

II.12 GEOGRAPHICAL REPORT UNITED KINGDOM

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1. General Introduction

The Team

All work at senior expert level has been carried out by **Robin McDowell**. This has encompassed all the main strategic and technical tasks detailed in the contract:

- design of contextual materials to introduce the aims and method of the evaluation and present the questionnaires (Q34 and Q202) and Focus Groups
- all the initial telephone contacts and face to face interviews with national / regional programme managers and other strategic players
- provision of technical support by telephone and e-mail for questionnaires completed by LAG representatives
- contacts with LEADER II administrations across the UK regarding data on financial allocations / expenditure and final reports on the programme for LAG 1000 and OP 102
- identification and research of the transnational co-operation case study.

He has been assisted by:

- **Suzie Mizrahi** (freelance project worker, Bath, England) for search and contacts of with LAG interlocutors for Q202, liaison re. supply of documentation and questionnaire completion, database and monitoring of progress, and codification responses and other data entry.
- **Tony Kerr** (freelance regeneration consultant, Bristol, England) for conduct of Focus Group for Cumbria Fells and Yorkshire Dales LAG
- **Meg Rodger** (freelance rural development consultant, Western Isles, Scotland) for conduct of Focus Group for Western Isles, Skye and Lochalsh LAG

Q34 Method

Interviews for the Q34 survey were carried out during March and April with national and regional programme managers and other strategic players for the sampled regional programmes of England and the Highlands and Islands. Prospective interviewees were contacted initially by telephone by Robin McDowell to discuss participation in the survey. The overall EU evaluation project was introduced and background materials including a summary of topics to be covered in the interview (based on the grid) sent by e-mail. Almost all approached agreed to participate. In the few cases where people declined, the reason was usually a referral to another official with greater knowledge and/or longer involvement in the programme. Finally, ahead of the meeting, a copy of the colour-coded grid for interviews with guidance notes (based on the Q34 manual) was e-mailed. A total of 8 out of 10 participants were interviewed 'face to face', the rest by

telephone. After the interviews, some further information and clarifications were requested by the evaluator by e-mail, and most queries received a ready response. The following participants were interviewed:

ENGLAND

National level – ‘face to face’ interviews:

- **Garry White**, Office of Deputy Prime Minister (formerly Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions – lead department for LEADER II)
- **Dean Thomas**, Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (formerly Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food), London – administrator of EAGGF
- **Helen Judge**, former Manager of UK LEADER + Network Unit (2000-01), operated by LRDP Ltd, London

National level – telephone interviews:

- **Eileen Humphreys**, former Manager of UK LEADER + Network Unit (1998-2000), LRDP Ltd

Regional level – ‘face to face’ interviews:

- **Stuart Tarr**, Government Office for South West, Bristol, and lead regional representative to the England Programme Monitoring Committee

Regional level – telephone interviews:

- **Ed Husband**, DEFRA, formerly of MAFF South West Regional Service Centre, Exeter, and Regional EAGGF Manager.

HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS

Regional level – ‘face to face’ interviews (all held in Inverness):

- **David Smillie**, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, LEADER Programme Manager
- **Melvyn Waumsley**, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and member of the Highlands and Islands Programme Monitoring Committee

Note: **Frank Gaskell**, Highlands and Islands Enterprise Chief Executive, and former Chair of the HI PMC, also participated in some of the discussions.

- **Richard Robinson**, Scottish Natural Heritage, and member of the HI PMC

Note: no interviews were held with the Scottish Executive, as they played a very limited role in managing the programme, as Highlands and Islands Enterprise was the global grant holder contracting directly with the European Commission, and did not have a consistent representation at the Programme Monitoring Committee meetings.

Q202 Method and Issues

Some 16 LAGs (10 in England and 6 in Highlands and Islands) were sampled for the Q202 survey. Due to the wide geographic dispersal of the LAGs in England and Scotland, the time constraints to carry out personal interviews and the limited allowance for travel and subsistence expenses, it was decided to identify lead contacts for each LAG, explain the purpose of the evaluation project and survey by telephone and seek their co-operation to self-complete the questionnaire individually or in conjunction with others experienced in the work of the LAG as a co-ordinator or Group member.

A project assistant was contracted to research, identify and set up the appropriate contacts (after briefing from Robin McDowell), and, as was often necessary, to encourage and persuade them to participate, as well as to provide background information (the introductory letter from the Commission and survey topics summary) by e-mail. Once they had agreed in principle to assist, the full survey was e-mailed along with 'user-friendly' guidelines (based on the Q202 manual), which indicated the relative priority of the red, green and black-coded questions, and requested the sending of reports and documentation to us in order to analyse or extract the factual data needed. The availability of telephone support to assist understanding of the Q202 from Robin McDowell or his assistant was strongly emphasised.

The initial process of searching and locating LAG interlocutors commenced from early March. It took over two weeks to make contact with the best informed people to work with and send out introductory materials, and then to obtain agreement co-operate with the survey. By 24 March, the Q202s and guidelines were sent out with indicative deadline for return by 17 April. The rate of response was poor and the deadline extended to 30 April. Considerable effort was made by the team to follow up non-returners by telephone and e-mail, but many indicated they had been deterred by the length of the questionnaire, the complexity of the issues and difficulty of answering them so long after the end of the programme. Some even expected to be paid to answer the questionnaire ! Nonetheless, by the end of May, we had received returns from 14 out of 16 with at least most of the red, and some green questions answered.

There remain large gaps in the black-coded data completion, due partly to the paucity of documentation found by LAG contacts and sent on to us, and partly to the fact that a large proportion of the financial, project and beneficiary data requested has simply not been captured or analysed by the LAGs or the regional government offices / intermediary body to the level required for this evaluation. We believe that the problem of these data deficits would be

endorsed by the team currently undertaking the England ex post evaluation (Alec Fraser and Associates of Stirling, Scotland) and by the Cambridge Economic Associates team, who undertook the Highlands and Islands ex post evaluation in 2001. Finally, in our opinion, there may be serious weaknesses in the regional financial tables, which summarise the final allocation, commitment and expenditure for their respective LAGs , and have been aggregated to provide the England summary table in Annex C to the Final Report for the England LEADER II programme (submitted to the Commission for 31 March 2003). Three regional government offices (West Midlands, East, and North East) have been wholly or partly unable to sub-analyse their figures down to individual LAG level. This has prevented satisfactory completion of the LAG 2000 grid, as well as the relevant parts of Q202.

We believe it may still be possible to obtain or construct from LAG files a substantial proportion of the missing black-coded data for the 16 LAGs, but more time and expert resources will be required to achieve this. Robin McDowell has been unable to give any sustained attention to solving these problems during May due to the need to prioritise work on the Focus Groups and TNC case study.

2. Focus Groups

Report already supplied on 8 June.

3. National and Regional Programme Evaluations

3.1 Overview

The table below summarises the official or statutory evaluation reports and other specific studies carried out for the five LEADER II programmes across the UK to the best of our knowledge based on contacts and surveys with the programme managers / administrations.

Regional Programme	Ex-ante	Interim	Ex-Post	Other Studies
England	None	Yes (1997)	In progress (to complete July 2003)	LAG group evaluations and 'exit strategies' for 5b regions – South West, North Uplands, Lincolnshire, East Anglia, West Midlands (1999).
Highlands & Islands (Scotland)	None	Yes (1997)	Yes (2001)	None
Lowland Scotland	None	Yes (1997)	Yes (2001)	None
Northern Ireland	None	Yes (1997)	Yes (2001)	None
Wales	None	Yes (1998)	In progress (to complete July 2003)	Qualitative evaluation of experience of Wales Leader Groups, Leader model, and forward strategy for LEADER + (2000)

Problems and Constraints

Programme managers across the UK have rarely mentioned any very specific problems or constraints with the official evaluations relating to insufficient resources or lack of co-operation of LAGs or beneficiaries, but tend to mention two general points:

- i) in the context of the late start made on LEADER II implementation – especially in England – the interim evaluation studies were required to be undertaken mostly in 1997 at too early a stage, before there was a sufficiently large body of projects completed or underway to measure progress on financial, physical or qualitative indicators in a meaningful way.
- ii) the lack of clarity and completion of a system of monitoring indicators and reporting requirements at European level, and hence inconsistent implementation of systems cascading from national and regional to local levels and in place at the start of programmes, have hindered the ability of evaluation teams to report in depth on quantitative outcomes from projects and measure the wider economic, social and environmental impacts of the whole programme or measures over its lifetime.

Procession of Evaluations at National Level

To our knowledge, the national / regional programme administrations have generally processed results of evaluations in three ways:

- i) distributed copies to strategic partners on the national / regional PMCs, including the Country Desk official of the European Commission, and discussed the findings at one or more PMC meetings.
- ii) published either a summary or full report for downloading from the administration's web site (e.g. Northern Ireland, Highlands and Islands and Lowland Scotland ex post evaluations).
- iii) sent copies of the summary or full report on request to LAGs and national / regional / European network units.

3.2 Overall Assessment of the Evaluations

England

The **interim evaluation** was conducted during July- November 1997 at a still very early stage of implementation of the programme due to the slow progress (relative to the other UK programmes) of the establishment of the 22 LAGs and approval of the LAG Business Plans by the regional government offices in England. The study reported on the situation at June 1997, when only 15% of the available EU funds for the programme had been committed and only 6% claimed. In terms of commitment against individual measures, most progress had been made with Measure A, as one would expect, (37% of total funds committed) and with B3 rural tourism (33%); all the others, with the exception of B1 technical support, had committed less than 10%. These facts effectively speak for the limitations of the evaluation findings on use of funds at that time.

However, the interim evaluation did give a substantial coverage of the programme background, LAG structures, project activities and plans, and process issues around capacity building for local development, partnership working, networking, project delivery, and local and regional administration and monitoring procedures. There were some 26 recommendations, of which 15 were on process issues and 11 on financial re-allocations. These were framed in somewhat simplistic terms but were generally practical and to the point and yet broad in scope. It is, however, not at all clear how influential the report was on the England and regional PMCs in driving forward change and improving performance in the final two years up to December 1999. There were a number of criticisms made of the superficiality of the study, but our view is that the evaluation was as good in quality as one could expect, given the lack of concrete results on the ground.

The **ex post evaluation** was only commissioned in January 2003, and the study has not yet been completed. It is therefore not possible to offer any opinion on it here. There are various explanations for the delay in commissioning the evaluation, including the late closure of the programme due to the Foot and Mouth Disease crisis in 2001 and also the restructuring of the national government departments responsible.

Probably the most useful studies in stimulating some real learning at local and institutional level were the **local external evaluations and exit strategies** funded by the national administration (DETR) but commissioned by the regional groupings of LAGs in 1999. Altogether some six studies were commissioned, one for each Objective 5b area grouping of LAGs – i.e. for the Northern Uplands, Midlands Uplands, Lincolnshire, East Anglia, the Marches and South West. These not only provided a substantial review of activities, processes, and outcomes (as far as then known) for each LAG in each regional group but also gave practical recommendations on the transition strategy to LEADER + and the general sustainability of the LAG structures and projects. There is good evidence that these studies were useful to both the LAGs and the incoming DEFRA officials who took over the preparation and administration of the new LEADER + from the DETR.

Wales

In Wales, in comparison with England, the programme implementation started earlier and the interim evaluation was conducted 8 months later with the result that a much greater proportion of the EU funds had been committed to projects, and there was much more activity in progress and evidence of 'process' on which to base the evaluation. Accordingly, it offered a more comprehensive scope of analysis and was far more detailed in its recommendations for changes to management and administration at local and regional levels, especially the 'unworkable' system of monitoring indicators.

Again, as in the case of England, the official ex post evaluation study was delayed for similar reasons, and has not yet been completed at the time of writing. But it is important to note that an evaluation of the experience of Wales LEADER II groups and of the LEADER approach was commissioned in 2000 by the Wales LEADER Company (the regional network) with official support of the Welsh Development Agency, the Welsh European Programmes Executive and the National Assembly for Wales. This was a substantial piece of work examining the performance and qualitative impacts of the LEADER Groups, and drawing out a number of policy-making and administrative lessons for LEADER +, which have proved to be quite influential in shaping the current programme.

Scotland

In the case of the **Highlands and Islands** and **Lowland Scotland** programmes, which were managed by intermediary bodies, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise

respectively, both the interim and ex post evaluations went ahead in good time in 1997 and 2001. The **interim evaluations** were both of a standard format and quality, and had some relevance in recommending improvements to monitoring systems and the allocation of funds between measures, as well as other changes to structures and processes. However, there is nothing to suggest that they were especially important in so far as the Global Grant system was working satisfactorily for both programmes, and there seemed to be no really serious operational or policy problems to address at that stage.

Equally, the **ex post evaluations** were sufficiently comprehensive in coverage of both quantitative and qualitative outcomes, the role of the LEADER specific features in relation to those outcomes and in making recommendations for LEADER + and future rural programmes. But the Lowland Scotland study had some difficulty gathering full and consistent data from LAGs against the indicators used due to weaknesses and gaps in monitoring practices. Highlands and Islands also lacked robust quantitative outcomes in certain areas. HIE and LAGs had used the AEIDL monitoring framework which was mainly process-oriented, but felt the evaluators did not make sufficient use of this. There were some reservations expressed by HIE about the lack of new research undertaken by the evaluation team to generate more outcome and impact data, whilst the evaluation team were quite critical of the lack of a pro-active and consistent approach to monitoring systems on the part of the HIE network (which in turn was attributed to a lack of clarity on the part of the Commission at the outset of the programme). Both studies drew out a number of lessons and practical proposals for the future, but it is hard to confirm the extent to which these findings have been taken on board by the Scottish Executive, which is now in charge of LEADER + in place of HIE and SE as intermediary bodies.

Northern Ireland

Of all the UK programmes, it can be asserted that Northern Ireland has exhibited probably the most rigorous and policy-driven approach to the commissioning and use of its ex post evaluation. It provides the most detailed analysis of the experience of its 15 LAGs and 9 OCBs (the only UK programme to have the latter) and of the physical and socio-economic impact of projects and the programme as a whole (56 pages on processes and delivery mechanisms, 23 pages on activities supported, and 45 pages on outcomes). It has also made extensive use of the findings in preparing the policy, structures and action focus of the main Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme for 2000-06, including, of course, LEADER +.

3.3 Conclusions and Recommendations from Regional Evaluation Reports

The grid on the next pages summarises the main conclusions and recommendations on the effects and implementation of the LEADER specific features derived from the ex post evaluation report for the **Highlands and Islands** Programme.

No grid has been provided for the **England** programme because the ex post evaluation study has not yet been completed. However, it is pointed out that a draft report is expected to become available within the next month. It was not considered appropriate to attempt to summarise from the evaluations carried out in 1999 of the sub-regional LAG groupings in England. The difficulties are two-fold: these studies preceded the final implementation of projects under the programme; also they adopted different evaluation approaches and did not systematically address the application of the LEADER specific features in each area.

SUMMARY APPRECIATION FROM THE REGIONAL EVALUATION REPORT

Operational Programme: Highlands and Islands

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Area-based approach	<p>This was implemented efficiently and effectively via the Highlands & Islands Enterprise Network of Local Enterprise Companies established in 1991 which operate in delimited local areas. All of these areas were adopted for LEADER II (a requirement of the EC after LEADER 1) except in one case where two areas were combined (WISL). Smallest area had population of 20,000 and largest of 69,500. The LEADER II measures were judged relevant to the conditions prevailing in all of the areas. Three limitations were evident:</p> <p>i) a very limited local base of financial resources apart from LEC funds and LAs to a lesser extent.</p> <p>ii) inequalities between areas in the extent of community engagement with LEADER</p> <p>iii) one area, where union of two former administrative areas did not work well</p>	<p>Sub-area 'hotspots' of development emerged - small groupings of communities within certain local areas were catalysed by LEADER to achieve a real critical mass of community spirit and confidence, and hence launch activities and multiple projects (eg. Applecross and Loch Ewe within Ross and Cromarty, Nethy Bridge in Moray, Badenoch and Strathspey, and Kilchoan and Ardnamurchan peninsular in Lochaber).</p> <p>Projects typically focused on use of local resources and obtained local match funding.</p> <p>The LAGs benefited from well established arrangements of the LECs as part of HIE network.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To continue to invest in and support with policy and programmes an approach based on coherent local areas and use of local resources of all types as the starting point for local development. ▪ To continue to use the LEC network for delivery of programmes including CED priorities and promoting integrated approaches.
Bottom-up approach	<p>Various 'bottom up' methods of engaging different types of community and social interest groups were positively adopted by most LAGs, including mobile animateurs, local community appraisals and agents networks. LEADER II coincided with and assisted a policy shift within the HIE network to seek to strengthen community involvement and build up local capacity for development.</p> <p>But factors such as the inadequate resources for animation in some areas, lack of direct community representation on LAGs, and the complexity of the application process did hamper 'bottom-up'. Also animation and representation of private sector interests was weak in some areas.</p>	<p>Different methods of animation, outreach and support were applied with different results across local areas, but generally LEADER succeeded in setting in place new structures and processes for community participation, developing skills and capacity of local groups to initiate and manage local development, and catalysing new investment in physical assets and facilities to strengthen communities and their base of resources (a central objective of regional policy via the HIE Network).</p> <p>This work has provided a new infrastructure of human, technical and physical resources for the benefit of future programmes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The design of future programmes must draw up on the wide evidence now assembled (largely due to LEADER II) of both <i>rural</i> /sector development and <i>community</i> development needs and opportunities ▪ Identify and involve local business sectors earlier (at the strategy development stage), clarify sectors to target, benefits to LAG etc ▪ Local animation systems used should be subjected to a deeper comparative evaluation ▪ Whilst still retaining respect for local variances, <i>some</i> aspects of local animation could be standardised – terms and conditions of staff, core training and qualifications etc. ▪ Continue work to make project application procedures simpler and more accessible.

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
The local group	<p>Even taking into account the need for LAGs to have representation appropriate to local circumstances, some LAGs (e.g. Lochaber and Argyll & the Islands) were too small and entirely comprised of the public sector, and should have been broadened during the programme. Mixed opinions of LAG composition – from ‘genuine partnership of equals’ to ‘domination by the LEC lead bodies’. Some LAGs were able to include and integrate well other organisations and sectors, but truly equitable decision-making was difficult, as global grant system required LECs to have final accountability for funds in each area. This resulted in a lack of identity or legal structure of LAGs independent from LECs. But HIE network commitment to bottom-up principles compensated – at least theoretically.</p>	<p>The best LAGs were those that achieved a <i>balance between breadth of representation and depth of commitment from core partners</i> able to match their funds to projects (e.g. LECs and Local authorities); also a <i>strong sense of shared identity and purpose creating momentum and critical mass of projects</i>. These factors of <i>cohesion and leadership</i> also had beneficial impact on public profile of LAG and participation of communities.</p> <p>Evidence of continuation and broadening of LAG structures for the new CED Priority of Objective 1 Special Programme for HI and other programmes.</p> <p>BUT some community interests were alienated or dis-empowered by perceived domination of LAG by LEC/ LAs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consider feasibility of <i>permanent rural partnership structures</i> building on LEADER II LAGs and now Obj. 1 CED priority LAGs with fully integrated multi-thematic remit. ▪ More effort required to ensure <i>appropriate community representation</i> on the LAG and sub-structures – ie. beneficiary groups to have more influence on the general strategy for and delivery of community support ▪ More effort required to find an appropriate role for the local <i>private / business sectors</i> in rural development partnerships ▪ Ensure that the LAG partnership can develop a stronger identity independent from the LEC lead body, but still consistent with financial accountability role of the LEC
Innovation	<p>A highly pragmatic approach was adopted by LAGs in applying innovation criteria to projects. Innovation was interpreted to be: designing a project using new consultation techniques, managing in a different way, e.g via community-owned enterprise, and delivering a type of service or product new to the applicant <i>community/ village</i>. This last was the most widely used, but also the weakest criterion. Obstacles were low levels of capacity to innovate, despite LEADER 1, or lack of early or consistent involvement of private entrepreneurs in many areas; also lack of a clear consensus about what constitutes innovation</p>	<p>Only 45% of project promoters surveyed actually considered their project innovative. But evaluators’ review of project files indicated a much stronger rating of relative innovation in terms of new ways of thinking and working at <i>community level</i>, which they considered the most important level. There were also several projects across the B measures which were recognised as exemplary and innovative at the wider regional, national and EU level. The majority of projects were judged to be innovative according to the European Rural Observatory definition.</p>	<p>None specific, but related recommendations are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The design of future programmes must draw up on the wide evidence now assembled (largely due to LEADER II) of both <i>rural /sector</i> development and <i>community</i> development needs and opportunities ▪ Identify and involve local business sectors earlier (at the strategy development stage), clarify sectors to target, benefits to LAG etc ▪ More publicity and promotion of examples of successful innovation at local / community levels
Multisectoral integration	<p>LEADER II in HI was to a large extent and deliberately non-prescriptive of actions (beyond the broad fit with each B Measure) and therefore lacked any clear strategy to secure integration of activity – ie. it lacked targeting to achieve a geographical or sectoral focus. The LAGs approach was to advertise the funding opportunities and react to demand rather than to plan strategically for sectors and inter-linkages.</p>	<p>The LAGs with smaller budgets achieved a large number of smaller projects spread throughout their local areas. Survey of project promoters showed only 13% of projects linked to another LEADER II project. BUT 65% had links to projects from other funding sources. Of these 53% had sustained links beyond the lifetime of LEADER II project. Some evidence of local clusters of linked projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A more pro-active approach to encourage integrated development of projects and stronger linkage of issues and actions <i>at the community level</i> – via support for development and delivery of more localised or sub-area strategies, and better linkage of existing to new projects

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Networking	Due to pressures to deliver the programme LAG co-ordinators and members had less time for networking than was desirable or originally expected at the outset. Some good practice was noted in terms of transfer of project ideas within and between LAGs and a limited amount of joint project work by LAGs. The Scottish Leader Network was more effective and accessible a structure for networking than UK or EU networks	Networking mainly at Scotland level, but to some extent at UK and EU levels, did assist spread of ideas and methods for project development and with sharing problems of programme implementation, but real transfer of actions and methods was quite limited. Guides on animation techniques, funding sources, foot path development were examples of successful dissemination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More resources – particularly staff time – needed for future programmes with priority on HI and Scotland levels ▪ Where outside providers are commissioned to support networking, LAG practitioners / users of services should have a role in the selection process
Trans-national cooperation	TNC was as time consuming and resource intensive activity, which only achieved modest results on the ground. The limited timeframe for implementation after the long project development phase and competing local delivery pressures were major barriers. However 6 LAGs generated multiple projects (4 – 14) under Measure C and some derived real local benefits from the exchange of know-how. But Measure C was only about 2% of overall LAG spend.	7 out of 9 LAG areas encouraged and promoted some form of TNC project work, but with variable success in terms of transfer of ideas and sustainability of the project networks. Those involved did however learn new skills and benefit from the experience.	<p>No specific recommendations but doubt expressed that the added value of TNC always outweighed the extra costs involved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More resources should have allocated to both regional networking to initiate project development and to best practice transfer at national / European level, rather than bilateral meetings ▪ More advice, guidance and training for TNC project promoters / participants needed
Decentralised management and financing	The use of the established network of LECs corresponding to local areas was the key mechanism by which the global grant held by HIE was further decentralised and managed at the local level. LAGs were free to develop their own locally appropriate partnership structure, business plan and links to local match funding sources. But the downside of autonomy was a failure to put in place a consistent monitoring system for outputs and impacts across all of the LAGs.	The delivery mechanism of global grant to LECs via HIE was considered highly effective, and has continued for use for delivery of main programmes and LEADER + after the end of LEADER II (CED Priority of Objective 1). Funds flowed relatively quickly to project promoters and beneficiaries. However, despite highlighting in the interim evaluation, nothing was done to rectify the weaknesses in monitoring systems. The	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue work to make project application procedures simpler and more accessible. ▪ Use existing information and new research to establish measurable baselines prior to programme implementation to enable formulation of clear, measurable strategies ▪ Make monitoring databases more robust and flexible to allow for innovations in indicators ▪ Monitor expenditure levered in by programme funds via grant claims process
Other important issues – sustainability of projects	The sustainability of projects at both the programme and LAG level was viewed less in terms of strict environmental criteria but rather their viability and potential to continue after the end of LEADER programme funding or give rise to a new project or phase of implementation. This factor was a major concern of local communities.	According to survey 62% of projects have been sustained after the end of LEADER II, many without the need for main programme funding. This is an indicator of the general quality and local user / community support for most projects. It also suggests that skills and capacity gained at local level can be sustained.	No specific recommendations.

4. General Appreciation from Perspective of Geographic Evaluator

4.1 Implementation and Effects of LEADER II Community Initiative in the UK

Across the five LEADER II programmes in the UK, it is possible to define several commonly experienced challenges of implementation. But equally the significance of differences in the regional programme management regimes needs to be highlighted. There is no doubt that those programmes which allowed decentralised control of funds under the system of global grants channelled through a single regional intermediary body enabled a greater local 'ownership' of the LEADER process and ease of access to grant funds for LAGs and project promoters, in contrast to the conventional operational programmes, under which each structural fund strand was managed by a different national government department usually through regional offices, but sometimes requiring processing at both national and regional levels. In England, in particular, the lack of connection to LEADER 1 (except two areas), the later start to LAG operations combined with the structural complexity and delays in the administrative system threatened to have a significantly negative effect. However, this was in the end minimised in most areas by the skill and efforts of LAG staff and board members to promote the benefits of the LEADER opportunity and ethos locally and use the regional network and PMC structures to solve the problems.

The common challenges were mainly experienced at the level of the LAG and the technical support team:

- i) creating the optimum 'laboratory' conditions for real innovation in activities and methods to emerge – of a local entrepreneurial culture, adequate technical and administrative support systems, strong co-operation of local organisations and agencies, access to risk finance, external networks etc

In practice, only a minority of LAGs – usually those benefiting from LEADER 1 – were able to put a comprehensive local support infrastructure in place, which *both* enabled a 'bottom-up' development process *and* generated some really innovative actions or methods for transfer to wider regional, national or international levels. Across the UK, the approach was typically pragmatic and concerned with delivering new types of activity, community-led structures for delivery and inclusion of new groups in the local area context, and, to this extent, every programme and almost every LAG recorded successes. Certainly, new capacity was built to formulate strategy, manage local development programmes, network and generate projects at the level of local sectors, and of town and village communities, but there have been real difficulties or failures in many areas to consolidate and sustain this local knowledge, partnerships and networking into LEADER + and other rural programmes for a whole variety of reasons.

- ii) giving sufficient priority, staff time and financial resources to national and international networking and early development of transnational co-operation projects

Whilst individual LAGs from all five programmes have made notable contributions to UK and EU levels, there was overall an under-achievement which it would be unfair to attribute solely to lack of interest or effort by LAGs. Their positive valuation of networking and co-operation per se was evidenced by the active participation in regional networking in each of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The background problems were a collective inertia of the managing authorities to ensure that the UK national network was set up at a sufficiently early stage and properly co-ordinated with the European Observatory to support TNC, an under-resourcing of national and regional networks to provide on-going technical support and dissemination of practice (beyond the training events), and a generally low priority given by PMCs and managing authorities to Measure C in comparison with Measure B actions.

- iii) achieving broad-based but locally-rooted representation of interests and sustaining local area partnership structures in a context of time-limited funding and parallel local programmes

In the UK there was a wide variation in quality and format of LAG partnerships – from the LEC-led structures in Scotland to local authority-led groups in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to LEADER companies in South West England and independent local development agencies in Wales and Lowland Scotland. Whatever the structure, there has been a common challenge to sustain partnership and/or extend local representation of sectoral and community interests during and beyond the life of programmes. As it has turned out, and despite the long transition period, the majority of LEADER II LAGs have proved enduring and adaptable for LEADER + and/or a more locally accountable implementation of main programmes (e.g. Objective 1 and 2). But a longer-term strategy and framework of core funding is still needed in each country / region of the UK (with possible exception of Scotland) to convert single programme-oriented LAGs into independent, permanent, and locally-owned institutions capable of promoting integrated rural development by combining resources from multiple funding programmes. Furthermore, there remains a real problem or risk of duplication of these structures, and lack of clarity in some regions about the appropriate and effective geographic areas for organising local economic partnership, as distinct from multi-policy themed partnerships.

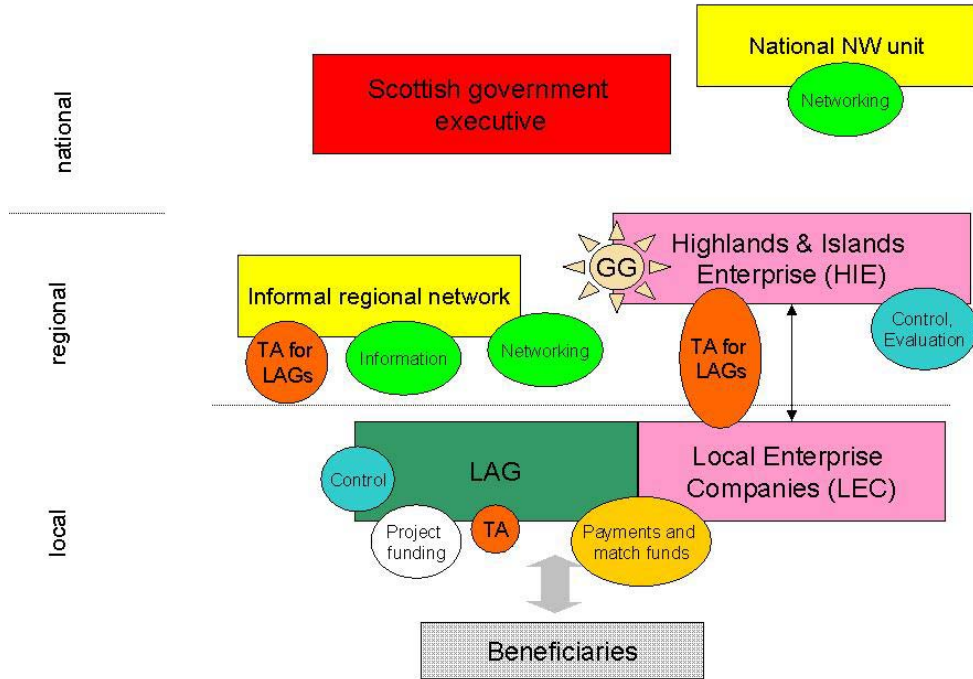
4.2 Critical Reflection on the Evaluation Process

It would have been much more productive of co-operation at LAG level with this final EU level evaluation if all the ex post evaluations for the five regional programmes in the UK could have been carried out within the same year, ie. in 2001 and if some framework had existed for closer linkage of the EU level objectives focused on the efficacy of the LEADER model to those at regional level relating to qualitative assessment of programme management and LAG processes in order to avoid repeating the same questions and encountering resistance due to 'evaluation fatigue'. There are plausible explanations as to why these things did not or could not happen – late closure of the programmes due to the Foot and Mouth Disease crisis and several national administrative reorganisations in England and Wales etc. However, at this late stage, there have been some very real practical obstacles to getting access to the key interlocutors and information sources – principally turnover of the original staff, archiving of files, transfer to other offices etc. There is also the fact that especially since the creation of devolved administrations and new regional agencies since 1997 there are now a multiplicity of integrated rural development programmes, at EU and national / regional levels, with variable timescales and area-based approaches, operating in each of the UK regions, which tends to create quite a short-term 'organisational memory' for any single programme, even one as distinctive as LEADER. This has been a particular problem in England, where LEADER II generally had a lower public profile and relatively smaller, fragmented administrative resources dedicated in the government offices in comparison to Objective 5b programmes. In terms of the quality and depth of analysis of financial and physical completion of programmes, there are problems of consistency and availability of data at the English sub-regional level (some much worse than others) hindering ability to draw conclusions at England level; in the Highlands and Islands, financial analysis is more comprehensive but there are gaps in data for project outcomes and beneficiary analysis due to shortcomings in the monitoring system (highlighted in the ex post evaluation).

Finally, apart from the obvious lesson (already being implemented) to improve monitoring frameworks for LEADER + and achieve inter-regional consistency in this aspect, there may be something to be gained from promoting better at local level, and before the end of the programme, the practical application and outcomes from EU level evaluation exercises in order to stimulate more interest and co-operation. Also, the possible differences in cultural and political attitude between UK and continental European players to the theory and practice of a unified LEADER model of rural development and to what are perceived to be 'remote' processes for EU regional / rural programme and policy-making are worthy of some further exploration in an open and honest way. In the course of this evaluation work, a full spectrum of views has been encountered about the validity of the model from scepticism about its lasting impact on the ground in relation to the 'opportunity cost' imposed by overarching bureaucracies to great enthusiasm and pride from Lands End in Cornwall to Fetlar in the Shetland Isles about what has been achieved to advance empowerment and entrepreneurship in local communities and sectors under the banner of LEADER.

Models of implementation

UK – Highlands & Islands



UK – England

