUX).
- ▶ **Replace** the common CMEF evaluation questions by **seven questions**: 1) What are the structural and competitiveness impacts of the RDP? 2) What are the income impacts of the RDP and how could they be fostered? 3) What have been the market impacts of the RDP and how could they be fostered? 4) What have been the environmental and welfare impacts of the RDP and how could positive impacts on environment and well-being be fostered? 5) What have been RDP’s impacts on demographic factors and community structures and how could they be improved? 6) What kind of impacts did the RDP have on employment and how could

they be improved? 7) How did the implementation of RDP succeed and how could the implementation be more efficient and support the success of RDP to a greater extent? (FI).

#4.	Design and management of the monitoring system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Overcome operational problems in running monitoring systems ▶ Include result indicators in the monitoring ▶ Strive for better monitoring designs in the future
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This was a major issue in nearly all MS. It seems that recommendations address two aspects: firstly, the basic task to provide timely valid data sets for the administration of the programme (e.g. to compile tables of the Annual Progress Reports), but this may not be the most prominent aspect; secondly, to provide timely, meaningful data for the evaluators, for the decision makers and for reprogramming. In this case more in-depth information is needed e.g. on spending pattern, response rates to calls etc. It seems Focus Groups addressed primarily the second aspect. It has to be noted that the setting up of a robust monitoring system is, in technical terms, a very complex task.

Various thematic sub activity fields of recommendations were identified:

- ▶ **Operational recommendations for the current period**, e.g. fill data gaps, improve inter-institutional cooperation between data providers; it seems – after having covered two thirds of the programme period - there are still serious problems related to the quality and availability of information for monitoring.
- ▶ **Improvement in view of evaluation needs**, i.e. expand monitoring to basic result and impact information (and not only to collection of input and output data).
- ▶ **Proposals for the future design and management**, e.g. simplification, electronic recording of data, fully integrated IT systems. Improvement of monitoring should be seen in line with the proposed overall methodological simplification (see activity field 3, “evaluation approach”, p.18).

Detailed list of recommendations:

- ▶ **Simplify** the EU monitoring system and make it more user-friendly, flexible and applicable to all kinds of reports, avoiding variability in interpretations, including limited number of indicators (PT).
- ▶ Improve the monitoring of the scheme and the impact of individual projects through better use of **electronic recording of data** from application forms, reports and more. The Managing Authority should implement electronic application forms. It is, however, an option that will have to be implemented in the long run (DK).
- ▶ Improve quality of data and ensure continuity in data provision by the administrative data providers (e.g. timely delivery of data, adaptation of application forms, and provision of evaluation indicators) (AT).
- ▶ Complete (create) an integrated database system; Improving data management; improve data format – when providing the evaluator with data, make the data usable for the evaluator; Further explore the existing datasets and networks / collaborating with other services; Improving evaluation awareness from bodies who implement measures and provide data (e.g. PA) (BENELUX).
- ▶ Secure timely data collection for the **result indicators** (individual axes and the entire programme) with sufficient amount of empirical data because of their methodological complexity and the short time dedicated to their evaluation. Evaluation of programme impacts is the task of the evaluator, however, basic data for **assessment of impacts** shall be collected via monitoring of outputs and especially results (CZ).

- ▶ Improve systematic data collection and **take advantage of existing sources** (business plans, applications for payment, end of project reports, etc.) in order to solve data problems that currently exist. Many MTE reports concluded that there was not enough information to analyse because Unit managers were not fully collecting it from beneficiaries (ES).
- ▶ Strengthen the **supervision** of the monitoring system, expand the circle of data sources for monitoring with data providers in administration, and strengthen the **interaction** with and between the data providers (HU).
- ▶ Improvement of data collection system (monitoring system) needed to **modify the RDP** (spending pattern, response rates to calls etc.) in terms of timely availability and quality (IT).
- ▶ Develop a better monitoring system to **integrate data from various sources** (e.g. setting up a data warehouse in the paying agency); ensure that existing data are more accessible and can be processed in a variety of ways; ensure that the evaluators' requirements (e.g. concerning wider information about beneficiaries) and data collected in the system are compatible (PL).
- ▶ Adopt a **fully functional integrated IT system** for all information related to the programming of execution, monitoring and evaluation of RDP so that the information for the management is available in real time (RO).
- ▶ Improve the monitoring system and adjust it to the requirements of the CMEF for the assessment of **impacts** and offer ongoing information about how the programme performs (incorporate data collections for **result and impact indicators** – common and programme specific). This recommendation relates to effective and efficient data collection for the evaluation via existing monitoring systems. Data collection for evaluation was the biggest issue in Slovakia and has threatened the evaluation at the MTE stage especially in terms of data related to Axis 2 result and impact indicators (SK).
- ▶ Data **collection and processing should be improved** to allow the MA to use databases as an analytical and planning tool. The database should include all data that is collected through various forms of monitoring and reporting, (including data monitoring according to FADN methodology) and enable automatic data capture and application for analysis in GIS. Electronic applications, electronic reporting and the possibility of insight into output indicators should be enabled. Reporting from recipients should be made simpler and obligatory and subject to penalties in case of breach (SI).
- ▶ Give more importance to the **reliability** of the monitoring indicators, for instance by linking payment to the transmission of satisfactory output / results indicators (FR).
- ▶ **Data management** should be one of the main focuses of the ongoing evaluation, including the identification and filling of data gaps and create or improve the functional IT systems for the collection and processing of high quality monitoring data. Significant gaps have already been identified in the Integrated Information System mainly as regards the provision of the necessary data for evaluation. An attempt has been made to cover these gaps by the creation of specialized applications such as the monitoring of the measure 214 (a project that has already been contracted). Similarly, the Managing Authority intends to launch an upgrading of the Integrated Information System so that it will be capable to provide all the necessary reports. Nevertheless, it is not clear when this upgrade will be carried out (GR).
- ▶ Improve data availability by **collecting missing data** which are crucial for the reporting in monitoring and evaluation. The MTE report contains several conclusions concerning missing data for all axes. A balanced solution has to be found to see how much resources could be spent to collect and process each of the required data set (LV).
- ▶ Specific attention shall be given to the **monitoring of environmental indicators** - biodiversity, water and soil quality and HNV (PT).

- ▶ Improve the monitoring system in order to know the **actual effect** on the investment volume and jobs created in rural area currently. It is possible to extract *ex ante* data, but not confirmed data as a result of project implementation (this data is provided by beneficiaries in the feasibility studies). Even if such information exists, it may never be made available. In this regard, it is necessary to create a complete database; in practical terms, this database already exists but there is a need to keep it updated (RO).
- ▶ The need to define a public service **as the coordinator for collecting data and information** concerning the environmental situation in Cyprus and to create national databases on biodiversity, soil quality, water quality, air quality and climate change. Many of the problems faced by the MTE evaluator on the conclusions and calculation of the impacts of the agri-environmental measures were attributed to the absence of databases and time series for crucial environmental parameters, and the absence of baseline data. The problem is particularly important given the fact that the Managing Authority currently does not have the responsibility to create those databases. To overcome the problem the MA already made two calls for tenders for hiring external consultants for the calculation of some environmental indicators, without success. Therefore, better coordination of all involved departments is already seen as part of the solution for the measurement of environmental indicators. Some progress has already been made since the Department of Environment has been defined as the coordination body, (but only at the administrative level) and a series of meetings with the competent bodies have taken place (CY).
- ▶ Improve the **collection and processing of monitoring data** in line with CMEF standards, and use projects applications, payment request forms, and business plans, project implementation reports for data collection. The Managing Authority has started creating a specific form for data collection from the beneficiaries (farmers and enterprises of the agri-food sector), which will include financial and employment data. Through them, the beneficiaries will be obliged to inform the Managing Authority in order to develop basic data after the completion of the investment. These forms will be used for the majority of the measures of Axes 1, 3 and 4. A problem exists in the calculation of results and hence the impacts of measure 125, which has significant financial weight and the majority of actions are on irrigation projects (GR).
- ▶ **Ensure coherent and comprehensively structured data collection.** The detailed recommendations relate to setting minimum data specification and requirements from those involved in delivery, establishing common systems and materials and securing a stronger evidence base, particularly in alignment with CMEF requirements. Improved data capture is a priority. Strengthening the evaluation culture and M&E planning are important contributors to minimising errors and gaps. Addressing these issues will improve M&E and programme decision making (UK).

#5.	Assessment of delivery and project selection; cost effectiveness of delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Assess the actual use of project selection criteria ▶ Put more emphasis on cost effectiveness of delivery
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The following thematic issue should be seen in close correlation with the evaluation approach taken (see activity field 3 on p.18) which defines the scope of research and issues treated.

The assessment of the delivery system is a specific issue in four Focus Groups (AT, IT, MT, UK).

- ▶ Two recommendations address an assessment of the use of selection criteria of the measures implemented, and the specific interest of the Commission in relation to this issue.
- ▶ One recommendation relates to a new evaluation study: cost effectiveness of delivery of the existing programme which should be elaborated.

Detailed list of recommendations:

- ▶ Broadening the scope of evaluation topics, including for instance the cost effectiveness of delivery of the existing programme. The national evaluation committee (“*Nationales Evaluierungsgremium*”) shall discuss and coordinate the implementation of the envisaged evaluation studies (AT).
- ▶ Clarify which aspects regarding the evaluation of the consistency of selection criteria are of particular interest to the Commission / desk officers. Evaluators have been required by the desk officers to make an in-depth study on the effectiveness of the selection criteria before the closure of MTE reports. However, the Commission was not fully satisfied; therefore clarification is needed (IT).
- ▶ Provide an assessment of the use of selection criteria of the measures implemented (MT).
- ▶ Assess scheme costs and performance. Two of the MTEs, England and Scotland had recommendations in this area. There was some debate over the difficulties which this presents and the desirability and reliability of attempting such a breakdown.

#6.	Assessment of programme performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Improve the information base at input and output level in order to assess programmes performance better
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This M&E activity related to the assessment of programme performance at the input and output level (e.g. financial uptake, collection of meaningful output data). Recommendations on this activity field have only been raised very specifically.

Detailed list of recommendations:

- ▶ Address as a priority collection of data to support provision of up-to-date information for all EU Common **output indicators for Axes 3 and 4** (Measures 312 and 413 regarding beneficiaries) (IE).

#7.	Assessment of results & impacts (against baselines)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Fill data gaps ▶ Further develop suitable methodologies and exchange information between countries with similar situations ▶ Pay specific attention to methodological challenges posed by certain measures
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This is one of the two major issues relevant for all MS. This M&E activity field is in **methodological terms the most complex** and needs considerable development work and adequate resourcing at programme level. The current CMEF is not a true manual "ready to use" but a source document to be further developed which is a real methodological challenge for programme bodies and evaluators. Basically, the CMEF allows for a wide variety of methods for evaluations. Consequently, there is no uniform method in Europe about how to calculate impact indicators. The methodological development in the specific programme context and the choice of adequate analytical tools and data sources is part of the ongoing evaluation approach.

The following sub activity fields were distinguished:

- ▶ Recommendations regarding **needs for enhanced data collection**, e.g. missing baseline indicators, lacking data compilation systems, setting the priority to fill data gaps.

- ▶ Recommendations regarding general **methodological aspects and recent research issues**, e.g. how to deal with counterfactual analysis and deadweight, more field research on specific issues such as climate effects and socio-economic effects.
- ▶ **Foster systematic exchange**, e.g. establish a common methodological ground / exchange between countries with similar situations, share methodologies.
- ▶ **Axis related recommendations** such as develop specific baseline indicator for quantifying the evolution of structural changes related to axis 1 measures; creating/maintaining a systematic process of quantifying the impact of axis 2 measures; clarifying sources and methods in order to quantify environmental impacts, make better use of current environmental data; focus on alternative ways of impact assessment in axis 3 and 4; develop an annual census of axis 3 results and impacts.

Sub activity field “need for enhanced data collection”

- ▶ The development of a mechanism to coordinate the **collection of data relevant to the assessment of results and impacts** should be the primary concern of the ongoing evaluation. The Managing Authority is kindly requested to review its data management and collection activities in order to ensure the availability of up-to-date data to make best use of quantitative and counterfactual analysis in future evaluations. The implementation of this recommendation was considered as a top priority by all the participants. To achieve this, the existence of a **comprehensive baseline** is required for the areas of interventions, in particular for the agri-environmental indicators. Also additional data collection to **create control groups** is particularly important for the measures of Axis 1 (Measures 121, 123, 112) in order to properly calculate the counterfactual situation. The search for solutions to overcome difficulties was a common view for all the FG participants (CY).
- ▶ Ensure that the quantification of result and especially impact indicators becomes the **priority of the ongoing evaluation**. An updated overview table of indicators should be provided for the next annual examination meeting and included in all future evaluations. Create new procedures that will allow data collection from beneficiaries both during the implementation phase and in particular after completion (even 1-2 years after the investment). Significant improvements to the application forms of potential beneficiaries have already been made. All participants agreed that a right balance between effort and usefulness of the data has to be found in order not to burden the implementation bodies and the Managing Authority and not to discourage potential beneficiaries. One of the consequences of the current economic crisis is that there is less interest in the programme’s measures (CY).
- ▶ Set up a **statistical compilation system** for impact and result indicators for the current programme period (MT, priority 1).
- ▶ Better utilisation of **existing statistical data** (e.g. more extensive utilisation of the existing FADN database) to estimate results and impacts (AT).
- ▶ Provide information for some **missing baseline indicators** (MT).

Sub activity field “General methodological aspects and recent research issues”

- ▶ More field research on specific issues e.g. climate effects, socio-economic effects to fill gaps (AT).
- ▶ Start discussions with relevant research institutions on the possibilities to determine the **societal value of public goods** produced under the programme, for which achievements were earlier and more extensively than without subsidies. Discussions should also be started on what natural synergy impacts are achieved through the integration of support from different measures/schemes on the same parcel/area (DK).

- ▶ Start discussions with relevant research institutions on the possibilities to implement more detailed and in-depth analysis of the **deadweight** of the programme in order to improve the design of the schemes to counteract this deadweight (DK).
- ▶ Develop other/improved methods to measure and evaluate **deadweight effects**. Dialogue with Evaluation Helpdesk and Multi-MS seminars are proposed (SE).
- ▶ Apply more robust methodologies (e.g. attribution issues, considering net effects, application of advanced qualitative methods, improvement of simulation model) (AT).
- ▶ Clarify how to fix information gaps related to the **calculation of impact indicators** and how to deal with **counterfactual analysis** and the calculation of net effect of the programme. EC desk officers unit for Spanish RDP stressed, in their feedback letter, the need for a better analysis of the net effect of the impact of the programmes (ES).
- ▶ Analyse the **climate indicators** (impact indicator No 7) in more detail. In MTE the evaluator had brought out that climate indicators, especially impact indicators, were not fully considered. With a view to the *ex post* evaluation, there is an urgent need to take the climate indicators into account. The complexity and urgency of both were ranked 10. It was considered important by all participants (EE).
- ▶ Assess how much the **external factors** influence the real evaluation results (net effects). In the MTE, it was shown that in several cases measuring the impact was shadowed by external factors and this made it hard to define. Participants found that the issue of, how to eliminate external factors, could be discussed further. E.g. how the MTE results were influenced by the economic crisis (EE).
- ▶ Improve the **evaluation of Leader** for the current and future periods. It was considered that this was an area where there had been some action and where further action was planned e.g. in terms of having concluded an economic impact assessment in England, through targeted and specific ongoing evaluation work in Wales and Scotland and in Northern Ireland where structural changes would make immediate action difficult (UK).
- ▶ Improve **baselines and evidence base** to strengthen targets, outcomes and impacts assessment. It is considered that there is a considerable body of work underway with more planned in the lead up to the *ex ante* evaluation for the next programme. In the absence of a clear perspective on the indicators proposed for the next period there are limits on what can be immediately achieved, steps are being taken under ongoing evaluation provisions (UK).

Sub activity field “foster systematic exchange”

- ▶ Establish a **common methodological ground / exchange between countries** with similar situations: set up an interactive platform to allow for an exchange experience / approaches with other regions / MS. Relevant topics are for instance: How to better evaluate the impact on human capital and level of competence? What are suitable indicators and methods for Quality of Life and quality of governance? How to better design counterfactuals? (BENELUX).
- ▶ Share methodologies which have been explored and which have been useful in the calculation of impact and result environmental indicators. It is necessary to increase current practise (some of them are good practice) sharing, at least at MS level. It would be extremely useful to M&E of RDP. It will improve calculation and reduce cost due to sharing (ES).

Sub activity field “axis related recommendations”

- ▶ Axis 1: Propose monitoring indicators (baseline indicator) specific for quantifying the evolution of structural changes following the introduction of the measure 141, support of semi-subsistence agriculture (RO).
- ▶ Axis 2: Clarifying sources and methods in order to quantify impacts (net effects vs. cross effects); clarify in particular the environmental impacts; more guidance should be provided on how to use the method of counterfactual; regarding environmental impacts clearer and more operationally applicable common methodological guidelines are lacking (IT).
- ▶ Axis 2: The impact assessment on agro-environmental farming should be launched (e.g. selection of supported parcels for comparison). More adequate baseline assessment should be made before starting the new period (post 2013). The *ex ante* evaluator should have an important role in this procedure (HU).
- ▶ Axis 2: Review existing information and make better use of existing structure. For example: in relation to Natura 2000 network there is interesting and organised information already available. This could be used, rather than defining a new indicator related to HNV to measure environmental effects. Is there a way to make better use of current environmental data? Furthermore, the CAP Geographic Information System is a strong tool that has not been taken into consideration so far (ES).
- ▶ Axis 2 (M 214, Agro-environment payments): Creating/maintaining a systematic process of quantifying the impact of the measure on the number of bird species as indicator to assess in a fair manner the impact on biodiversity. Additionally, the need to increase the focus on soil quality was also stressed, especially in the areas where irrigation and drainage systems existed in the past and are now abandoned. In this context, Romania should pursue other monitoring indicators such as water and soil quality (RO).
- ▶ Axis 3: Develop an annual census of Axis 3 results and impacts, to include project-level quantitative and qualitative output, result and impact indicators collected by LAGs and inputted to a centralised data system (IE).
- ▶ Axis 3: Clarify what to do in the absence of impact indicators related to improving the quality of life? Although the Axis 3 is intended to improve the quality of life, the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework does not define specific indicators to measure the impact of interventions on the quality of life in rural areas (although in case of economic diversification effects are measured through the same indicator as defined for Axis 1 measures). Therefore this issue was considered as interesting one to address in the discussion and exchange views on it (ES).
- ▶ Axis 1 and 3: Investigate potential to develop alternative measurement for economic growth (gross value-added) and labour productivity impact indicators for Axis 1 and Axis 3 measures (IE).
- ▶ Axis 3 and 4: Focus on alternative ways of registration of impact for example though collecting the best local examples of this from the LAGs and communicating them. Instead of mainly communicating the resources allocated, the ‘good story’ should be given more attention. Consider the trade-off between the quantitative registration of impact and the communication of more qualitative ‘good stories’ (DK).

#8.

Review of objectives and targets

- ▶ Clarify the need and rationale to revise originally planned RDP targets

A specific recommendation relates to this M&E activity field.

- ▶ Clarify the method and procedure on **how to revise the targets set for some of the programme indicators**. The outstanding question is: how to carry out this target revision, based on what premise and who should address it? Nowadays, after several years of programme implementation and a mid-term evaluation, the MA and Measure Management Units have noted that many of the targets set up in the RDPs (programme level, or measurement level) can hardly be achieved. In some cases they have been wrongly estimated, in other cases the reality has simply changed in the meantime and deviations appeared. Given this scenario, the Focus Group participants wanted to know if originally estimated targets could be recalculated, how and under what procedure (ES)

#9. Assessment of other specific issues such as National Rural Networks

- ▶ Address evaluation topics which have not been sufficiently treated in the mid-term evaluation 2010

A specific recommendation relates to that M&E activity field.

- ▶ Broadening the scope of **evaluation topics**, includes for instance an **in-depth analysis of the National Rural Network**. The national evaluation committee ("*Nationales Evaluierungsgremium*") shall discuss and coordinate the implementation of the envisaged evaluation studies (AT).

#10. Reporting

- ▶ Make reporting more meaningful by improving contents, removing inconsistencies and improved planning of the reporting exercise

A limited number of recommendations in MT, CZ and UK relate directly to reporting issues.

- ▶ An **alignment** needs to be achieved between all programming and reporting documents: national strategy plan - Rural Development Programme - mid-term evaluation report - strategic monitoring report (e.g. concerning inconsistencies between indicators, targets) (MT).
- ▶ Maltese authorities are invited to reflect on the recommendations and consider which elements could already be tackled within a short term perspective or rather in medium/long term. **Report on the progress** achieved in the framework of Annual Progress Reports (MT).
- ▶ Develop the **plan for reporting requirements** about most important evaluation reports (the given year). Reach agreement between MA and evaluator on some evaluation related topics, e.g. on the content of annual progress reports for each given year, data types, sources and collections (CZ).
- ▶ Ensure **consistency of reporting, aligning systems and materials, addressing data gaps**. This recommendation was given highest overall priority as it is both complex and urgent, it relates specifically to the measures, delivery mechanisms, delivery organisations etc. This theme was seen as an immediate priority as MAs are on the point of commencing work on the Annual Progress Reports for 2011. There is a body of work ongoing in the light of the MTEs and there are a number of outstanding issues identified which remain to be fully resolved (UK).

#11. Dissemination and capitalization of evaluation results

- ▶ Strengthen the role of evaluation in policy making

A specific recommendation relates directly to that M&E activity field.

- ▶ Ensure that evaluation results are **taken into account** in making proposals to improve/adapt the programme (PL).

#12. Coordination with the Commission, Support by Evaluation Helpdesk

- ▶ Improve the coordination and division of work between Commission and Member States
- ▶ Improve feedback loops of the Commission

A limited number of recommendations relate directly to this M&E activity field.

- ▶ Establish **better coordination between the EU and Member State levels**, including: improving the reporting system: the collection of financial data versus data from monitoring and evaluation; a change in the CMEF (already for the *ex post* evaluation): fewer questions but more guidance on methodologies; complementarity with the objectives of other policies, especially in view of stronger coordination in the next programming period (PL).
- ▶ Develop a **new division of work between Commission and MS**. At the EU level the comparable information could be collected via EU level evaluations. Ongoing evaluations in the Member States can concentrate on issues of national importance. This was seen as an important and interesting idea but at the same time complex and problematic (FI).
- ▶ **Valorise evaluation at all levels**: Ask the Commission to produce some real feedback documents on the evaluation exercises carried out by the Member States. Publish some pedagogical and reader friendly feedback documents presenting the results of evaluation work (FR).
- ▶ It would be good to **receive feedback** from the Commission whether the MTE reports provided sufficient information related to common evaluation questions considering the fact that not all questions were sufficiently understood (SI).

3.4 Concreteness of planned steps to address the recommendations

For a selection of recommendations, an analysis was carried out to determine to what extent the recommendations were concretely addressed with planned steps. These recommendations have been thoroughly elaborated during the FG workshops, and information on the steps to be implemented in the short-term and longer-term perspective was partly provided.

For a **selection of 64 recommendations** (i.e. 63% of all 103 recommendations), **follow-up activities** were discussed in the Focus Groups. The intention was to clarify the concrete steps planned to tackle the respective M&E issue, by whom and by when.

Most of the follow-up activities (56 out of 64) relate to the **top four priority M&E activity fields**: (i) Steering of the ongoing M&E process; (ii) Development of an adequate evaluation approach at programme level; (iii) Design and management of the monitoring system; and (iv) Assessment of results & impacts.

In order to appraise how concrete the follow-up activities were, the assessment looked at to what extent the content of the activity was clear; if a responsible body existed and if a time plan was established.

As an example of a high degree of concreteness to tackle problems with data collection, in one case it was decided that an RDP Managing Authority monitors from now on the consistency of financial data prepared by scheme delivery teams. On the contrary, a very general recommendation, purely stating an intention in an ongoing process without defining a responsible body or deadline, would be an example for a low degree of concreteness.

The assessment shows that, on average, 13% of all follow-up activities were precisely defined while 36% reached a medium and 50% a low level of concreteness.

Regarding the most prominent and **top four priority M&E activity fields** (see above) the share of well-defined follow-up activities lies between **7% and 20%**.

- ▶ The two activity fields (ii) development of an adequate evaluation approach at programme level and (iii) design and management of the monitoring system, belong to the more developed M&E activity fields with a relatively higher share of well-defined follow-up activities.
- ▶ Regarding activity field (i) the steering aspect of the ongoing M&E process, a considerable share of mediocre solutions was observed.
- ▶ With respect to activity field (iv) the assessment of results and impacts, only a few concrete solutions have been formulated during the Focus Groups. A reason for this might be that the participants of the FG lacked technical expertise.

Additionally, it has to be noted that only a limited number of follow-up activities are under the **full control** of the Managing Authority and solutions have to be developed in a longer-term perspective within a multi-actors environment. This makes it difficult to define a concrete implementation path from the beginning. For instance, steps related to the recommendation to reduce the number of Common Evaluation Questions to be answered by ongoing evaluations in Member States depend largely on the CMEF review undertaken by the Commission.

An issue that is more within the **scope of action** of programme bodies relates to the improvement of the data collection system. In this field, a limited number of actors at national or regional level exist, and mechanisms for coordinating the collection of data can be developed within a relatively short period of time - provided that the issue is taken on board by the programme bodies and adequate resources are available. The detailed results of the assessment are outlined in the following table.

Table 2: Assessment of concreteness of follow-up activities

M&E activity field	Total no of recommendations	of this: no of recommendation addressed by follow-up activities	Degree of concreteness of follow-up activities					
			absolute no of recommendations per category			in % of total no of recommendation addressed by follow-up activities		
			1) High	2) Middle	3) Low	1) High	2) Middle	3) Low
1. Organisational settings & resourcing	3	1			1			100%
2. Steering of ongoing evaluation process, accompanying capacity building	16	10	1	7	2	10%	70%	20%
3. Develop an adequate evaluation approach	23	15	3	3	9	20%	20%	60%
4. Management of the monitoring system	21	16	3	6	7	19%	38%	44%
5. Assessment of delivery and project selection; cost effectiveness of delivery	4	2		1	1		50%	50%
6. Assessment of performance (input, outputs)	1							
7. Assessment of results & impacts (against baselines)	25	15	1	4	10	7%	27%	67%
8. Review of objectives and targets	1	1			1			100%
9. Assessment of other specific issues such as National Rural Networks	1	1		1			100%	
10. Reporting	4	2		1	1		50%	50%
11. Dissemination and capitalization of evaluation results	1							
12. Coordination with EC, Support by Evaluation Helpdesk	3	1			1			100%
Total	103	64	8	23	32	13%	36%	50%

Green colour indicates the four M&E activity fields with the highest number of recommendations

3.5 Good practice in response to mid-term evaluation recommendations

The good practice examples mentioned in the Focus Group reports have been clustered into four categories

- ▶ data collection
- ▶ evaluation methods
- ▶ processes and
- ▶ reporting

It should be noted that the information given in the reports is unbalanced (due to various constraints) and does not allow providing a fully representative picture of achievements.

Data collection

Description of Practice	Contact person	RDP
Data collection from applicant forms in order to calculate the environmental effects of Axis 1 measures http://lv.vlaanderen.be/nlapps/docs/default.asp?id=2046	Ellen Maertens: Ellen.maertens@lv.vlaanderen.be	BE-Flanders
Data collection from applicant forms to complete FADN database for calculating Gross Value Added (GVA)	Jeff Donderlinger: Jeff.Donderlinger@ma.etat.lu	LU
Qualitative data capture	MA	IE
Development of an on-line data collection system for beneficiary data (yearly surveys)	MA	HU
Examples of geo-referenced data, useful for RDP evaluation	MA	SE
FADN reporting – monitoring, build up on individual data and not on sample basis	tomaz.cor@gov.si	SI
Development of the Less Favoured Areas database system and its management	silvester.kranjec@gov.si	SI

Evaluation methods

Description of Practice	Contact person	RDP
Development of the impact indicator on biodiversity http://lv.vlaanderen.be/nlapps/docs/default.asp?id=1966	Ellen Maertens; Ellen.maertens@lv.vlaanderen.be	BE-Flanders
Use of fixed effects dynamic regression in order to calculate the impact of investment support; alternative method for propensity score matching http://lv.vlaanderen.be/nlapps/docs/default.asp?id=2046	Ellen Maertens: Ellen.maertens@lv.vlaanderen.be	BE-Flanders
Scoping matrix for linking programme priorities, measures, evaluation questions and indicators. (Method used in the MTE of BE_Flanders).	Bart Van Herck: Bart.VanHerck@ideaconsult.be	BE-Flanders
Calculation of GVA using FADN data. (Method developed by a Consultant and used in BE_Wallonia and Luxembourg).	Monika Beck: Monika.Beck@ade.eu	BE-Wallonia
Use of Strategic Environmental Assessment.(SEA) indicators for the calculation of the environmental impacts of the RDP	MA	ES_Navarra
Assessment of “quality of life” by the following indicators: * “gross national product of happiness” * attractiveness of rural areas for living conditions * rural impact assessment as a method for evaluating the impacts which different policy actions have on rural areas	MA	FI
Experience regarding the HNV indicator for forestry	Kathy Johnston: Kathy.johnston@scotland.gsi.gov.uk	UK_Scotland
Quantification of benefits from agri-environmental schemes	John Place: John.place@defra.gsi.gov.uk	UK

Processes

Description of Practice	Contact person	RDP
Cooperation between the MA, PA, Implementation Bodies and evaluator in the redesign of the application forms in order to improve data collection	MA	CY
Development of a LAG performance procedure using a comparison method	Ivo Skrabal: ivo.skrabal@cpkp.cz	CZ
Involvement of PA and external evaluator in the creation of the monitoring system for “project measures”	Kuruczova Alena: Alena.Kuruczova@apa.sk	SK
Example of thematic working group on forestry measures composed of MA, PA and National Forestry Centre	Dr Sarvaš, director of National Forestry Centre:, sarvas@nlcsk.org	SK
The benefits of engaging the evaluators at the beginning of the programme	MA	UK_Northern Ireland
Developing the evaluation culture between the MA, PA and evaluator.	mojca.hrabar@oikos.si tomaz.cor@gov.si	SI

Reporting

Description of Practice	Contact person	RDP
Examples of good reporting (Polish <i>ex post</i> evaluation 2000-2006, MTE)	MA	PL

4 CONCLUSIONS

This section presents a number of conclusions that can be drawn from the findings in the previous sections.

1) A balanced approach is necessary to tackle all “building blocks” which are necessary to establish and conduct a sound M&E system

Common priorities of Focus Groups are (in different configurations) on the one hand **basic organisational processes** which form the **fundamental prerequisites** of the evaluation exercise and on the other hand more **advanced methodological issues**. In detail, the common priorities are:

- ▶ Development of an **adequate evaluation approach** at programme level (establish a sound evaluation architecture; apply full set of common indicators; complement common indicators by programme specific ones in Axes 3 and 4; lighten and simplify the future CMEF).
- ▶ Proper **assessment of results & impacts** (fill data gaps, further develop suitable methodologies to capture effects, pay specific attention to methodological challenges posed by certain measures).
- ▶ **Steering of the ongoing evaluation process**, provision of capacity building (increase human capacities in evaluation within MA; strengthen governance regarding evaluation in terms of Steering Group and evaluation plans; guarantee information flows, cooperation and consultation among evaluation stakeholders).
- ▶ **Design and management of the monitoring system** (overcome operational problems in running monitoring systems; include result indicators in the monitoring, strive for better monitoring designs in the future).

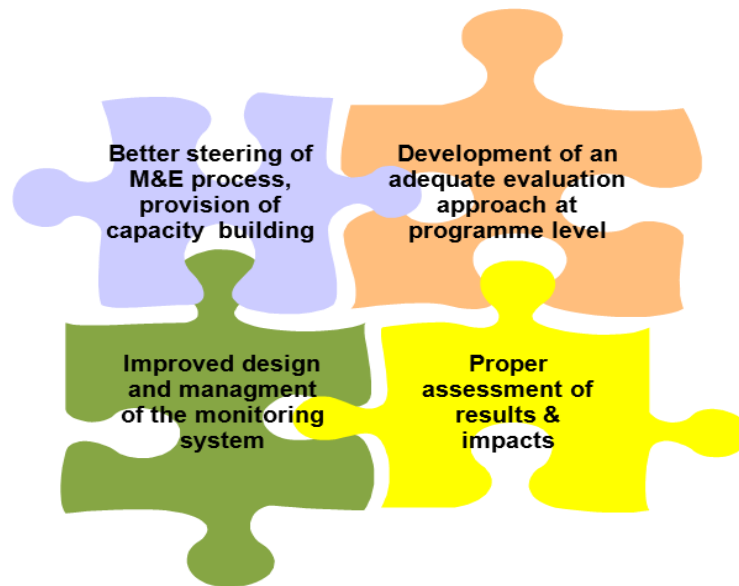
The first two M&E activity fields outlined above (i) development of an adequate evaluation approach and (ii) assessment of results & impacts **have already been systematically addressed** by various stakeholders since the start of the current programme period.

- ▶ By programme owners: research studies, envisaged internal activities to update MTE (part of ongoing evaluation);
- ▶ By the Helpdesk: working papers, new exchange formats such as Good Practice Workshops;
- ▶ By the EC: CMEF review; and
- ▶ By other actors: conduction of workshops, conferences on evaluation methods.

With regard to methodological issues, some Focus Groups recommend to strengthen the exchange of information between countries in similar situations using specific formats, for example establishing a network of countries that are applying counterfactuals..

With respect to the other two M&E activity fields (i) Steering of ongoing evaluation process and (ii) management of monitoring system serious bottlenecks have been articulated by Focus Groups. Both activity fields are crucial for the success of M&E. However, a systematic approach by stakeholders to address these bottlenecks is so far **hardly evident**. Accordingly, all actors involved in M&E need to develop a **balanced and integrated approach** to tackle all four M&E activity fields and not to narrow the focus down to indicators and methods.

Figure 8: Illustration of the integrated approach to tackle all relevant M&E activity fields



2) Establish integrated evaluation plans in the future programme period

Focus Group findings indicate a **broad need** to tackle organisational challenges and methodological challenges at the same time. In this respect the compulsory **evaluation plans** in the new programme period should address all M&E activity fields including steering and monitoring aspects.

The [draft Common Provisions Regulation COM \(2011\) 615](#) in its **article 48** on *ex ante* evaluation puts **more emphasis** on both aspects of steering and monitoring. It is required to appraise more systematically the adequacy of administrative capacity for management of the programme (including evaluation), and the suitability of procedures for monitoring the programme.

Moreover, **article 9** of the [draft European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development Regulation COM \(2011\) 627/final/2](#) on the content of Rural Development Programmes requires an analysis of needs relating to monitoring and evaluation requirements and the evaluation plan. The Member States are asked to provide sufficient resources and capacity building activities to address the identified needs.

3) Systematic observation of the progress achieved in implementing the MTE recommendations is necessary

The assessment in relation to what extent the recommendations were concretely addressed with planned steps has revealed that, on average, only 13% of all follow-up activities were precisely defined while 36% reached a medium and 50% a low level of concreteness. Therefore, there is a great deal of uncertainty about how recommendations will be addressed by the relevant stakeholders.

Focus Groups in 2012 should therefore continue to deal with the implementation process of MTE recommendations and should contribute to a systematic observation of achieved progress in the implementation of the identified recommendations. To this end, Focus Groups should apply a comparable rating method. For instance three categories of progress should be defined: 1) Nothing happened, no change has taken place; 2) Some changes have started or are ongoing; 3) Significant changes have taken place.

The need for a continuous observation ties in with the identification of good practice solutions related to the MTE recommendations. Due to various constraints it was not possible to deal with this issue in

an adequate way in the Focus Group discussion in 2011, and mostly anecdotal evidence has been delivered. For an improved gathering of evidence future Focus Groups should continue to systematically collect good practice approaches related to the M&E activity fields.

4) Focus groups were perceived as good instrument to reflect upon M&E issues in an informal way

The feedback from the Focus Groups in 2011 has been very positive overall. A high number of people actively participated (around 370 persons in 24 countries) and the groups proved to be effective informal exchange forums which can deliver the expected results to a large extent.

Gaining an overview of the most common MTE recommendations, which can be shared between programme management bodies and evaluators, represents a major step forward in the process and is a core result of the Focus Group exercise in 2011.

Without the Focus Group tool, which is conducted with a similar method in all Member States, it would not be possible to get an overview of the most common and most relevant priorities out of the numerous recommendations which are provided in the MTE reports.

Nevertheless some weaknesses in Focus Group composition and working design could be observed in terms of low involvement of Monitoring Committee members, and the absence of evaluators in some countries. The EC desk officers were partly present and this was very much appreciated and should be further strengthened in the future.



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