



## The newsletter of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

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## Approaches used to identify HNV Farmland

*Zélie Peppiette*

In recent years, increasing emphasis has been placed on the non-market benefits of agricultural and rural policy, and in particular the environmental impact of policy instruments. Environmental outcomes are a key issue for many stakeholders and for the public in general, and the emphasis within the Europe 2020 strategy document ([European Commission, 2010a](#)) and the EU Biodiversity Action Plan ([European Commission, 2010b](#)) on sustainability, respect for the environment and the prevention of biodiversity loss makes it clear that the importance of environmental considerations in EU policy making will continue to grow.

This, taken together with the increasing focus on evaluation and policy performance within the European Union (EU), means that it becomes ever more important to be able to measure, monitor and assess environmental characteristics in a reliable and consistent manner.

The concept of High Nature Value (HNV) farming has been emerging as a policy consideration within the EU for some years and provides an interesting example of the issues and challenges linked to environmental monitoring for use in policy development and implementation.

### What is HNV farmland?

HNV farmland results from a combination of land use and farming systems. Some “natural values”, related to high levels of biodiversity or the presence of certain species and habitats, depend on certain types of farming activity. The dominant feature of HNV farming

*Continued on* ►

### Your feedback is welcome

This newsletter is intended to be applicable, accessible and user-friendly for anybody dealing with the evaluation of Rural Development Programmes and measures in the EU. We therefore welcome your feedback on the content presented and we would encourage you to provide suggestions regarding appropriate articles or regular features. Please send us your comments to: [info@ruralevaluation.eu](mailto:info@ruralevaluation.eu)

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is low-intensity management, with a significant presence of semi-natural vegetation, in particular extensive grassland. Diversity of land cover, including features such as ponds, hedges, woodland, is also a characteristic.

A broad classification of HNV farmland into three types was first proposed in 2003 (*Andersen et al, 2003*), with subsequent modifications (*Paracchini et al, 2008*). This typology has now been widely adopted, and has formed the basis of guidance provided in the context of monitoring HNV farmland within the EU rural development framework.

## HNV indicators within EU Rural Development Policy

The Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) for rural development includes two indicators specifically related to HNV farmland:

- **Baseline indicator 18: HNV farmland and forestry.** The CMEF Handbook defines this indicator as the Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA) of HNV farmland, expressed in hectares.
- **Common impact indicator 5: maintenance of HNV farmland and forestry.** This indicator encompasses changes in both the extent and condition of HNV farmland. Extent is defined as the area of HNV farmland and forestry expressed either as an absolute area (ha) or as a percentage of UAA and/or forest land. No standard definitions for assessment of condition are given.

In addition to these definitions, further guidance on the measurement of the HNV indicators has been prepared by the EU Evaluation Helpdesk to assist Member States and evaluators in establishing, updating and interpreting indicator data.

### The three types of HNV Farmland

- **Type 1:** Farmland with a high proportion of semi-natural vegetation.
- **Type 2:** Farmland with a mosaic of low intensity agriculture and natural and structural elements (field margins, hedgerows, stone walls, patches of woodland or scrub, small rivers etc).
- **Type 3:** Farmland supporting rare species or a high proportion of European or world populations.

Photo: courtesy of LIFE Project LIFE03/NAT/FIN/000039



*A typical HNV landscape in Finland showing semi-natural extensive grassland within a mosaic landscape*

The [Guidance Document on the Application of the High Nature Value Impact Indicator 2007-2013](#) explores the key characteristics of HNV and explains how they can form the basis for the design of indicators to monitor trends in HNV farming and forestry. A four-step approach is presented. Further guidance is provided in the [Working Paper on Approaches for assessing the impacts of the Rural Development Programmes in the context of multiple intervening factors](#).

The CMEF approach to assessing HNV farming and forestry acknowledges the varied histories and experience of environmental monitoring across the EU, and the variation in HNV farmland characteristics, and therefore does not prescribe a specific method for the assessment of either the extent or the condition of HNV farmland. Instead, programme authorities are asked to assess the extent and condition of HNV farmland within the RDP area, using the best data available to them, and their own choice of appropriate methods and subsidiary indicators, with the aid of the guidance and methodological support provided.

## Methods used for the assessment of HNV farmland

In spring 2010, the European Commission asked the Member States to provide details of the methodology used to establish the data for the CMEF HNV baseline indicator within their programmes. Twenty four submissions contained sufficient methodological detail to allow common analysis. Taken together these cover all or part of 22 EU Member States. The descriptions were assessed in relation to the data sources and methods used to identify HNV farmland, and the type of HNV land identified (see table opposite).

**Methods used to identify HNV farmland,  
and effectiveness in identifying the 3 HNV types**

Case																										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	TOTAL	
<b>Methods</b>																										
IRENA/EEA					X											X	X									3
Land cover				X				X	X			X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	13
Soil/ Altitude									X																	1
Management schemes	X														X				X	X						4
Farming systems												X		X					X	X	X			X	X	7
Species data									X											X	X			X		4
EU designation		X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X		X	X	X				X							12
National designation			X		X				X	X	X								X							6
Other habitat identification		X		X	X				X				X	X	X											7
Site sampling							X																			1
IACS/ LPIS	X			X															X	X					X	5
<b>HNV TYPE</b>																										
Type 1	●	●		●	○	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	○	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	18+4
Type 2	○					○	●		●			●			○	●	○		○	○	○	○	○	○		4+9
Type 3			●	●	●		●		●	●	●		●	●	●				●	○	●		●			13+1
<b>For methods, X =&gt; method used      For HNV type, ● =&gt; identified    ○ =&gt; identified to some extent</b>																										

Source: [The challenge of monitoring environmental priorities: the example of HNV farmland](#), Peppiette, Z.E.N. 122nd EAAE Seminar "Evidence-based agricultural and rural policy making: Methodological and empirical challenges of policy evaluation", Ancona, February 17-18, 2011.

### Approaches to assessment: extent

The twenty-four submissions show that a wide variety of methods are currently being used, either singly, or in combination to identify the extent of HNV farmland.

The most commonly occurring methods are based on land cover and statutory designations, (including both EU and national). Land cover data sources include grassland inventories, and other surveys as well as [CORINE data](#). Methods combined with land cover include expert panels to enhance criteria through the incorporation of data on altitude and soil quality, or combination with species' distribution databases.

The use of statutory designations at EU-level (e.g. [NATURA 2000](#), protected water management areas) and national designations (e.g. nature reserves and national parks) offer a predefined basis which can be used quickly and simply. Countries and regions relying wholly or predominantly on designations tend to be those where the original land cover approach proved unsuited to conditions on the ground, often because the grid size was too coarse to identify the complex pattern of land use, or because of difficulties in distinguishing between land classes (e.g. extensive semi-natural grassland and abandoned land).

This summary table does of course obscure the detail of the methodologies. In some cases, HNV areas identified from land cover data were complemented by land within designated areas. In other cases designated areas were used as an additional filter, with a different group of land classes selected within and outwith NATURA areas. For another group, the starting point was the designated areas, and a limited number of specific land cover classes or habitats were added to provide a more complete picture of HNV status.

Seven of the cases included using the farming system as one of the predictors for HNV farmland. Each used a different approach, ranging from simple identification of agricultural land managed organically, through data from the [EUROSTAT Farm Structural Survey](#) (FSS) or the [Farm Accounts Data Network](#) (FADN) to individual farm scoring using data from comprehensive farm registers.

Five of the reported methods involve Integrated Administration and Control System/Land Parcel Information System (IACS/LPIS). In some cases, once HNV land has been identified, a Geographic Information System (GIS) HNV layer is overlaid with LPIS so that only agricultural parcels are included in the final figure. In other cases, IACS/LPIS is used in a pro-active way to identify

HNV farmland, through calculations of stocking density, parcel size, proportion of permanent pasture or areas included in certain agri-environment schemes.

A small group include, in addition to other methods, land entered into management contracts in their assessment of HNV farmland. This may be specific agri-environment schemes focussed on biodiversity, or other national schemes supporting HNV land.

### Approaches to assessment: condition

Whilst all the methods provide an estimate of the extent of HNV farmland, very few even attempt to assess condition or quality. The only instance recorded which currently includes a graded assessment of condition, using an ordinal scale, is the method based on extensive field sampling. Various other authorities indicated that further work is continuing on the assessment of condition, for the most part proposing sampling on a limited basis.

### Identification of the three types of HNV farmland

With regards to the effectiveness with which each of the methods is considered to identify the three types of HNV farmland, the research has shown that **Type 1 HNV** is clearly the most commonly identified type. 18 of the 24 methods were considered as well-adapted to identifying it and a further four assess it to some degree. Identification of this type is highly correlated with the use of land cover approaches, which are generally considered a reasonable means of assessing Type 1 HNV, although they do not take account of quality. One noteworthy variant of Type 1 HNV is grazed low density woodland which occurs widely across southern Europe. Several cases from these regions have adapted definitions and/or methods in order to take this category of land into account.

**Type 2 HNV** is the hardest to identify. Only four of the 24 cases were considered to identify Type 2 effectively, although a further nine provide some assessment of the extent of this type of HNV farmland. The four cases use very different methods: one is based on physical site sampling, one very small and homogenous region uses the [IRENA](#) approach to calculate the density of field boundaries, one case uses farming systems data, and the fourth uses a complex combination of methods. This variety of approaches serves to underline the difficulties encountered in assessing this type of HNV farmland.

Apart from site sampling, the other cases are highly context specific and would be hard to transfer to other regions. This is due to the fact that they are either linked to the specific physical environment or reliant on particularly comprehensive data sets.

More than half the approaches are considered to be effective in identifying **Type 3 HNV** farmland. Since statutory designations focus on habitats of particular importance for specific species or groups of species, a correlation between use of designations and identification of Type 3 HNV has been assumed. Use of statutory designations is not however the only method which identifies this category: sample plots, expert panels and national species databases have also been used in some cases.

### Issues and challenges related to the identification of HNV farmland

- Although the link between farm system, management practices and HNV farmland is well-established, currently **little use is made of farming systems data**. Further investigation of how to combine systems data with other methods is needed.
- Landscape features, such as hedgerows, ponds,

*The Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax*, a threatened species*



Photo: courtesy of Juan Martin Simon, LIFE Project LIFE02/NAT/P/008476

small groups of bushes or trees within fields etc, are not always counted as agricultural land, which complicates **identification of Type 2 HNV** in particular. The situation may improve following the development of the Good Agricultural and Environment Condition (GAEC) standard on landscape features in 2010 to include hedges, ponds, ditches, field margins, isolated trees and groups and lines of trees (Council Regulation (EC) No 73/2009). These features must now be recorded and retained. A similar issue exists in relation to grazed extensive woodland, which is frequently not considered as agricultural.

- **Land cover methods** do not always distinguish well between abandoned land with encroaching scrub, and extensive semi-natural grassland with patches of bushes or scattered trees. Improving definitions and guidelines to make a clearer distinction between the two would reduce this confusion.
- The **inability to assess quality/condition** is a widespread weakness of the methods currently used. Sampling can provide detailed data to identify all HNV types, and provide condition/quality assessments. However, whilst it can give a good indication of the situation at population level, it is not so reliable at lower levels. Full coverage necessarily involves fewer variables than sampling, and is better for extent than quality. It is often more reliant on proxy or derived indicators. More work is needed to establish ways of combining the two approaches.
- In order to identify distinctly land classified as HNV which is agricultural, improved links to IACS/LPIS are likely to be needed. In some places these links have already been established, but only a minority of regions currently use **IACS/LPIS in the calculation of HNV farmland**. If HNV was ever to be used as a criterion for targeting policy measures or funding, as advocated by some environmental NGOs, such links would be essential.
- **Derived or proxy indicators** are likely to be less accurate in identifying HNV farmland than parameters directly related to biodiversity status. However, they are widely available, and often more consistent, easier to use and more frequently updated. Further verification work to establish the plausibility of derived or proxy indicators, using for example triangulation techniques would increase their reliability and acceptance.
- Existing data sets and sources relating to environmental parameters vary greatly in content, coverage, detail, quality and frequency of updating. The result is incomparable, inconsistent **data availability across the EU**. It is important to avoid a “Lowest

Common Denominator” approach which only uses ubiquitous data sources. The highest quality and most appropriate data available in any region should be used, even if it is unique to that region.

- If a variety of different methods and data sources are to be used, mutual trust in the **validity of alternative methods** must be developed. This relies on transparency, and increased understanding. Methods must be shown to be acceptable in order to be accepted.
- In these days of cash-strapped public administrations, all expenditure, including that related to implementation and monitoring, must be carefully justified. The **resources devoted to assessing parameters such as HNV farmland** must be seen to be proportionate and affordable.
- The **purpose of identification of HNV farmland** must be clear: different methods will be appropriate to meet different objectives. Methods which provide a robust assessment of the overall state of HNV farmland, and its evolution over time, may be unsuited for targeting policy measures or funding to support its maintenance. If directing public funds to support HNV farmland becomes a political commitment, then it will be necessary to identify eligible farms or parcels, and so different assessment methods may be needed.

## Conclusion

Whilst good progress has been made in assessing the extent of HNV farmland, the assessment of its condition or quality still presents a considerable challenge. It must be said however, that the situation is much better today than it was even as little as five years ago.

Due to the variation in data availability across the Member States and regions of the EU and the range of physical situations, it does not appear feasible to propose one single method for the assessment of the extent of HNV farmland. It appears more realistic to work on refining the various existing methods, improving and demonstrating their reliability, and increasing their acceptability. The goal would be to establish the “area of HNV farmland” as a common parameter, to be assessed within each individual programme area using the highest quality and most appropriate data and methods available within that area, generating widely-accepted results which can give an overall picture at EU level.

## Find out more

- o [The challenge of monitoring environmental priorities: the example of HNV farmland](#), Peppiette, Z.E.N. Paper prepared for the 122nd EAAE Seminar “Evidence-based agricultural and rural policy making: Methodological and empirical challenges of policy evaluation”, Ancona, February 17-18, 2011.
- o [Guidance Document on the Application of the High Nature Value Impact Indicator 2007-2013](#). Available in English, French and German.
- o [Working Paper on Approaches for assessing the impacts of the Rural Development Programmes in the context of multiple intervening factors](#)
- o [European Commission \(2010a\). Communication from the Commission: Europe 2020, A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. COM \(2010\) 2020. Brussels: European Commission](#)
- o [European Commission \(2010b\). Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: The 2010 assessment of implementing the EU biodiversity action plan. COM \(2010\) 548. Brussels: European Commission](#)
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- o Paracchini, M.L., Petersen, J.E. and Hoogeveen, Y., Catharina Bamps, Ian Burfield, Chris van Swaay (2008). [High Nature Value Farmland in Europe](#). European Commission Directorate General Joint Research Centre and the European Environment Agency.

# Updated SWOT analysis of the rural development evaluation system

*Jela Tvrdonova/Jon Eldridge*

Evaluations are an integral part of the process of implementing Rural Development Programmes (RDPs). For this reason, it is essential to regularly assess the single components of the monitoring and evaluation system that has been created for RDPs to ensure that it is working effectively and efficiently.

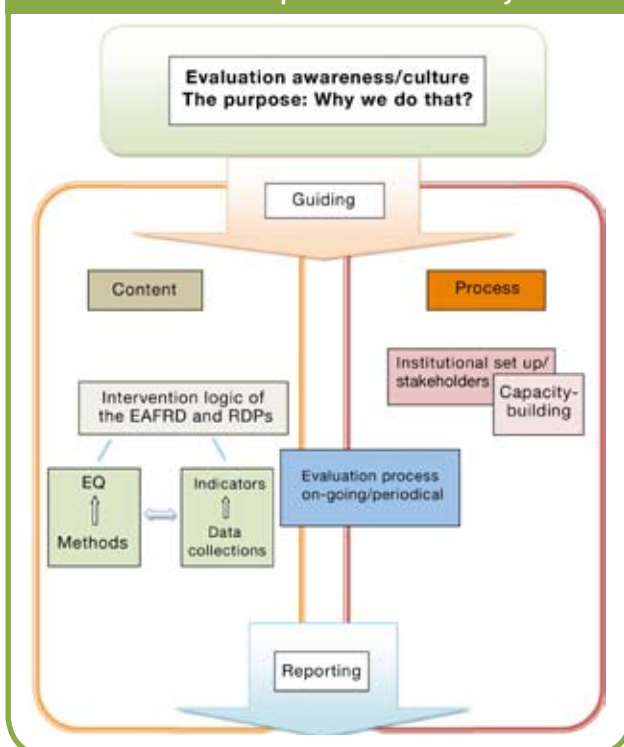
**A**n updated strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis of the rural development evaluation system 2007-2013 has recently been published. The analysis, which was based on the experiences of a wide range of actors, examined different aspects of the system in order to highlight specific points that need to be addressed, as well as identify those positive aspects of the system that can be built upon (see figure 1 below).

The strategic approach to rural development for the running programming period, which focuses on competitiveness, environment and quality of life, provides a sound basis for evaluation. The application of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF),

encourages the ongoing evaluation of RDPs alongside their implementation. Such an integration of evaluation into the initial phase of the programme and the emphasis on ongoing evaluation is enhancing the level of governance of public resources used in rural development across the EU.

However, the experts of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, who compiled the report, identified some lack of awareness among programme managers and decision makers about the use of evaluation. “In several cases programme adjustments are more driven by concerns regarding the absorption of allocated budgets rather than by a critical assessment of needs and programme impacts”. Therefore, the report concludes that improved communication among evaluation stakeholders and transfer of results in RDP practice should be seen as an opportunity to greatly enhance the evaluation culture.

Figure 1: The structure of the SWOT of the rural development evaluation system



Source: Helpdesk of the Evaluation Expert Network

## The role of the CMEF

The SWOT analysis also examined the use of the CMEF as a guiding tool for rural development evaluation. While the CMEF was found to be a useful single source of reference for stakeholders, it is sometimes considered too prescriptive, demanding and complex, particularly if authorities and evaluators lack the experience and capacity to act on it.

The CMEF introduced a set of common indicators (baseline, output, result, impact) and evaluation questions, but analysis showed that a broad range of approaches is being applied to assess the impacts and to answer these questions. As a result, EU-level comparisons remain challenging. Assessments could still be improved by the introduction of common evaluation approaches. Moreover, complementary guidance drawn up by the European Commission and the Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development could further improve the common understanding of the concept among evaluation stakeholders.

In fact, the role of the network and its Helpdesk was highlighted as a 'strength' of the system. "The network promotes ongoing methodological work regarding the assessment of rural developments impacts and shares evaluation knowledge and practices," the report found. However, monitoring and evaluation are commonly still managed separately and responsibility for data collection is often not clear. Capacity building in most Member States is modest. Economic and social partners, local and non-professional stakeholders are still not sufficiently involved in the evaluation process.

Another important issue identified by the SWOT was the timing of evaluation tasks. In general the mid-term evaluations are perceived to be conducted too early to take into account certain impacts and too late to influence the shaping of policy. An emphasis on ongoing evaluation will thus reduce these timing difficulties and the threat to valid evaluation.

Finally, the SWOT analysis also focussed on the reporting process. It found that Annual Progress Reports rely too heavily on tables. Reports that are difficult to read deter stakeholders from paying attention to results and

findings. The analysis highlighted the need to develop a more focussed and detailed reporting structure that programme authorities can adopt.

In the updated SWOT analysis in 2010 it was possible to further verify and explore many of the findings of previous years. With the help of increasing practical experiences in implementing the CMEF a valuable knowledge pool could be created. This provides further input for the design of the monitoring and evaluation system for the programming period post-2013.

#### Find out more

- o [Updated SWOT analysis: Rural Development Evaluation System 2007-2013](#)
- o [Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework - CMEF 2007-2013](#)

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## Findings of the EU-wide synthesis of the Annual Progress Reports for 2009 concerning ongoing evaluation

*Margot van Soetendael*

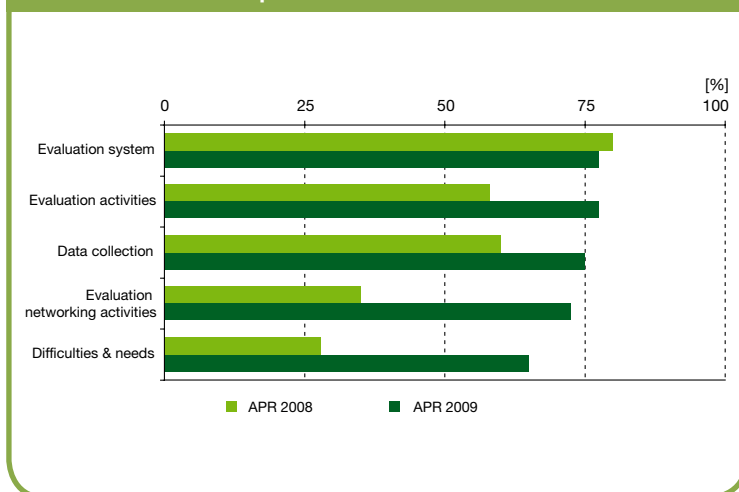
The Evaluation Helpdesk has conducted the third synthesis of the ongoing evaluation sections in the Annual Progress Reports (APRs). The synthesis is based on the reports submitted by Managing Authorities in June 2010 covering the evaluation activities carried out in 2009. The main aim of the synthesis was to summarize findings on the ongoing evaluation systems in the Member States and enhance the quality of reporting about evaluation by providing good practices.

**A** total of 80 Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) were examined, including 16 national and 64 regional reports. The analytical work was organised in close collaboration between the Evaluation Helpdesk and its Geographic Experts in the Member States. The Evaluation Helpdesk developed an assessment grid to collect

the relevant information from the sections of the APRs that deal with evaluation. As for the previous syntheses, the aim of the exercise was to extract and analyse the available information rather than judge or rank the reports of individual Member States.



Figure 1: Information availability (%) of the 5 topics in APR for 2008 and 2009



Source: Helpdesk of the Evaluation Expert Network

### More in-depth reporting about evaluation

The sections on ongoing evaluation in the APRs for 2009 still vary in their degree of completeness, although in terms of the overall quality an improvement is observed in the information content. A comparison of the APRs for 2008 and 2009 as regards the information available for each of the five topics included in the indicative outline of an APR (see Guidance note B of the Handbook on CMEF) is presented in figure above. While reporting in previous years focussed mainly on the evaluation system, in 2009 considerable attention is given to the preparation of the mid-term evaluation (MTE) and more substantial information is also provided on the other topics of the indicative outline.

### Preparing the ground for the mid-term evaluation in 2010

On the whole, the Member States are at very different stages as regards the preparation and implementation of the MTE: at the end of the reporting period (December 2009) most MTEs were still in the structuring phase, few were in the observation phase, and the least advanced programmes were only preparing the Terms of Reference. However, the APRs also show evidence that ongoing evaluation is increasingly used to prepare the MTE. It is described as a separate evaluation exercise in very few cases.

### Consolidating the evaluation systems in the Member States

A tendency to fully outsource all ongoing evaluation activities to external evaluators has been confirmed for the majority of RDPs. Conducting ongoing evaluation in house (by separate evaluation units within the Managing Authorities or public research institutes) is the case in only a few programmes.

Communication between Managing Authorities, evaluators and other stakeholders is increasing. Managing Authorities described different organisational set-ups in order to support communication activities: evaluation steering groups, working groups for specific measures or axis, assistance committees on evaluation, evaluation management groups etc.

### Increasing evaluation activities undertaken

The descriptions in the APRs suggest that the Managing Authorities follow Guidance note B of the Handbook on the CMEF quite precisely in conducting evaluation phases in terms of the type, content and sequence of the reported evaluation activities.

Although rarely explained in detail, a variety of methods on the assessment of impacts is mentioned in the APRs, both quantitative and qualitative, or their combination. Thematic studies are mentioned in particular for assessing Axis 2 (supporting land management and improving the environment), the environmental impact indicators, and in order to fill gaps in describing the baseline situations.

### Ongoing efforts to improve the systems for data collection and management

The synthesis report reveals that Member States are making significant efforts to meet data collection requirements for the common indicators. The following data sources are the most frequently mentioned by Managing Authorities:

- Monitoring data gathered by paying agencies or by measure managers;
- Primary data (e.g. focus group, questionnaires, interviews, survey) is collected by evaluators or outsourced externally;

- Secondary data for evaluation purposes and for the description of the baseline situation is mostly collected from national/regional statistics and national databases.

Data gaps were stated in particular for environmental result and impact indicators of Axis 2, but also for Axis 4 (Leader axis). Measuring the impact of the projects on the local economy has proved to be difficult in some cases.

For some programmes, where quantitative data was not easily available, there is evidence that data gaps are being covered by the application of qualitative methods, such as interviews, focus groups, questionnaires. The reporting in some APRs suggests that the coordination among the various institutions involved in data collection and processing is still a critical issue.

### Slow uptake of capacity building and networking activities

While the total number of capacity building events on evaluation is increasing, the scope is insufficient in some countries and depends mostly on external offers in this respect. Member States composed of regions, with National Rural Network Programmes, tend to organise more events in capacity building and networking in comparison to other Member States. Interestingly, some bilateral capacity building events and information exchange between Managing Authorities are mentioned.

The role of the Evaluation Expert Committee and Evaluation Helpdesk in capacity building and networking activities at EU and national level is given more prominence in the 2009 Annual Progress Reports. The meetings of the Evaluation Expert Committee are reported as a major networking activity at EU level, whereas the focus groups and missions organised by the Evaluation Helpdesk are frequently mentioned as a national networking activity.

However, little mention is given to scientific conferences or other international events on evaluation.

### Difficulties encountered in evaluation processes and methods

Major difficulties described in relation to ongoing evaluation are:

- methodological problems, e.g. quantifying impacts, netting out programme effects, data gaps, etc;
- insufficient clarity of Common Evaluation Questions and their inconsistency with indicators;
- problems with baseline indicators and data collection;
- problems with the Gross Value Added (GVA) calculation (data gaps, problems in applying the CMEF definition etc).

Interaction with the Evaluation Helpdesk is reported as one possible way to overcome such difficulties.

### Outlook to the Annual Progress Reports for 2010

The Annual Progress Reports for 2010 are to be submitted by the Managing Authorities in June 2011. The mid-term evaluation, that has been conducted by independent evaluators, will be the main focus of the reported activities. It will be interesting to read about the considerations of the Managing Authorities as regards the preparation stages, the challenges encountered and the solutions adopted. In some reports information about the envisaged follow-up activities may be found, but also complementary information on other topics of the indicative outline of an APR on ongoing evaluation (see Guidance note B of the Handbook on CMEF). It can be expected, that the overall increase in the quality of reporting will continue.

#### Find out more

- o [Synthesis of Annual Progress Reports for 2009 concerning ongoing evaluation](#)

## Update of needs assessment and Annual Work Programme 2011

Hannes Wimmer

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 how these issues can be addressed in the framework of the Annual Work Programmes of the Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development.

**T**he *Update of needs assessment in the Member States* (third paper to be published since 2008) draws from an ongoing analysis of various information sources such as Helpdesk mission reports to Member States, technical questions received, conferences attended, etc. Additionally also the yearly organized focus groups, as well as written Member States' contributions have been taken into account. The response to the focus groups in 2010 has been very positive indeed. Some Member States who were not able to organise a focus group due to a heavy workload in the context of the mid-term evaluation (MTE), have explicitly expressed their interest in having one in 2011.

### General needs raised by the Evaluation Community

Actions to transfer expertise between Member States (or groups of Member States or regions who share common interests) is a general need expressed by stakeholders regarding the work of the Evaluation Helpdesk. It was suggested that the Evaluation Helpdesk should rather fine-tune and adjust the work already accomplished. Furthermore, there is an expressed need for good examples of evaluation tools at the operational level, for example data collection, application forms, guidelines on how to involve a Monitoring Committee etc.

### Needs concerning the follow-up on the MTE results

Intensifying the communication of MTE results at the national/regional and EU-level has been identified as a major need of the evaluation community. A synthesis



of the MTEs is due to be commissioned shortly by the European Commission. However, lessons learned should be made available earlier in order to feed into the terms of reference for the *ex post* evaluations.

- In accordance with the Annual Work Programme 2011, the activities of the Evaluation Helpdesk in the first half of 2011 are concentrated on support for the assessment of the MTE reports: EC Desk Officers carry out the actual assessment exercise based on a tool that has been developed by the Evaluation Helpdesk. In early 2011 the Helpdesk provided a training for EC Desk Officers to ensure a consistent approach in assessing MTE reports. Methodological backstopping for potential evaluation-related questions of EC Desk Officers is provided and additionally a synthesis of findings on methods and impacts is being prepared.

## Needs in relation to ongoing evaluation

The evaluation stakeholders made clear that there is still not a common understanding in the Member States of what is actually meant by “ongoing evaluation”, what the implications are and who is concerned. Member States have therefore asked for further explanations and examples of how other Member States effectively use this concept. Furthermore practical guidance on the evaluation of National Rural Network Programmes is requested.

- The thematic work of the Evaluation Helpdesk in 2011 therefore foresees a comparison of selected approaches of organising ongoing evaluation and capacity building activities in the Member States. The *Working Paper on the Evaluation of National Rural Network Programmes*, published in 2010, will be updated this year with new information on methods effectively applied during the mid-term evaluation.

## Needs concerning methodological guidance

Methodological guidance should primarily focus on methodological problems, such as counterfactuals, overlapping commitments of two programming periods, measuring gross and net effects of interventions and synergic effects of policies. More guidance on qualitative approaches was called for as a means of informing the quantification of results and impact and helping to achieve a structured and consistent approach. Support for evaluation data outside indicators, such as statistics, models, methods etc. was mentioned, along with evaluation forms.

- A consolidated update of the Evaluation Helpdesk’s *Working paper on Approaches for assessing the impacts of the Rural Development Programmes in the context of multiple intervening factors* and the *Working paper on Capturing impacts of Leader and of measures to improve the Quality of Life in rural areas*, should be conducted after exchanging with Member States on the experiences gained during the mid-term evaluation. More practical tools and advice should support Member States in effectively working with the impact indicators in the context of the *ex post* evaluation. During the second half of 2011 a working group, composed of evaluation experts and practitioners from the Member States, will look at practices applied for assessing RD impacts during the MTE. What methods have or have not worked? Do the methods provide best value for money? Do they ensure comparability at EU level?

## Needs concerning the *ex post* evaluation of RDPs and the next programming period

Member States raised concerns with regard to the early availability and dissemination of guidelines for the *ex post* evaluation. However, giving priority to the production of *ex ante* guidance for the post-2013 period was also mentioned. This guidance will be needed well before the *ex post*.

- The Evaluation Helpdesk will support the Working Group on the review of the CMEF. This think-tank has been set up within the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development to develop proposals for the improvement of the monitoring and evaluation system for Rural Development Programmes post-2013.

It can therefore be concluded, that this year the activities of the Evaluation Expert Network concentrate on four areas (a) consolidate the methodological work of the network from previous years; (b) step up dissemination of good practices; (c) share the results of the mid-term evaluation and; (d) support the process of reviewing the CMEF for the next programming period post-2013.

### Find out more

- [Annual Work Programme 2011](#)
- [Update of needs assessment in the Member States](#)

## News in Brief

### Sixth meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee

Maylis Campbell

The sixth meeting of the Expert Committee on Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes on 26 November 2010 in Brussels, took a look at what came out of the assessment of needs carried out through focus groups in the Member States and what is planned in the 2011 Work Programme of the Evaluation Expert Network. Furthermore, discussions continued about the review of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF), in light of the current debate about the post-2013 period.

The first results of the synthesis of the Annual Progress Reports (APR) for 2009 concerning evaluation showed a general improvement compared to previous years in terms of the quality of the reporting by the Managing Authorities and the coverage of topics. The final results are now available. For the full details, read article on page 8.

The findings of the focus groups, which were organised in the Member States, have been translated into concrete activities in the 2011 Work Programme of the Evaluation Expert Network. Read article on page 11.

Apart from looking at the evaluation and monitoring needs for the current CMEF, the focus groups also reflected on needs for the next programming period. Read article on page 11.

*Delegates at the meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee in November 2010*



Photo courtesy of Maylis Campbell



Photo courtesy of Jela Tvrdonova

*Participants at the Czech Focus Group in Prague exchange views on the future design of the CMEF*

An updated strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis of the rural development evaluation system 2007-2013 was presented to the delegates. This study has revealed the main issues in relation to the current CMEF methodologies and processes, identified needs for further guidance, and possibilities for improvement of the CMEF post-2013. Read article on page 7.

Information on discussions in individual Member States about the future of monitoring and evaluation post-2013 was shared with the delegates. One Member State gave a presentation about its work in this respect.

Continuing the work on the review of the CMEF, a working document "Objectives and principles of the Monitoring and Evaluation System for rural development" was presented to the members of the Committee for their consideration. This document, with three objectives and seven key principles for the system post-2013 will guide the preparation of regulations and guidelines. The Committee members broke up into 12 sub-groups to thoroughly consider this document. In a lively feedback session, a reporter of each group commented on the proposed text.

The 7th meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee takes place on 16 June 2011 in Brussels.

## News in Brief

### Ex post evaluation outlines key recommendations for improving Leader performance

Jon Eldridge/Robert Lukesch

Effective strategies for sustainable local development are built on strong local partnerships and networks of co-operation. This message was underlined by the ex post evaluation of Leader+, an EU initiative that stimulated strategies for the long-term development of rural regions.

By providing local stakeholders with opportunities to trial and implement new development measures, Leader+ has complemented mainstream programmes, the study found. These measures typically were implemented on a smaller scale and incurred less concerns about failure than mainstream supported interventions.

However, the report also concluded that the role of Leader+ as a “laboratory” needs to be strengthened and that long-term resilience of rural areas must take precedence over short-term economic gains. The local development strategy should serve as a reference point for local innovation.

*Baumkronenweg Austria - Tree-top walkway or canopy walkway in the Leader area Sauwald. The Leader funded canopy walkway attracts about 200,000 visitors per year and thus created new jobs in the Leader area Sauwald*



Photo courtesy of LAG Sauwald, <http://www.sauwald.at/>

The ex post evaluation, which was produced in 2010, focussed on the experiences of the EU 15 (2000-2006), and of the Leader+-type measures implemented by six of the 10 new Member States (2004-2006).

The field work included a survey of 10% of all Local Action Groups (LAGs - a total of 102 responded) and Managing Authorities, interviews with National Network Unit representatives and 10 country-specific case studies that addressed both the overall programmes and the individual LAGs that were created.

These studies showed the extent to which the strategies adopted as a result of the Leader method have fostered innovative new structures and partnerships among local actors. The Leader+ approach has been very successful in connecting people and activities, though there is some evidence to suggest that LAGs have not always succeeded in integrating the most disadvantaged members of a community into the development process.

On a wider scale, networking and co-operation, particularly among neighbouring groups, have resulted in many projects which would otherwise not have been launched. The report recommends that such territorial co-operation continues in order to create opportunities for local actors to learn from peers both nationally and across the EU.

#### Leader benefits

One of the main benefits of Leader+ is that it has boosted social capital and therefore territorial competitiveness. This advantage is most widely reported by new local partnerships, while established LAGs cite positive impacts on the local economy. An emphasis on enhanced social capital and multi-sectoral development (particularly rural-urban partnerships) are necessary for the implementation of local responses to global problems, the evaluation concludes.

Another significant impact of Leader+ was related to employment. The report highlights the innovative aspects of many interventions, their implementation in

areas of low employment and their impact on specific sectors, such as small-scale crafts and tourism activities. Employment levels have also benefitted from the creation of new facilities and services for local people, and new ways of profiting from natural and cultural resources.



Local governance capacities are another area that the report highlights are strengthened by Leader+. Studies showed that Leader+ measures significantly enhanced the capacities of communities in the new Member States to conceive and implement local rural development strategies. The evaluation report recommends further developing the autonomy and decision-making processes of LAGs so that they are more able to carry out capacity building measures.

## Autonomy

Greater decision-making capabilities and autonomy of LAGs increases the impact on actions taken on the ground. Autonomy in practice, however, is not determined simply by formal arrangements; it is a result of the quality of the relationships between the LAG, the Managing Authority and other stakeholders such as the networks.

The report recommends to improve the quality of these relationships. It advocates establishing balanced, inclusive and effective public-private partnerships that are built on a clear understanding of respective roles and responsibilities, thus avoiding any conflicts of interests and even the appearance of insider dealing. It also encourages the setting up of transparent and accountable institutional frameworks that do not impede LAGs from carrying out development initiatives.

Finally, a lack of a structured monitoring and evaluation culture among LAGs was identified. Considerable scope exists for extending the use of monitoring as a means of improving local development strategy performance. LAGs should systematically monitor their development strategies, the report concluded.

### Find out more

- o [Ex-post evaluation of LEADER+](#)

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The contents of this newsletter do not necessarily express the official views of the European Commission.