

Better LEADER practices for Local Development Strategies across the EU

This Infosheet is part of a series of relevant practice examples that Managing Authorities and Local Action Groups have used while implementing the LEADER approach in the 2007-2013 period. The series aims to extend the reach of rural development policy by highlighting what works well in the design and delivery phase of Local Development Strategies (LDS).

Better monitoring and evaluation of LEADER

N.11



Country: Italy

Organisation: Italian National Rural Network (NRN)

AT A GLANCE



Objectives

The available EU and national level monitoring and evaluation instruments failed to capture the special characteristics of the LEADER approach and did not provide aggregated information about Local Development Strategy (LDS) implementation. The Italian NRN developed a specific monitoring system for the collection and elaboration of information at regional and national level.



Key elements of the approach

The new LEADER monitoring system interface is integrated with existing systems and enables the storing and processing of incremental and more specific information collected from other sources. The monitoring system includes five areas of data collection: Local Action Group (LAG) selection; LDS selection; LAG data; LDS data; and Animation of LAG Activities.



Lessons learnt

The indicators proposed under the EU's Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) do not meet the LEADER monitoring requirements. The networking which was part of the development of the Italian LEADER monitoring system has increased the awareness of Managing Authority (MA) representatives about the importance of well-planned LEADER indicators and an integrated system for collecting and processing data.



Objectives and background

Rural development programming places a growing emphasis on monitoring activities. The instruments developed at EU and national level - with particular reference to the CMEF and related information systems - do not capture the special characteristics of the LEADER approach. The output and results indicators fail to represent the basic characteristics of LEADER such as participatory and bottom-up planning, and its specific implementation procedures. While policymakers attach an important role to LEADER in their programme objectives, specific guidelines or adequate instruments to monitor progress have not been provided.

Currently, the Italian national monitoring system for rural development' (NMS) is structured so as to follow procedural, physical and financial evolutions at the level of each single project. Through the subsequent aggregation of this basic data, it is possible to represent the progress made in terms of measures and axis for each Regional Development Plan (in Italy there are 21 such plans).

However, the system does not provide aggregated information for more complex operations such as, for Local Development Strategies implemented by LAGs. For Axis 4, the Regional Development Plans' output and result indicators are as per the minimum requirements defined by the CMEF. While the NMS was adopted, the need emerged to define a common frame of reference for regional monitoring and evaluation, including integrated design in general and in particular for LEADER.

The Italian National Rural Network therefore developed the '**National Monitoring System for Integrated Projects and LEADER approach**' for the collection and elaboration of information that is not collected or aggregated by the NMS.

The system is targeted at Managing Authorities and rural development policy implementing bodies dealing with the LEADER axis with the aim of collecting data for each individual project and the effects of the proposed interventions, both at regional and at national levels.



Key elements of the approach

The new monitoring system for LEADER does not overlap with the NMS. Its interface is integrated with existing systems, enabling the storing and processing of incremental and more specific types of information. The monitoring system includes five areas of data collection:

1. Local Action Group (LAG) selection: collects information on LAG selection, in cases where the LAG and LDS selection is divided in two distinct phases. The information relates to the selection process and primarily to the administrative aspects and the outcome of the selection. This data set does not require regular updating.

2. Local Development Strategy (LDS) selection: collects information on the LDS selection, in cases where the selection procedure is articulated in a single phase. This data set does not require regular updating.

Communication aspects

The monitoring system for LEADER was presented to the Ministry of Agriculture and is now linked to via its web portal. The NRN, in cooperation with the regional agricultural government offices, carried out a number of seminars to inform

3. Local Action Group: gathers structural data and key information on LAGs, on individual LAG partners and describes the profile of the partnership and organisational structure of the LAG.

4. Local Development Strategy: the structure of this data is rather complex, since it refers both to the LDS and their general characteristics (strategies, objectives, estimated financial framework, etc.) and, more specifically, to individual operations, such as financial, administrative and procedural and qualitative issues.

5. Animation of LAG Activities: collects information on animation activities carried out during the selection and implementation phase of the LDS. The aim is to provide an information framework on the modes and results of the animation activities, on the type of events and to provide a profile of stakeholders who have participated in such initiatives.

operators and LAGs about the system functionalities, data to be inserted, reports generated, integration with national and regional databases, and on how to improve monitoring and self-evaluation.



Lessons learnt

Benefits

The Italian LEADER monitoring system encourages:

- Understanding of the partnerships and their organisational structures;
- Detailed analysis of the characteristics of beneficiaries and types of projects financed;
- Collection and analysis of animation activity data;
- Use of additional output and outcome indicators, not currently considered by the Regional Development Plans;
- Geo-referencing of LEADER operations.

Barriers

The system (including software) had to be designed and established by the National Rural Network. The roll-out included a lot of networking activity and discussion.

Lessons learnt

The CMEF indicators do not meet the requirements associated with LEADER monitoring. In the context of rural development policies more attention should be paid to LEADER and its specificities.

Due to the networking that led to the development phase of the Italian LEADER monitoring system, there is increased awareness among the MA representatives that:

- Output and result indicators of LEADER should be customised to the objectives assigned;
- Information systems need to take into account the specific programmatic, procedural and administrative aspects of LEADER;
- From the programming cycle outset, qualitative information should be collected in order to build a LEADER profile (stakeholders, activities performed, organisational mechanisms) and provide specific SMART indicators;
- A standardised system is needed to collect, aggregate and compare data.

The information included in this Infosheet is primarily coming from case studies carried out within the ENRD Focus Group 4 on Better Local Development Strategies. It has been compiled by the Contact Point on the basis of the information collected in the EU Member States and regions and takes into account views expressed by the Focus Group. This notwithstanding, the content does not necessarily reflect the official position of the EU institutions and national authorities.