



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
AGRICULTURE DIRECTORATE-GENERAL

Directorate G. Economic analyses and evaluation
G.4. Evaluation of measures applicable to agriculture

Brussels,

EX-POST EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY INITIATIVE LEADER II

Subject: Quality grid based on the Final Report submitted by ÖIR on 4 November 2003

PRELIMINARY REMARK

The following text and grid provides a global assessment of the above-mentioned evaluation study. The Commission steering group in charge prepared it at the end of the evaluation process.

If the report is to be published on the Internet, the present grid, with the comments of the steering group, will complement the final report.

The judgement is made on the methodological approach followed to answer the evaluation questions, not on the results, conclusions or recommendations reached by the contractor. It has to be pointed out that it is not the opinion of the evaluators nor the content of their conclusions that are judged here, but only the methods used for obtaining them.

1. Meeting the needs: Does the evaluation adequately address the information needs of the commissioning body and fit the terms of reference?

The evaluation carefully addresses the information needs as exemplified in the evaluation questions listed in the Terms of Reference and gives an overview across the entire Community of the added value of Leader II. The analysis is based more on the evaluator's own extensive data collection and less on the information provided through the national or regional ex-post evaluation reports of the Leader II programmes, as required in the Terms of Reference. This was motivated by the difficulties in comparing and synthesising heterogeneous evaluation reports which lacked a solid common framework.

The Terms of Reference asked for the development of a typology of rural zones. The evaluator tested typologies but they proved to be of no use as explanatory variables for the utility and efficiency of Leader II in different contexts. In general, the evaluator delivered what the tender had promised, and the information needs of the Commission are well-covered.

Global assessment: good

2. Relevant scope: Is the rationale of the policy examined and its set of outputs, results and outcomes/impacts examined fully, including both intended and unexpected policy interactions and consequences?

The rationale of the Community Initiative is fully examined; all aspects of the Leader approach were extensively analysed; outputs, results and outcomes are presented in very great detail through the case studies. The horizontal objectives as well as expected and unexpected policy consequences have been analysed and presented. The interaction of the programme strategy with its environment has been reviewed, but comparison and interaction of Leader programmes with other European and/or national Rural Development schemes is less developed.

Global assessment: good

3. Defensible design: Is the evaluation design appropriate and adequate to ensure that the full set of findings, along with methodological limitations, is made accessible for answering the main evaluation questions?

The methodological design is ambitious, carefully reasoned and clearly presented. The multiple ways of data collection are effectively targeted towards the evaluation questions listed in the Terms of Reference. The evaluator's data collection efforts are impressive. The organisation of the evaluation team was exemplary; guidelines and grids for data collection and systematic analysis by the national sub-contractors were well-developed.

Global assessment: excellent

4. Reliable data: To what extent are the primary and secondary data selected adequate? Are they sufficiently reliable for their intended use?

The size and the sampling techniques for the data collection ensure a good reliability of primary data. The data sources are clearly identifiable in the report. Secondary data, especially the work of the Leader observatory, is well exploited.

Country reports annexed to this report are based on a selection of analysed programmes/ LAGs and may therefore not have the same degree of reliability as the programme evaluation reports commissioned by Member States/ regions.

Global assessment: good

5. Sound analysis: Is quantitative and qualitative information appropriately and systematically analysed according to the state of the art so that evaluation questions are answered in a valid way?

The analysis of the collected data was carried out in a very systematic and rigorous manner. A stronger exploitation of national/regional evaluation reports would have strengthened the balanced character of the analysis.

Global assessment: good

6. Credible findings: Do findings follow logically from, and are they justified by, the data analysis and interpretations based on carefully described assumptions and rationale?

The data used form a very robust basis supporting the judgements and recommendations, which follow logically from the data analysis. There are few exceptions where the link between data basis and judgement is not clearly visible, e.g. regarding the use of Leader II ex-post evaluation results for Leader+ programming (p.218).

Global assessment: good

7. Validity of the conclusions: Does the report provide clear conclusions? Are conclusions based on credible results?

Conclusions are laid out in a clearly understandable and very detailed manner. A presentation of conclusions in a stronger hierarchical order would have made the main messages even clearer. In their detail, the conclusions are well-founded and based on credible judgements. All in all, however, the conclusions about weaknesses in the realization of some elements of the Leader approach stand in contrast to the positive overall conclusion about the clear added value of Leader for Rural Development policies. The identified weaknesses are attributed to deficiencies in the implementation of the Leader approach but do not lead the evaluator to question the Leader approach as such.

Global assessment: good

8. Usefulness of the recommendations: Are recommendations fair, unbiased by personal or stakeholders' views, and sufficiently detailed to be operationally applicable?

The critical distance of the evaluator to Leader II was on the whole sufficient. Recommendations are extraordinarily detailed. A clearer identification of the sources for the recommendations would have made some of them more convincing. A number of conclusions are difficult to be applied operationally; some of them appear to be contradictory. Examples are recommendations for simplification of administrative burden and a strengthening of the bottom-up approach on the one hand and calls for a stronger (top-down) role of regions in programme implementation and monitoring and harmonisation between regions. Equally, no convincing solution is proposed for the tension between the demanded stronger decentralisation of responsibilities to LAGs and respect for accountability obligations.

Global assessment: satisfactory

9. Clear report: Does the report clearly describe the policy evaluated, including its context and purpose, together with the procedures and findings of the evaluation, so that information provided can easily be understood?

The report is very clearly structured. However, on the one hand a tighter presentation of some of the information would have benefited the stringency of the report; on the other hand the main report does not always adequately reflect the richness of information contained in the case studies in the annexes. Generally, the report is not easily readable, mainly due to the enormous amount of information presented. This is also reflected in the executive summary which goes far beyond the size normally expected.

Overall judgement: good

Taking into account the contextual constraints on the evaluation, the overall quality rating of the report is considered

good

Note to the reader:

The country reports attached to this evaluation report are based on the results of the data collection efforts that the evaluators undertook in each of the Member States. The information available through the national/regional evaluations commissioned at Member State level were also used to feed into the evaluator's country reports. However, it is important to note that the purpose of the evaluator's country reports is not to repeat the work done for the national/regional evaluations or to supplement or correct them. Their purpose is entirely to facilitate the aggregation of findings at EU-level following the evaluation questions set out in the Terms of Reference of this evaluation.

Concerning these criteria, the evaluation report is:	Unaccep- table	Poor	Satisfac- tory	Good	Excel- lent
1. Meeting the needs: Does the evaluation adequately address the information needs of the commissioning body and fit the terms of reference?				X	
2. Relevant scope: Is the rationale of the policy examined and its set of outputs, results and outcomes/impacts examined fully, including both intended and unexpected policy interactions and consequences?				X	
3. Defensible design: Is the evaluation design appropriate and adequate to ensure that the full set of findings, along with methodological limitations, is made accessible for answering the main evaluation questions?					X
4. Reliable data: To what extent are the primary and secondary data selected adequate? Are they sufficiently reliable for their intended use?				X	
5. Sound analysis: Is quantitative and qualitative information appropriately and systematically analysed according to the state of the art so that evaluation questions are answered in a valid way?				X	
6. Credible findings: Do findings follow logically from, and are they justified by, the data analysis and interpretations based on carefully described assumptions and rationale?				X	
7. Validity of the conclusions: Does the report provide clear conclusions? Are conclusions based on credible results?				X	
8. Usefulness of the recommendations: Are recommendations fair, unbiased by personal or stakeholders' views, and sufficiently detailed to be operationally applicable?			X		
9. Clearly reported: Does the report clearly describe the policy being evaluated, including its context and purpose, together with the procedures and findings of the evaluation, so that information provided can easily be understood?				X	
Taking into account the contextual constraints on the evaluation, the overall quality rating of the report is considered				X	