SYNTHESIS OF THE ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORTS FOR 2008 CONCERNING ONGOING EVALUATION

MARCH 31, 2010

European Evaluation Network
for Rural Development

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://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/eval/network/index_en.htm)

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Contents

I. Introduction

Managing Authorities of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) were required by Council Regulation 1698/2005 Art. 86 (1) to put in place from 2007 a system of ongoing evaluation for the programming period 2007-2013. Each year from 2008 onwards they should report about their ongoing evaluation activities to the responsible Monitoring Committee. A summary of these activities is to be included in their Annual Progress Report (APR) to the Commission, as provided for in Article 82 of the above mentioned Regulation.

The Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development (Evaluation Expert Network) supports the EC in assessing the APR sections on ongoing evaluation by preparing an annual synthesis, to:

✓ Summarize findings on the state of play of the ongoing evaluation systems in the Member States (MS)

✓ enhance the quality of evaluation reporting by providing reporting recommendations to the MS

✓ identify and promote good practice about evaluation activities

For the EC, the APRs are an important tool to follow the progress with evaluation during the programming period. **For the MS**, the section on ongoing evaluation should aim to identify and describe areas for the fine-tuning and improvement of their ongoing evaluation systems. The reporting task encourages MAs to reflect about evaluation by answering such questions as: Where do we now stand with ongoing evaluation? What have we achieved? What still needs to be done? It should stimulate action to better prepare for the main evaluation events (mid-term and ex post evaluations), and facilitate exchange of experience and good practice.

In June 2009 the MS of the European Union reported for the second time on ongoing evaluation activities as part of their APRs for the year 2008.

This synthesis paper of the APRs for 2008 has examined a total of 88 RDPs, including 19 national and 69 regional reports. The analytical work was organised in a similar way to the first synthesis (which covered the year 2007), along the following steps: (1) the Evaluation Helpdesk developed an assessment grid to collect the relevant information from the evaluation related sections of the APRs; (2) the Helpdesk's Geographic Experts (GEs) analysed the reports, completed and returned the filled-out grids to the Helpdesk; and (3) the Helpdesk synthesised their findings, carried out the EU-wide analysis and drafted a set of recommendations for both the MS and the EC.

The findings presented in this synthesis are limited by the fact that, for formal reasons, only information contained in the evaluation section of the APRs for 2008 were analysed. Consequently information provided under different headings of the APRs, as well as in other documents, has not been considered. In order to indicate trends in the evolution of ongoing evaluation systems, a comparison to the situation in the reports of the previous year (APRs for 2007) has been included.

This synthesis paper is structured as follows. Section II presents an overview of the ongoing evaluation sections in the APRs for 2008. The remaining sections follow closely the indicative outline of an APR on ongoing evaluation (see Guidance note B of the Handbook on CMEF). Thus, Section III looks into the provisions MS made in setting up and developing their ongoing evaluation systems. Section IV deals with ongoing evaluation activities, and Section V with data collection and management. Section VI focuses on networking activities of evaluation stakeholders, and Section VII is on difficulties encountered and need for additional work. Throughout the paper, examples are used to illustrate good practices across the EU countries and regions. Some more detailed examples are presented in boxes. Each section concludes with a set of concise recommendations, addressed both to the MS and to the EC.

An additional feature of this synthesis report is an **Explanatory note** for MAs (see Annex 1), providing suggestions on what aspects to describe and provide information about in the APRs for 2009 (section on ongoing evaluation). This complements and clarifies information provided in Guidance note B of the Handbook on CMEF.

II. The Ongoing Evaluation Sections in the Annual Progress Reports (APRs) for 2008: An Overview

While the first APRs for 2007 had the specific aim to describe the provisions for the establishment of the evaluation system in the national/regional context (including indicators, administrative arrangements, data collection provisions), the APRs for 2008 were asked to focus particular attention on the description of evaluation activities undertaken (including capacity building and methodological work), data collection and difficulties encountered.

Findings

1. Overall the sections on ongoing evaluation in the APRS for 2008 vary in their degree of completeness. The description of the 'ongoing evaluation system' and 'data collection' are most prominently covered, while 'evaluation activities', 'networking activities' and 'difficulties encountered' are reported less often. About 60% of reports deal with at least three of the five topics indicated in Guidance Note B of the Handbook on CMEF. 27% address four of the topics while only 13% deal with all five topics (Figure 1).
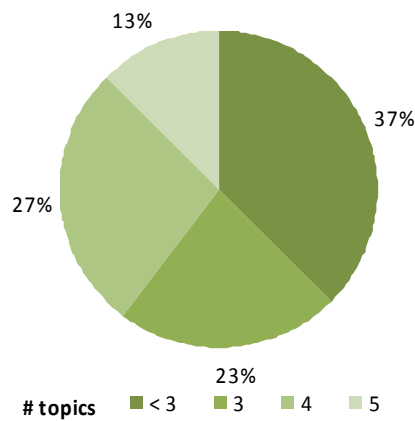
Figure 1 Number of APRs 2008 covering 5, 4, 3 or ≤3 of the indicative topics

Chapters on ongoing evaluation systems, evaluation activities and data collection are each addressed in more than 50% of all reports, while the two topics which are covered the least (35% or less of the reports) are networking activities, difficulties encountered and needs for additional work (Figure 2).
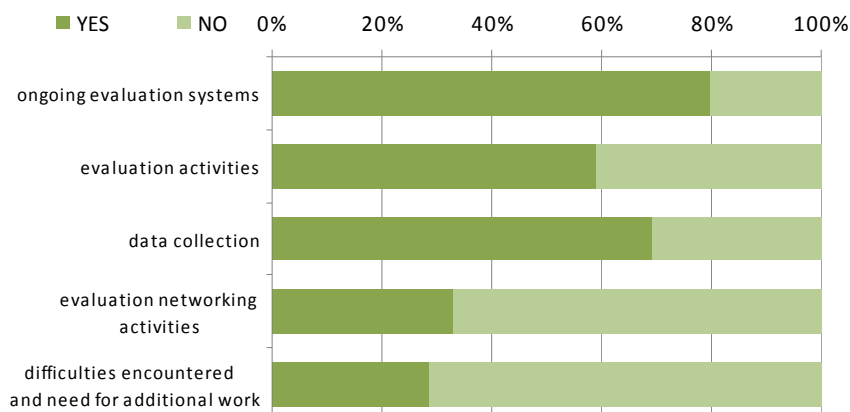
Figure 2 Coverage of indicative topics (in % of the total APRs 2008)

Box 1: The structure of the ongoing evaluation section of the APR

Italy-Marche reports in a concise and structured way on ongoing evaluation following the indicative outline of Guidance Note B (Chapter 6).

The "Introduction" provides summary information on the evaluation plan 2007-2013, presented and discussed at the Monitoring Committee meeting of 13 June 2008. It provides an outline of the decision to outsource the bulk of ongoing, mid-term and ex post evaluation by open tender to one contractor. A short section describes possible modifications of the evaluation plan due to the Health Check and Economic Recovery Plan.

Under the heading "Evaluation system", external and internal evaluation stakeholders are listed and their roles are described (in a similar way to the report on 2007).

The "Evaluation activities" section provides more details about the development of the regional evaluation plan, the tendering process for hiring the external evaluator, organization and publication of the RDP ex post evaluation 2000-2006, and the review of common result and impact indicators for the current programming period.

Procedures for "Data collection" are explained up to the level of result indicators. The MA has the main responsibility in this regard and works in close collaboration with statistical institutes at regional and national levels as they provide the economic data in an appropriate format for monitoring and evaluation. Particular attention in the current APR is put on data collection for soil indicators for the agro-forestry measures.

The "Networking activities" section reports on the collaboration with the regional evaluation unit (Nucleo di Valutazione della Regione Marche). This consisted of a contribution to the single regional evaluation plan (PUV).

In the final section "Difficulties encountered and need for additional work" the MA mentions the delay with the tendering process to appoint the ongoing evaluator. This was due to complex administrative tendering procedures and the overlap of evaluation activities (ex-post and mid-term). Further issues concern the need to develop several impact indicators (in particular for the environment) and the annual frequency of reporting on result indicators. The latter is seen as problematic in particular for those measures for which result indicators were not collected systematically during the former period.

Recommendation for the MS:

✓ **Use the evaluation section of the APR as a tool to demonstrate progress in ongoing evaluation.** Indicate with cross-references, if relevant information on evaluation is provided in other sections of the APR or in reports of previous years.

✓ **Describe in sufficient detail all 5 topics indicated in Guidance note B of the Handbook on CMEF.** Pay particular attention to the coverage of the topics 'evaluation activities', 'networking activities' and 'problems encountered'.

Recommendations for the EC:

✓ Encourage MS to provide informative summaries, covering all 5 topics of the indicative outline in Guidance note B of the Handbook on CMEF.

✓ Use the report summaries to monitor progress by MAs on ongoing evaluation.

III. The system established for ongoing evaluation

Under this heading of the APRs the provisions for the progress of the ongoing evaluation system in the national/regional context should be described. A clear picture of who does what, when and how for the range of ongoing evaluation activities is expected to be provided. This may also include information on the composition of programme bodies (Monitoring Committee, Steering Committee, Working Groups etc.), their coordination mechanisms (regular meetings, workshops etc.) and information about their activities.

Findings

2. Due to the late finalisation and approval of many RDPs, the MAs continued to describe the establishment and fine-tuning of their evaluation systems in the APRs for 2008. While the majority of APRs for 2008 cover the description of the evaluation system (approx. 80%), relatively few programmes describe it in a detailed manner or consistently report on changes. However, some programmes reported already last year on their evaluation system either in the section of the APR on ongoing evaluation or elsewhere (e.g. in other sections of the APR, the programme document etc).

3. In 2008, a majority of RDPs were still concerned with administrative preparations for tendering evaluations, in particular for the MTE. 55 out of 88 APRs mention the selection procedure for external evaluators. While the reported information remains at a rather general level, different models for outsourcing ongoing evaluation are emerging: e.g. single-package tenders for ongoing evaluation including MTE (e.g. Slovakia), or multiple tenders for various evaluation activities (e.g. in Austria, Umbria, Calabria etc). Information on the internal coordination of evaluation activities and the overall division of the responsibilities complements the picture.

Box 2: Examples of outsourcing evaluation activities

Spain-Catalunya decided to contract the mid-term evaluator already in 2009 to help prepare for the MTE well in advance. The evaluator's tasks are described in detail in the APR and related time planning was provided.

Italy-Umbria decided to outsource all evaluation activities to a *single contractor* who is responsible for the programme's evaluations and for contributing to the evaluation section in the APRs from 2008 onwards. In the evaluator's task description, close collaboration with the MA and participation in the Monitoring Committee meetings is required, particularly where additional tasks related to indicators (review of common and programme specific indicators), and thematic studies are planned during the programming period.

In Italy-Calabria, the ongoing evaluator, besides drafting the APRs, mid-term and ex post evaluation reports, is also responsible for the collection of result and impact indicators and for the update of the baseline indicators.

4. Steering Groups (SG) for evaluation are becoming increasingly operational in Rural Development Programmes throughout Europe. While for 2007 relatively little evidence on the non-compulsory setting-up of SG for evaluation could be found (only 14 APRs reported on it for 2007), this situation has changed for 2008; 36 programmes mention the establishment of such bodies. With regard to the activities of the SG, the information from 32 APRs for 2008 proves that they have become operational in the respective programmes (e.g. in Italy-Veneto the SG successfully advised the Managing Authority to include the task of defining additional evaluation questions into the tender for the MTE evaluator; in Bavaria the SG selected the evaluator based on pre-defined award criteria).

Recommendations for the MS:

- ✓ **Report comprehensively on evaluation system and evaluation plan**. (Who does what, how and when?)

- ✓ **Describe administrative arrangements for selecting evaluators (MTE)** (e.g. preparation of ToR, type of tender, start and closure dates, activities outsourced, information on contracted companies etc).

- ✓ Provide **information on coordination with evaluation stakeholders** (i.e. interaction with evaluators, Steering Groups etc).

Recommendations for the EC:

- ✓ Explore possibilities to summarize dispatched information on evaluation systems from various sources.

- ✓ Take account of the diversity of evaluation systems established in the Member States.

IV.   Ongoing Evaluation Activities

In this section of the APRs the programme bodies have to summarize relevant evaluation activities of the MA and the hired evaluators during the reporting period. This refers both to preparatory activities (e.g. for the MTE) as well as to the progress in developing and implementing evaluations (e.g. evaluation methodologies and tools, thematic studies). In a concise form, the main outcomes of evaluation reports/studies may also be presented.

Findings

5. Compared to the reports for 2007 there is more in-depth coverage of ongoing evaluation activities in the APRs for 2008. This improved coverage is reflected both in the range of activities described and the proportion of the reports dealing with evaluation activities (approx. 80% in APRs for 2008). The increased coverage of activities can be explained by the fact that more than half of the RDPs were approved either in the 4th quarter 2007 or during the first two quarters of 2008.

6. In view of the MTE, activities concerning the review of the result/impact indicators, the intervention logics and the evaluation questions are steadily increasing. While the review of result and impact indicators was mentioned in 15 APRs for 2007, in 2008 this number increases to 49 (e.g. major preparatory work for impact indicators took place in Abruzzo, Brandenburg/Berlin and Thüringen; Madrid has developed a manual of result and impact indicators). The number of reports which mention the review of the intervention logic has increased from 16 in 2007 to 20 in 2008. References to activities concerning the review of the evaluation questions are still rather moderate; reported in 9 cases in 2007, rising to 16 cases in 2008. The example in Box 3 illustrates the focus of the work in Extremadura on reviewing the intervention logic and links this to related activities of the evaluation system.

Box 3: Example of reviewing the intervention logic

Spain-Extremadura. Activity commenced in 2008, with progress made on reviewing the intervention logic and the establishment of cause-effect relationships for the measures of the RDP, with the aim to present a picture of its suitability for strategic and operational decisions. Results from this activity are foreseen during 2009, and the MA then plans to have objective analysis from different perspectives (top-down and bottom-up) on the following elements:

- availability of financial resources for development of future activities

- reviewing target levels for expected results during the programme

- products and services generated by the different measures applied in the RDP

- direct benefits to the beneficiaries of the RDP

- expected impact in relation to the strategy and the defined intervention logic

7. Rural Development Programmes have progressed in developing evaluation methodologies and tools. 38 out of 88 APRs in 2008 mention work in the field of methodologies and tools (e.g. a glossary of evaluation key terms has been developed in Austria, a methodological study on net effects has been conducted in Flanders, an alternative method of measuring the GVA has been explored in several German programmes, Scotland has specified methods for impact assessment etc).

8. Lessons from the ex post (2000-2006) and ex ante evaluations are followed up in some RDPs. In many APRs the ex post evaluation is mentioned although the information provided remains at a rather general level. Lessons learned from the ex post evaluations included among others recommendations for improved data systems, more accurate reviewing of the intervention logic and indicators, better structuring and operational planning of the evaluation system, refining and addressing evaluation questions.

An example of a lesson from the ex post evaluation has been mentioned in the APR of **Belgium-Flanders**. For water quality, the ex post evaluation showed a very low correlation between the RDP measures and nitrogen changes in surface and groundwater. However, it has also been stated, that the validity of this finding might be limited due to the rather wide-meshed network of measure points for nitrogen in the last period. The MA has therefore concluded that data collection regarding water quality for the current RDP needs to be improved. However, the APR does not provide a clear timeframe for this activity.

9. Thematic studies are increasingly used as a tool to provide relevant information for RD evaluation activities. 21 APRs mention thematic studies in 2008, mostly in the field of environment, biodiversity, HNV or water quality: the APR of Austria mentions 12 thematic studies; Denmark has contracted several research projects on effects of rural development policies; Estonia has contracted several studies on soil, but also on water quality, biodiversity and in the socio-economic field.

Box 5: Examples of thematic studies concerning Axis 2 evaluation

In **Austria** the majority of studies subcontracted are related to Axis 2. Major themes concern: (i) the set-up of a monitoring network of 600 sample spots, in order to monitor biodiversity indicators over a longer period of time; (ii) establishment of a data base for the Farmland Bird Index in Austria; and (iii) creating a model for quantification of soil erosion.

In **England**, the MA has a monitoring and evaluation plan developed with Natural England (a government advisory body which also delivers the agri-environment measure of the Rural Development Programme for England), setting out a range of indicators that were expected to be addressed in evaluation of agri-environment aspects. Agri-environment measures are underpinned by a programme of detailed research designed to inform measure development and delivery. This research has been directed at developing and testing management options and techniques that, if successful, could be incorporated into measure management. This has significantly enhanced the understanding of environmental constraints and processes.

Recommendations for the MS:

- ✓ **Report on evaluation activities in relation to your evaluation plan.**
- ✓ **Give an overview of preparatory activities for the MTE.** e.g. review of intervention logic, result and impact indicators, and evaluation questions.
- ✓ **Provide information on the follow-up of previous evaluations.** If relevant for the current period, refer to recommendations of ex post 2000-06 and ex ante by describing how recommendations have been addressed.
- ✓ **Outline specific evaluation methodologies developed.** Highlight examples of innovative evaluation approaches and reasons for adopting them.
- ✓ **Report on commissioned studies.** Indicate the focus, the expected or realized outcome, the use for evaluation purposes.

Recommendations for the EC:

- ✓ Update and present the state of play concerning ongoing evaluation activities in the MS.
- ✓ Encourage Member States to share practices on their evaluation activities.

V. Systems for Data Collection and Management

Under this heading the programmes describe the approaches and arrangements for data collection (e.g. IT systems, data sources etc.), the responsible bodies (e.g. MA, paying agency, evaluators) and the procedures established between these bodies to ensure the provision of data for evaluation purposes. Furthermore data gaps and actions to overcome these should be reported.

Findings

10. Data collection attracts major attention in the APRs for 2008. While 61 APRs provide information on data sources (e.g. databases, IT solutions), less than half of these (21) make a distinction between primary and secondary data sources. Institutional arrangements are covered by 33 reports for 2008 (compared to 18 reports for 2007) but the information often remains at a rather general level. Many reports limit the description of data collection to the development of the monitoring tables (input and output data) to be delivered together with the APR.

11. Different organisational models for data systems and data management are emerging in terms of the division of work between responsible bodies, the degree of centralisation and externalisation. In UK-Northern Ireland the central database was fine-tuned during 2008 and officials from the MA worked closely with the programme's evaluators to ensure that data collection obligations were met with regard to each measure/axis. The evaluators also completed a considerable amount of user testing. In Estonia the paying agency processes the data collection and submits the monitoring tables for the APRs to the MA by March 15th each year. In Flanders data collection and management is outsourced to a private company specialising in data management. Each organisation/person responsible for each (sub)measure is provided with made-to-measure digital tables, delivered annually. Control algorithms are included, and the system does the necessary computing to produce the cumulative tables for the APRs, thus lightening the workload of data suppliers and assisting quality control of cumulative data.

12. MAs have been exploring various ways of upgrading their IT systems in particular to improve data entry, data-transmission and visualization. Açores outsourced the development of an IT system during 2008, while Sicily partially outsourced this task by setting-up a protocol between the MA and a private company for developing its IT system. Other challenges addressed by MS or regions include: converting paper-based data to electronic IT systems, and development of a functional interface between the MA and payments agency for monitoring data. Piemonte has developed a common visualization tool to help the MA and the wider public (including beneficiaries) to gain a quick and continuous overview of the performances of each measure and thereby support them in reviewing the programme strategy and/or objectives, if needed. However, practical problems in data management relate often also to the establishment of appropriate IT systems (e.g. reported for Cyprus and Romania) or the coordination between the relevant bodies involved (e.g. in Cyprus, Umbria, Friuli Venezia Giulia).

13. The main data gaps identified by Member States relate to environmental indicators (measures Axis 2) and to the gross value added indicators related to non-agricultural activities. 21 APRs mention specific data gaps. This is the case for Belgium-Flanders, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Spain-Madrid, among others. Against the background of a late start in the implementation of measures under Axes 3 and 4, data gaps for these axes are also mentioned (e.g. Ireland). Moreover delays in the update of socio-economic data are also reported (e.g. Navarra).

14. Rural Development Programmes have started numerous activities to overcome data gaps and to improve data quality while preparing for the MTE. Several reports refer to activities to overcome information gaps: Belgium-Flanders set up a project which aimed to improve the electronic data collection system for gross value added data of non-agricultural farm activities. Denmark identified some data gaps in the course of updating some of the baseline indicators and was exploring ways to overcome these gaps with new statistical information. UK-Scotland outsourced a contract during 2008 to review and improve data collection and highlight data gaps for the MTE. Estonia started a study on data availability for the RDP in 2008 and this will be completed in 2009. Madeira outlined plans to set up new arrangements to ensure data collection for the RDP (between the MA, the statistical service and environmental institutes), Belgium-Wallonia will apply ISO quality standards to further develop their IT system and achieve quality data management.

15. The processing of large amounts of dispersed and non-harmonized data is perceived as challenging by several RDPs. Estonia mentions that the large amount of data is difficult to process. Capacity building in data processing has been mentioned as an issue in Wallonia. The lack of organization and the dispersion of quantitative data and the insufficient disaggregation are perceived as unsatisfactory in Azores. Madeira has recommended that in the near future, arrangements will be made between the MA and regional organization for statistics in order to provide more adequate data for the use of RD impact evaluation.

Recommendations for the MS:

- ✓ **Present the approaches and systems for data collection and management in detail and describe respective responsibilities** (e.g. include a diagram and outline information flows etc).

- ✓ **Report on main data sources and types used.** Give information on data providers and specify which data is expected to be collected by the evaluators.

- ✓ Provide an **overview on main data gaps** and activities to overcome such gaps. Include an indication on data quality and appropriateness for MTE.

- ✓ **Describe arrangements taken** to provide evaluators with necessary data.

Recommendations for the EC:

- ✓ Provide appropriate support to improve data collection and management systems.

VI.   Networking activities of people involved in evaluation

The reporting on this topic in the evaluation section of the APRs should include activities and outcomes linked to information exchange in the field of evaluation. In addition, capacity building activities may also be summarized in this section.

Findings

16. Overall networking activities in the field of evaluation are gradually increasing in the RDPs. One third of the APRs mentions specific evaluation-related networking activities in 2008. However, in most APRs networking is described in a separate (monitoring) chapter of the APR and consequently relevant information might not be mentioned in the section on ongoing evaluation.

17. Networking activities at programme level are characterized by both formal and informal information exchange. The reported formal activities in 2008 comprise internal evaluation workshops (e.g. in Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark) and coordination meetings (e.g. Evaluation Coordination Group in Pays Basque, coordination meetings in Lithuania, inter-ministerial networking meetings in Poland). Informal information exchange between evaluators (Hessen, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Schleswig-Holstein, Cataluña etc.) is particularly relevant in countries with regional programmes. Few reports mentioned exchanges with the research community (e.g. Estonia, Portugal).

18. Networking activities at national level show a heterogeneous picture across the EU. Some countries have proactive exchange mechanisms established, while for the majority of Member States there is little evidence of networking in the field of evaluation. The reported activities include the participation in national evaluation conferences (e.g. Poland, Germany, Hungary, Austria), in specific evaluation related workshops (e.g. in Germany, a workshop on Leader, on agri-environmental measures, and on the evaluation of compensatory allowances and in Belgium, evaluation-related events organised by the national network etc.). For Spanish programmes the meetings in the Evaluation Sub-Committee of the Ministry are mentioned, whereas several APRs from Germany and Italy refer to activities of their national rural networks (see Box 6). However, in several Member States (e.g. Finland, Portugal, United Kingdom, Belgium and particularly the new Member States) no inter-regional networking in the field of evaluation is mentioned.

19. European and international networking activities of RDPs remain overall at a rather moderate level - the activities of the Evaluation Expert Network and of the Evaluation Expert Committee are the exception. With regard to international networking, the APRs for 2008 mention most prominently the exchange with the Evaluation Expert Network and the Evaluation Expert Committee. The Helpdesk missions to the Member States are also among the reported activities. Prominence is given to participation in the Focus Groups organized by the Evaluation Helpdesk and contacts with the Helpdesk's Geographic Experts (e.g. Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy, Malta). The APR for The Netherlands mentions the participation in the HNV conference in Estonia, and the APR for Austria describes the information exchange with the German Evaluation Society.

Box 6: National Evaluation Network enhancing capacity building

The **Italian National Rural Network** (NRN), through its National Evaluation Network (NEN), is supporting the regions in setting up their evaluation systems and in developing their evaluation activities in an ongoing process. The NEN produces methodological documents and thematic studies, and follows up on activities (e.g. evaluations, thematic studies) that have been carried out in the different regions and thereby helps to enhance knowledge exchange and cooperation between the regions. Although there are considerable differences between evaluation systems across the Italian regions, and a range of evaluation capacities within the respective MAs, the NRN/NEN is supporting capacity building at all levels.

20. Capacity building actions in the field of evaluation showed an increase in 2008 but remain at a rather low level. References to capacity building in evaluation are made in 18 APRs. Most of these 18 reports state in a rather general manner that they participated in a number of events, conferences or workshops dealing with evaluation issues (Bulgaria, German programmes, Netherlands, Poland), however the distinction between networking, coordination and capacity building is sometimes rather difficult to make. Few programmes mention the participation in explicit training actions or the organisation of their own capacity building activities.

Recommendations for the MS:

- ✓ **Provide an overview on the participation in relevant networking activities at programme, national and EU level** (e.g. interaction with evaluation stakeholders, with national evaluation network, with Evaluation Expert Network, etc).

- ✓ Describe in detail the **purpose, outcome and follow-up of networking events**, workshops and seminars (e.g. the initiators, the participants, the lessons learned etc).

- ✓ State **references to further documentation** about these networking events (e.g. links to websites and publications).

- ✓ **Highlight capacity building actions** in the field of evaluation (e.g. trainings, specific seminars etc).

Recommendations for the EC:

- ✓ Encourage and facilitate effective networking activities in the field of evaluation at various levels.

- ✓ Foster capacity building in the field of evaluation.

VII. Difficulties encountered and need for additional work

This chapter should provide a brief overview of the difficulties experienced in fulfilling ongoing evaluation requirements), planned and realized solutions to overcome the difficulties, including an explanation of whether the solutions were found in-house or externally.

Findings

21. While the number of difficulties encountered in relation to evaluation have increased the described issues are of a more practical dimension.   A total of 25 APRs, i.e. more than twice as many as in the year before, included a section on difficulties encountered in relation to evaluation. The reported difficulties mainly concern IT systems, CMEF, workload and monitoring tables.

22. Numerous difficulties are reported in relation to the IT systems and in this context general concerns are expressed about answering the evaluation questions. The late start of many programmes has led to a delay in the development of data collection systems and this in turn brings risks of limited or insufficient data availability for the preparation of the MTE - these concerns are mentioned by the Netherlands, Portugal-Continent, Madeira, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and some regions in Germany, Spain and Italy. Even in MS where the IT systems are fully operational, the early timing of the MTE (in relation to progress on programme implementation) is still reported as a problem, as the available data may not be sufficient to properly assess the impacts of the RDPs, including answering the evaluation questions.

23. Many difficulties are mentioned in relation to fulfilling the requirements of the monitoring tables. This is the case, for instance, in the RDP Madrid where an insufficient definition of indicators (socio-economic, environmental) is identified by the MA as leading to difficulties with answering the evaluation questions and assessing the impacts at MTE stage. In this example, no recommendations are mentioned to overcome this lack of data.

24. The workload linked to carrying out evaluations and the various evaluation tasks are a challenge for the Managing Authorities. For example, Italy-Marche reported on the difficulties faced by the Evaluation Unit of the MA in dealing with the ex post evaluation for 2000-2006 and the preparation of MTE 2010 at the same time. The substantial workload and staff shortages have been mentioned by other MS e.g. Bolzano and Romania. Other challenges include staff turnover in MAs and the consequent loss of capacity which slows down their work.

25. Several APRs report on challenges encountered in the practical application of the overall CMEF. In this respect problems relate to answers to the common evaluation questions, the stabilization and harmonization of methodologies in the evaluation process (Azores). Several German programme authorities have commented that with the focus of the CMEF being on objectives and indicators (Baden-Württemberg, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Hamburg, etc.), there is a need for a closer and more intensive exchange of experiences with other evaluators as well as with the Evaluation Helpdesk and DG Agriculture and Rural Development.

Recommendations for the MS:

- ✓ **Describe the most significant difficulties experienced** in carrying out ongoing evaluation activities. Indicate with cross-references, if problems are reported under other sections of the APR.

- ✓ **Report on planned and realized solutions for overcoming difficulties**. Describe the solutions adopted, the involved actors, the lessons learnt.

- ✓ **Differentiate between difficulties to be resolved at programme, Member State or EU level.** Report on progress in overcoming problems and needs which were described in previous years.

Recommendations for the EC:

- ✓ Follow-up on problems encountered and foster solutions where possible.

VIII. Annex 1: Explanatory note, providing clarifications to the MAs for preparing the section on ongoing evaluation in APRs (complementing Guidance note B of the Handbook on CMEF)

General recommendations: Use the following 6 sub-headings proposed in the indicative outline of Guidance note B and report in a concise, but clear manner. Demonstrate progress in your ongoing evaluation activities. Differentiate between activities planned and activities realized. The proposed contents are intended to provide suggestions about what can be reported under each heading.

CMEF INDICATIVE OUTLINE	Proposed contents (optional)
1. Introduction	✓ **Brief overview** of the most important milestones during the reporting period as regards the ongoing evaluation ✓ **Major progress towards** the preparation of mid-term and ex post evaluation (i.e. where do you stand?)
2. The system established for ensuring ongoing evaluation	✓ **Evaluation system and evaluation plan**: Who does what, how and when? ✓ **Administrative arrangements for selecting evaluators (ongoing, MTE, ex post)** e.g. preparation of ToR, type of tender, start and closure dates, activities outsourced, information on contracted companies etc. ✓ **Coordination with evaluation stakeholders** i.e. interaction with evaluators, Steering Groups etc.
3. The evaluation activities undertaken (ongoing and finished)	✓ **Evaluation activities in relation to evaluation plan** ✓ **Preparatory activities for the main evaluation events (MTE, ex post)** e.g. reviews of intervention logic, result and impact indicators, and evaluation questions ✓ Information on the **follow-up of previous evaluations**, if relevant ✓ Outline of **specific evaluation methodologies** developed ✓ Themes, outcomes and use of **commissioned studies**
4. Data collection	✓ Approaches and systems for **data collection and management** (information flows) ✓ Main **data sources and types** used (incl. data providers) ✓ **Overview on main data gaps** and activities to overcome such gaps (indication on data quality) ✓ **Arrangements taken** to provide evaluators with data
5. Networking activities of the people involved in evaluation	✓ **Participation in relevant networking activities at programme, national and EU level** (e.g. interaction with evaluation stakeholders, with national evaluation network, with Evaluation Expert Network, with research community etc.) ✓ **Purpose, outcome and follow-up** of networking events, workshops and seminars (e.g. the initiators, the participants, the lessons learned etc.) ✓ **References to further documentation** about these networking events (e.g. links to websites and publications) ✓ **Capacity building actions** in the field of evaluation, e.g. training sessions, seminars etc.
6. Difficulties encountered and need for additional work	✓ **Difficulties experienced in carrying out ongoing evaluation activities** (use cross-references where problems are reported in other sections of the APR, distinguish at which level they have to be solved) ✓ **Planned and realized solutions for overcoming difficulties** (solutions adopted, involved actors, lessons learnt)

IX. Annex 2: Acronyms and abbreviations used in this document

APR	Annual Progress Report
CMEF	Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
EQ	Evaluation Question(s)
GE	Geographic Expert(s) (part of the team of the Evaluation Helpdesk)
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee(s)
MS	Member State(s)
MTE	mid-term evaluation
RDP	Rural Development Programme(s)
RD	Rural Development
SG	Steering Group
ToR	Terms of Reference