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Guidelines for the ex post evaluation of the LEADER II Community Initiative

1.- Aims of document

1.1. The purpose of this document is to map out guidelines for the authorities responsible for evaluating the Community Initiative, and for evaluators asked by the authorities to undertake this task. The document gives details of the content and procedures for evaluation in line with the principles set out in Article 26 of Regulation 2082/93. Explanations on the legal basis were provided earlier in STAR Committee document VI/3479/94/Rev. 3.

1.2. The STAR document states that the approach outlined for the programmes is to be applied also for the monitoring and evaluation of the Leader Initiative but that it is essential, in particular for examining the impact of the Initiative, to take account of its objectives, as well as of certain specific factors such as the approach taken at local level, innovative action, and the assessment of the nature and composition of the beneficiary groups. This document proposes to do that using the wealth of experience gained during the ex post evaluation of Leader I, which was based on a specially devised methodology. Following the latter evaluation, certain of the specific features of Leader I were dealt with in a document from the rural development Observatory sent to all local action groups and other local collective bodies.

1.3. Point 19 of the Commission Notice concerning the Initiative (94/C 180/12) deals with assessment and sets out the different steps to be taken, namely continuous assessment, mid-term review and ex post evaluation:

- Continuous assessment is considered to be essential. Each programme is required therefore to include a mechanism for continuous assessment of the projects and the programme as a whole. The beneficiaries of the programme (local group or other collective body) must provide information mainly concerning innovation and the circumstances in which it emerges. Documents on innovation and a technical report have been prepared by the rural development Observatory. This information has been collected directly from the groups and may be included as one aspect of the examination of the specific features of the Initiative.

- Regular reports prepared by the partners are to be submitted to the Monitoring Committee and the Commission and forwarded to the Observatory which is responsible for assembling the data.
- Interim or mid-term reviews must be carried out. Evaluation reports are available for some programmes, and for others the management authorities simply make an appraisal. For others still, because of major delays in implementing the programme, evaluation has not been undertaken.
- The final stage is the ex post evaluation which examines the Initiative in the light of its impact at national and Community levels. This statutory assessment has to be carried out within the partnership. It applies specific parameters adapted to the programme's particular characteristics.

Data obtained as a result of the assessment steps prior to the ex post evaluation must be used as a starting point and included in it where necessary and if available, as it has not always been possible to carry out the assessment steps as planned.

1.4. This document does not go into all aspects of the ex post evaluation in detail. It sets out the fundamental issues for the evaluation of the Initiative, in particular the minimum requirements from the Community point of view. For that reason, it has been considered necessary to explain clearly the points and common issues which are to be included in all evaluations and to make certain suggestions concerning the typologies and indicators. These should be tailored to the context of the programme and other matters deemed to be relevant by the management authorities should be added.

1.5. The customary concepts associated with evaluation are the same as those described in the STAR document, which are based on those in the methodological document for the interim review, prepared by the Commission. These concepts were included also in the document setting the guidelines for the evaluation of Objective 5(b). It will be necessary, however, to describe in greater detail in this document the concepts distinctively associated with the Leader Initiative.

2.- Conduct of the evaluation

2.1. The evaluation is to be carried out at the level of the programme, whether national or regional. In this case, the data will be available from the management authority or the local action groups. Other information may be collected from the local groups also and the method to be applied will be determined by the management authority. This document gives guidance on the most appropriate method to be applied, mainly on the basis of experience gained during the ex post evaluation of Leader I and the work carried out by the Observatory on the specific features.

2.2. Closer consideration must be given to the question of aggregating the data for Member States with a large number of Leader II programmes at regional level. In order to obtain results at Community level it will be necessary to aggregate the data at regional level. Examples are given in this document for the typologies of the local groups. Aggregating the data will only be possible, of course, where there are common indicators.

3.- Ties between the Leader II objectives and its specific features

3.1. The intervention logic of the Leader programme does not differ from that of any other programme. This means that there will be objectives and resources which give rise to activities or actions, allowing attainments to be measured the evaluation of which will assess the results and impact. However, the content of these different elements will have to be determined bearing in mind their links with the specific objectives of Leader (diagram 1).

3.2. It is important also to understand the relationship between the intervention logic and three factors relating to the context of the programme:

- the institutional context, in other words the links between the various levels of programme implementation (local, regional, national and European). The evaluation of the programme may be undertaken at the most appropriate level;
- those involved locally: the local action groups or other collective bodies, the partners operating within the group and at regional level and their role;
- the local context bearing in mind the point of departure of the Initiative, which is founded on a local or regional approach.

3.3. The attainment of the specific objectives of Leader and their impact as described subsequently will show whether the local development approach has been successful. The actions carried out, although identical with those included in other programmes, apart from genuinely innovatory ones, will have value added by virtue of the approach adopted and not simply as a result of the action itself.

If the value added of Leader is to be defined, this will have to be done in relation to these different elements explained clearly through the objectives.

4.- General objectives of the Initiative and specific objectives

4.1. The overall objectives of the programme, as described in the Notice concerning Leader II, are:

- a) locally-generated development, namely a new, locally-based approach to rural development;
- b) encouraging the participation of those involved in development and making best use of their potential;
- c) stimulating innovative measures;
- d) making known the results and transferring them to others.

4.2. These overall objectives tie in with more specific objectives which make it possible for them to be realised, as the latter can take the form of operational objectives linked to the types of attainments (diagram 2):

- a) the local approach allows the local development process to be launched by targeting the specific resources and needs of each region;
- b) the bottom-up approach involves the local actors and creates a new way of looking at the strengths and weaknesses of the region which affect the activities, results and impact throughout the duration of the programme;
- c) the innovative nature of the actions and the links between them, their integration which will enhance the effects of the actions, which in themselves are not very different from those undertaken in the other programmes, apart from certain innovations. Innovation will be defined very clearly using the criteria in the Observatory report, contained in the document on the specific features: new forms of upgrading of local resources, actions responding to the weaknesses of the area, conventional technological innovation (new product, new form of organisation, etc.), actions not included in other programmes ;
- d) networking and transnational cooperation, which is the value added of the programme as this is not provided for in other rural development programmes. This point will examine cooperation and exchanges between local groups in the same country and those established with other countries and exchanges at European level, using various networks. The transnational cooperation put in place over the last two years of the programme produces more structured actions. They need to be looked at more closely in terms of their operation, attainments and impact;
- e) the method of financing under Leader II differs in a number of ways compared with the other programmes, especially where global grants are concerned or where it uses its own financing channels. Its impact on the programme in terms of flexibility and greater autonomy for the groups needs to be examined.

5.- **Attainments, immediate impact and final impact (1)**

Assessment of the three strands of the programme:

Strand A : acquisition of skills

If this has been examined in the interim review, the findings must be included and fleshed out on the following points:

- 1- groups and bodies benefiting under the measure, the nature of the measures and bodies which implemented them; this is not to consist merely of a description of the measures but should focus on their effects in terms of stimulating the programme and their relevance in relation to the actual needs of the region as described in the programme;
- 2- the use of this strand by the newly set up groups;
- 3- the passing on of experience by Leader I groups to the new groups;
- 4- the procedures for introducing and setting up local groups: selection procedures and criteria, starting-up difficulties (financial, administrative, socio-economic, etc.).

Strand B : Rural innovation programme

- 1- Level of attainment on the basis of financial and physical indicators (attainment of each category of action and each local group (Annex 2).

This information obtained from monitoring is essential for assessing the impact of the actions.

- 2- Effectiveness of the programme (percentage attainment compared with the forecasts for each category of action – in the programme or action plan of the groups - and for each local group). If no forecasts have been made for the physical indicators, the measurement of attainments in terms of effectiveness, as is carried out in the other " mainstream" programmes, may be difficult .

- 3- On this point it is important to examine whether the attainment of the specific objectives as described above has resulted in greater effectiveness. For example, through questions such as: Has the fact that a large number of partners have participated or that the population has been involved in the project contributed to its success?

The immediate impact is measured therefore in relation to the actions and their links with the specific features. A list illustrating the various types of immediate impact for different categories of action is given (in Annex 2).

Special attention must be paid to the effects on employment of each category of action: the number of full-time/part-time male/female jobs created, maintained. It would clearly be helpful to measure the substitution effect, but so far a large number of difficulties have arisen. If figures for this element cannot be provided, the examination of certain qualitative aspects would be useful.

4- Impact arising from specific objectives

It is difficult to cover every aspect in depth but certain relevant questions must be asked. For fuller information consult the Observatory document which contains further details on what can be gathered regarding the initial situation, the process and the impact. The questions below focus principally on the impact:

(a) The local approach:

- Did the region or local area as defined, with a certain "critical mass", have the capacity to generate a development process which harnesses its own resources ?
- Did the actions create in the population a sense of belonging to the region and of identity ?
- Were the rural innovation programme actions relevant to the local area? Did they add value as compared with the actions under other Community programmes, in particular those of Objectives 1 or 5(b) ?

(b) The bottom-up approach:

These questions are to be asked once the local actors involved and the partnership within the groups have been determined (questions on the characteristics of the local groups):

- Does participative and effective decision-making exist and is there a consultation process in which all the partners participate? If so, how has decision-making been implemented?
- In what ways has the bottom-up approach had a positive effect on the choice of objectives, the representation of the local actors?
- Has this approach been an effective alternative to the existing approaches?

(c) Local action group or other collective body

- What has been the outcome of the fact that the Initiative operates with beneficiaries in the form of local groups or other collective bodies? Is decision-making autonomous? Are the group and its operations legally approved?
- Have the establishment and operation of local action groups enhanced their responsibilities, increased cooperation with public institutions and the local actors, enhanced their negotiating capacity? Have they stimulated new activities ?
- Have these experiences of the groups benefited other agencies or bodies in other programmes ?

(d) Innovative character

Has the innovation enhanced or improved the position of the local area on the markets and the diversification of the local economy?

- Are the new solutions that have been found more in tune with the local area than the earlier ones ? Have they brought additional advantages, new forms of organisation and diversification, multiplier effects ?
- Has the example given by these actions been passed on (to other groups or programmes) ?

(e) Multisectoral and integrated character

- Has the multisectoral and integrated nature of the actions had a synergy effect ? Have the actions been more effective ? Has it helped bring about better coordination between the actors and the institutions ?

If the multisectoral aspect is of prime importance, other questions may be asked concerning the forms of integration and their impact in terms of the organisation of regional sectors, the organisation of supply and demand and the diversification of agricultural activities, the creation of new products and services, etc.

Strand C : transnational cooperation

- a) What are the characteristics and categories of transnational actions implemented which have been approved already by the Commission and received technical assistance? Have the institutions promoted these actions and played an active part in their development?
- b) What forms of technical assistance have been used and what positive effects have they produced?
- c) What value added have actions carried out as part of transnational cooperation produced compared with those carried out under Strand B ?
- d) Which networks are local action groups involved in? Has networking made it possible to transfer innovation, expand into new products, new markets ?

One question must be asked: has the practical manifestation of all these specific objectives enabled the local groups to continue to operate in the medium or long term, without Community support? Is it going to make it easier for them to use other public or private resources, possibly within other (mainstream) programmes, other initiatives ?

6.- National evaluation reports

Suggestions for main points to be included:

- 6.1. It is helpful to give the characteristics of the Leader regions, and of the local action groups and other collective bodies. Annex 1 contains some basic information for preparing typologies, the most useful of which concern the partnership and the main actions. A typology of the local areas is also suggested.
- 6.2. Examination of the setting up of the groups: selection procedure and selection.
- 6.3. Analysis of strand A - Acquisition of skills. Effect on the setting up of new groups.
- 6.4. Examination of the general objectives of the programme, their consistency and specific objectives as described in point 4.
- 6.5. Data on the financial and physical indicators.
- 6.6. Analysis of the immediate and final impact (point 4).
- 6.7. Analysis of the links between the impact and the specific features as a result of the replies to the questions on the impact of the specific features (point 4 of Strand B).
- 6.8. Transferability and demonstration effect arising from the analysis of the final impact of the specific features.
- 6.9. Transnational cooperation and network effect.
- 6.10. Conclusions and recommendations.

For the assessment of the quality of the evaluation reports, as for Objective 5(b), the scale given in MEANS handbook No 5 could be used.

7.- Timetable

It would be helpful to follow the same timetable as for the Objective 5(b) programmes as the management authorities of the programme could then issue a call for proposals at the same time as the one for the evaluation of Objective 5(b) and will prefer not to increase the number of evaluators.

A number of key dates should be borne in mind: expenditure on evaluation must be committed before 31 December 1999 and requests for payment must reach the Commission before 31 December 2001. The final report should be transmitted to the Commission services by 30 September 2001 at least.

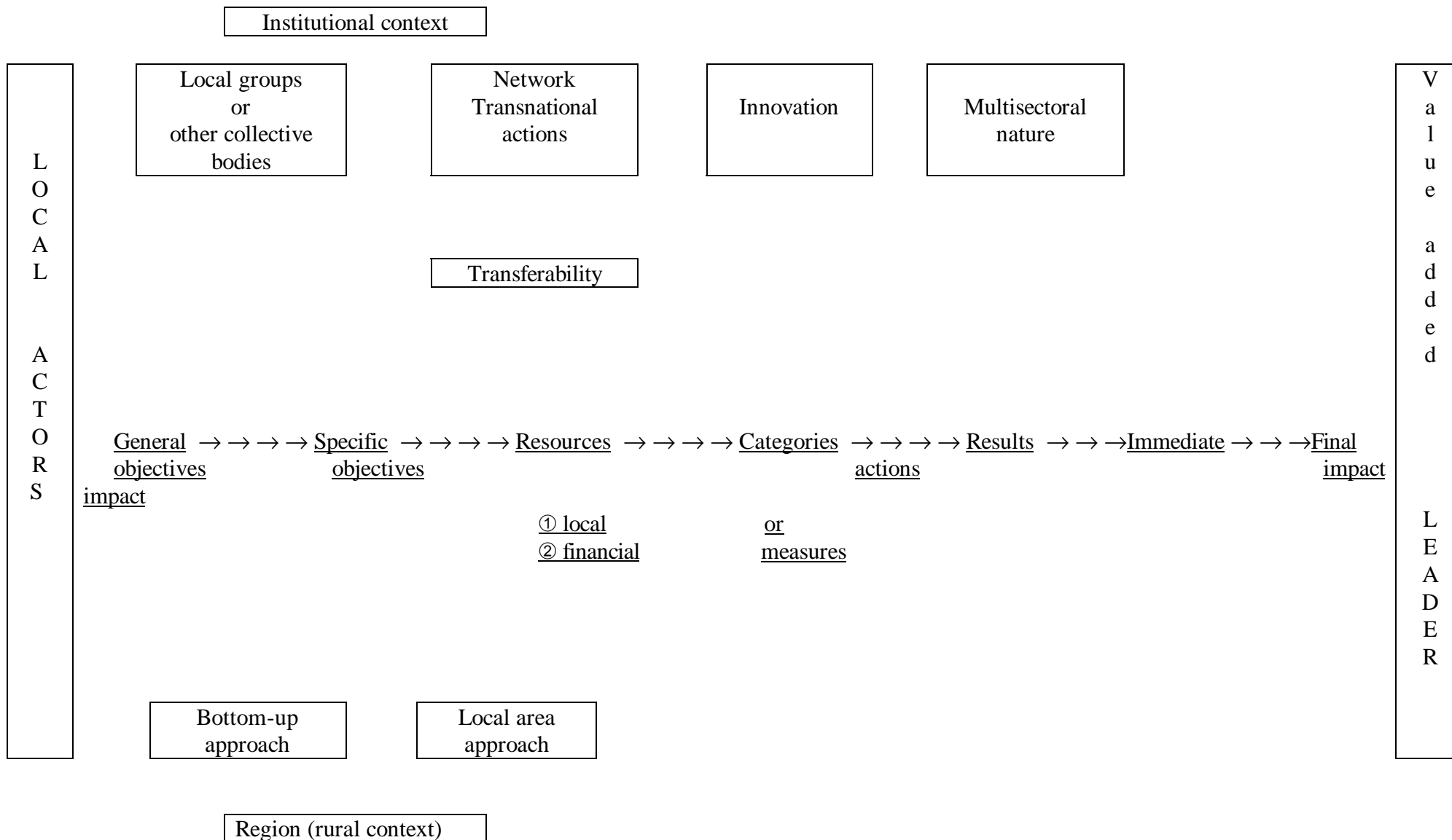
The Community summaries will follow the same procedures as the evaluation reports for Objective 5(b).

Notes

(1) Immediate impact: measures the direct or immediate effects of actions carried out taking into account the attainments which the actions should help achieve.

(2) Final (or global) impact: measures the effects which the specific objectives achieved have helped secure compared with the overall objective set. This impact can be measured at the end of the intervention. ("Common guidelines for monitoring and interim reviews", EEC, 1995).

DIAGRAM 1



D I A G R A M 2

General objectives

Specific objectives

Impact

Local area approach

Management of a specifically tailored development process – relevance of actions
Sense of belonging to the local area

1. Locally-generated development

Bottom-up approach

Effective participative decision
Relevance of choice of objectives, actions, implementation

2. Participation of actors

Local action group

Organisation tailored to the context
Flexibility, management, promotion
Appropriate financing channels

3. Innovative actions

Innovative character

Improvement in position of the local area
Improvement in competitiveness

4. Demonstrative aspect
Transferability

Multisectoral features

Diversification of products, chain of economic activity, improved coordination of actions

Network
Transnational nature

Procedures
Transfer models and examples

Characteristics of Leader II groups

Suggestions for data to be collected to establish a typology of groups (in situations where the programme covers a large number of groups). The authorities responsible will decide on which information it would be useful to collect. Experience gained in the ex post evaluation of Leader I indicates that the points relating to the actions of the local groups, the partnership and the types of beneficiaries are indispensable.

1. Where the geographical location of the Leader areas differs significantly and affects the activity of the groups they should be classified as: flat open country or high level ground, mountain areas, coastal and small islands, mixed or other.
2. Area, population and development (increase, unchanged or decline, per capita GDP, economic activities by sector (men/women), crop systems, overall employment rate (men/women), unemployment rate (men/women).
3. Classification of measures (grouped by typology: - dominant: over 50% of the actions of the group concern a given sector ; - average: between 50% and 30% of the actions of the group concern a given sector; - small: under 30% of the actions of the group concern a given sector). Adding value to agricultural products, tourism, small businesses, training, services, support for local development, other.
4. Groups and partnership - Determine the main characteristics of the participation of the partners within the groups: public, non-profit-making private, private (including cooperatives), mixed, informal or other.

Frequency of representation of: (1) local authorities, national or regional authorities, public bodies; (2) professional groups, cooperatives, local development agencies; (3) associations/communities, beneficiaries, banks, other.

Examples of grouping by typology: public partners only, professional partners only (with/without cooperatives), public and association partners, without professional partners, 3 categories of partners.

5. Structure of the local group development team: number of people paid by the local group, number seconded to the local group, full-time and part-time jobs (men/women).

6. Information activities of local groups: production of film, videos, CD-ROMs, publications (characteristics and frequency), database.
7. Request for assistance from the European Association for Information on Local Development (AEIDL): never, exceptionally, occasionally (3 to 5 times), frequently (more than 5 times), no reply.
8. Type of beneficiaries: relevant categories: farmers, cooperatives, small businesses, local authorities, associations, other.
9. Sustainability of the group (basically a matter of opinion): average or long-term, resources to be used.

Some questions may be changed in the case of other collective bodies with a quite different structure and actions.

Information must be collected in figures or numbers and reduced to a percentage to establish a typology.

Suggestion for collecting data: where information is not available from the management authority of a programme make direct enquiries by sending the local group a questionnaire. A questionnaire sent by electronic mail can attract replies in around 50% of cases.

ANNEX II

Physical indicators and indicators of immediate and final impact for each measure

These indicators are easier to collect if classified by categories of actions as defined by the Observatory when analysing all the Leader II programmes, which resulted in a summary report.

The list below is given for guidance. It is up to the management authorities of the programme to decide whether it is helpful and to alter it in the light of the requirements for the application of the Leader II programme for which they are responsible. A study of the actions will show those which are innovative.

1- **Adding value to and marketing of regional agricultural products**

Type of actions carried out (number of actions, percentage of total actions for the category):

- quality labels for local products
- setting up of producer groups
- promotional schemes for products
- R&D measures
- packaging and processing of products
- search for markets, identifying products or markets, etc.

Immediate impact (especially on businesses):

- number of new businesses set up or expanding
- new services
- number of businesses introducing new production processes
- number of final beneficiaries
- increased use of information technology

Include the indicators referred to above in the characteristic features (Annex 1) concerning employment (impact may be immediate or final depending on the level at which it is situated).

Final impact (as an example):

- diversification of products in terms of local area, value added in terms of distribution chain
- increased competitiveness of local areas.

The distribution chain effect (from production to the final consumer) gives value added to the product and creates more jobs.

2- Rural tourism

Significance of tourism activities carried on by the local groups - involving a large number of groups - Type of actions (number, %)

- initial appraisal
- marketing plan
- training of operators
- exploiting the potential of the rural heritage
- infrastructure and services
- support or subsidies for the public and the private sector
- promotion of tourism products
- creation of routes involving specific landscapes or products
- central reservation system for all operators in the region/local area.

Physical indicators for the entire sector: new beds, new accommodation structures including farm tourism, number of final beneficiaries, etc.

Immediate impact on businesses and jobs (use the indicators mentioned above). On the latter point, the impact may be considerable particularly in terms of seasonal employment.

Final impact

To be dealt with globally as tourism brings together and is included in a very wide range of actions where emphasis must be placed on the effects of exploiting the heritage's potential and establishing infrastructures and services which can be used also by the local population. It can be an activity that can attract widespread participation and harness the local population.

Tourism has allowed specialised markets to be created (for families, children - distinguishing between age groups -, etc.).

3- Small businesses and local services

Type of actions (number, %)

- studies to assist recovery
- new products, new designs, R&D
- audit and development plans for businesses and activities
- development of teleworking and data transmission
- setting up of multiservice centres, support and grants for business start-ups, financial engineering
- immediate impact (include where useful the indicators on the impact on businesses and jobs)
- final impact: examine whether the measure has attracted other funds by vitalising certain sectors. Impact of the role of the services on the dynamics of local development, especially: databases, incubators, business services. Opening up of greater and better opportunities.

4- Training

Types of training (number, percentage of total, numbers of men/women participating, level of qualifications)

- training of representatives of Leader associations
- training for Leader coordinators and group leaders
- groups targeted by categories of actions
- mobile training, distance training
- training on the starting up and management of business projects, etc.

Immediate impact

- improving skills levels
- effect on the operation and organisation of the local group, on its actions
- access to jobs

Final impact

- increased participation, more effective organisation, better service to population.

5- Services

- Physical indicators: number of services established, number of people served, etc.

The other physical indicators depend on the type of service created: transport, child-care facilities, social services, etc.

Immediate impact: assisting the setting up of activities or access to jobs -

Final impact : improvement in living conditions for the population, reduces sense of isolation, gives the region a special vibrancy

6- Technical assistance in the programme

Type of actions (number and percentage)

- appraisal of the region
- preparation of the action plan of the local group
- feasibility studies, market studies
- promotion and information (organisation of events and activities, raising public awareness), etc.

Physical indicators:

- number of meetings with the population
- number of project organisers/group coordinators (full-time, part-time, men/women)
- number of final beneficiaries

Immediate impact

- assisted or refocused actions actually carried out subsequently
- satisfactory operation of actions arising from studies, new products, new markets.

Final impact

- greater participation of partners and population concerned
- actions better targeted with a view to the satisfactory operation of the local group
- stimulant effect on other programmes

ANNEX III

Reference documents

- Reference documents in Annex V to the document containing the guidelines for the ex post evaluation of Objective 5(b) (Commission documents and MEANS handbooks)
- Technical reports on innovation from the rural development Observatory
- « « assessing the specific aspects of the Leader programme
- Methodology for the ex post evaluation of Leader I (on the Internet)
- Final Report on the ex post evaluation of Leader I (can be consulted on the Internet, to be published shortly).