



European Evaluation Network  
for Rural Development



European Commission  
Agriculture and Rural Development

SWOT ANALYSIS

Rural Development  
Evaluation System

2007 – 2013

including CMEF

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

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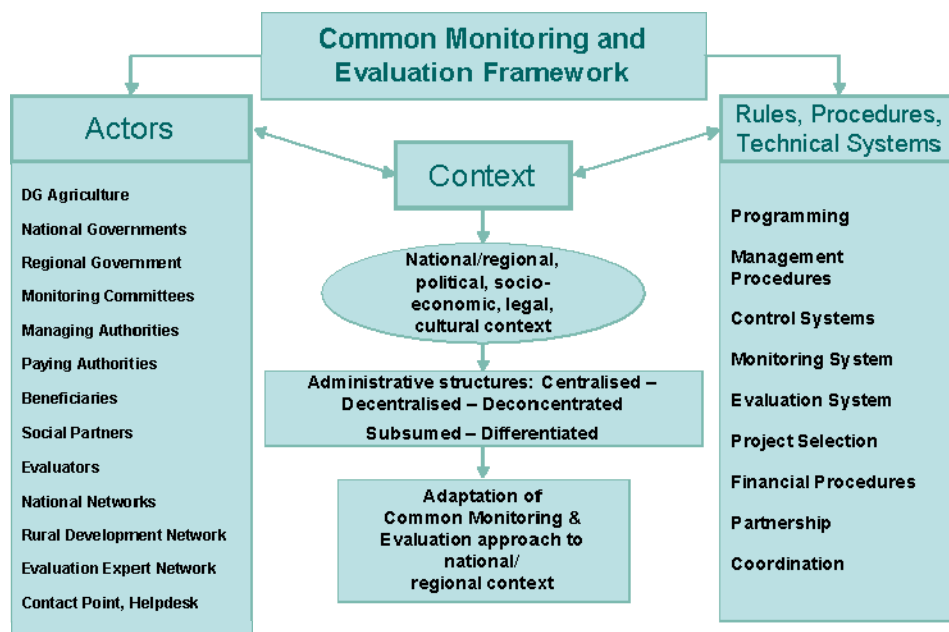
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# 1. Introduction

For the work of the Evaluation Helpdesk this SWOT analysis has the aim to analyse different elements of the RD Evaluation System (including Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework) in a way to highlight

- where the Evaluation Network needs to undertake structural work
- where thematic working groups could be established
- where other elements can be improved by further work.

The SWOT exercise is therefore planned as an ongoing exercise, which has to be updated and further developed throughout the implementation of the Rural Development programmes. The Rural Development Evaluation System 2007-2013 is part of the overall programming and implementation process and is composed of several components:



The evaluation context comprises the overall EU Rural Development Policy as well in the specific national/regional/local situations (political, administrative, socio-economic, legal, cultural), which lead to a variety of adaptations of the overall evaluation model.

The actors (stakeholders) that are involved at different administrative levels into the evaluation of RD programmes are many: the European Commission, national and regional governments, the monitoring committees, managing authorities, the paying authorities, evaluators, national networks, the Evaluation Expert Network, beneficiaries etc. These actors have different roles in the evaluation process and they also have different interests in the results. More generally, these actors define and interpret rules, take decisions and act on a day-to-day basis within their specific context.

The evaluation capacity within the entire programming and implementation capacity stands in close relation to the actors and their organisations: It consists of the available resources for evaluation, and the way in which evaluation know-how is provided and systematically further developed. Evaluation capacity comprises the methodological capacity, as well as the capacity to manage evaluation processes, to provide evaluation know how and to feed evaluation results into the programme steering.

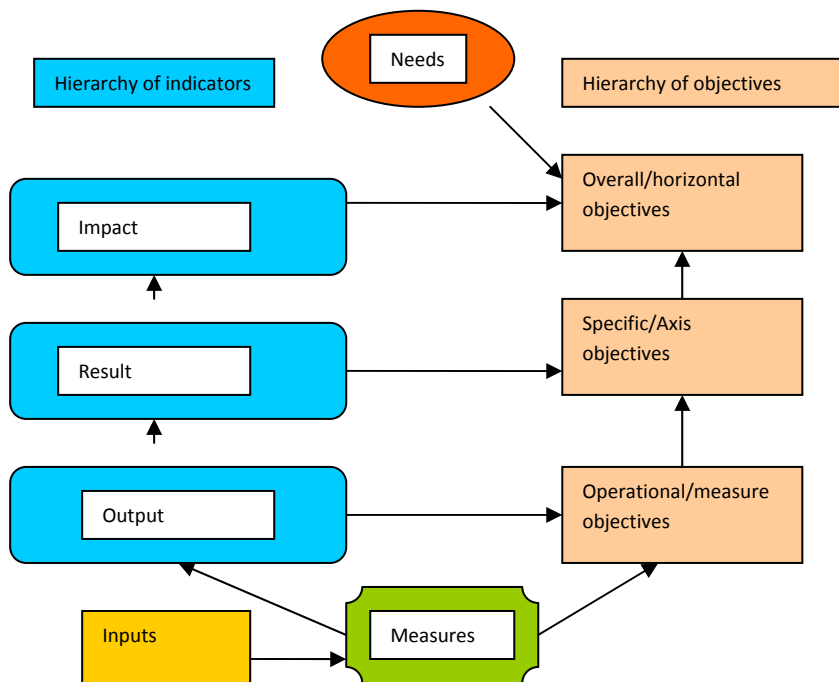
The rules, procedures and technical systems for the implementation of the evaluation system: In the period 2007-2013 the rules are codified in the CMEF-Handbook. The CMEF-handbook and the annexes support the Member States in setting up the evaluation system and carrying out monitoring and evaluation procedures during the design and implementation of rural development programmes: Consequently, this guidance documents help to define the concept of the ongoing evaluation, specify how the evaluation process should be organised (timing, minimum requirements etc.), in which way the set-up is organised and leave room for the methodological challenges. The guidance documents as well as complimentary sources further define technical issues regarding monitoring, data-gathering, reporting.

## 2. Intervention logic of RD programmes and evaluation approach

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The intervention logic within rural development programs reflects the hierarchy of objectives and indicators in the rural development programme, designed within the framework of the EC regulations and the National Strategic Plans (see Figure 1):

Figure 1: The Hierarchy of rural development program objectives and indicators in RDP – intervention logic



Source: CMEF, Annex B: Evaluation Guidelines (adapted)

### 3. Findings of the SWOT analysis

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For the analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats the single components of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation System (context, stakeholders & evaluation capacity, tools, technical issues) have been thoroughly analysed. The analysis is based on literature research (academic documents, EU guidelines and regulations, the CMEF handbook, Court of Auditors Special Report 07/2006 etc.) and will be further complemented and verified by the Needs Assessments (Focus Groups) in the Member States.

a) In which respect has the context for the evaluation of RD programmes changed?

Strengths:

- **Strategic approach** to rural development policy enabling the setting up of a clear rural development strategy targeting rural areas of Europe and giving enough flexibility to national authorities and their socio-economic partners to balance European strategic priorities with specific conditions of various MS.
- Clear and understandable explicit definition of objectives in the EC Regulation 1698/2005 on rural development, as well as a clear and robust monitoring and evaluation framework description.
- The result oriented rural development programs integrate evaluation more into their implementation.
- Simplification of RDP through single funding system and single set of programming, financing, monitoring and auditing rules.

Weaknesses:

- Non-existence of a common „rural eligibility“ criterion in order to target the intervention more effectively and consequently the risk of misidentification of rural areas most in needs of intervention.

Opportunities:

- Strategic focus on competitiveness, environment and quality of life and further elaboration into priorities and measure specific objectives enables rural development policy to be incorporated into wider European policies and contribute to overall objectives under Lisbon and Gothenburg agenda (i.e. competitiveness, growth, employment and sustainability).
- It also enables the introduction of a clearer monitoring and evaluation system – following inputs/flows down to measures and evaluates them back against.

Threats:

- Too much focus on the evaluation of the contributions to goals of the EU strategic guidelines of RD might overlook other important effects of EU RD Policy, which are not reflected in indicators.



## b) Is the new concept of ongoing evaluation useful?

### Strengths:

- The existence of a consistent evaluation framework - all evaluation requirements are brought together in a single common monitoring and evaluation framework (CMEF) - agreed with MS facilitates the creation of a common base for comparing approaches, effects and efficiency in the use of EU financial instruments among Member States.
- Existence of the CMEF, with common indicators sets, will support Member States in setting up monitoring and evaluation frameworks of rural development programmes as well as create a common methodological basis for independent evaluators to carry out evaluation exercises.
- The availability of the framework right from the beginning of programming period is an important precondition for its effective implementation.

### Weaknesses:

- The CMEF framework is a rather complex and demanding system especially for MA representatives.
- The definition of "ongoing evaluation" still creates confusion among evaluation stakeholders.
- Missing practical experience in implementing the new concept.

### Opportunities:

- Existence of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework is new in EU evaluation culture enabling harmonisation of approaches towards monitoring and evaluation of rural development programmes under new programming period 2007 – 2013. Moreover, it provides an opportunity to see the overall situation in European rural areas.
- Existence of ongoing evaluation approach creates the opportunity for MS and EC to observe and examine continuously the influence of intervention of rural development programmes on the situation in rural areas and gather data. This data can later facilitate effective periodic evaluation – mid-term and ex-post.
- With the need to set up national ongoing evaluation systems, national and regional authorities have the opportunity to improve the entire programme evaluation culture and see the system as help to improve intervention and operations.
- The concept of ongoing evaluation allows for regular and implementation-oriented evaluation of rural development programmes → e.g. at the beginning the evaluation might concentrate more on implementation oriented aspects, whereas at the end more on impact oriented issues.
- The flexibility of the framework towards embracing the broad range of different evaluation experiences throughout the MS might generate innovative approaches.

### Threats:

- The risk of a changing evaluation framework and context (health check, reforms, reviews etc.) might threaten the evaluation design.

- Unresolved methodological challenges might lead to a wide variety of national and regional approaches, which are not comparable (e.g. issue of impact analysis; micro-macro approaches etc.), which can make it difficult to draw out a synthesis analysis among MS.
- Comparability of evaluation results may be difficult if approaches are too different.

c) In which way are evaluation processes expected to change between 2007-2013?

Strengths:

- The concept of ongoing evaluation implies a strong link between monitoring, evaluation and decision-making
- A strong process-orientation: evaluation is organized in a series of evaluation activities instead of isolated, singular actions.
- The continuous long-term evaluation encourages a close communication between the Managing Authority and evaluators.

Weaknesses:

- The timing of the ex-ante evaluation comes very early in the programmes' cycle, thus not allowing a full assessment of the established monitoring and evaluation system).

Opportunities:

- Opportunity to establish evaluation as an interactive process between evaluator and public administration (based on regular meetings between evaluator and MA); continuous reporting to Steering Committee and Monitoring Committee.

Threats:

- A very close cooperation between evaluators and programming bodies in the course of "ongoing evaluation" might threaten the independence of evaluators.
- At programme level, the evaluation systems might fail to provide the right information for the necessities of programme steering and policy re-design (this might lead to the establishment of a "monitoring and evaluation system" that is only used for the purpose of EU reporting).
- The lack of long-term policy vision and of "ownership" of the evaluation process/results by the MS could undermine the whole ongoing evaluation system by reducing it to a mere "procedural" issue.
- A lack of "enthusiasm" and active involvement in the activities of the network etc.
- The risk of insufficient organisation and follow up of the evaluations by the national/regional authorities, e.g. the need of mobilising the necessary expertise (steering group, the need of timely preparing the mid-term and ex post evaluations etc.)

## d) How is evaluation capacity developed under the new system?

### Strengths:

- Rural development programme stakeholders get support through the Evaluation Expert Network. The network provides a platform for transnational exchange of experiences, good practices and information and promotes continuous methodological work on indicators (e.g. for HNV).
- Capacity building is foreseen throughout the programme life cycle and is organized as a continuous exchange among stakeholders at all levels.

### Weaknesses:

- The new system is not equipped sufficiently with capacities at national, regional and EU levels . Managing Authority and PA officers are not sufficiently trained; they need an explanation and training in the use of the handbook and annexes which would help them to implement the CMEF more efficiently.
- EU country desk officers are not sufficiently informed and trained in CMEF and sometimes it is difficult for them to provide appropriate support to national authorities.
- At programme level there are rather high obstacles for new "evaluators " to enter into the market (due to the specificity of the task, which may lead to a certain lack of "fresh ideas", thus weakening the results of evaluation. The limited "size" of the market (e.g. in "small" countries) may cause similar effects.
- Often evaluation capacities are lost due to "mobility" reasons in public administrations.
- Existing best practices are not sufficiently exploited under the current system (evaluation methodologies, University projects, existing evaluation networks).

### Opportunities:

- Existence of the European Evaluation Network is an opportunity to harmonize approaches and methodologies and enhance the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation across MS. In this respect, the network could "collect evaluation methods", classify them and make them known across programme areas.
- At programme level, there is more possibility to further develop evaluation approaches in a dialog between evaluators and administrations (check relevance of evaluation questions, coherence between objectives and measures, coverage of evaluation questions through indicators, clarification of data accessibility).

### Threats:

- The lack of training (in particular in the new Member States) right from the beginning may be an obstacle for an appropriate implementation of the evaluation framework.
- A lack of coordination of evaluation capacities between different administrative levels (EU, national, programme) may lead to a duplication of work if synergies are not exploited sufficiently.

e) Are the new tools (the CMEF handbook, indicators, etc.) adequate for the set-up of the evaluation systems and for the evaluation of Rural Development programmes?

Strengths:

- The Handbook on CMEF and its annexes – provide a comprehensive guidance for all phases of evaluation.
- Measure Fiches and other indicators Fiches are in general good tools for describing measures, indicators and questions in logic. They can be a good help for MA and PA presenting a description of measure and related indicators, description of indicator, definition, measurement unit, sources, responsibility for collection, availability etc.
- The effort in clear division of financial inputs, output, results, impact and baseline indicators and the description of their use in the framework, as well as their clear pairing with the hierarchy of objectives (Strategic guidelines, RD Regulations, national strategic plans and rural development programmes).
- The consideration of the baseline situation (context and objectives related) is an important part of the evaluation methodology.

Weaknesses:

- The structure of the Handbook is rather unclear from the point of M&E logic. Monitoring processes are described in several parts, sometimes headings do not fully correspond with the content and occasionally there is different information regarding the same topic
- The establishment of a common framework for monitoring and evaluation in the EU-27 based on a limited number of common indicators leads to a variety of intrinsic limitations, such as:
  - Questionable relevance of common baseline and impact indicators for axis 3 (and 4?),
  - Common indicators only partially address the scope of some of the common evaluation questions,
  - Inconsistencies in the proposed measurement of the same parameter under different indicators (e.g. labour productivity in agriculture and in food industry),
  - The relevance of the given definitions for some of the common indicators is varying with respect to the different regional/national contexts,
  - The set of impact indicators does not cover horizontal objectives and all the specific objectives of each Axis, in particular Axis 3 and 4.
- The proposed "bottom-up estimation of impact" against the baseline trend implies methodological challenges and high level professional skills by the evaluators.
- The demarcation between monitoring and evaluation does not lend in itself to a clear differentiation of responsibilities between Managing Authorities and evaluators in terms of data collection, e.g. result indicators are part of monitoring and annual reports, but can often only be collected via evaluation (e.g. economic key values).

### Opportunities:

- The Guidance documents facilitate to establish a common understanding of monitoring and evaluation across programme areas.
- The possibility to generate additional indicators, which gives MS the flexibility in the evaluation of country and programme specific objectives as well as provide opportunity to incorporate the RD evaluation system into the M&E framework in their country and to use programme specific indicators in order to examine specificities of interventions in national and regional programmes.
- The presence of Context indicators provides the possibility for the stronger integration of rural development interventions with other policies.
- Properly calculated impacts are the best tool for demonstrating the contribution of RDP to the strategic priorities.

### Threats:

- The use of the guidance documents as “closed” documents could “freeze” the evaluation methods at the present stage and could be an obstacle for future innovations.
- The CMEF provides the framework for the EU 27; however it has to be adapted to the national/regional circumstances. The very existence of the CMEF guidance documents could prevent the Member States to invest in the evaluation process for going beyond the minimum requirements.
- Inappropriate rationale of measures and indicators might prevent the effective evaluation of the real contribution of the measures to specific objectives.



European Evaluation Network  
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**Evaluation Helpdesk**

260 Chaussée St Pierre – B-1040 Brussels

Tel: +32 (0)2 736 18 90

E-mail: [info@ruralevaluation.eu](mailto:info@ruralevaluation.eu)