

*12th meeting of the Expert
Committee on Evaluation of Rural
Development Programmes*

20 September 2012



1. Introduction and adoption of the agenda

The Expert Committee on Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes (abbreviated to "Evaluation Expert Committee") met for the twelfth time in Brussels in the European Commission's premises on 20 September 2012.

The meeting was chaired by Leo Maier (Head of Unit AGRI L.4) who welcomed the participants and introduced the draft agenda. The agenda was adopted, and the topics addressed during the meeting followed the agreed agenda as summarized below.

2. Presentation and discussion of revised ex-ante guidance

Leo Maier, DG AGRI, Unit L4, introduced the process for the revision of the ex ante guidelines, thanking the Member States for their written comments sent by mid July. He explained that the structure and content of the guidelines have been thoroughly revised and corrected and that the guidelines will stay a draft until the legal acts are approved. Hannes Wimmer, Jela Tvrdonova and Robert Lukesch, Evaluation Helpdesk, presented the guidelines focusing on:

- Improvement of the structure: the guidelines are divided into three parts (I: mainly for managing authorities; II: mainly for evaluators; III: toolbox)
- Revision of all chapters since the June draft: including proposed evaluation questions and graphs,
- New content added: „Scope of the ex ante evaluation“, sections on National Rural Network (Programmes), glossary of terms, indicative number of man-days, and legal texts

Questions and answers:

The Member States (MS) positively assessed the work accomplished by the Evaluation Helpdesk and the drafting experts. They welcomed the clear separation between the legal requirements and the elements that are recommended in an ex ante evaluation. The following comments were further raised:

- **Guidance needed for conducting the SWOT**

The UK expressed the concern that a good ex ante evaluation starts with a good SWOT-analysis and asked if further guidance on this is foreseen.

The European Commission (EC) pointed out that the SWOT-analysis belongs to programming and can therefore not be included in the guidelines for ex ante evaluation. However, the need for guidance on the programming elements will be transmitted to the respective colleagues within the EC.

- **Relationship between SWOT and indicators, role of evaluator in checking the SMARTness of indicators**

Poland asked for more clarity on the link between the SWOT and indicators, and the role of evaluator in checking the SMARTness of indicators.

The European Commission explained that the starting situation needs to be described and quantified by baseline values of context indicators when carrying out the SWOT and needs assessment. This is different from setting target values for indicators when developing the programme's intervention logic and measures. Regarding SMARTness and CLEARNESS of indicators: the evaluators have a particular role when looking at the programme specific indicators, while the common indicators are supposed to be SMART and CLEAR. For the latter however it is still important that the ex ante evaluator checks if the common indicators are appropriately included in the programme.

- **Inconsistencies between the guidelines and the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) directive**

Greece outlined that the content of SEA in the guidelines present inconsistencies with the SEA directive.

The European Commission invited the Greek delegation to send written comments with details to learn about these inconsistencies. The guidelines were checked by the SEA experts of DG ENV and are intended to take into account the directive. If they still could cause an issue, this must be checked once more with DG ENV.

- **SEA for National Rural Network Programmes (NRNPs)**

Italy expressed that it is not fully clear whether NRNP have to undergo SEA, as they are also subject to ex ante evaluation.

The European Commission explained that NRNP do not need a SEA, as they do not involve physical investments.

- **Link between the position papers and the ex ante evaluation (EAE)**

Ireland asked for clarifications about the ex ante evaluation and the EC position papers and their possible link.

The European Commission explained that:

- *the EC position papers set the ground for the Partnership Agreement (PA) in the MS and point out the Commission's opinion on the orientation to take for the MS when preparing the next programming period. As the PA sets out the frame how the MS will use the CSF funds to achieve the Europe2020 goals, the EC position papers must be seen in the context of the CSF, and not at the programme level;*
- *the ex ante evaluation of the RDP needs to include a chapter, where the consistency between the RDP and the PA is checked, however, the ex ante evaluation is specific for the RDP and therefore at the programme level.*

- **Chapter on man days**

The new chapter on man days needed for the ex ante evaluation was generally appreciated by the MS, although there was some unclearness regarding the meaning of the indicated number of days (e.g. why so different? Do they express working days or the duration of the ex ante evaluation?).

The European Commission explained that the variation in the number of man days results from a high variability of RDPs within the EU. The number of man days does not provide information about the duration of the ex ante contract, but gives a rough estimation of the resources required to fulfill the tasks.

3. Presentation and discussion of result indicators pillar II

Annette HURRELMANN (AGRI L.4) presented the indicator fiches of the result/target indicators for priority 1-4 of pillar II and further information on the result/target indicators for priority 5 and 6. She explained that the fiches were established by DG AGRI taking into account the comments received from MS after the last Evaluation Expert Committee meeting. The Evaluation Expert Committee members were invited to discuss the following questions after the presentation:

- Is the proposed structure for the result indicator fiches for Pillar II reasonable? Is something missing? What should be changed?
- Are the completed fiches for Priorities 1-4 correct and useful?
- Should indicator P2A be split into a simple target and an "additional" result indicator?
- What approach is best for Priority 5?
 - keep original methodology using coefficients
 - use simplified calculation on basis of estimates
 - establish simple target and keep original definition for additional result indicator
- Does the restructuring of indicators in Priority 6 seem reasonable?

Questions and answers

General observations

- **Availability of background material, mandate of the group**

Many MS (DE, FR, IE, PL, PT, etc.) pointed out that the material on the indicator fiches (both result and impact indicators) was sent out too late in order to be fully prepared to provide feedback during this meeting.

The European Commission apologized for sending out the documents at late stage and explained that there have been time constraints also for EC, due to the workload on the establishment of the indicator fiches and the need of coordination within DG AGRI with expert units on the various indicators, including Pillar I indicators. Furthermore, the Commission explained the differences of the mandate of the Rural Development Committee (RDC) and the Evaluation Expert Committee: the same set of indicators was indeed discussed the day before in the RDC in the context of the indicator plan, emphasizing programming and target setting; while the mandate of the Evaluation Expert Committee is emphasizing the expert input on the indicator fiches itself.

- **Lay-out of the fiches, unclarity regarding information included in the fiches**

Some MS highlighted that the repetition of information and the length of the fiches are not very practical, and asked if the editing of the fiches could be improved. Moreover, unclear statements regarding data collection, applicant information, absolute values versus percentages, total public expenditure, etc. need clarification

The European Commission answered that an effort will be made to shorten the fiches by limiting repetitions to the extent possible. Also improvements will be made in order to improve clarity of information on data collection issues, applicants' information and other issues.

- **Unclearness on what is the number of applicants and what is included in total public expenditure**

Poland pointed out that from the fiches it is unclear to understand which numbers have to be included: only approved proposals or all applicants. Germany explained that the total public expenditure includes EC, national

budgets and national top ups and asked how the EC contribution has to be extracted from this.

The European Commission explained that number of applicants stood for the number of beneficiaries that received final payments; and recognized that there is unclarity about dealing with top ups, and promised to improve the clarity of some definitions and concepts in the indicator fiches.

Discussion and answers on specific indicators

P2A: change in agricultural output on supported farms/AWU

MS comments received after last Evaluation Expert Committee meeting:

- *complex to calculate;*
- *difficult to directly attribute effects of RDP support.*

Alternative provided by the EC:

- *change target indicator to: % of agricultural holdings with RDP support for investments in restructuring (simple output-type target); AND*
- *keep original indicator as additional result indicator.*

Discussion

- Italy pointed out the usefulness of having result indicators that go beyond the information included in the proposed simplified target indicators in order to collect relevant information of the results of policy interventions in evaluations.
- Italy and Belgium pointed out that indicator P2A should not be part of the monitoring system, as it needs an evaluation approach to calculate it;
- France pointed out that keeping the original indicator as additional result indicator, increases the total number of indicators, which is in contrast with the idea of simplification. Portugal asked if the 'additional result indicator' is also a compulsory indicator, or if every RDP may select the most relevant indicators for its RDP. Austria added that the MS should take this decision and that this needs evaluation expertise and is not part of the RDP monitoring;
- Belgium pointed out that for this indicator there is a substantial time lag between the number of approved applicants and the number of applicants who received final payments, as investments can be carried out over several years and asked how to deal with this in the monitoring.

The European Commission explained that these are not really "additional" result indicators but the original result indicators and that the simplified target indicators are now added to the system in order to move to a simplified target setting. However, the simplified targets are not enough for measuring the results, e.g. focus area 2A (restructuring farms) where the simple target would be sufficient for monitoring purposes but does not allow to give deeper insight in the results achieved such as the success of the restructuring and the change in agricultural output. Furthermore the EC explained that monitoring data should be included in the annual reporting, while other indicators should be used in the context of evaluations included in the evaluation plan, however, there is a certain overlap between M&E activities as far as the result indicators are concerned.

P5A – P5D:

- **Water saved in agriculture**
- **Energy savings in agriculture and food sectors**
- **Renewable energy produced**
- **Reduced emissions of methane and nitrous oxide**

MS comments received after last Evaluation Expert Committee meeting:

- *definition of coefficients complex and difficult;*
- *diversity in production/climatic zones to be considered.*

Alternatives A and b proposed by the EC:

A)

- *change target indicators to output/input type indicators, e.g., P5A: % irrigated land switching to more efficient irrigation systems, P5B: Total investment in energy savings and efficiency; AND*
- *keep original indicator as additional result indicator.*

B)

- *maintain original indicator definition but simplify calculation: demand (estimate of) water saving/energy saving/renewable energy produced/emissions reduced from applicant at project application.*

Discussion

- Lithuania pointed out that P5A is only relevant for southern MS where irrigation is an issue and water efficiency needs to be checked.
- Portugal pointed out that the Priority 5 indicators should be based on simple criteria.
- Belgium pointed out that the use of coefficients for indicator calculation is complicated and should be limited for evaluation purposes. In alternative, for monitoring purposes, the MS suggests to use estimates of energy savings and water savings, directly collected from the beneficiaries.

The European Commission explained that Priority 5 needs to distinguish for the different focus areas and provided some examples, e.g. investment in renewable energy is not enough to actually assess results of the intervention but energy savings need to be estimated, also the amount of irrigated hectares is not enough but water savings need to be estimated etc. This requires technical skills and use of coefficients where possible to arrive at correct estimates, but can be carried out in the context of evaluations.

P6A – P6BC:

- Jobs created

- % rural population covered by Local Development Strategy (LDS)

- Rural population benefiting from new or improved services/ infrastructures/ IT infrastructures

MS comments received after last Evaluation Expert Committee meeting:

- *unclear definition and methodology*
- *indicators not adjusted to Focus Areas (esp. P6BC)*

Alternative proposed by the EC, including a restructuring of indicators, however further work is required to ensure consistency with other CSF funds:

- *P6B to contain 3 sub-indicators (% rural population covered by LDS, no. of jobs created in supported projects through LEADER, rural population benefiting from new or improved services/infrastructures)*
- *P6A to contain only jobs created through other sources than LEADER*
- *P6C to contain only population benefiting from new/improved IT infrastructures*

Discussion

- Lithuania and Portugal pointed out that the percentage of population under LAGs is irrelevant. Belgium commented it is impossible to see with this indicator the difference between a LAG covering a large area but working inefficiently, and LAGs covering small areas and being very efficient.

The European Commission replied that this is indeed basic information but nevertheless relevant, however recognized that it does not necessarily provide information about the success of Community-Led Local Development (CLLD).

The EC invited MS to send written comments on the result/target indicators until October 10. In case there is no possibility for an earlier meeting date for the Evaluation Expert Committee than the currently foreseen 18 December, the EC will circulate the draft indicators fiches for priorities 5 and 6 and P2A by the end of October for written comments from the MS.

4. Presentation and discussion of indicator fiches for impact indicators

Yves Plees (AGRI L.4) presented the indicator fiches for the CAP impact indicators. He explained the main differences between Pillar I and Pillar II, and informed about the work carried out to develop the draft indicator fiches. The Evaluation Expert Committee members were invited to discuss the following questions after the presentation:

- Is there a need for a good practice workshop for the Member States with regionalized RDPs?
- Is the information presented in the fiches sufficient? Is there a need to cover other issues?
- Proposal for the following changes to the indicator list:
 - Deletion of two indicators (irrigated area, share of food expenditure in total expenditure)
 - Addition of one indicator (agricultural factor income)
 - Move of two more indicators to the context indicators (consumer price evolution of food prices, soil erosion)

Questions and answers:

➤ **Organization of a good practice workshop for the Member States with regionalized RDPs**

Italy welcomes a good practice workshop and is willing to host it. Also Germany confirmed to be interested.

➤ **General comments on the common impact indicators**

Italy pointed out that 16 common impact indicators, collected mainly from statistical sources, are too many and at the same time do not provide the necessary information for a good impact evaluation for the RDP. From the presentation the role of the evaluator is highly relevant to look for programme specific impact indicators, however, who is going to control the accuracy and validity of these indicators?

The European Commission explained that these 16 impact indicators need to be used in combination with additional information, analysis and methodologies, and that these 16 impact indicators are based on data already available through existing channels of data collection. The use of these 16 common impact indicators in both pillars of the CAP should allow the MS and the EC to look for links and synergies between the policies which in the current period were more difficult to reveal, however, evaluation of RDPs will continue to look at the net impact of pillar II on these impact indicators. Furthermore impact indicators have no target values as these indicators are influenced by many more factors than just the CAP.

➤ **General comments on assessment of impacts at programme level**

Several MS questioned the necessity and quality of the proposed common impact indicators, the lack of common methods and the impossibility of calculating programme impacts and net effects of policy interventions. Germany informed on its position in the Council Working Party to shift the responsibility for the ex-post evaluation from the MS to the EC.

The European Commission replied that the challenges for calculating programme impacts are already well known during the current programming period, and that further guidance may be needed (e.g. the role of the evaluators, how to fit in the impact indicators in the evaluation plan).

Nevertheless in the context of the ex ante evaluation, it is important to decide on the set of impact indicators in order to use these as context indicators, while guidance on complex methodologies (e.g. counterfactual, netting out) is not necessary at the stage of ex ante evaluation. The logical sequence is 1) decide on the set of impact indicators; 2) data provision from the EC; 3) selection of additional impact indicators and data provision by the MS.

➤ **Pillar I and Pillar II**

Germany and Cyprus asked if there will be guidance produced for dealing with Pillar I and Pillar II impact indicators together.

The European Commission replied that Pillar I evaluation remains under the responsibility of the EC, and that Pillar II has a different approach with the CMEF in place and with the assessment of impacts under the responsibility of the MS, as in the current programming period. Assessing the impacts of the CAP as a whole is not a mandatory concern for the evaluators dealing with RDP evaluation and RDP impact assessment, but considering Pillar I impacts in the RDP evaluation can be considered as good practice.

➤ **Definition of 'rural area' and the consequences for the assessment of impacts**

Italy pointed out that they use a definition for rural area which is different from the classic OECD definition, and that this affects the calculation of the impact indicators.

The European Commission replied that similar problems existed already in this programming period and that progress had been made with EUROSTAT and DG REGIO, as the OECD terminology was not always appropriate. The EC has worked on these methodologies in order to improve the situation for the MS for the NUTS 3 level and has proposed a revised definition which takes into account MS concerns. The EC understands the difficulties the MS have, but nevertheless stressed that this is an EU policy with EU goals and EU impacts, which need a common terminology.

The EC invited MS to send written comments on the impact indicators until October 10.

5. Group work and discussion of context indicators

In order to collect information on the set of context indicators for the next programming period, the Evaluation Expert Committee members were invited to work in groups. The basis for the work was the list of current context indicators (divided per RDP axis) described in Guidance note F of the CMEF. The Evaluation Expert Committee members were asked to divide into groups following the 6 Priorities of the next programming period, and to carry out a relevance check of context indicators for the Priority. The results are available in Annex I and will serve as an input for the Good Practice Workshop on context indicators in Lisbon on 15-16 November.

Questions and answers:

The EC explained that the application of context indicators in programming and ex ante evaluation will be part of the agenda of the Good Practice Workshop. The EC will invite a written contribution from MS on the context indicators before the workshop.

6. A.O.B

- Planning for the Evaluation Expert Committee and other groups:
- Deadline 10 October for written comments for this meeting;
 - 2 October article 110 expert group meeting will look at the impact indicators for the CAP and the result and output indicators for pillar I.

- 17 October: Rural Development Committee on the indicator plan,
 - 5 November: technical meeting on indicator plan and monitoring
 - The next Evaluation Expert Committee meeting is tentatively foreseen for December 18.
- Good Practice Workshop in Hungary, 8-9 October on targeted data management. Possibility to register still until 24 September.
 - Synthesis of ex post evaluations 2000-2006 is published on Europa
 - Information about the Focus Groups organised by the Geographic Experts of the Evaluation Helpdesk dealing with the topic: "Monitoring and Evaluation of RDPs on the way from the current to the next programming period: What are the main changes? How well are rural development stakeholders prepared for it? What are the consequences for ongoing, ex-post and ex-ante evaluation?"
 - Strategic Monitoring Report: submission bi-annual, deadline is 1 October.

All presentations are available on the CIRCA platform. The next meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee is tentatively foreseen for 18 December 2012.

ANNEXES

PRIORITY 1

Context indicators (current CMEF baselines objectives and context related marked in green, additional proposed indicators marked in blank - Evaluation Expert Committee meeting of 20 September)	RDR proposal priorities					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Economic development	X	X				X
Employment rate	X					X
Unemployment	X					X
Training and education in agriculture	X	X	X			X
Age structure in agriculture	X	X				
Labour productivity in agriculture	X	X	X			
Gross fixed capital formation in agriculture	X	X	X			
Employment development of primary sector	X	X				
Labour productivity in food industry	X	X	X			
Gross fixed capital formation in food industry	X	X				
Employment development in food industry	X	X	X			
Labour productivity in forestry	X	X			X	
Gross fixed capital formation in forestry	X	X				
Importance of semi-subsistence farming in NMS	X			X		
Biodiversity: High Nature Value farmland and forestry	X			X	X	
Water quality: Gross Nutrient Balances	X			X	X	
Soil: Areas at risk of soil erosion	X			X	X	
Soil: Organic farming	X			X		
Climate change: Production of renewable energy from agriculture and forestry	X				X	
Climate change/air quality: gas emissions from agriculture	X				X	
Employment development of non-agricultural sector	X	X				X
Economic development of non-agricultural sector	X	X			X	X
Self-employment development	X	X				X
Internet take-up in rural areas	X					X
Net migration	X					X
Life-long learning in rural areas	X					X
Natura 2000 area	X			X		
Water use	X				X	
Structure of the Economy	X	X				X
Structure of Employment	X					X
Long-term unemployment	X					X
Educational attainment	X					X
Average age of young farmers taking over	X					

PRIORITY 2

Context indicators (current CMEF baselines objectives and context related marked in green, additional proposed indicators marked in blank - Evaluation Expert Committee meeting of 20 September)	RDR proposal priorities					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Economic development	X	X				X
Training and education in agriculture	X	X	X			X
Age structure in agriculture	X	X				
Labour productivity in agriculture	X	X	X			
Gross fixed capital formation in agriculture	X	X	X			
Employment development of primary sector	X	X				
Labour productivity in food industry	X	X	X			
Gross fixed capital formation in food industry	X	X				
Employment development in food industry	X	X	X			
Labour productivity in forestry	X	X			X	
Gross fixed capital formation in forestry	X	X				
Employment development of non-agricultural sector	X	X				X
Economic development of non-agricultural sector	X	X			X	X
Self-employment development	X	X				X
Structure of the Economy	X	X				X
Economic development of food industry		X				
Farmers with other gainful activity		X			X	X
Development of services sector		X			X	X
Agricultural land use		X		X		
Farm structure		X		X		
Forestry structure		X		X	X	
Forest productivity		X		X		
Less Favoured Areas		X		X		
Areas of extensive agriculture		X		X		
Development of forest area		X		X		
Age structure		X				X
Income in agriculture sectors		X				
Wages in non-agricultural sector		X				
GDP/person employed in agriculture and non-agriculture		X				

PRIORITY 3

Context indicators (current CMEF baselines objectives and context related marked in green, additional proposed indicators marked in blank - Evaluation Expert Committee meeting of 20 September)	RDR proposal priorities					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Training and education in agriculture	X	X	X			X
Labour productivity in agriculture	X	X	X			
Gross fixed capital formation in agriculture	X	X	X			
Labour productivity in food industry	X	X	X			
Employment development in food industry	X	X	X			
No of farmer's markets			X			
No of registered quality products			X			
%of agricultural products as the inputs for local food industry			X			
Participants in mutual funds			X			
Income level in agriculture sector			X			
Uptake value of insurance			X			

PRIORITY 4

Context indicators (current CMEF baselines objectives and context related marked in green, additional proposed indicators marked in blank - Evaluation Expert Committee meeting of 20 September)	RDR proposal priorities					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Agricultural land use		X		X		
Farm structure		X		X		
Forestry structure		X		X	X	
Forest productivity		X		X		
Less Favoured Areas		X		X		
Areas of extensive agriculture		X		X		
Development of forest area		X		X		
Importance of semi-subsistence farming in NMS	X			X		
Biodiversity: High Nature Value farmland and forestry	X			X	X	
Water quality: Gross Nutrient Balances	X			X	X	
Soil: Areas at risk of soil erosion	X			X	X	
Soil: Organic farming	X			X		
Natura 2000 area	X			X		
Biodiversity: Population of farmland birds				X	X	
Biodiversity: Tree species composition				X	X	
Water quality: Pollution by nitrates and pesticides				X	X	
Land cover				X	X	
Biodiversity: Protected forest				X		
Protective forests concerning primarily soil and water				X		
Extent of existing forest environmental schemes				X		
Extent of existing agri-environmental schemes				X		
Pillar I situation - modulation and greening (baselines)				X		
Regional or specific information on particular issues (example water catchment, HNV)				X		
Other sources of funding				X		
Existence of advisory plus training services for the environment				X		
Impact of climate change on ecosystems				X		

PRIORITY 5

Context indicators (current CMEF baselines objectives and context related marked in green, additional proposed indicators marked in blank - Evaluation Expert Committee meeting of 20 September)	RDR proposal priorities					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Forestry structure		X		X	X	
Biodiversity: High Nature Value farmland and forestry	X			X	X	
Water quality: Gross Nutrient Balances	X			X	X	
Soil: Areas at risk of soil erosion	X			X	X	
Biodiversity: Population of farmland birds				X	X	
Biodiversity: Tree species composition				X	X	
Water quality: Pollution by nitrates and pesticides				X	X	
Land cover				X	X	
Labour productivity in forestry	X	X			X	
Economic development of non-agricultural sector	X	X			X	X
Farmers with other gainful activity		X			X	X
Development of services sector		X			X	X
Climate change: Production of renewable energy from agriculture and forestry	X				X	
Climate change/air quality: gas emissions from agriculture	X				X	
Water use	X				X	
Climate change: UAA devoted to renewable energy					X	
Water quality					X	
Sensitivity awareness					X	
Production of biomass					X	
Consumption kwh/EUR produced					X	
Recycling					X	

PRIORITY 6

Context indicators (current CMEF baselines objectives and context related marked in green, additional proposed indicators marked in blank - Evaluation Expert Committee meeting of 20 September)	RDR proposal priorities					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Economic development of non-agricultural sector	X	X			X	X
Farmers with other gainful activity		X			X	X
Development of services sector		X			X	X
Training and education in agriculture	X	X	X			X
Economic development	X	X				X
Employment development of non-agricultural sector	X	X				X
Self-employment development	X	X				X
Structure of the Economy	X	X				X
Age structure		X				X
Employment rate	X					X
Unemployment	X					X
Internet take-up in rural areas	X					X
Net migration	X					X
Life-long learning in rural areas	X					X
Structure of Employment	X					X
Long-term unemployment	X					X
Educational attainment	X					X
Tourism infrastructure in rural area						X
Development of Local Action Groups						X
Designation of rural areas						X
Importance of rural areas						X
Population density						X
Internet infrastructure						X
Age structure in rural areas						X
Population under poverty risk (impact indicator)						X
Accessibility to basic services and infrastructure						X
Social capital						X