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# Rural Evaluation

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EUROPEAN EVALUATION NETWORK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

## NEWS

NUMBER 10  
DECEMBER  
2012



### EVALUATORS' PERSPECTIVE

# Moving towards more evidence-based evaluation and targeted data management

WRITTEN BY **ANDREAS RESCH / ROLF BERGS**

**With the prospect of tighter budgets in the next programming period, concern about the effective use of funds is growing. In addition, evaluations of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) and interventions have proved challenging and have in many cases not provided policy-makers with clear evidence-based conclusions regarding their effectiveness, efficiency and impact.**



**D**irectorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development is encouraging Member States to increase their efforts in developing credible evidence of rural development (RD) effects. This will require a review of current monitoring and evaluation systems and capacities, including data collection arrangements. Moreover, evaluation plans will become obligatory, and more emphasis is to be placed on the evaluation of impacts. As a variety of methods are available to capture the impacts of RD interventions, it is up to the Managing Authorities together with evaluators to decide which one, or which combination of methods, is the most suitable. High-quality evaluation strategies and tech-

niques are essential for generating useful knowledge about which interventions 'work' and which do not. Strengthening the quality of evaluations and developing reliable evidence of value added is essential. In the first half of the current program-

ming period, process oriented evaluation approaches prevailed. This type of evaluation is very important for improving programme implementation and for adapting the programmes in order to increase

*continued on page 2*



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the effectiveness of the EAFRD. However, in view of the *ex post* evaluation in 2015, the second half of the 2007-2013 programming period – and the subsequent one – requires more impact evaluations in order to obtain credible evidence of the achievements of the RDPs. The calculation of impacts needs to be based on empirical evidence, otherwise justification of the intervention becomes questionable.

There are two types of **empirical evidence**. First, direct “tangible” observation can establish evidence of impact of many interventions (e.g. a survey, causal relationship or case studies). Second, the impacts of some sorts of intervention cannot be directly observed. In order to observe the effect of an intervention on a group of beneficiaries, it is necessary to compare them with a similar group who did not benefit from the intervention: this is called the counterfactual. Impacts are

**“ The calculation of impacts needs to be based on empirical evidence, otherwise justification of the intervention becomes questionable. ”**

thus expressed, for example, in the form of differences in means (or proportions) between results observed for programme beneficiaries and counterfactual values of a control group generated by logistic regression and unbiased in selection. It is essential to bear in mind that some RD interventions may be suitable for counterfactual analysis and others not.

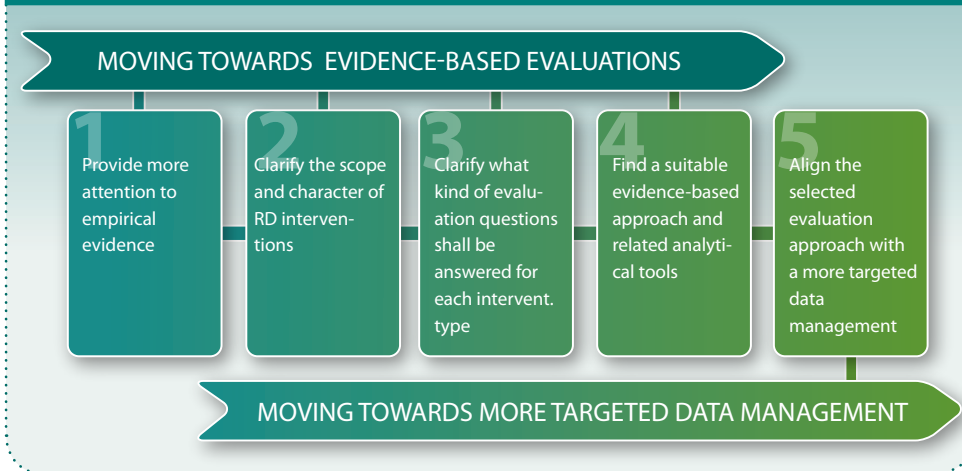
Finding a suitable form of evidence depends to a large extent on the **scope and character** of rural development interventions. The character of RD interventions is

broad (from vocational training of farmers to flood protection) and measures are in many cases less focused on strengthening immediate economic competitiveness (growth and employment) but rather on sustainability and safeguarding welfare (e.g. agri-environmental payments, village renewal, etc.). In order to help clarify the expected consequences of an intervention, evaluation questions need to be developed.

Evaluation questions have a fundamental role in determining what kind of effects of

| EXAMPLE 1  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Measure 111</b><br>Vocational training and information actions, including diffusion of scientific knowledge and innovative practises for persons engaged in the agricultural, food and forestry sectors |  |
| Key evaluation question  | “Did the farmer benefit from the training?”  |
| Assessment through simple (naïve) approach   | A comparison of the economic situation of the farmer with and without training disregarding other external impacts   |
| <b>The problem of unobservables :</b><br>One cannot observe a farmer being trained and not trained at the same time  |  |
| Evidence-based approach and related analytical tools   | Setting up a statistically generated control group out of similar units of farmers   |
| <b>The decision is determined by the trade-off between reliability of results and costs for generating results</b>   |  |
| Selected evaluation approach with a more targeted data management  | <b>Propensity score matching approach:</b><br>Estimate the statistical probability of being treated by using data for characteristic predictor variables from both trained and not trained individuals<br>> Reduced selection bias   |
| <b>Need for meaningful data provided in time &gt; more targeted data management</b>  |  |
| Data requirement   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information on the participants (e.g. age, sex, education, professional status, type of farm, size of farm, regional type, income)</li> <li>- Anonymous “micro” data from FADN to separate participants and non-participants</li> </ul> <p>Alternative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Surveys among a non-participating panel of farmers</li> <li>- Monitoring extended to a pre-defined control group</li> </ul> |

## 5 KEY STEPS TOWARDS MORE EVIDENCE-BASED EVALUATION AND TARGETED DATA MANAGEMENT



interventions should be explored according to the different interests and perspectives of stakeholders and policy-makers. Evaluation questions form the basis for

the identification of a suitable evidence-based approach and related analytical tools for each intervention. This selection procedure is based on a trade-off be-

tween the reliability of results and costs for generating results since the effort of providing empirical evidence needs to be justified by the benefit of having new insights in terms of accountability or learning for better decision making.

A wide range of approaches and analytical tools can be used in evaluation, and serve a range of different purposes. The critical question is how these approaches can be combined in useful ways to promote accountability and policy learning. Evidence-based approaches do not only comprise quantitative methods (e.g. counterfactual impact evaluation using control groups - [See Example 1](#)). A qualitative evaluation (=the approach) based on case studies (=the tool), showing the specific transmission mechanisms of policy (how are impacts generated?), is also considered to be evidence-based - [See Example 2](#).

### EXAMPLE 2

#### Measure 126

Restoring agricultural production potential damaged by natural disasters and introducing appropriate prevention actions

Key evaluation question "How much has the damage risk declined?"

Assessment through simple (naive) approach A reduction of the occurrence of flooding before and after construction of dams and retention basins

#### The problem of unobservables :

One cannot observe the future of floods in the long term (as they may occur every 100 or more years)

Evidence-based approach and related analytical tools How much money will be saved (risk=cost) based on the knowledge about the distribution of floods according to past floods and the knowledge about specific damage functions ?

#### The selection decision is determined by the trade-off between the reliability of results and costs for establishing results

Selected evaluation approach with a more targeted data management **Simulation to estimate the expected value of reduced damage:** Reducing the probability of flooding from 40% to 5% along the Upper Rhine in the next 50 years through dams or retention basins would decrease the potential damage value from 5.28 bn € to 600 mn €. Taking the damage functions of agricultural infrastructure and production (cattle/crops) and the regional distribution of the agricultural capital stock > Possible to estimate sectoral cost savings at regional level.

#### Need for meaningful data provided in time > more targeted data management

Data requirement

- Information on the damage function\* for agricultural buildings and machinery
- Damage potential along the river (in €)
- Damage cost for different crops (€/ha)
- Past distribution of flooding

\* Formula for the expression of flood risk



In most cases, the application of the proposed tools largely depends on the availability of reliable data which can be provided in time. Hence the requirement for more targeted data management which is linked to different sources such as monitoring data, statistics and field research. In particular monitoring systems should be systematically prepared for later evaluation purposes in order to reduce evaluation cost and improve evalua-

tion quality. The type of intervention and the suggested evaluation method must determine data requirements.

Moreover, monitoring should be linked to the application and reporting systems. The application forms should include data characterising the applicant and – as an option to construct quasi-control groups – also a section forecasting the applicant's estimation

of what he or she expects to happen with or without funding. Good cooperation between data providers (i.e. Paying Agencies, statistical offices) and data users (Managing Authorities and evaluators) is also necessary. On the basis of improved data management, generating much stronger evidence of the net impacts of RD interventions can be expected and will lead to more robust evaluation in future.

## Good Practice Workshop - Budapest 8 & 9 October 2012

A workshop was organized by the Evaluation Helpdesk in cooperation with the Managing Authority of the Hungarian Rural Development Programme in the Ministry's premises with the objective of bringing data providers and data users together. About 70 participants from 20 Member States and European Commission attended the workshop.

The meeting aimed at identifying the different types of data and systems of targeted data management required for evidence-based evaluation in the context of the RDPs and at providing a useful input to the *ex ante* evaluations and the evaluation plans. The European Commission outlined the main differences in evaluation requirements for 2014-2020, focusing on the main changes compared to the current programming period and gave an overview of the different

proposals for data collection and management. Four case studies (Hungary, Slovenia, France and Italy - Emilia Romagna) highlighted the challenges in data management from the point of view of data providers and data users.

An indicative roadmap was developed in order to adapt their RDP data management systems to the new evaluation requirements. In an interactive working session the main challenges of targeted data management were discussed and recommendations for the selected challenges were developed.

For more information about the Good Practice Workshop "Targeted data management for evidence-based evaluation in rural development", visit our website [here](#).



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# Improving evaluation in action

WRITTEN BY JOHN GRIEVE

**Three years ago, the Welsh Government’s Rural Development Plan Management Unit (RDPMU) decided to tender out an external ongoing evaluation contract to improve programme management and in particular the interaction between monitoring and evaluation activities. Through an extensive programme of consultations with delivery staff across the different axes, a programme of “Evaluation in action” workshops was implemented and aimed at levelling up the staff knowledge and skills base.**



**W**ith an overall budget of circa €1bn of which around 75% comes from domestic funding the RDP in Wales is delivered through a number of delivery ‘schemes’ some of which group measures together into packages.

The specific objectives were to review current data collection procedures for input and output indicators, devise data collection procedures for result

and impact indicators and provide expert advice on evaluation activity on an ad-hoc basis.

Underpinning this was the intention that the ongoing evaluation should also help to prepare those staff who work on RDP funded schemes to contribute to the MTE. In practice this proved to be impractical as the MTE was already well under way by the time the ongoing evaluation was commissioned and

an effective feed in to the MTE was no longer possible.

In addition to reviewing the adequacy of data collection and the necessary current and future monitoring arrangements it was intended that the ongoing evaluation review the relevant MTE recommendations and suggest methods to take these forward e.g. re designing or refining data collection procedures and instruments. The over-

*Peats on Migneint*



© I. RUGG, LNFPM, Welsh Government

all purpose was to improve the quality of the methods and outputs of monitoring and evaluation. Discussions with RDP delivery staff leading on individual parts of the programme were planned into this.

### USING ONGOING EVALUATION TO MAKE POLICY MORE EVIDENCE-BASED

As the ongoing evaluation work was being commissioned it was evident that the MTE evaluators were experiencing difficulties in identifying, sourcing and collecting relevant data from the various schemes. In part this was due to the early stage of RDP implementation but the fit of the data being gathered with the CMEF indicators also appeared to be inconsistent. The level of awareness of the relevance and importance of monitoring and evaluation amongst delivery staff appeared also to be relatively low. As these staff were focused on delivery, particularly so in the early stages of the

“ **Developing a more methodical approach and greater harmonisation were therefore important objectives for this work.** ”

programme e.g. in meeting financial targets this was not unexpected. As it is also these same staff who are responsible for gathering and often reporting much of the monitoring data this presented a considerable challenge. Developing a more methodical approach and greater harmonisation were therefore important objectives for this work.

It was agreed that the greatest added value which the ongoing evaluation could contribute would be to strengthen the understanding, buy-in and commitment to evaluation amongst delivery managers and the capacity, knowledge and skills of staff involved. Building on the experience and lessons

of the MTE process, and findings and preparation for the next programming period and the *ex ante* and *ex post* evaluations was a priority.

### INTEGRATING EVALUATION WITHIN PROGRAMME DESIGN, MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY

An iterative approach which sought to integrate evaluation overtly within programme design, management and delivery was adopted. Building on the MTE findings and the client's priorities an ongoing evaluation launch workshop was conducted involving delivery staff from across the axes, policy staff and the MTE evaluators. This workshop was very



#### INTERVIEW



HOWARD DAVIES  
RDP Evidence Team  
Manager, Wales

#### **Why were these “Evaluation in action” workshops organized?**

*Following Government elections and a subsequent major internal restructuring exercise in 2009, a new team emerged to take responsibility for monitoring and evaluation for the RDP. I headed the operation supported by three key members of staff who had experience from the previous RDP programme. One of the first tasks was to contract out the RDP Mid Term Evaluation in 2010. It was our experience of staff reaction/difficulties with the examination of their programme by the appointed contractors that led us to conclude that the culture and understanding of monitoring and evaluation was not very strong in Welsh Government. Our solution was to take up the option in the Regulations that Managing Authorities could set up a contract with evaluation specialists for their own operational purpose.*

#### **What are the benefits of the workshops in terms of capacity building?**

*Whilst the main thrust of the assignment was targeted at programme managers and contractors, we saw the opportunity of using this body of external expertise to our own advantage. The service has been very effective in identifying and anticipating issues/problems in the management of the RDP in Wales at*

*very early stages which allowed us to effectively react. Consistency of information through the use of templates developed between the team and contractors has been valuable. The association with the contractors made us feel more confident as a team and more “bombproof”.*

*The practical ability of the contractors to interpret regulations into plain language was a major component in assisting our staff to develop an understanding of the EU requirements. This in turn generated better information for our key EU submissions. This improvement continues to contribute to a key objective for our team. Our Wales AIR 2011 has been unconditionally approved by the Commission this year and the QA service offered through the contract has undoubtedly had a major influence in the quality of submissions. We also valued the fact that the contractors had an established contact with the Evaluation Expert Network thus ensuring that our team and colleagues working in this area were kept up to date.*

#### **What are your expectations for the next programming period?**

*This initiative has been very well received by our staff and has generated major improvements in our business. For this reason we are hoping we will be allowed to continue with this type of arrangement in the next period.*



actively supported by senior managers demonstrating to others both through their participation and contributions the importance they placed on this activity.

An extensive programme of consultations involved visiting delivery staff across the axes and various delivery schemes in their own workplaces. The aim was to establish their level of knowledge and understanding of monitoring and evaluation, identify the monitoring and reporting systems and data they operate and develop an understanding of any barriers or difficulties which had arisen for them in the MTE. From this any relevant training or development needs were highlighted. An important if unspoken element of this work was to establish direct contact with delivery staff and demystify or reduce any perceived threat in relation to evaluation and establishing the ongoing evaluators as their 'critical friend'.

As a result a programme of 'Evaluation in action' workshops was set up for staff to improve the design, conduct and use of monitoring and evaluation in rural programmes in Wales by building it in to the process of RDP delivery by:

- increasing the understanding, buy-in and commitment to the principle of evaluation/evidence based policy and development;
- improving the quality, content, management and presentation of monitoring and reporting information at all levels;
- improving the capacity, knowledge and skills of staff to contribute to the processes; and
- gathering feedback from them to inform future approaches to monitoring and evaluation and demonstrate the positive benefits of evaluation actions.

Workshops have been conducted on an axis by axis basis bringing people delivering similar activities together to explore, discuss and learn about evaluation. Priorities vary between axes and schemes and the evaluators have been able to tailor the provision to meet these needs. The early workshops focused on

developing staff's understanding of the outcome focused approach, intervention logic and the CMEF and why it is important, reinforcing the fact that the RDP is a system and that M&E is both a part of that and a system in its own right. In linking policy to practice, participative sessions involved staff in constructing intervention logics for their own schemes and measures. This in turn was linked with the emerging Welsh rural policy context. Further inputs have been provided on evaluation planning, working with indicators, working with evaluators, understanding the anatomy of an evaluation, etc. and tailored sessions are now being delivered with smaller teams to improve their application of output and result indicators on a one-off basis.

In addition to the workshops and call of support the team have prepared

a range of guidance documents and tools. For example a guidance paper on evaluation planning has been provided together with templates for completion by the individual delivery schemes, this enables RDP managers to gather data on a consistent basis, to a higher quality and more completely.



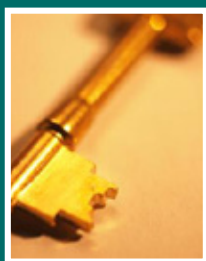
#### FIND OUT MORE

- > Welsh Government  
Howard Davies MBE  
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/farmingandcountryside>
- > Rural Development Company  
John Grieve  
<http://www.rural-development.co.uk>



## What still needs to be done?

One of the remaining tasks for the ongoing evaluation is to assess the effects of this activity and the difference which it has made. Subjectively the results appear to be positive, participation is strong, inputs are well received, there are regular requests for additional help or guidance and many of these demonstrate a more highly developed understanding than was previously the case. From the client's perspective the quality of delivery staffs contributions to the Annual Progress Report is said to have improved markedly and the number of queries from the EC has also reduced considerably. The capacity building and capacity provision seems to be pump priming this improvement. The challenge now however is to maintain this improvement and momentum in the current time of change and consolidate these improvements in the design and delivery of the new programme.



MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY FOR 2014-2020

# 10 Key developments compared to 2007-2013

WRITTEN BY **ZÉLIE PEPPIETTE**



1

## THE WHOLE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY (CAP)

For 2007-2013 the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) relates only to rural development. For 2014-2020 there will be one monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system for the CAP as a whole<sup>1</sup>.

2

## IMPACT INDICATORS WILL COVER BOTH PILLARS OF THE CAP

There will be one set of impact indicators for the CAP as a whole, covering both Pillar 1 and Pillar 2. As far as possible the indicators proposed use existing datasets (EUROSTAT, Farm Structure Survey, FADN, etc.) available at national and/or regional level to avoid imposing any additional administrative burden. This approach is also proposed for context indicators.

<sup>1</sup> Article 110 of CAP Horizontal Regulation proposal COM(2011) 628/3

3

## A QUANTIFIED TARGET INDICATOR FOR EACH FOCUS AREA

A set of common quantifiable target indicators is being established, and targets will be required for each focus area included within a Rural Development Programme (RDP). Some focus areas have two target indicators (e.g. one relating to forestry and one to agriculture). The target indicators will be reported on annually in the Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs), with indicator values obtained from monitoring data.

4

## OUTPUTS – THE OPERATIONS DATABASE

Each approved operation will be included in an operations database (at RDP level) containing key information about the project and beneficiary. This data-

base will be used to generate aggregate information for the AIRs. It will allow the monitoring data necessary to measure progress in implementation to be extracted and will simplify data handling and reporting.

5

## EVALUATION PLAN

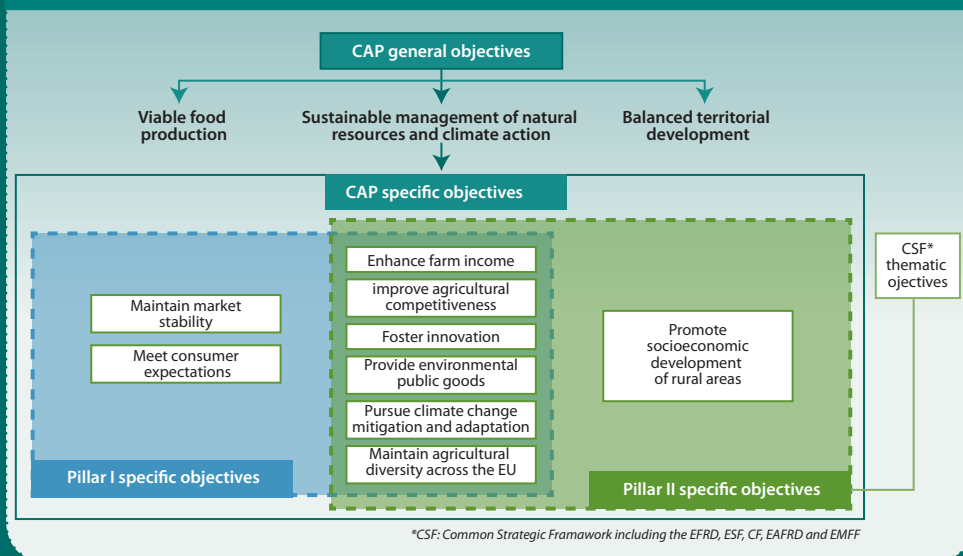
An Evaluation Plan must be submitted with each RDP, and will be approved as part of it. It should set out the main elements foreseen for conducting evaluations throughout the programming period, including topics, timeline, resources, etc. The objective is to ensure that appropriate and sufficient evaluation activities will be carried out so that the information required on programme achievements and impacts is obtained at the appropriate time. The elements to be included will be established in implementing rules, and the intention is also to provide guidance on the content of the Evaluation Plan. There is no longer a specific mention of "ongoing evaluation" in the legal texts, but the Evaluation Plan should ensure that the necessary activities are implemented.

6

## NO MID-TERM EVALUATION (MTE)

There will be no MTE as there was for 2007-2013. The experience of this programming period showed that the timing of the MTE was not ideal: it was too late to have a significant influence on programme design (as much of the resources were already committed) and too early to be able to identify substantial achievements.

FIGURE 1: INTERVENTION LOGIC FOR THE CAP



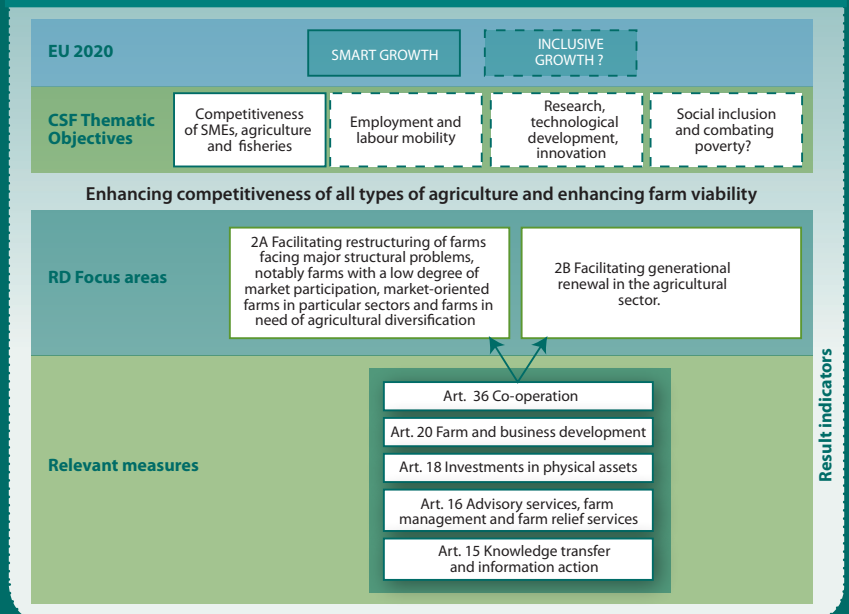


7

### ENHANCED ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION REPORTS

In 2017 and 2019 the AIRs will contain additional elements compared to other years. In 2017 these will be geared towards improving programme design and implementation, e.g. identifying reasons for slow progress towards targets or lack of take up of certain measures, whilst in 2019 the focus will be on establishing interim achievements of the programme, including the contribution to EU 2020 objectives. Much of this information will come from evaluation activities undertaken in line with the Evaluation Plan. The AIRs will be drafted and submitted by Member States, and will be subject to admissibility and approval procedures.

FIGURE 2: PRIORITY 2 ENHANCING COMPETITIVENESS OF ALL TYPES OF AGRICULTURE AND ENHANCING FARM VIABILITY



8

### INFORMATION FROM BENEFICIARIES

The rural development legal proposal requires RDP beneficiaries to provide the data needed for monitoring and evaluation of the RDP to the Managing Authority, evaluators, or other relevant bodies. This will be done mainly through the application forms which will feed the operations database. For evaluation, subsequent participation in surveys may also be required.

10

### STRUCTURED SYSTEM FOR FUND MANAGEMENT IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY (SFC) INPUT<sup>2</sup>

Currently RDPs and programme management documents (modifications, Annual Progress Reports, etc.) are submitted as unstructured whole files. For the future period, a more structured approach will be adopted, with text sec-

tions, tables to be completed, etc. This will allow some automated checking and validation of the completeness of submissions, and of figures provided (for example in indicator plans). This should among other things help improve the completeness and accuracy of monitoring data, and facilitate data extraction and use.

<sup>2</sup> SFC is the electronic communication channel between MS and the Commission for official documents related to RDPs (and other CSF programmes)

9

### MORE REALISTIC INTERVENTION LOGIC

Each RDP will be designed around an intervention logic showing which rural development priorities and focus areas are included, and which measures are planned to contribute to each of the selected focus areas. This structure reflects the reality of the potential multiple contributions of each measure more accurately, compared to the current period where each measure is linked to only one axis. A basic intervention logic has been developed covering the most commonly expected combinations, but Managing Authorities have the flexibility to develop a specific intervention logic appropriate to their territory and its needs.



### FIND OUT MORE

- > Further information on M&E for post-2013 can be found at: [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/monitoring-evaluation/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/monitoring-evaluation/index_en.htm)
- > Proposal on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/legal-proposals/com627/627\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/legal-proposals/com627/627_en.pdf)
- > Proposal on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agricultural policy [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/legal-proposals/com628/628\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/legal-proposals/com628/628_en.pdf)
- > Guidelines for the *ex ante* evaluations of 2014-2020 RDPs [http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app\\_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=7797A2AE-91CD-8D82-C9DB-D30E043439F1](http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=7797A2AE-91CD-8D82-C9DB-D30E043439F1)

## Publication of *ex post* Evaluation of 2000-2006 Rural Development Programmes

WRITTEN BY ZÉLIE PEPPIETTE



This evaluation, carried out by Kantor Management Consultants S.A. in association with the Institut für Ländliche Strukturforchung was recently published on the EUROPA website.

This evaluation covered the EAGGF Guarantee funded RDPs implemented in the EU15, the TRDIs implemented in the EU10, and all EAGGF Guidance funded programmes implemented throughout the EU25 during 2000-2006. It used a combination of desk research, existing evaluation reports, surveys and case studies to cover all the measures and programme types implemented.

The evaluation was structured according to eight themes: the relevance of the policy objectives; coherence between the policy measures and objectives; complementarity with other instruments; the coverage, content and consistency of the programmes; results, impact, effectiveness and efficiency; delivery systems; monitoring and evaluation; and impact in relation to new priorities.

In addition to conclusions and recommendations by theme, the report makes the following general recommendations in relation to rural development policy:

- (1) **Improve targeting:** Better targeting is fundamental to improving the efficiency of rural development measures. It should be tailored to the needs of the territory, based on the identification of priority areas, beneficiaries, types of activity and/or achievements. To be effective, targeting depends on a good understanding of the area and a comprehensive vision of its future sustainable development.
- (2) **Creating synergy:** Complementarity between measures should be enhanced through identifying groups of measures which can work together, and strengthening the links between them. This could be done within the legal framework and/or in the implementation process. It is particularly important to identify and make good use of measures which can act as catalysts (e.g. training).
- (3) **Unlock the potential of underperforming measures.** Some measures, such as training, can play an important role in meeting RDP objectives, but are not being implemented widely or effectively enough to reach their potential, which constrains overall RDP achievements. This issue should be addressed in programme strategy



and design, through e.g. making training and use of advisory services a compulsory component of assistance to young farmers, and improving the links between the training available and the training needs of beneficiaries of other RDP measures.

- (4) **Put more emphasis on wider rural development:** A better balance should be struck within programmes, increasing the focus on the wider rural economy and environment, compared to the agricultural sector.

- (5) **Develop complementarity with other funds and programmes:** The benefits and achievements of programmes could be increased through strengthening complementarity between RDPs and other programmes and funds.

- (6) **Focus on the territory rather than individual beneficiaries:** Moving the vision of efficiency and competitiveness from the farm and business level to the rural area level as a whole, would improve the impact of programmes on rural economies and populations. This is likely to require increased capacity-building, training and cooperation, coupled with capitalising on traditional knowledge and heritage, and promoting diversification as a key factor for innovation. These concepts, which are fundamental components of the Leader approach, could help to maximise the potential of other rural development measures if applied at RDP level.

These findings and recommendations based on the experience of 2000-2006 programmes make a useful contribution to the development of the policy framework, and the strategy and design of RDPs for the 2014-2020 programming period.




### FIND OUT MORE

- > The text of the full report can be found at: [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/evaluation/rural-development-reports/ex-post-evaluation-rdp-2000-2006\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/evaluation/rural-development-reports/ex-post-evaluation-rdp-2000-2006_en.htm)

## Good Practice Workshop: Choosing and using context indicators for rural development

WRITTEN BY VALÉRIE DUMONT


 On 15 and 16 November over 46 representatives of Managing Authorities as well as evaluators from 15 Member States attended the 6<sup>th</sup> Good Practice Workshop in Lisbon on "Choosing and using context indicators for rural development" co-organised by the Portuguese Ministry of Agriculture, Sea, Environment and Spatial Planning and the Evaluation Helpdesk. The meeting aimed at better understanding how context indicators are used during the SWOT and needs assessment to develop a proper basis for the RDP. First, Morten Kivstgaard, an evaluator, Leo Maier and Zélie Peppiette, DG AGRI, explained the links between context indicators, SWOT, needs assessment, objectives and intervention.

Three case studies from Portugal, Estonia and the Czech Republic and a fictitious illustrative example were presented. In working groups, the participants debated the feasibility and relevance of the proposed context indicators based on the written comments received during the screening of the indicators through Member States experts and Commission services. The list of context indicators was tentatively reduced from 84 to 27 common context indicators although this does not include all the common impact indicators.

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

## 10<sup>th</sup> EES Biennial Conference of the European Evaluation Society (EES)

WRITTEN BY JELA TVRDONOVA

 At the 10<sup>th</sup> biennial conference of the EES on "Evaluation in the Networked Society: new concepts, new challenges, new solutions" from 3-5 October 2012 in Helsinki, the Evaluation Helpdesk was invited to present two papers:

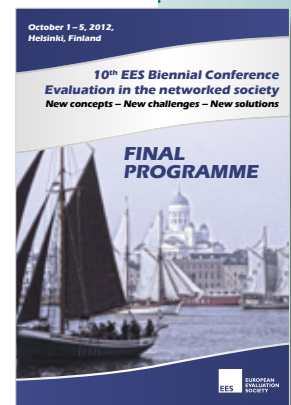
- 1. Evaluating National Rural Network Programmes:** methodological challenges and suggested solutions. It discussed the evaluation of National Rural Networks and Network Programmes which are set up by Member States to improve implementation of EU rural development policy. The presentation provided a practical introduction to rural development networks, suggested an evaluation framework and proposed several evaluation methods and tools.
- 2. Ongoing evaluation,** a tool to steer the evaluation process. It highlighted the role of ongoing evaluation in steering and implementing the evaluation of RDPs in the Member States for 2007-2013. It also provided an overview of how ongoing evaluation systems are organized EU-wide, and described the different tasks of ongoing evaluation.

Moreover Leo Maier from the DG AGRI Evaluation Unit participated in a panel of various European Commission services (AGRI, REGIO, EMPL, ELARG, OLAF) to discuss the relationship and complementarities between monitoring and evaluation and to present the different models in operation for the organisation of these activities

within the Commission. There was general agreement that in addition to providing timely reporting for management purposes, monitoring also has an important role in providing data for policy evaluation. Monitoring activities should ideally go beyond inputs and outputs, and also capture results and achievements to some degree, although what is possible depends on the policy area. The effectiveness and quality of monitoring systems and data should also be evaluated, although stability in monitoring systems is important (as they are costly to set up, and for consistency of data provision) so this should ideally be done prior to their implementation.

All models of monitoring and evaluation have their advantages and disadvantages. There can be economies of scale linked to combining monitoring and evaluation internally, whilst external evaluations can be perceived as more objective. The design and management of the system, ensuring that any potential drawbacks are addressed, and benefits maximised, is therefore very important.

Read more about the conference on <http://www.ees2012.org/general-info.htm>





## The Evaluation Expert Committee met for the 12<sup>th</sup> time on September 20, 2012

WRITTEN BY VALÉRIE DUMONT



The revised structure and content of the draft guidelines for the *ex ante* evaluation of the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programmes were presented in Brussels on September 20, 2012 at the 12<sup>th</sup> Evaluation Expert committee meeting. Following the comments from the Member States received after the June meeting, the Thematic Working Group of the Evaluation Helpdesk improved the structure of the guidelines by dividing them into three parts: one for the Managing Authority, one for the Evaluators and one presented as a toolbox. The content of the document was thoroughly revised and new sections were developed: the scope of the *ex ante* evaluation, National Rural Network (Programmes), a glossary of terms, a table with the indicative number of person-days and for specific texts excerpts of the legal proposals. The European Commission informed the representatives of the committee that the guidelines would formally remain at a draft stage until the legal acts had been adopted.

The second topic dealt with the indicators. First, the European Commission presented the indicator fiches of the proposed target indicators for Pillar II Priorities 1-4 compiled by DG AGRI and invited the representatives of the committee to discuss the general structure of the fiche, the usefulness of the indicators for Priorities 1-4, and the division of Priority 2A into a simple target and an additional result indicator. The Committee then discussed the best approach to deal with Priority 5. Finally, the committee was asked if they considered it reasonable to restructure Priority 6. Subsequently, the European Commission presented the indicator fiches for the CAP impact indicators, and explained the process for developing them. Some Member States proposed to have a Good Practice Workshop specifically related to impact indicators for regionalized Rural Development Programmes.

The draft list of context indicators for the next programming period was debated in working groups. The members carried out a relevance check of all context indicators in relation to each Union Priority. The European Commission informed the committee that the results of the group work will



Interactive working session about indicators

serve as a basis for the Good Practice Workshop "Choosing and using context indicators for rural development" that will take place in Lisbon on 15 and 16 November 2012. (see related news, [here](#))

The Evaluation Helpdesk also invited the committee members to register for the Good Practice Workshop "targeted data management for evidence-based evaluation in rural development" held in Budapest on 8 and 9 of October 2012. (see related article, [here](#))

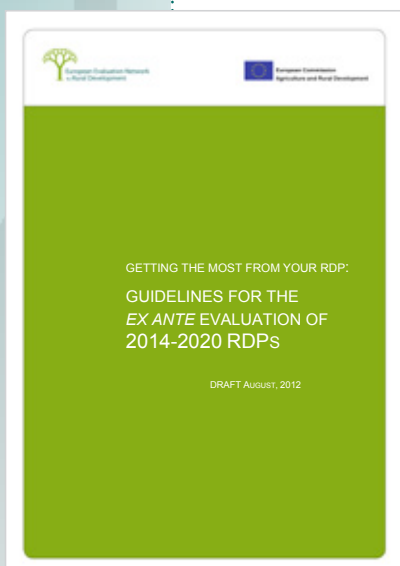
It finally informed the representatives about the Focus Groups being organized in the Member States dealing with the following topic: "Monitoring and evaluation of RDPs on the way from the current to the next programming period".

The following meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee took place on 18 December 2012.



### FIND OUT MORE

> [Draft Guidelines for the \*ex ante\* evaluation of 2014-2020 RDPs](#)





# The added value of the Evaluation Expert Network

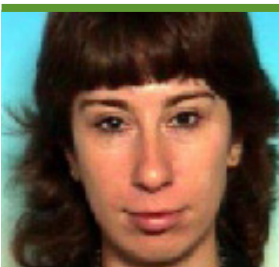
**As you may have noticed, a wind of change has blown through our Rural Evaluation News! We are celebrating the Evaluation Expert Network's 10<sup>th</sup> issue of the newsletter with a fresher layout and a more interactive presentation. We also invited 10 stakeholders of the Evaluation Community to hear their views on the added value of the network and its main achievements as well as to reflect on how to innovate or improve the network in future.**



**LEO MAIER**  
DG AGRI  
Head of Unit L4  
Evaluation of measures  
applicable to evaluation;  
studies

**F**or me, the biggest achievement of the Network so far has been to create an active dialogue between the Commission, Member States and other evaluation actors. This is especially important for a policy like rural development which is targeted to national and regional situations and needs, and evaluated in a decentralised manner. To involve the full range of actors from the bottom up in all aspects of our work, ensuring that EU-level activities are directed to priority areas of common interest, would not have been possible without the Network. Creating an active dialogue has also meant experimenting with different styles of work, away from prepared roundtable statements towards more interactive and participatory work sessions. This has not always been easy but on balance I think it has proven worthwhile, even though we are still learning how to get the most out of these sessions. I find the good practice workshops particularly valuable. They demonstrate how much

we can learn from each other, and have become a fixture of the Network, allowing us to address specific issues in a more informal setting. Some of the ideas coming out of them have fed directly into the development of the monitoring and evaluation framework for the next period. The fact that the workshops are hosted by individual Member States on a voluntary basis reinforces the feeling of 'shared ownership' of the Network. I think the Network has played an important role in turning the concept of ongoing evaluation into a reality. We should not forget that this was a new and ambitious approach to rural development evaluation. So it is not surprising that most of the work carried out by the Network until now has focused on developing and refining the system, and on making it work. What I would like to see in the future is a greater emphasis on getting concrete, high-quality evaluation results that are useful for programme improvement and for demonstrating the value-added of the policy.



**ALBENA TANEVA**  
Desk Officer,  
DG-AGRI – E3

**I** took part in the Helpdesk's mission to Bulgaria earlier this year, and found it a very useful exercise. It helped emphasise the importance of the evaluation process in successful RDP programming and implementation, and gave the national authorities and stakeholders the chance to exchange their views and experience about a topic which is not usually a subject of their day-to-day discussions. The participants learned about the essential role of the *ex ante* evaluation for the preparation of the next programming period and the technicalities Member States are expected to fulfil. The group benefited from the Helpdesk's input to clarify various evaluation related issues. I think that the mission provided good

support and hopefully will help improve the evaluation of the RDP in Bulgaria. Evaluation is a technical subject, and for those responsible it is often an additional task, for which they may not have specific background knowledge. The guidance provided by the Helpdesk is appreciated, and opportunities to learn and share face to face are particularly valuable. Contacts have now been established and the authorities know whom they can ask when they have questions. It is also very useful when information is presented in a simple and understandable way on the ground, and when material is translated into different languages, it is much more user-friendly and accessible.



**VIDA HOČEVAR**  
*Managing Authority,  
Slovenia*

**F**rom my perspective, I would say that the Evaluation Expert Network's added value is certainly the opportunity it gives Managing Authorities and other stakeholders to meet and work together. It also allows us to learn about particular evaluation activities and to discuss issues with the aim to improve evaluation as such. Over the years, the Network has become a central recognizable actor in the field of evaluation of Rural Development Programmes thanks to all the different types of guidance and working papers it has produced to support the Member States in relation to specific areas of evaluation of the RDP. I particularly appreciate the Good Practice Workshops where the evaluation

stakeholders can network but also be informed about selected topics and at the same time strengthen and affirm a common working spirit. I had the opportunity to present a case study on Slovenia at the workshop in Budapest on targeted data management for evidence-based evaluation in Rural Development. For the future, it would be valuable to have more interaction between the Evaluation Expert Network and the Rural Development Committee especially when specific themes are being discussed (the new programming period, the evaluation plan, monitoring activities, etc.). It would be important mainly when different representatives are members of different committees.



**EERO PEHKONEN**  
*Senior Officer, Ministry of  
Agriculture and Forestry,  
Finland*

**I** think that the discussions about evaluation related issues have increased at European level but the added value of the Network at Member State level is hard to assess as the discussions are very theoretical most of the time. Sometimes the guidance produced cannot be implemented in the Member States. Concerning the achievements, I see that more meetings are organized at EU level and also in the Member States to exchange on practices but concretely it

is difficult to measure the achievements. The draft Guidelines for the *ex ante* evaluation of 2014-2020 RDPs are in my opinion very useful for the Managing Authorities and the evaluators. We were happy to receive these guidelines right on time. I cannot see any missing activities. However, I believe that the Member States should be asked how they consider evaluation as such and how the recommendations proposed can be used efficiently.



**MIROSLAV KOSIK**  
*Evaluator, Slovakia*

**T**he Evaluation Expert Network is a key element in the continuous improvement of evaluation culture and professionalism. Thanks to the Network, evaluation has become more visible and is now considered a substantial part of the programme implementation processes. There are many achievements but, in my opinion, the biggest one so far is the good preparatory work and overall guidance for the mid-term evaluation and subsequently the Methodological Assessment of Mid-Term Evaluation Reports of 2007-2013 Rural Development Programmes that provided added value for all parties concerned. For evaluators and Managing Authorities, it was a

good opportunity to compare evaluation methods, practices and outcomes among the Member States and benefit from some transfer of know-how. From an evaluation capacity building perspective, the organization of the Stakeholder Conference in September 2011 was undoubtedly a highlight in the life of the Network. At the moment, we do not see any missing activities. The existence of the Evaluation Helpdesk and its pool of national experts make them easily accessible when evaluators want to contact them and ask for advice on any rural development evaluation related issues. We have made this fruitful experience in our evaluation team several times.





**KIM POLLERMANN**  
Evaluator,  
Germany

**B**ringing together scientists, evaluators and practitioners from different EU countries is an important added value as we all have similar evaluation tasks to carry out. This exchange generates new ideas and creates synergetic effects. For me the biggest achievement of the Evaluation Expert Network lies in its working papers because they are accessible to everyone. I particularly appreciate being part of the Thematic Working Group "Capturing impacts of Leader and of measures to improve Quality of life

in rural areas": it was a great opportunity to share knowledge among experts and also to network with various stakeholders. I think there should be even more working papers on specific fields of evaluation. They should however be ready at an earlier stage of the evaluation process in order to improve the practical work. In the future, more meetings should be organized not only to discuss the methods but also the results. The academic world should also be more involved in scientific meetings to exchange experiences.



**ALESSANDRO MONTELEONE**  
Rete Rurale Nazionale,  
Italy

**E**stablishing contacts with thematic experts from different Member States concerned with evaluation and indicators is certainly the main added value of the Evaluation Expert Network. It has enabled the exchange of good practice and experience on monitoring and evaluation. The Network has also managed to create a structured exchange between the Member States and the European Commission through its various activities. One of the biggest achievements is that the Member States now know who to talk to in other Member States and can also organize bilateral meetings more easily. I think that the Good Practice Workshops are my favorite activity. They create moments where ex-

perts can get to know each other and also work together outside the normal schemes of the European Commission. Nevertheless, we are missing similar monitoring and evaluation networks at national level. A few Member States have an evaluation task force but most of them unfortunately do not. I also think that we lack coordination regarding monitoring and evaluation with structural funds both at EU and national level. I also have the feeling that coordination on monitoring could be improved. Sometimes the Rural Development Committee and the Evaluation Expert Committee do not work in the same direction leading to some inconsistencies which are visible to the Member States representatives.



**JOHN GRIEVE**  
Core Team member,  
Evaluation Helpdesk

**T**he primary benefit of the Evaluation Expert Network lies in the forum it provides for communication and discussion of rural evaluation and related issues. I think it has been extremely important in enabling evaluation to be addressed proactively as a strategic tool and in a better planned and more consistent way. The biggest achievement of the Network lies quite simply in bringing people together to spend dedicated time on improving the design, conduct and utilisation of evaluation. This helps us all to work more smartly and consider how we could do things better. Linking theory and practice is a key part of this and applies both to the practice of

rural development and to its evaluation. In that respect I find the annual focus groups valuable in extending the reach of the evaluation networking activity within the Member States where key stakeholders always welcome the opportunity to come together and discuss evaluation matters with their peers. It links theory and practice and helps evaluation to be addressed in a positive manner. In the future, I would like to see more themed events where specific issues are addressed. There have been a number of these so far but I think we could do more in order to strengthen our understanding of evaluating the effects of different delivery approaches.



**DIMITRIS LIANOS**  
*Geographic Expert, Evaluation  
Helpdesk*

**T**he added value of the Evaluation Expert Network at EU Level is the establishment of a permanent open forum for discussion and exchange of experience in evaluation related objectives. The significant change related to the past is the “creation of a common view” between Member States and DG Agri. In the past the approach for the evaluation was a “single bureaucratic approach”. Now, at least at the MA level, evaluation is perceived as a useful tool which can be used both in management and programming. In my opinion the biggest achievement of the Evaluation Expert Network

so far is the improvement of the methodologies and tools that were developed by the Helpdesk. Furthermore, an essential improvement is the open dialogue and the awareness for the evaluation and the progress which has occurred in the formulation of a common terminology. This was made possible through various interactive methods and high level of discussions between the European Commission and the Member States to reach a mutual compromise. Some improvement could be made in networking with other Evaluation Expert Networks, specifically with the ERDF and ESF.



**VALERIE DUMONT**  
*Project Manager,  
Evaluation Helpdesk*

**O**ver the years, I think that the Evaluation Expert Network has helped to raise the evaluation awareness at EU level. If I compare the situation today to the one five years ago when the network was established, the biggest change I have seen is that evaluation stakeholders can communicate with each other, exchange and share practices in a very informal but efficient way. In the past, I had the impression that evaluation stakeholders were working on parallel paths without interacting and learning from each other. For me this is real added value, people talk, inspire and learn from one another through the Network. I believe that the biggest achievement of the Network is having placed evaluation in

its proper place. All evaluation stakeholders are now aware of the importance of evaluation as a tool to improve their programme and achieve more. It is less considered as an administrative burden but rather as an indispensable tool. I would say that the Good Practice Workshops are my favorite activity. They are an intelligent mix of knowledge transfer and exchange at all levels. It is also a great opportunity to get to know the individuals who are involved in the evaluation process and to understand their expectations, constraints and frustrations and to work on common relevant solutions. I believe that more “capacity building” events could be organized in the future where specific issues are addressed.

## Your feedback is welcome

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

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