



European Evaluation Network  
for Rural Development



European Commission  
Agriculture and Rural Development

UPDATE OF  
NEEDS ASSESSMENT  
IN THE MEMBER STATES

MARCH 2011

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The European Evaluation Network for Rural Development (abbreviated to “Evaluation Expert Network”) operates under the responsibility of the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development. The overall aim of the Network is to increase the usefulness of evaluation as a tool for improving the formulation and implementation of rural development policies by helping to establish good practice and capacity building in the evaluation of rural development programmes up until 2013. Additional information about the activities of the Evaluation Expert Network and its Evaluation Helpdesk is available on the Internet through the Europa server ([http://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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## 1. The purpose of the work

The assessment of needs is carried out on a yearly basis and summarizes the experiences and needs of evaluation stakeholders in the Member States while implementing the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF). The purpose of this exercise is to learn more about the practical issues, that actors on the ground are facing and to consider those issues that lie in the remit of the Evaluation Helpdesk, in its Annual Work Programmes. In 2010 moreover also first input for the review of the CMEF post-2013 was collected from the Member States.

The present paper draws from different information sources, of which the main one constitutes the outcome of the focus groups, which were organized in the Member States in autumn 2010. Evaluation stakeholders met in small groups of approx. 5 to 15 participants and discussed under the guidance of a Geographic Expert of the Evaluation Helpdesk the following questions:

- Question no. 1: *"What needs for guidance do exist still for the current programming period?"*
  - Needs for guidance related to ongoing evaluation
  - Needs for guidance related to the upcoming ex-post evaluation
- Question no. 2: *What kind of guidance should the CMEF provide for the next programming period?"*
  - What should be monitored and evaluated at European level, what should be kept at Member States' level? (strategic scope and attribution of tasks)
  - What (from the CMEF) should be dropped, what should be redesigned, what should be introduced? (practical proposals)

In order to capture a wide range of points of view, the exercise was targeted at a variety of evaluation stakeholders in the Member States (in particular from Managing Authorities, implementing bodies for axes 1, 2, 3 and 4, evaluation experts, members of the Monitoring Committee, members of the Paying Agencies, development agencies and local partnerships involved in consultancy to beneficiaries, evaluators and Managing Authorities).

## 2. Organizing the assessment of the evaluation needs across the EU<sup>1</sup>

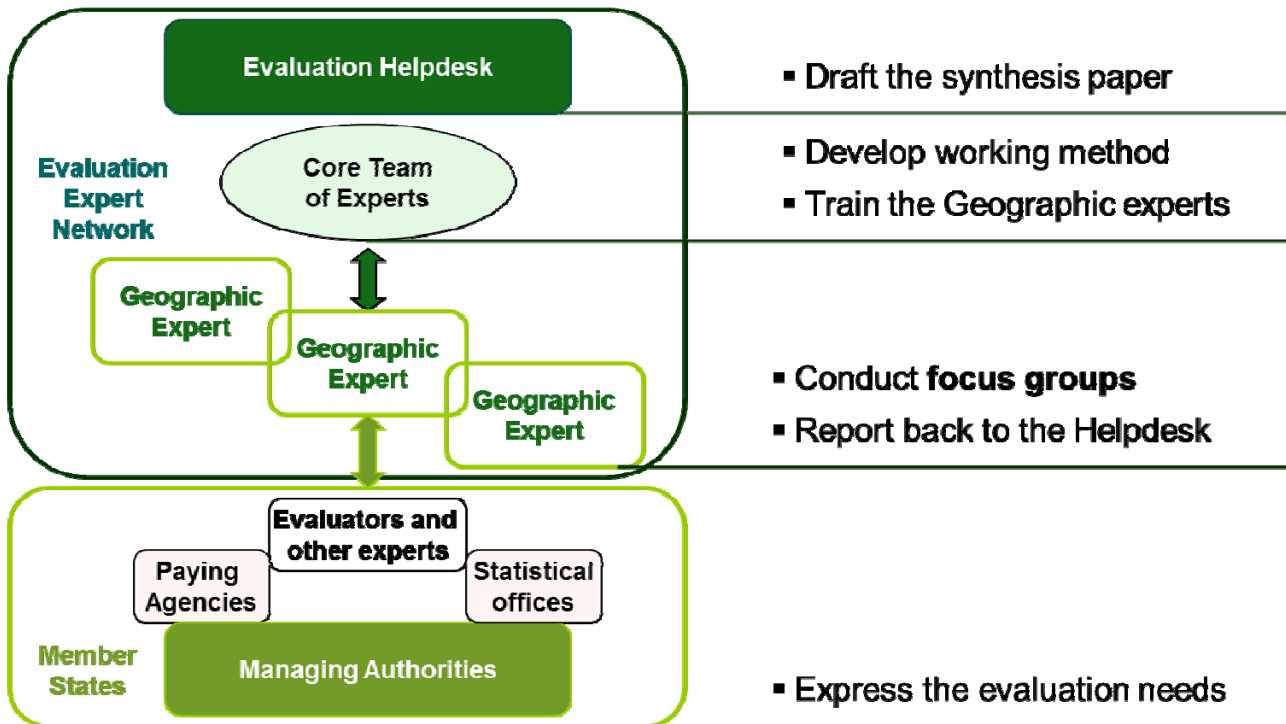
All in all 21 focus groups in Member States were organized between September and November 2010. Where focus groups could not be organized due to various reasons (e.g. workload of Managing Authorities and evaluators in course of the MTE, other organisational problems) written contributions from evaluation stakeholders in the respective countries were sought. As the needs assessment is an ongoing task of the Evaluation Helpdesk, needs are generally examined throughout the year, drawing from all available sources (Member State Missions, technical questions, minutes, events etc.) thus ensuring a full coverage of EU 27.

The working methods for the focus group meetings in 2010 consisted in interactive group discussions, which were professionally animated and documented by Geographic Experts which were specifically trained beforehand to conduct this exercise. Were focus groups reached a critical size small round table groups were introduced in order to explore specific issues more in depth.

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<sup>1</sup> In line with activity 1.4.1 "To update the assessment of needs carried out in 2008" foreseen in the Annual Work Plan 2009 of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development.

Figure 1. The organisation of the Needs Assessment in the Member States



Although this year's focus groups were organized in a very busy time for Managing Authorities and evaluators, who were most concerned with the finalisation of their mid-term evaluation reports, the response to the focus groups has been very positive. Several Member States that could not have a focus group in 2010 (due to the above mentioned reasons) approached the Evaluation Helpdesk in order to underline, that in 2011 in each case they also want a focus group. Some smaller Member States suggested to have joint focus groups with Managing Authorities of neighbouring countries (e.g. between France, Luxembourg and Belgium-Wallonia). Moreover, focus groups were positively mentioned in several Annual Progress Reports of the different evaluation stakeholders that in some cases do rarely meet throughout the year.

The findings of the focus groups were submitted to the Evaluation Helpdesk in a reporting form, developed for this specific purpose. The findings are structured in

- A) Needs for the current programming period
- B) Needs for the review of the CMEF post-2013



### 3. What needs for guidance do exist still for the current programming period?

#### 3.1 Challenges and needs still to be addressed in the programming period 2007-2013

##### A.1. General needs concerning work of Helpdesk

#1.	<b>Consolidate work rather than develop new activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Seek better coordination with DG Agriculture</li> <li>▶ Conduct targeted actions for “groups of Member States” on common issues</li> <li>▶ Provide support for the preparation of the next programming period</li> <li>▶ Improve knowledge on different evaluation systems</li> <li>▶ Help to implement tools at the operational level</li> </ul>
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##### #1. Support from Evaluation Helpdesk

- **Consolidate the work of the Evaluation Helpdesk rather than developing new activities.** The Helpdesk should not start up new activities in relation to the current programming period but rather fine-tune and adjust the work done. The timing is of guidelines is of utmost importance.
- **Seek better co-ordination between Evaluation Helpdesk and the DG Agriculture.** Each actor needs to be aware of its responsibilities. Questions from Member States should therefore not be sent back and forth but communicated to “users”, such as the Managing Authorities.
- **Conduct targeted actions of the Evaluation Helpdesk to transfer expertise between group of Member States or regions with common issues or similar characteristics** (climatic, economic, similar rural areas).
- **Improve Helpdesk’s knowledge on the different evaluation systems of the Member States.** Geographic Experts can support this by linking between experts, the Evaluation Helpdesk and national evaluators, and deal with specific problems.
- **Prepare effectively the next programming period.** It is very important that the Helpdesk concentrates its work in making things work effectively from day one in 2014 when the new programming period starts.
- **Helpdesk should help to implement tools at the operational level** within individual countries, for example good instructive examples of (1) ongoing data collection, application forms, IT systems; (2) guidelines on how a Monitoring Committee can be involved in relation to the RDP.

## A.2. Needs in relation to the follow-up of the mid-term evaluation

#2.	<b>Ensure more communication on MTE results</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Exchange on MTE reports</li> <li>▶ Share lessons learnt between MS</li> <li>▶ Survey among MTE evaluators regarding lessons and experiences</li> </ul>
#3.	<b>Provide guidance on how to effectively present evaluation results to the evaluation stakeholders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Show examples how to present evaluation results in a user-friendly manner</li> <li>▶ Guidance on how to communicate evaluation results effectively</li> </ul>

### #2. Needs in relation to the follow-up of the mid-term evaluation

- **Ensure more intense communication of the MTE results.** The results of the mid-term evaluation (the main source for the new programme design) and the subsequent synthesis of all MTE results (commissioned by the European Commission) should be more intensively communicated in all Member States. Lessons learned from all the MTEs should be made available to inform and feed in to the ex post terms of reference.
- **Ensure a trilateral debriefing on the MTE with the evaluators, Managing Authorities and the European Commission** to enhance the knowledge base on the collection of data for the impact indicators. Establish more direct communications and flows of information
- **Learn from practical experiences of MTE-evaluators through a survey on their perspectives and experience in relation to rural development evaluation**

### #3. Provide guidance on how to effectively present evaluation results to the evaluation stakeholders.

- **Recommendations made by evaluators** should be of clear, feasible and of high quality. However, evaluation results are not always presented in a user-friendly manner. Guidance on how to approach, and present the information to specific groups of evaluation stakeholders, would contribute to better understood decisions on programme implementation.

## A.3. Needs in relation to ongoing evaluation

#4.	<b>Clarify what is meant exactly by ongoing evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Demonstrate relevance of ongoing evaluation to those who should be involved in it.</li> <li>▶ Provide explanations of what is covered by ongoing evaluation.</li> <li>▶ Provide good practices.</li> </ul>
#5.	<b>Support improvement of monitoring and evaluation data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Show examples of good practice of data collection approaches (e.g. in form of screenshots)</li> <li>▶ Show evaluation data outside indicators (statistics, model, methods).</li> </ul>

### #4. Needs in relation to ongoing evaluation

- **There is still a need for clarification of what exactly is meant by ongoing evaluation**, what the implications are and for whom they arise, i.e. demonstrate the relevance to those who should be involved. It is necessary to provide explanations of what the EC expects about ongoing evaluation of programs once the mid-term has been finished.

- **Improve, develop and provide more methods for supporting implementing actors' continuous learning** (ongoing evaluation). At EU-level, support for the use of various evaluation methods is needed.
- There should be included some kind of guidance on **capacity building activities for local stakeholders in relation to ongoing evaluation**. Evaluation is generally a good thing since it results in better projects. The evaluation must, however, be flexible and allow for more qualitative assessments.

## #5. Needs concerning data collection

- **Support the improvement of monitoring data:** In the remaining programming period the main focus should be on the improvement of monitoring and evaluation data. There is a need to ensure the timely and complete delivery of the required monitoring and evaluation data. The consistency of data management should be made an issue for further clarifications e.g. whether the reporting should relate to approved or completed projects?
- **Examples of good database or data collection approaches** could be provided e.g. in the form of screenshots. Develop a common on-line database for direct entering of data including space to explain/comment on results of specific indicators. The database should be open in the sense that it would allow seeing data of other Member States for comparison.

### A.4. Needs concerning the ex-post evaluation

#6.	<b>Guidelines for the ex-post shall be prepared and disseminated in proper time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Develop further specifications and contents of ex-post</li> <li>▶ Focus on impacts and answers to common evaluation questions (→horizontal EQs)</li> <li>▶ Suggest summary of Annual Progress Reports as basis for ex-post</li> </ul>
#7.	<b>Give priority to ex-ante guidance which will be needed prior to the ex-post</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Indicate ex-ante guidance as priority for CMEF review working group</li> </ul>

## #6. Guidance in relation to the ex-post evaluation

- **Guidelines for the ex post evaluation of RDPs shall be prepared and disseminated in proper time** prior to the start of the respective evaluation activities. These should include further specifications regarding the contents of the ex-post evaluation. The ex-post evaluation should focus on the impacts and the answers to the common evaluation questions in the agricultural sector and not on the economy as a whole. Moreover, the ex post should be limited to impact indicators and the common evaluation questions.
- **Further clarifications regarding the link between the (horizontal) evaluation questions and the indicators are needed.** In the current CMEF the indicators of the framework do not sufficient information to answer the Common Evaluation Questions. Information exchange with other Member States would be useful in this respect
- Regarding **evaluation questions** it was felt by some participants that a more precise guidance of the type developed for SAPARD (describing in detail the methodology, indicators and data to be used for answering each questions) would be useful; which would also make comparison and synthesis easier at the EU-level.

## #7. Priority should be given to the development of guidance for the ex ante evaluation for the next programming period.

- By the time the ex post evaluation is concluded it will be largely ‘historic’ and therefore **priority should be given to the ex ante evaluation**. As such the ex post evaluation could use different approaches to impact assessment e.g. a case study per impact indicator and could be based on a summary or aggregation of the annual reports. Such a summary approach could also be led by the European Commission.

### A.5. Needs concerning thematic guidance

#8.	Guidance on methodological problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide guidance on issues such as counterfactuals; overlapping commitments of two programming periods; measuring gross and net effects; synergic effects of policies</li> </ul>
#9.	More practical tools and advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Show qualitative approaches to inform quantifications of results and impacts</li> <li>▶ Support effective working with impact indicators</li> </ul>

## #8. Need for methodological guidance

- **Guidance should deal with methodological problems**, such as counterfactuals, overlapping commitments of two programming periods, measuring gross and net effects of interventions, synergic effects of policies (e.g. axis 2 payments where from different measures payments go sometimes to the same surface of land, which leads to the problem of defining effects of a single measure).
- **An update of the Evaluation Helpdesk’s working paper on impacts and of the working paper on Quality of Life** should be conducted after an information exchange with Member States on the experiences during the mid-term evaluation. More detailed guidance and information on the methodologies and data used should reflect the experiences of the mid-term evaluation. More practical tools and advice should support Member States in effectively working with the impact indicators. Guidance on survey and sampling approaches would be particularly valuable here.

## #9. Need for methodological guidance

- **More guidance on qualitative approaches** to inform quantification of results and impacts should help to achieve a better structured and more consistent approach. Support for evaluation data outside indicators, such as statistics, model, methods, multifunctional measures etc. Use of evaluation forms, which also allows the beneficiaries to include qualitative aspects in describing the impacts of the investments carried out.

## A.6. Needs concerning capacity building

#10.	<b>Provide more frequent occasions for evaluation stakeholders to share experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Support direct exchange between focus group participants</li> <li>▶ Establish channels for sharing findings</li> </ul>
#11.	<b>Support CMEF's educational role</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Promote information on CMEF to Monitoring Committee &amp; Managing Authorities' representatives</li> <li>▶ Support implementing actor's learning (at EU and Member State level)</li> <li>▶ Build endogenous evaluation capability within the delivery bodies</li> </ul>

### #10. Needs concerning the exchange of information

- **Increase actions of the Evaluation Helpdesk to transfer expertise** between Member States and regions and establish channels for sharing findings from other parts of Europe on specific themes or axes.
- **Organize seminars, workshops** and all kinds of events that contribute to promote the exchange of experiences and knowledge among. The specific topics for such and information exchange should include
  - Approaches used for evaluating axis 3 and axis 4 measures
  - How to improve the relation between evaluation questions and indicators?
  - How to organize capacity building activities in the field of rural development evaluation in the Member States?
  - How to promote capacity building activities in the field of evaluation?
- **Further develop a network of evaluators** to share best practices on issues of common interest (an ongoing approach as part of the Evaluation Network)
- Enable **direct exchange between the focus group participants** across Member States similarly to the exchange in the Evaluation Expert Committee.

### #11. Needs concerning capacity building

- **Build evaluation capacity in the Member States through training:** The CMEF has an educational role in so far as it is teaching how to evaluate the intervention logic of the Rural Development Programmes following the intervention levels from inputs, outputs, results to impacts. However, members of the Monitoring Committee are not always fully qualified to judge the quality of Annual Progress Reports and evaluation reports in general. A general lack of information in the area of the CMEF, and the evaluation process has been observed. Training should target both the Monitoring Committee and the Managing Authority in order to increase evaluation capacity.
- **Improve, develop and provide more methods for supporting implementing actors' continuous learning** in the field of evaluation (e.g. through ongoing evaluation, self-evaluation etc.). At EU level, the use of various evaluation methods should be further promoted.
- **Organize focus groups twice a year** with a view to foster exchange between participants of several evaluation stakeholders that do not meet regularly. This would contribute to the richness of debates on evaluation.

## 3.2 Needs expressed for the programming period post-2013

### B.1. Needs concerning the scope and organization of evaluation, monitoring and data-collection

#### #12. General needs regarding the purpose of the CMEF (post-2013)

- **Make the new CMEF simpler, more transparent and more efficient by tightening the system** and by concentrating on the actual information needs, by including fewer indicators, by leaving more room for national adjustments. The existing CMEF should not be omitted, but downsized as regards the number of indicators and evaluation questions, provision of data from the Member States to the European Commission.
- **Make the CMEF a tool with a “high recognition value”** (brand mark) and do not redesign it completely new in every new programming period. Evaluation results should be comparable over several programming periods. Moreover, the CMEF should remain stable during its implementation period.
- **Ensure stability and continuity of the CMEF as well as the common approach to monitoring and evaluation.** The basics of the CMEF should be maintained, developed and improved. Redundancies must be eliminated, things worth to maintain need to be kept, though not additional requirements should be added.
- **A common approach to monitoring and evaluation should be ensured**, however combining effectively exogenous and endogenous evaluation as well as interlinking bottom up and top down point of views (starting with the beneficiary and coming up to the entire sector) .
- **Raise awareness for accountability purpose of the EU monitoring and evaluation system.** The new system should clearly convey the message for the decision makers that not the “full spending of available funds” is the measuring means of the success of a rural development programme but the real positive impacts achieved by the spending of the money. EU-support programmes must also be able to prove their effectiveness on an EU-wide level.
- **Consider the proportionality of evaluation requirements.** The principle of proportionality should apply to the rural development evaluation approach and should reflect the scale and scope of the contribution. It is suggested that more flexible assessment regimes become available for smaller Member States and for priorities that these Member States define in their Rural Development Programmes.
- **Increase flexibility of the CMEF**, allowing that each Management Authority will be able to adjust its system to its context and needs.
- **Reconsider the implementation costs of the CMEF.** Apart from the optimisation of the CMEF, improvements should result from going through the system a second time. However, overall the costs remain (too) high.

#### #13. Needs concerning the scope of evaluation (post-2013)

- **Concentrate on actual information needs of evaluation stakeholders and focus the CMEF either towards the EU-level or the Member State level.** The current focus of the CMEF on EU-needs and those of the Member States and the programme-level are a good idea in principle but difficult to apply in practice. Besides the formal reporting requirements for the EU-level the

information gained by monitoring and evaluation is only used to a relatively small extent by Managing Authorities.

- **Sharpen the role of evaluation by dividing it into two levels**
  - Evaluation at EU-level should apply a sectoral approach, be quantitative and targeted at most important investment effects. It should focus on few objectives and be based on the strategic monitoring of few indicators. The measurements should apply a common approach and the quantification should be achieved with standardized data. Moreover common methodologies of analysis and measurement should be applied.
  - Evaluation at local level should be linked to national and regional strategies and adopt a territorially integrated approach (e.g. improvement of the socio-economic context, attractiveness of the territory, quality of life and governance). More specific methods should be used and combine qualitative and quantitative approaches.
- **Sharpen the thematic focus evaluations** depending on differences between programmes, different implementation of measures (strategy), budget allocation (economic importance in the RDP) and territorial characteristics. Ensure that programmes and Local Action Groups set aside resources for evaluation. It could be considered to limit levels of evaluation and to introduce a system of territorial sampling. Thematic evaluations would be useful for many Managing Authorities. Introduce specific evaluation themes to better respond to certain specificities of some RDP's.
- Introduce the **definition of rural areas** as a substantial factor of the evaluation of Rural Development Programmes.

#### #14. Needs concerning the focus of evaluation (post-2013)

- **The focus of evaluation should be extended.** Public resources allocated under Pillar I of the CAP shall be evaluated as well, not only resources under Pillar II, which represents only 30% of the total CAP budget.
- **All outputs of environmental measures** (water quality, biodiversity..) shall come out of exact measurements secured across the EU. The **joint evaluation of measures** which share common targets should be facilitated. This would help to pick up the impact of combined or complementary measures which reinforce one another.
- The **evaluation of Leader** should be on the basis of their delivery of their strategies rather than aggregation of projects.
- **Focus also on evaluation of policy design and delivery mechanisms.** The evaluation should focus not only of results and impacts, but also evaluation of the Rural Development Policy design, delivery/implementation and evaluation procedures.
- **A bottom up approach for evaluation** should be adopted to reflect the implementation approach and intervention logic of the programme concerned i.e. takes proper account of subsidiarity. This would only evaluate that which is strictly necessary at the EU level, otherwise indicators to be local, regional or national.

#### #15. Needs concerning the division of responsibilities between the actors (post-2013)

- **Strengthen the European Commission's role in financing EU-wide strategic studies, thematic evaluations, synthesis reports or very specialized studies** on evaluation topics that are of common interest and for which the cost for a single Member State is considered high out of technical assistance of the Commission.

- **Topics of such evaluations could especially be studies** relevant for the preparation of the new funding period, large-scale, macro-level, model-based analyses related e.g. to socio-economic and environmental impacts. In the case of such evaluation, the Commission would have to define a unified system of data collection by the Member States early on (methods, sources, and how they would be used in the model). The EU should develop strategic evaluations and studies with a common methodology for horizontal issues and impacts.
- **Rethink the role of the Evaluation Expert Network / Helpdesk:** the challenge is to really enable the exchange of methods and realistic practices between Member States and evaluation teams, with a collaborative platform in real time, only condition which can lead to an evolution of the practices. Until now, the Evaluation Helpdesk has only been a link (spokesman) between the European Commission and the Member States.
- **Clarify the responsibility by defining what has to be monitored and evaluated at EU-, Member States and especially on RDP level.** Provide incentives for additional programme-specific monitoring and evaluation activities through earmarked funds within technical assistance.

#### #16. Needs concerning the set of indicators (post-2013)

- **The CMEF in the next programming phase should provide more guidelines on the baseline indicators** which ought to be more precise. Indeed, for the current period, these baseline indicators have proved difficult to interpret in practice. This is particularly true for the financial indicators which undergo major changes and are established on different bases which means that they do not allow for benchmarking. They have to be identified in advance and not only during programme implementation.
- **More clear correspondence between measures and baseline indicators (context and objective).** The output and result indicators should be a priority for member states in relation to the impact indicators.
- **The EC should have the responsibility for defining and providing data for the common baseline indicators** and using them for the strategic evaluations which will be carried under its responsibility. This data, provided by statistical institutes at EU-level, should cover time lines which coincide with the dates of data collection.
- **Coverage of Axis 3 and 4:** If measures of Axis 3 and 4 are still present in the future RD programs the CMEF shall be completed in order to cover also their effects/impacts on rural areas including proper explanation of terms related to these measures.
- The European Commission should **provide one common method** to be applied for measuring the common indicators.

#### #17. Needs expressed concerning monitoring and data collection (post-2013)

- **Increase coordination at EU-level in order to limit contributions from Member States regarding monitoring.** It is important to gain consistency between Eurostat and each statistical authority at national level. In this way, the Commission could consult the Eurostat, FADN databases as well as all the statements of expenditures, before the reporting on the implementation of the RDP begins.
- **Complexity of data collection for Axis 2 should be reduced** and country specifics related to data collection should be taken into account, at present output indicators for axis 2 do not really measure the actual outputs. The division of responsibilities for data collection and cross sector cooperation in this area remain a particular challenge. The institutional set up for such cooperation was considered



to be important, including the safeguarding it in the future EC Regulation or creation of the separate sub-committee within the MC.

- **Develop a better system of inputting and uploading data** in order to streamline processes, save time and reduce errors.
- **Improve the SFC system.** It presents some weakness in the current period, notably because its practical application is heavier than the Excel spreadsheets used before. It is to be kept in mind that Excel tables are still used to collect data at the level of the measure managers. When using the SFC, a double encoding has to be made and encoding the data SFC requires more time than before in Excel. Perhaps could it be possible to use SFC only for the transfer of documents and thus also excel table like that was the case in 2007.
- **Balance the system of payments** with monitoring tables (SCF) for national currency and Euro.
- **Statements of expenditure** in the Member States can certainly help the Commission to ensure the progress of various measures of the RDP. Why is it necessary for the Member State to have to wait for the Commission to make the sheet containing the information on the annual financial expenses available on the SFC in order to 1/ download it and 2/ upload it again in another chapter of the SFC in order to be able to eventually send the final implementation report. This seems a very long and complicated procedure which is difficult to understand.
- **Revise discontinue continuous monitoring data reporting as this does not reflect the real and dynamic position** e.g. in Axis 2. This needs to take account of the fact that Axis 2 may be subject to stock flow fluctuations and a multi annual approach is required for this.

## B.2. Needs concerning the assessment of results and impacts

### #18. General needs concerning the assessment of results and impacts (post-2013)

- **Consider the timing of assessing results and impacts.** There needs to be a recognition of the time taken for results and impacts to arise, current approaches seem to result in much fruitless activity in the early stages of programmes when other than inputs little if anything meaningful is likely to be reported.
- **Evaluation at the level of axis' objectives and not of specific measure objectives should be introduced.** The focus on the axis level requires well-defined axis' objectives, related evaluation questions and indicators. It would be necessary to take into consideration the level of detail in which the measures should be described. Less detailed measures would give more flexibility to a Member State/programme. Partly this is also connected to the idea that allocation of funds per axis should be in the responsibility of a Member State or at least that minimum per each axis should be given.
- **Focus on impacts at programme level:** It is insufficient to estimate effects at the level of specific measures as proposed by CMEF. Overall impacts in terms of economic growth or effects in combating climate change are generated by a combination of measures. Therefore, more effort should be devoted do estimate overall effects at programme level.
- **A clear intervention logic should be elaborated** for each measure. Measures should have plural objectives in order to overcome the verticality of the current CMEF where every measure has only one main objective.
- **Foster cross policy evaluation:** Introduce the integrated evaluation of policies influencing rural areas.

- The impacts should be **assessed through impact studies** conducted by the European Commission and not by the indicators based on the needs (priorities) of the Member States.

#### #19. Needs concerning the methods used for assessing impacts (post-2013)

- The **methodological approach for the assessment of impacts** should be better adapted to the information available. The general development work on how to measure different kinds of impact and how to expand the variety of impacts mentioned in the CMEF today should be kept at EU level, so inspiration can be shared among the countries.
- **More room for the qualitative assessment of impacts.** In several cases there is very difficult to quantify the impacts. More scope should be given to qualitative assessment in case of measures where data collection faces serious difficulties.
- In terms of guidance, in order to determine the contribution to the strategic orientations of the Commission, it would be necessary to **allow for a qualitative evaluation approach**, instead of trying to formalize evaluation in a quantitative way through impact indicators for which it is sometimes impossible to give numbers.
- **Reconsider the relevance and method of net impacts.** Rural development budgets in some cases are very small compared to other programmes, therefore the expected impacts of RDPs are rather small for a given area. However, netting out the impacts of the RDPs is a very difficult exercise. To introduce the methodology on how to determine the real contribution of rural development programs along with other interventions – e.g. direct payments or other EU SF influencing rural areas would be necessary.
- The **common versus program specific methodologies in evaluating impacts** were discussed as well. There is the need to have straightforward methodology enabling comparisons across the EU within the future CMEF, but the same time the flexibility shall be given to program specific evaluation methods. On the other hand there should be more room for methodological pluralism in evaluation methods and materials.
- **Introduce a methodology to distinguish effects of commitments of the previous programming period** within the currently running one, by introducing partial objectives for these commitments within the running period and the proper monitoring along with the commitments of the actually implemented programme.
- The **scope and contribution of case study approaches** should be explored with a view to these being more emphasised and prominent. More evaluation work could be based on case studies and thematic evaluations that would allow ongoing evaluation more focused on specific and important issues and that can be carried out in a short period of time.
- **Econometric methods** should be proposed with a view to allow comparability between programmes and Member States.
- **Counterfactuals:** The problem of establishment of control groups should be solved in order to measure the impacts of the measures properly and to filter out deadweight effects or double-counting. Familiarization with best practice methods in this area would be welcomed.
- **Distinguish average (or summary) effects and marginal effects of measures:** For the implementation of a programme it is important to know which measures should be up scaled and which downscaled in order to maximise its effects. Guidelines for estimating effects should consider and ask for this distinction.

- Some means of **monitoring and evaluation at the catchment or landscape level** needs to be developed and introduced.

## #20. Needs expressed concerning evaluation questions (post-2013)

- **Revise the content of evaluation questions** and introduce direct links between the evaluation questions and the indicators of the CMEF. It is still difficult to “apply the logic” of the CMEF in the local context. A more logical approach would be: Divide the RDP’s objectives in themes (which have regional importance, e.g. competitiveness of farmers, job creation, landscape, etc.). From the objectives define the result areas (with result indicators). Then develop an overview table of the measures versus ‘result areas’. Then define the indicators for all levels (output, result, impact), that provide you with useful information to answer the EQs. In the current CMEF there is no direct relation between the EQs and the indicators.
- **Decrease the number of the Common Evaluation Questions**, explaining them properly and completing them by definitions of terms (criteria). In general the number of common evaluation question shall be limited to the overall EU objectives and more space shall be left to programme-specific questions.
- **Revise and integrate horizontal evaluation questions** in an overall concept and make them more meaningful OR skip them completely. At the moment horizontal objectives and community priorities are a separate part within the CMEF. The horizontal objectives should be integrated into a structured overall concept comprising the relevant indicators and questions.
- **Evaluation must rely more on evaluation questions less on a set of existing indicators.** The questions should be well formulated and treated according to what is performed as RDP activities. focus The CEQ’s should be redesigned in order to become more specific, thus will provide a better adaptation to the member states and their RDP’s.
- **Increase number of national/programme-specific EQs.** In future RDP evaluations in the Member States should be made mostly by national questions and only with very limited amount of common evaluation questions. By doing this it is possible to focus better on the themes that are really relevant for each Member State. The same time apply the CMEF with a certain degree of flexibility and allow Member States to use specific methodologies to answer them.
- The **evaluation questions should clearly indicate which ones are most relevant for which phase** of evaluation (i.e. not all questions should be asked at ex ante, mid-term and ex post evaluation). Need to set evaluation criteria or provide alternative evaluation criteria for the answers to common evaluation questions.
- **Give flexibility in the sense that a certain part of the questions and indicators might not be obligatory** but would be analysed only when considered relevant by the Member States.
- **Revise the level of the evaluation questions.** With the current CMEF, it is necessary to evaluate on too many levels: the demands of the Commission, the evaluation questions, the demands of the Ministry (which have to be management related). As it is now, the span is too wide and the common evaluation questions somehow overrule the other dimensions.
- **Reconsider the responsibility for Evaluation Questions.** **Option A:** The Member States are responsible for evaluation – how the objectives are reached. Horizontal questions have to be answered by the Commission, whereas the Member States would be responsible for providing data. **Option B:** Common Evaluation Questions are evaluated in international evaluation studies at the European level (organised by the European Commission).

### B.3. Needs concerning the ex-ante, ongoing, mid-term and ex-post evaluation

#### #21. Needs with regard to the ex ante evaluation (post-2013)

- **Redesign the ex-ante evaluation** according to different options:
  - Option 1: **Increase the importance of ex-ante evaluation** with a view to set the basis for a “realistic” evaluation plan (in particular important if also the programme specific part of the evaluation increases, to set a good basis for data collection, a proper baseline situation, and to define evaluation questions relevant for the programme.
  - Option 2: **Replace the ex-ante evaluation** with a report on the development process of the Rural Development Programmes.
- **Unify the structure of the ex post and ex ante evaluation report** for a better comparison of the respective results.
- **Drop the EU obligations concerning the quantification of targets in the course of the ex-ante evaluation.** Setting targets (objectives) at the beginning of the programming period is rather a “guessing” exercise (in particular for the measures of Axis 3). “Setting targets” should therefore become a part of ongoing evaluation when realistic numbers can be provided.
- **Increase the importance of the evaluation plan** in the CMEF: it sets the basis for good data collection and targeted evaluation activities.

#### #22. Needs concerning ongoing and mid-term evaluation (post-2013)

- **Better distinguish between the on-going and the mid-term evaluation in terms of thematic focus, content and methods:**
  - In thematic terms a distinction could be that ongoing evaluation is stronger focused on “procedural questions” rather than on the effects of the policy.
  - In terms of content a second proposal is that ongoing evaluation concentrates mostly on national evaluation questions and on local and regional strategies.
  - With regards to methods it was suggested, that the CMEF in the next programming period demands a quantitative ongoing evaluation supplemented by qualitative and thematic analyses in the course of mid-term and the ex-post evaluations.
- **Emphasize the increasing role of ongoing evaluation** through a stronger role of Annual Progress Reports and through a **new division of responsibilities:**
  - **EU-wide evaluations** should be conducted by the European Commission: Synthesis reports (as before), as well as additional EU-wide thematic studies, esp. for the preparation of the new funding period. The Managing Authorities in the Member States are obliged to implement the EU-wide mandatory monitoring and evaluation requirements.
  - Complementary and additionally **programme-specific** evaluation through the Managing Authorities in the Member States. Provide an incentive through earmarked funds within the technical assistance for additional programme-specific monitoring and evaluation activities.
  - Managing Authorities should be focused on the **monitoring of outputs** and should create awareness at the level of national stakeholders regarding the evaluation instruments and the programming of activities.

### #23. Needs concerning the ex post evaluation (post-2013)

- **Shift the responsibility for the ex post evaluation** to the European Commission at the EU-level. This evaluation is less used at regional level (too late for policy development) but still considered useful, notably for the more advanced assessment of impacts which allows a comparison to the mid-term evaluation results. Shifting the responsibility to the EU-level would ensure a comparative analysis at EU-level and at the same time allow for a stronger national focus on important evaluation themes in the course of the ongoing evaluation.
- **Review the scope of the ex post evaluation:** The usefulness and scope of the ex post evaluation should be reviewed. Comparing the ratio of efforts and benefits for this tool the efficiency is questionable. The ex post evaluation comes too late to be considered for planning the next programming period, so there is no good correspondence between evaluation and programming. A mid-term update would be more useful in this respect. An ex post evaluation could be reduced to a description of the complete implementation status – including a summary of the findings of the mid-term evaluations and mid-term updates.

## B.4. Needs concerning guidance, reporting and follow-up

### #24. Needs concerning guidance for monitoring and evaluation (post-2013)

- **Prepare and disseminate the CMEF and all necessary support documents in time for the next programming period and ensure availability in more community languages.** The framework must exist in advance and must be well-defined, especially before the new programming period starts. In fact, the evaluation and monitoring systems of each programme shall be designed and disseminated at early stages – before the ex-ante evaluation. It is very important that the information and support documents defined as part of the CMEF are released in time and that they are available well in all official languages of the RDPs.
- **Further develop methodologies regarding the assessment of RD impacts at EU-level.** The general development work on how to measure different kinds of impact and how to expand the variety of impacts mentioned in the CMEF today should be kept at EU level, so inspiration can be shared among the countries.
- **Improve guidance on methods.** It was also felt that there should be a clearer guidance at the EU-level concerning the evaluation methodologies, so that synthesis and comparison of national inputs could be easier. E.g. including the working paper on Leader and Quality of Life by proposing a list of econometric methods to be used (as options for evaluators).
- **Provide more precise definitions on key terms, better intervention logics, covering all measures** (also operations similar to the current axis 3 and 4 measures); establish conditions for exchange rates. Some terms used in evaluation shall be better defined e.g. „innovation“ or „improvement of the quality of life“.
- The **measure fiches should be retained**, these are highly valued, clear and well structured . Moreover the provision of fiches for qualitative indicators is highly desirable.
- The Commission must **strengthen the guidance and technical support to the Member States**, thus as to be done along all the evaluation process.
- A well described **collection and calculation methods for the common indicators** would be helpful.
- The **timing to define or publish working papers, guidelines** for all the RDPs is very important and more anticipation is needed in this respect. By now, it is considered to be a problem due to delays

although the content is good and valuable for the future. Quick and short response on methodology would be more welcome than extensive and long working papers.

#### #25. Needs concerning the reporting (post-2013)

- **Adapt the timing of reporting requirements to RDP's progress.** The timing of reporting and evaluations should be reviewed against the programme implementation, evaluation and the policy development cycle with a view to make it more timely and effective. The timing for the mid-term evaluation should be dependent on the proportion of programme delivered.
- **Avoid duplication of efforts in reporting and reduce overall number of monitoring reports.** Some reports such as the annual progress reports and strategic reports have the same contents. This reporting is relevant for the EU, but not for the county administrative boards or the LAGs. Annual reports involve a significant duplication of effort and this should be avoided throughout. Two yearly strategic reports could be Commission led and based on the annual progress reports.
- Consider the **harmonization of the reporting year** between the financial regulation and implementing regulation.
- **A stronger annual reporting of the ongoing evaluation could substitute the mid-term or ex post evaluation as separate processes.** As a part of ongoing evaluation annual themes of the evaluation should have stronger roles – every year some different themes are evaluated and reported as a part of on-going evaluation.
- **Provide greater flexibility for local reporting when this is more relevant or appropriate** e.g. some environmental conditions are better monitored at catchment level than national level, the quality of information derived would be of much greater value.
- **Simplify reporting by revising the need to report separately measures which are grouped together as schemes** for (more effective) delivery purposes. Reducing the number of measures rationalising or grouping them more effectively would help here as would the ability to evaluate them directly on a scheme basis. Drop the requirement for 4 separate sets of indicator tables by funding type and all areas of duplication e.g. payment reporting, monitoring tables, spreadsheets, AIR annexes etc.
- **Provide guidance for technical problems such as** reporting legacy schemes from previous RDPs.

#### #26. Needs concerning the use and follow-up of evaluations (post-2013)

- **Establish EU quality standards and define specific expectations for evaluation and monitoring.** Quality standards are needed not only for indicators or answering common evaluation questions but also regarding methods and data processing. Requirements for a **minimum standard of data quality** should provide for cross-country comparison of evaluation results to avoid any misinterpretation of results. For evaluation objectives and specific results should be defined more clearly.
- **Increase the learning and mainstreaming aspect of the CMEF.** The “final” phase of the evaluation cycle (use of results, learning, dissemination, mainstreaming, meta-evaluation) so far does not find sufficient attention in the CMEF and should be strengthened).
- **Make evaluation more user-friendly and to establish system of “meta-evaluation”** realized for example through a team of experts or through feedback from evaluation stakeholders. In future reports should be more orientation towards the “evaluation customers“ and „user friendly“ information about the evaluation of impacts for broader public shall be introduced.

- **Increase relevance of EU-level evaluation reports** for the Member State level.
- More emphasis should be put on the **dissemination of evaluation results** for the decision makers. It seems that less attention than required is paid by the decision makers to the progress of the rural development programs. For this reason, necessary interventions to modify, change or accelerate process in implementation are taken late or not at all.

## 4. ANNEX: Action plan in response to the identified needs

*The sequence of the listed needs does not reflect the degree of their importance.*

The following table contains the main needs that were formulated by the focus group participants in the Member States in 2010 and suggests envisaged actions that can be covered in by the activities in the 2011 Annual Work Programme.

No.	Member States' needs	Envisaged actions (indicative)	Relevant activity proposed in 2011 Annual Work Programme	Tentative planning
<b>A.1. General needs concerning work of Helpdesk</b>				
#1.	<b>Consolidate work rather than develop new activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Seek better coordination with DG Agriculture</li> <li>▶ Conduct targeted actions for "groups of Member States" on common issues</li> <li>▶ Provide support for the preparation of the next programming period</li> <li>▶ Improve knowledge on different evaluation systems</li> <li>▶ Help to implement tools at the operational level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Thematic working group on MTE impacts (A 1.1.1)</li> <li>▶ Responses to requests for information (A.3.2.1.1.)</li> <li>▶ Support the CMEF review (1.3.2)</li> </ul>	2011+
<b>A.2. Needs in relation to follow-up of the MTE</b>				
#2.	<b>Ensure more communication on MTE results</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Exchange on MTE reports</li> <li>▶ Share lessons learnt between MS</li> <li>▶ Survey among MTE evaluators regarding lessons and experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Thematic working group on MTE impacts (A 1.1.1)</li> <li>▶ Develop further topics from the 'thematic pool' (A 1.1.2)</li> <li>▶ Increase assessment capacity of EC desk officers (A 2.1.1)</li> <li>▶ Collect best practices (A 2.2.2)</li> <li>▶ Provide an assessment for MTE-reports (A 2.3.1)</li> <li>▶ Collaborate with the Evaluation Expert Committee (A 3.2.3)</li> </ul>	2011



No.	Member States' needs	Envisaged actions (indicative)	Relevant activity proposed in 2011 Annual Work Programme	Tentative planning
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Liaise with Member States (A 3.4.4)</li> <li>▶ Ensure dissemination in form of newsletters, website etc. etc. (A 3.1.)</li> </ul>	
#3.	<b>Provide guidance on how to effectively present evaluation results to the evaluation stakeholders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Show examples how to present evaluation results in a user-friendly manner</li> <li>▶ Guidance on how to communicate evaluation results effectively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Develop further topics from the 'thematic pool' (A 1.1.2)</li> <li>▶ Support capacity building in the Member States (A.2.2.1)</li> <li>▶ Collect best practices (A 2.2.2)</li> <li>▶ Liaise with Member States (A 3.4.4)</li> </ul>	2011+
<b>A.3. Needs in relation to ongoing evaluation</b>				
#4.	<b>Clarify what is meant exactly by ongoing evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Demonstrate relevance of ongoing evaluation to those who should be involved</li> <li>▶ Provide explanations of what is covered by ongoing evaluation</li> <li>▶ Provide good practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Develop further topics from the 'thematic pool' (A 1.1.2)</li> <li>▶ Collect best practices (A 2.2.2)</li> </ul>	2011
#5.	<b>Support improvement of monitoring and evaluation data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Show examples of good practice of data collection approaches (e.g. in form of screenshots)</li> <li>▶ Show evaluation data outside indicators (statistics, model, methods)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Develop further topics from the 'thematic pool' (A 1.1.2)</li> <li>▶ Collect best practices (A 2.2.2)</li> </ul>	2011
<b>A.4. Needs concerning ex-post evaluation</b>				
#6.	<b>Guidelines for the ex-post shall be prepared and disseminated in proper time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Develop further specifications and contents of ex-post</li> <li>▶ Focus on impacts and answers to common evaluation questions (→horizontal EQs)</li> <li>▶ Suggest summary of Annual Progress Reports as basis for ex-post</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Thematic working group on MTE impacts (A 1.1.1)</li> <li>▶ Support the CMEF review (A 1.3.2)</li> </ul>	2011+

No.	Member States' needs	Envisaged actions (indicative)	Relevant activity proposed in 2011 Annual Work Programme	Tentative planning
#7.	Give priority to ex-ante guidance which will be needed prior to the ex-post	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Indicate ex-ante guidance as priority for CMEF review working group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Thematic working group on MTE impacts (A 1.1.1)</li> <li>▶ Support the CMEF review (A 1.3.2)</li> </ul>	2011+
<b>A.5. Needs concerning thematic guidance</b>				
#8.	Guidance on methodological problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide guidance on issues such as Counterfactuals; Overlapping commitments of 2 programming periods; measuring gross and net effects; synergic effects of policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Thematic working group on MTE impacts (A 1.1.1)</li> <li>▶ Collect best practices (A 2.2.2)</li> <li>▶ Responses to requests for information (A.3.2.1.1.)</li> </ul>	2011+
#9.	More practical tools and advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Show qualitative approaches to inform quantifications of results and impacts</li> <li>▶ Support effective working with impact indicators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Thematic working group on MTE impacts (A 1.1.1)</li> <li>▶ Collect best practices (A 2.2.2)</li> </ul>	2011+
<b>A.6. Needs concerning capacity building</b>				
#10.	Provide more frequent occasions for evaluation stakeholders to share experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Support direct exchange between focus group participants</li> <li>▶ Establish channels for sharing findings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Support capacity building in the Member States (A.2.2.1)</li> <li>▶ Collect best practices (A 2.2.2)</li> <li>▶ Liaise with Member States (A 3.4.4)</li> </ul>	2011+
#11.	Support CMEF's educational role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Promote information on CMEF to Monitoring Committee &amp; MA representatives</li> <li>▶ Support implementing actor's learning (at EU and MS level)</li> <li>▶ Build endogenous evaluation capability within the delivery bodies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Thematic working group on MTE impacts (A 1.1.1)</li> <li>▶ Develop further topics from the 'thematic pool' (A 1.1.2)</li> <li>▶ Collect best practices (A 2.2.2)</li> <li>▶ Liaise with Member States (A 3.4.4).</li> </ul>	2011+



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