



Rural Evaluation News
Number 3 - July 2009

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The newsletter of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

Preparations for the Mid-Term Evaluations in 2010

John Grieve and Irina Ramniceanu

This issue of the Newsletter presents the work that the Evaluation Helpdesk has done in support of the Member States' (MS) preparations for the Mid-Term Evaluations (MTE). The MTE is a key milestone in the ongoing evaluation process, and a significant moment of reflection on how to improve the quality, performance and the implementation of the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs).

Making all the necessary preparations for organizing the MTE may pose challenges to the managing authorities (MAs). The MAs must outsource this activity to independent evaluators, and equip them with all the necessary data to complete the evaluations before the end of 2010.

The work of the Evaluation Helpdesk in the first half of 2009 has focused on finding ways to support these challenges. A survey was first carried out in the MS to better pinpoint their progress towards organizing the MTE and the inherent difficulties and needs. The target population of the survey was 88 RDPs (the national network and national framework programmes were excluded), of which 72 responded to it.

Most importantly, the findings of the survey, underpinned the Guidelines regarding the Mid-Term Evaluation. The Guidelines are designed to support MS and relevant national or regional authorities in framing the work of their independent evaluators in their preparation and implementation of the MTE. This good practice advice complements the Community evaluation guidelines (Annex B of the Handbook on the CMEF) and contributes to the adoption of a consistent approach across the EU-27. This will allow the evaluations to be synthesised at the EU level.

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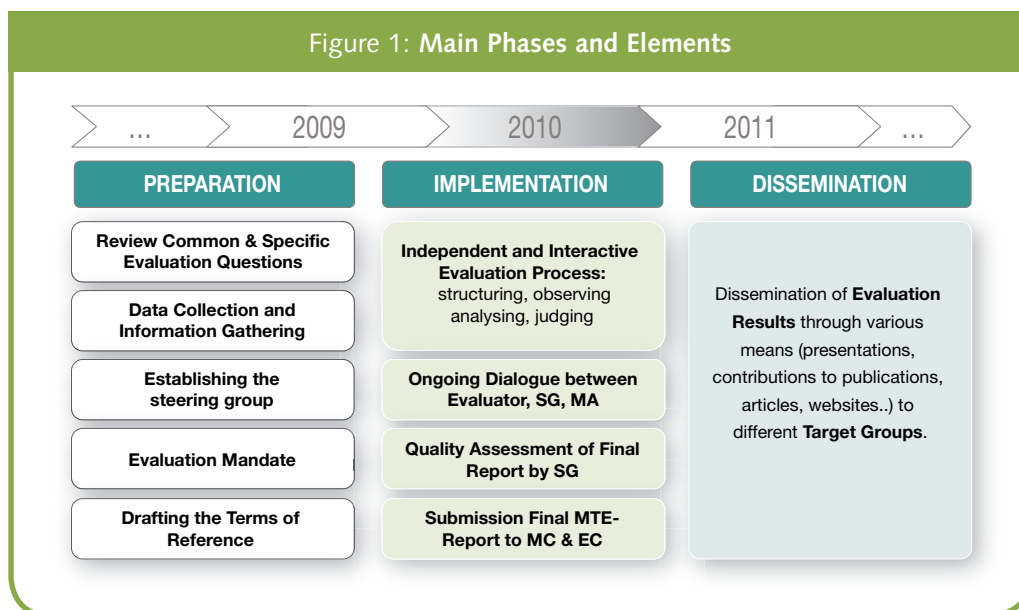
Your feedback is welcome

This newsletter is intended to be applicable, accessible and user-friendly for anybody dealing with the evaluation of rural development programmes and measures in the EU. We therefore welcome your feedback on the content presented and we would encourage you to provide suggestions regarding appropriate articles or regular features. Please send us your comments to: info@ruralevaluation.eu

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Figure 1: Main Phases and Elements

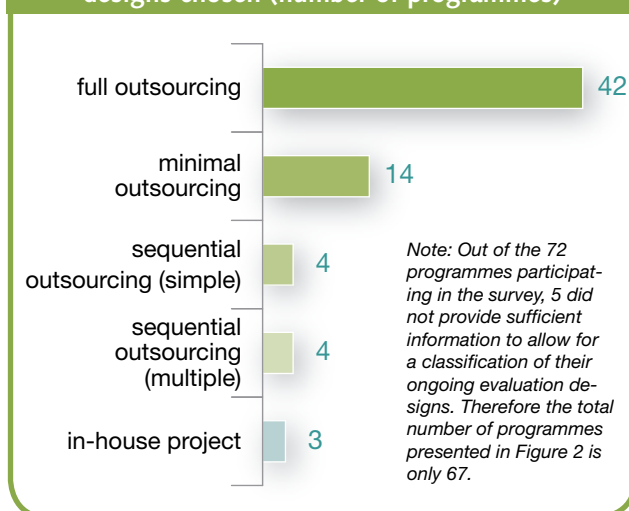


The Guidelines address the three main phases of the Mid Term Evaluation and their constituent elements and lay out an indicative timeline for the evaluation as illustrated in Figure 1.

Where do the MS stand?

The MTE survey revealed that the needs for guidance are driven by the ongoing evaluation system the MS chose, and by how the MTE links in. The Helpdesk has identified a variety of patterns for organizing the ongoing evaluation activities (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Overview of the ongoing evaluation designs chosen (number of programmes)



(1) The MTE is part of a self-standing tender under:

- Minimal outsourcing:** the MA only hires independent evaluators for the ex-ante, mid-term and ex-post evaluations (as per the RD Regulation). Any other evaluation-related activities between these milestones are typically taken care of by the MA themselves. As a variation of it, a choice of additional studies may be commissioned, to support the work of the evaluators at these critical moments.

- Sequential outsourcing:** the MA externalizes most or all of the ongoing evaluation activities to one (simple) or several (multiple) contractors. Most likely, in the latter case, the division of activities is determined by their sectoral specificities, e.g. the division of the evaluation activities by the RDP axes. However, the ex-ante, mid-term and ex-post evaluations are tendered separately.

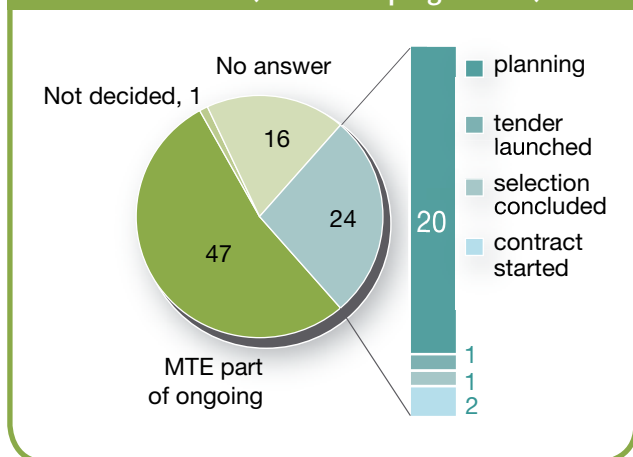
(2) The MTE is bundled with other evaluation activities under:

- Full-outsourcing:** the MA tenders the ongoing evaluation under a single contract; this may include the MTE only, or also the ex-post evaluation. Some variations may exist with regard to the duration and sequencing of the contracts. As an illustration, a set of two contracts, first terminating after the completion of the MTE, and the second running until the completion of the ex-post evaluation, ensures that there is sufficient flexibility for a performance-based contracting of evaluators.

The full-outsourcing presents several advantages. It keeps the administrative burden related to the evaluation activities low, as there is no need to organize frequent tenders. Most importantly, it facilitates a better collaboration between the evaluators and the MA, with potentially positive effects on the quality of data collection, and on the quality of the evaluation as such. It also makes possible an increase in the role and impact of evaluation in the delivery of the rural development policy.

- In-house project:** the ongoing evaluation (including the mid-term) is entrusted to an independent yet public unit or agency, which may, in turn, contract out specific activities. This option is rather an exception among the RDPs.

Figure 3: Progress in appointing the evaluators for the MTE (number of programmes)



The programmes where the MTE is organized as a self-standing tender are in the greatest need for support. Appointing the independent evaluators is now a major administrative priority for most of them, and 20 authorities are still in a planning phase (see Figure 3).

Moreover, out of the programmes surveyed, only about half acknowledged progress on reviewing evaluation questions, evaluation indicators and intervention logic frames. These issues will need to be addressed swiftly, still in the early stages of the programme implementation cycle.

MTE-related needs and Helpdesk support

Let us focus briefly on two main areas of difficulty or need which emerge as priorities from the survey. Each of these relates to the preparation phase of MTE work as identified above, the two elements are:

Data collection and methodologies

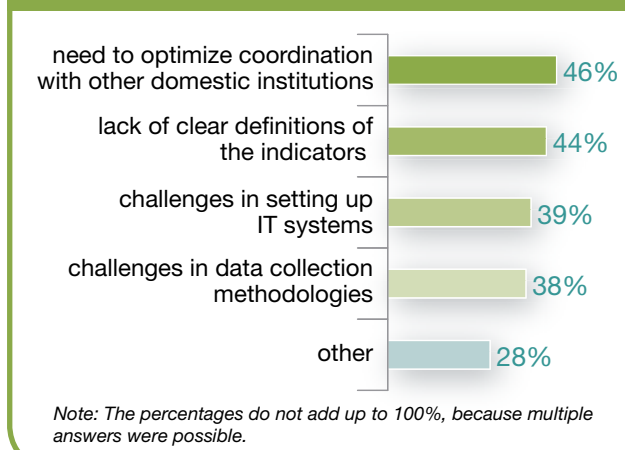
80% of the programmes surveyed expect data collection to be a major challenge. Purely domestic reasons (e.g. institutional coordination or IT system development) intertwine with factors that require EU-concerted action (e.g. definitions of indicators) (see Figure 4).

There are several paths through which the Helpdesk is delivering support, for instance:

The Guidelines lay out two main sets of procedures to assist in this area

The first of these, reviewing the common and specific evaluation questions and indicators, describes how MTE preparations should anticipate the precise data collection needs for the evaluation. This involves preparing a framework to ensure meeting both the individual programme and

Figure 4: The main reasons for the expected difficulties with data collection



CMEF specificities to facilitate an efficient, effective and meaningful evaluation process. Providing the evaluators with an appropriate set of data and evaluation questions and indicators, clearly capable of capturing and assessing the full range of intended programme effects, is a vital early step in the process of preparing for the evaluation.

Those commissioning the evaluation must identify the right questions to ask in order that data collection and respective responsibilities are correctly specified i.e. what are the common and specific evaluation questions that the MTE will seek to answer and which information and data will be required in order to answer them? Answering this should anticipate any potential difficulties and drive a process of cross checking and reconciliation to ensure the relevance, applicability and appropriateness of the framework.

Secondly, having identified what the data requirements are and ensured that data collection and responsibilities are correctly specified the key question is how and by whom will these data be sourced or provided? Ultimately responsibility rests with the MA, although generally a pragmatic balance would be agreed between the MA and the evaluators.

Normally monitoring and programme management data would be provided by the MA, effective monitoring systems should ensure the majority of these data are collated, available and up to date. The monitoring process and these data are essential to the evaluation process. However, monitoring information would need to be supplemented with other sources in order to ensure rigorous and effective evaluations. With that in mind, MAs should anticipate that the evaluators will need to access management databases and any relevant studies undertaken or commissioned. MAs should also seek to ensure the accessibility and utility of such information to the evaluators.

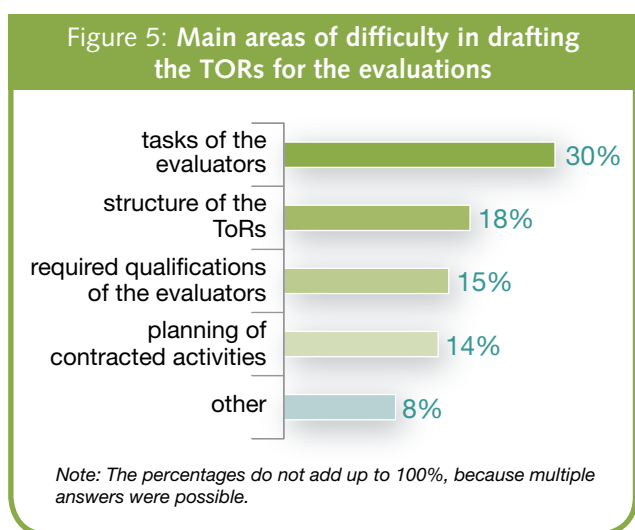
Independent evaluators should be expected to contribute to the development of approaches for acquiring primary data on results and impacts and any additional secondary or contextual data to support assessment of impacts. MAs can ease this process e.g. by providing contact details for beneficiaries or making other relevant information available.

Additional supporting activities, conducted by the Helpdesk, include:

- Thematic working groups (e.g. the assessment of the socio-economic and environmental impacts of the RDPs, in the context of multiple intervening factors – read article on page 12);
- A set of dedicated good practice examples;
- A dedicated FAQ section on the Evaluation Expert Network website and providing answers to specific Member State queries; and
- A glossary of key evaluation terms.

Administrative and procedural matters

About 60% of the programmes surveyed had needed or still need support in drafting the terms of reference (TORs) for their evaluators, the main administrative and procedural need identified. The main areas of difficulty, in drafting the TORs are highlighted in Figure 5.



The preparation of a good quality TOR is fundamental to the design and implementation of an effective approach to the MTE. While there is no given prescription for the content of the TOR, the Guidelines do provide support on the section concerning technical specifications. Domestic specificities concerning tendering procedures and contractual issues make it difficult to widen the scope of such support.

However the following fundamental points, presented in the Guidelines, should be considered in the preparation of the TOR:

- The TOR and the evaluators' response to these form the basis of the contract for the delivery of the evaluation, i.e. a shared responsibility between the contracting partners and as such the start of their iterative dialogue.
- The TOR should detail the evaluation requirements and expectations and the way in which the different parties will work with each other in its implementation.
- Whilst the MTE clearly has a distinct role as a constituent part of the ongoing evaluation process it should be informed by and contribute to that process.
- The time and level of resourcing required given the scale and scope of the programme, its evaluation and the specific activities which will be required.
- Identifying the basis on which decisions on the award of contract will be made.
- The application of relevant and appropriate tendering procedures and the provisions for the management of the contract.

Although not a prescription, the Guidelines do propose a series of headings and elements which should be covered, these are:

- MTE context;
- Scope of the MTE;
- Evaluation objectives;
- Common and specific evaluation questions;
- Evaluations tasks;
- Content and timing of deliverables;
- Organisation of the work; and
- Sources and documents.

Each of these headings is addressed in the Guidelines document. The survey and the Guidelines provide useful insights into the carrying out of the evaluation activities in the MS, and accompany the MAs in their efforts towards completing the MTE. The Evaluation Helpdesk will remain strongly engaged in the MTE process, through activities tailored to cater for the needs of both MAs and evaluators during this important phase of the RDPs' lifecycle.

Find out more

- o Read the [Guidelines on the MTE of Rural Development Programmes](#) and the [Survey of the Member States](#).

Synthesis of the annual progress reports concerning ongoing evaluation for 2007

Irina Ramniceanu

The Evaluation Helpdesk has conducted the first synthesis concerning the ongoing evaluation sections in the annual progress reports (APRs). This is based on the first set of APRs, submitted by the rural development programme (RDP) authorities in June 2008 covering the evaluation activities carried out in 2007.

This paper focuses on **how the ongoing evaluation systems have been set up** for the EU RDPs but also informs about other evaluation aspects (data collection, evaluation methodologies, and networking).

Equally important, the Helpdesk provides **recommendations** for both the MS and the EC on how to enhance the quality and usefulness of the reports on ongoing evaluation in the following years.

Several boxes, all throughout the text, offer hands-on examples of (good) practice in evaluation systems and reporting.

Drafting such a synthesis will become an annual activity of the Helpdesk, and the findings will be presented yearly to the Evaluation Expert Network, and in particular to the Evaluation Expert Committee. As a result, the evaluation stakeholders will:

- be able to better reference their own progress at the EU level;
- benefit from practical examples on how the various ongoing evaluation systems function;
- be informed about key developments in evaluation methodologies and processes in all EU regions;
- receive guidance on how to improve their evaluation reporting.

Main findings

The first reports concerning ongoing evaluation vary widely in quality, length and in their information content. The APRs follow calendar years, but 2007 saw an uneven launch of the RDPs. Less than a third of the RDPs were approved before the fourth quarter of 2007. This left countries and regions with variable amounts of time to start their ongoing evaluation activities – hence with a richer or a thinner reporting base for the year in question.

The content coverage ranges from a systematic following of the outline laid out in the Evaluation Guidelines to the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF)



to extensive – and unnecessary – descriptions of the European regulatory framework. The administrative preparations for hiring evaluators are the best covered aspect (in more than half of the reports), followed by arrangements for data collection (in about a third of the reports).

More detailed topical findings and examples follow below.

Focus on:

The evaluation systems

About half of the programmes report progress on the administrative preparations for evaluations. Based on this, several patterns of organizing the ongoing evaluation can already be recognized. However, the reports on 2007 do not provide sufficient information to draw a comprehensive picture of the various evaluation systems that the MS have set up. A clear overview has only become possible after the EU-wide survey that the Helpdesk carried out for its MTE-related activities. The outcomes of the survey, along with a programme-specific account of the evaluation systems in the MS are available (for further details, read the article on page 1).

The ongoing evaluation sections of the 2007 APRs provide little information about how the various actors are involved in the evaluation of the RDPs. For effective results, the independent evaluators need to rely on and interact with a significant number of parties, under the coordination of the RDP authorities. With this in mind, the CMEF Handbook advises the managing authorities to set up a steering group

to oversee the various evaluation activities. Only 15 of the APRs for 2007 describe how the evaluation processes are coordinated.

Similarly, few reports refer to the work carried out on evaluation questions and indicators. Still, reviewing the common evaluation questions (i.e. adapting them to the national or regional contexts) and developing programme-specific ones are very important and time critical. These are key steps towards assessing what needs to be done in terms of collection of information and analysis, and laying the basis for effective evaluations.

The ongoing evaluation activities

The 2007 APRs included some reporting on the “borderline” activities, i.e. the ex-post evaluations for 2000-06, and the ex-ante evaluations for 2007-13. In general, managing authorities should only have referred to such activities if there was clear relevance and follow-up required.

First glimpses of the evaluation methodologies in use are available even from 2007. Some of the reports mention thematic studies undertaken (e.g. on the farmland bird index in Austria), whereas others already reveal some of the methodological tools employed in evaluation (e.g. the use

of the counterfactual analysis for the agri-environmental measures in some of the German Lander).

The systems for data collection and management

The reports are generally informative about the arrangements regarding data collection and management. This fully reflects the importance of having data collection systems established early on in the programme implementation process.

Most reports describe the division of responsibilities or even the detailed procedures established between managing authorities, paying agencies and other bodies. The synthesis provides several country-specific references.

Many programmes also refer to the development of their IT systems for data management. Such activities may cover building new systems or adjusting older ones, and a lot depends on the extent of the country's or region's track record in evaluation.

In institutional terms, the centralization of data collection and management with the managing authority is the norm, but there are some alternative models as well. In the case of the latter, responsibilities are usually divided by the RD axes.

A few recommendations to Member States for 2008

- Refer to the setting up of your ongoing evaluation systems, if not already done so for 2007
- Cover all the components of the evaluation systems, and be clear and specific about how they are articulated
- Show, if applicable, preparations already made for the MTE
- Refer to any thematic activities that are undertaken or planned, as well as to the methodologies for the evaluation of your RDP
- Highlight progress and/or difficulties encountered with data collection
- If not done so yet, inform about the arrangements made to develop/adjust the IT systems for data collection and management
- Distinguish between what has been achieved and what is planned
- Use clear and concise language

Find out more

- o Read the [Synthesis of the Annual Progress Reports for 2007 concerning ongoing evaluation](#).

System of ongoing evaluation in Austria and its success factors

Karl Ortner and Otto Hofer



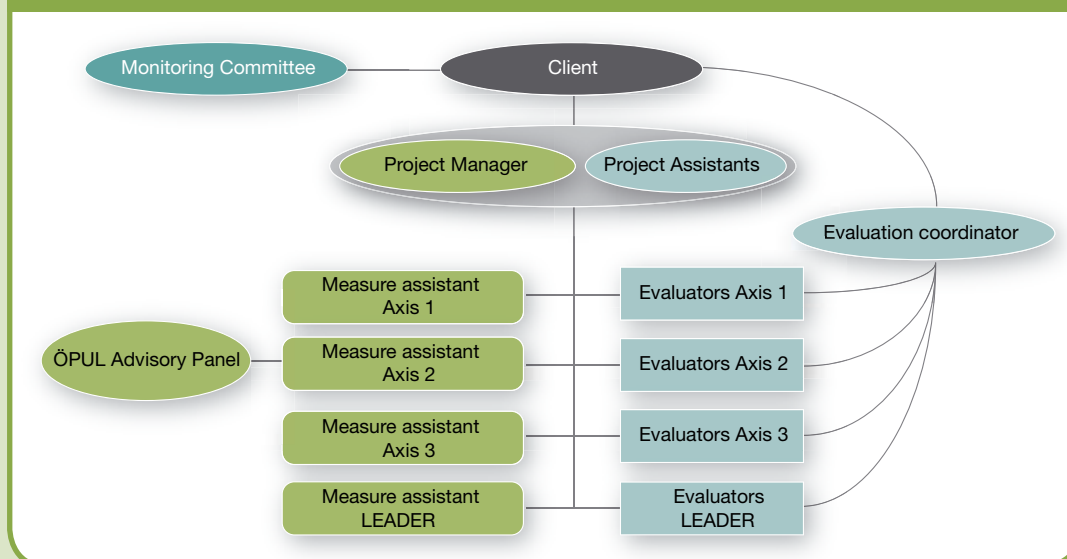
In the Austrian evaluation system monitoring and evaluation are being carried out separately, the former by the managing authority and the latter by independent evaluators. Monitoring includes the acquisition and provision of data gathered during the implementation of the pro-

gramme and aggregating these data to produce input, output and certain result indicators. The main task of the evaluators is to estimate the impact of the programme and the individual measures (result and impact indicators) and evaluate their efficiency. The Austrian system is based on the following success factors.

Making ongoing evaluation manageable by organising it as an in-house project

The evaluation of the Rural Development Programme in Austria is organised as a project under the responsibility of the **Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management (BMLFUW)**. The project is managed and coordinated by the Evaluation Section of Department II/5 at the BMLFUW (principles and evaluation of agricultural policy) in consultation and cooperation with an individual who coordinates the independent evaluators. The **Evaluation Project Team** is made up of the Project Manager and his assistants, the Measure Assistants, the evaluators and the Evaluation Coordinator.

Figure 1: Organisation of the ongoing evaluation of the Austrian Rural Development Programme



Hiring specialised experts for the evaluation of single measures

Each individual measure of the programme is evaluated by one or more **independent evaluators**. These evaluators come from public or private research organisations who have the relevant expertise and are supported by a suitable infrastructure. They follow the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework established by DG AGRI and can draw on their in-depth knowledge to answer more technical questions which could be of interest to the Managing Authority, implementing agencies and/or to the public at large.

At the time of writing, eighteen evaluators from the following institutions have been assigned the evaluation of the measures under the Austrian Rural Development Programme:

- Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics
- Federal Institute for Less Favoured and Mountainous Areas
- Agricultural Research and Education Centre (AREC) Raumberg-Gumpenstein
- Umweltbundesamt GmbH (expert authority of the federal government in Austria for environmental protection and environmental control)
- Austrian Agency for Health and Food Safety (AGES GmbH)
- Section V of the BMLFUW – General Environmental Policy, Department for Protection against Harmful Effects on the Environment and Climate Protection
- Federal Research and Training Centre for Forests, Natural Hazards and Landscape (BFW)

Supporting the evaluators effectively by involving the managing authorities in the evaluation process

The managing authority has appointed so called **Measure Assistants** to assist the evaluators in gathering all relevant information for the evaluation of each individual measure. They specify the scope of the evaluation in close cooperation with the evaluator responsible and are resource persons for all issues regarding content, implementation, data acquisition and interpretation, as well as any projects awarded for evaluation. The Measure Assistants also receive the evaluation results and ensure compliance with the recommendations.

In view of the special significance of the Agri-Environment Programme (ÖPUL), an advisory panel of experts was set up during the last programming period. It comments on questions concerning the evaluation of ÖPUL (Axis 2 measures) and is consulted in relation to the awarding of thematic studies.

This ÖPUL advisory panel is made up of representatives of the Ministry, the Federal States and NGOs.

In addition, the Monitoring Committee is informed about the evaluation activities on a regular basis.

The national rural network ("Netzwerk Land") began its activities in January 2009. Coordination of the various activities in relation to evaluation is achieved by way of regular discussions and a reciprocal exchange of information.

A central database provides extensive information on farms, projects and payments

The collection of monitoring data (from application forms and requests for payment) and any other evaluation data specified by the evaluators is provided by the paying agency's computer systems. This data is made available to the managing authority and also to the evaluation coordinator, who forwards them to the evaluators. Additional data is provided by the Ministry's so-called data pool, which contains data from Invekos (IACS), farm accountancy data (FADN) and the Agricultural Structure Survey (ASE). Other regional data can be retrieved from the ISIS online database system of the Austrian Federal Institute of Statistics (Statistik Austria).

Ensuring comparability of the evaluation results above and beyond the measures

The Evaluation Coordinator endeavours to ensure, in cooperation with project management, that the results of the evaluations of individual measures meet the requirements of the European Commission and are comparable as far as possible above and beyond the measures so that they can be aggregated for the entire programme. The aggregated net effects of the individual measures should concur with the impact of the programme in overall terms. To verify the evaluation results, estimations for the entire programme are assigned as research projects.

Communicating the interim results of the evaluation to the programme authorities

The Evaluation Project Team is convened at least once a year to provide information on the implementation of the programme, as well as the extent and quality of the data collected and the progress with ongoing evaluation. A common understanding of the requirements for the coming year is reached and the activities of the individual evaluators are coordinated.

Additional tasks are also defined when needed and their results discussed in order to ensure the consistency

tency and complementarity of the individual evaluations or draw up valid information. The first workshop (2007) of the Project Team dealt with the drafting and presentation of initial evaluation concepts for the respective measures.

In the second workshop (2008), the evaluators were offered the possibility to develop evaluation data forms as a working tool for collecting data. These forms are collected from applicants and project operators by the paying agency and are subsequently forwarded to the evaluators. In addition, a dedicated working group defined terms and concepts in relation to the evaluation questions and suggested possible indicators.

At the 2009 workshop, the evaluators were asked to further fine-tune their evaluation concept. The reports on this can be found on the Internet at <http://www.gruenerbericht.at>.

Disseminating the evaluation results among a specialist public

The evaluators are members of research centres and regularly take part in and organise research seminars

and conferences. The Federal Institute of Agriculture, for example, organised an ERDN (European Rural Development Network) conference in Vienna on 20/21 November 2008 on the subject of "Multifunctional Territories - Importance of Rural Areas Beyond Food Production", see http://www.erdn.waw.pl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=11&Itemid=9.

Getting scientists involved to propose further research to consolidate evaluation methodologies and results

Up to now, 17 research projects have been prepared or already awarded in relation to evaluation (the results are available for 13 of these) with the aim to answer evaluation questions and methodological questions (such as how to measure specific indicators). Most of the studies relate to Axis 2 - supporting land management and improving the environment. In this area, the work has dealt with the setting-up of a monitoring network with 600 random sample points to enable the observation of biodiversity development over a longer period of time, improvement of the database for the Farmland Bird Index for Austria and the establishment of a model to quantify soil erosion.

Find out more

- o Read the presentation "[The Monitoring and Evaluation System of the Austrian RDP 2007-13](#)" delivered at the Evaluation Expert Committee meeting, 23 June 2009, Brussels
- o Austria programme for Rural Development 2007-2013. Ex-ante evaluation. Annex III (in German only) <http://land.lebensministerium.at/article/articleview/60417/1/8486/>
- o Environmental Report in the frame of SEA. Vienna 2007. (in German only). <http://land.lebensministerium.at/filemanager/download/18290/>
- o Contracted and concluded studies (in German only): http://www.gruenerbericht.at/cms/index.php?option=com_docman&task=catview&gid=128&Itemid=27
- o Project Handbook on Evaluation (in German only): <http://www.gruenerbericht.at/cms/download/evaluierung/projekthandbuch/download.html>
- o Evaluation Report 2008. Ex-post Evaluation of the Austrian Programme for Rural Development. Vienna. (in German only). <http://land.lebensministerium.at/article/articleview/72112/1/25107/>

Identification of good practice in evaluation methods and processes

Hannes Wimmer

The needs assessment carried out in the Member States during 2008 showed that evaluation stakeholders are keen to learn about evaluation through “good practice examples”. Although, the CMEF Handbook already provides stakeholders with detailed and concise guidance, it lacks illustrative examples of how this guidance is used and implemented in Member States.

Why do we need good practice?

Identification of **relevant good practice** will help to:

- provide the Member States, the European Commission and the wider Evaluation Community with examples of good practice worth disseminating at EU level;
- complement the methodological guidance documents of the CMEF Handbook with concrete examples;
- support the work of the Evaluation Network’s thematic working groups with concrete experiences from the Member States;
- “feedback” experiences (issues, solutions, etc) to stakeholders working towards successful implementation of the rural development programmes across the EU.

How can we define good practice examples?

Within the Evaluation Expert Network a good practice is understood to mean “a practice, which increases the usefulness of evaluation as a tool for better formulation and implementation of rural development policies”. Examples may cover:

- Good practice in **evaluation methods** refer to methodological solutions for the evaluation requirements outlined in the CMEF. Examples could include: innovative methods for measuring the impact of RD programmes; solutions to overcome the attribution gap; to establish the counterfactual, etc. Read the example of a good practice in evaluation methodology from Sweden (see box on page 11).
- Good practice in **evaluation processes** refer to activities related to the set-up of the ongoing evaluation system. Examples could be: how managing authorities and evaluators involve other evaluation stakeholders; how recommendations of the evaluators are discussed and followed-up; solutions found to raise evaluation awareness; use of evaluation results; formal and technical aspects such as evaluation reports which are particularly

Photo: Courtesy of LIFE Nature project LIFE00/NAT/A/007055



Disseminating good practice in evaluation methods helps improve the measurement of impacts of RD programmes.

well-written or specific technical solutions etc. Read the examples of good practices in evaluation processes from Germany and Cyprus (see boxes on page 11).

The reference period for the collection of good practice by the Helpdesk is the 2007-2013 programming period. However, for methodological topics, examples from the 2000-2006 programming period are also considered.

Identification, selection and dissemination of good practice examples

A two-step procedure (within a template) for the identification of good practice has been developed, mainly carried out by the Helpdesk’s geographic experts¹ in the Member States.

1. The experts propose possible “good practice examples” in a short abstract which briefly presents the example and includes related follow-up questions.
2. The Helpdesk conducts a screening of the good practice description and related questions, then the experts complete the full description template for re-submission. The description includes sections on the context, solutions found, problems encountered including limitations and lessons learned.

The Helpdesk disseminates the examples in various ways (e.g. as illustrations in guidance documents newsletter articles, as a collection of “good practice examples” on the website and in replies to requests from evaluation stakeholders). Desk research and telephone interviews are the main methods used to prepare the good practice descriptions.

¹ Geographic experts are non-permanent team members of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development and act as the ‘relays’ of the Helpdesk in the Member States.

First examples of good practice in processes and methods

The focus of the work on good practice may be adapted over time. For instance, 2008 saw an emphasis on the ongoing evaluation systems, and related reporting. Some of these early good practice examples emerged during the work on the assessment of the evaluation sections of the annual progress reports (read article on page 5). The current search for good practice focuses on the measurement of impacts and the preparation of the mid-term evaluation. Some examples of good practice on evaluation processes and methods are presented below. For further information about any of the examples, please contact the Evaluation Helpdesk.

METHODS

Collecting reliable economic data to establish the counterfactual situation (RDP Sweden)

Sweden is building up systems to collect information related to output, result and impact indicators for axes 1 and 3. All the approved projects will be analysed for impact including comparisons with counterfactual situations (i.e. situations which would have occurred under a continuation of pre-existing policies but without this RDP intervention).

The collection of economic data from farmers and other rural businesses is no trivial exercise; the CMEF Handbook recommends data collection from national accounting networks and directly from application forms. However, experience has shown that the quality of data is rather low if farmers are asked directly to provide detailed economic information.

Sweden has managed to overcome this challenge. The Swedish authorities found that the most effective way to collect accurate data is to use farm accounting agencies, (which collect figures from their book keeping systems), and to carry out complementary studies. The largest such agency in Sweden services most of the country's farmers, and has the capacity to manage information electronically. This agency also supplies information to the Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN).

This agency further capitalizes its data pool and expertise. It is now involved, together with the relevant programme authorities, in fine-tuning the methodologies to establish the counterfactual situations for the various types of socio-economic support schemes under the RDP.

PROCESSES

Fiche tool to ensure continuous communication between evaluation stakeholders (RDP Thuringia and Brandenburg/Berlin, Germany)

To work together, build capacity and use evaluation results as a timely instrument to review programme progress, evaluation stakeholders (Managing Authority, evaluators, monitoring committee), have developed a monitoring and evaluation system based on "Measure Evaluation Fiches" for two German RD Programmes (Thuringia and Brandenburg/Berlin). This open file system: 1) facilitates continuous communication between the evaluator and the official task manager of each programme measure; and 2) allows for the evaluation activities to be conducted as soon as the information feeding into them becomes available. In this way, outputs of each evaluation activity can be discussed promptly, methodologies can be reviewed, applied and improved, and further evaluation tasks (including accompanying thematic studies) can be identified.

Capacity building seminars in order to raise evaluation awareness (RDP Cyprus)

The Managing Authority (MA) of the RDP in Cyprus concluded that most RDP stakeholders were not sufficiently familiar with the evaluation process, and this had a negative effect on data collection in 2000-2006. To prevent this from reoccurring in the current programming period, the MA decided to strengthen the evaluation awareness and knowledge of their RDP stakeholders.

The ex-post evaluators of the 2000-2006 were invited to play a key role in this exercise. Over a series of three-day seminars, the evaluators explained to officials involved in the implementation of the RDP the fundamentals of the evaluation process and how evaluation can be used as a management tool in the implementation of the RDP. The training sessions included discussions about the intervention logic and about how the baseline, output, result and impact indicators should articulate.

A different set of tools was used to increase the evaluation awareness among the social and economic stakeholders. The MA organised a dedicated session on the occasion of the June 2009 meeting of the Monitoring Committee. The socio-economic partners were introduced to the CMEF and Handbook, and discussed experiences from previous programmes.

News in Brief

Thematic Working Group on assessment of impacts

In May the Evaluation Expert Network held a kick-off workshop for a new Thematic Working Group (TWG). Its task is to identify viable approaches to assessing the impacts of rural development programmes in the context of multiple intervening factors.

Particular focus will be on providing practical guidance to Member States (MS) on how the seven common impact indicators of the CMEF can be interpreted and measured. It will also discuss programme specific indicators and methods of measurement, to improve the overall assessment of impacts for areas covered by the seven common impact indicators.

Experts covering all the specialist areas relevant for the CMEF have been engaged in the TWG activities. They are exploring various approaches to impact evaluation – qualitative versus quantitative, counterfactual versus factual, black box versus theory-based approaches, and micro (bottom-up) versus macro (top-down) – and judge how these can be best applied to their respective areas of study.

The guidance resulting from this process will draw heavily on the current methods used by the MS – and identified by the Helpdesk via surveys, direct contacts with the evaluators etc. Nevertheless, it will also contemplate state-of-the-art methods and good practice in evaluation, from wider sources, with potential to be successfully applied for the evaluation of the RDPs.

Without prejudging the final outcomes, which will be subject to a consultation process, here is a glimpse of the thematic group's early findings. The example below presents one impact indicator only ("Economic growth"), but similar approaches are envisaged for all the other programme impact areas.

The drafting process is scheduled to conclude in the autumn. A draft guidance document will be discussed with the MS at the end of 2009 in Evaluation Expert Committee meeting (see next issue of Rural Evaluation Newsletter).

Proposed way to construct the "Economic growth" impact indicator, through statistical/econometric methods that control for the differences in initial conditions and policies undertaken in programme areas with non-programme areas

1. Collection/Calculation of value added coefficients generated by rural development programme beneficiaries at the micro-level (farm or food processors) in a selected programme area.
2. Collection/Calculation of value added coefficients generated by similar enterprises (e.g. farms, food processors) which did not participate in a given rural development programme (e.g. through matching) in a selected programme area.
3. Calculation of the change in value added created at the group of beneficiaries caused by the rural development programme, by deriving appropriate counterfactuals and calculating Average Treatment on Treated Effects (ATT) using a combination of difference-in difference (DID) and ATT methods.
NB These methods will be adequately described and explained in the guidance document.
4. Explicit selection of other groups of enterprises considered to be indirectly affected by the rural development programme in a selected programme area (e.g. agricultural producers/food processors not supported by the current rural development programme, local producers of construction materials to be used in building of new inventories, local consultancy companies, etc).
5. Calculation of the change in value added in the above group (indirect programme affected: positively and negatively) and caused by the programme in a selected programme area.
6. Aggregation of the changes in value added in direct and indirect programme beneficiaries, in a selected programme area.
7. Calculation of rural development programme general equilibrium effects (substitution, displacement, multiplier, etc.) in a selected programme area.
8. Calculation of the Net Additional value added in a given programme area by subtracting (7) from (6).
9. Calculation of (8) in all respective regions (programme areas).
10. Expressing (9) in purchasing power standards (PPS).

Note: Given the conditions imposed in EU guidelines, the "Economic growth" impact indicator is generally not directly available from any statistical sources and would have to be calculated by the programme evaluators, using adequate evaluation methodologies.

News in Brief

Evaluation Expert Committee meets for second time

On 23 June the second meeting of the Expert Committee on Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes took place in Brussels, attended by representatives from Member States (MS), officials from the European Commission and the Helpdesk of the Evaluation Expert Network.

With preparations in MS now advancing for the Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) of the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) in 2010, the Helpdesk provided presentations on the topic. This included draft new guidance which is intended to assist Member States in organizing the MTE, and a snapshot of the state of preparation for the MTE across the EU-27 based on the results of a survey (read article on page 1).

Next was a presentation by the Commission on the measurement of the CMEF Gross Value Added indicators. This reported on the outcomes of a working group set up by the Commission, with the support of the Helpdesk, to address a number of key issues raised by the Member States with regard to the quantification of the value added indicators applied in farming and forestry. Agreement was reached on amendments to the following indicator fiches which are found in Annex 3 of the Handbook of the CMEF: result indicators 2 & 7 and impact indicators 1 & 3. The amended fiches are planned to be published on the Network's website following their presentation to the Rural Development Committee.

This linked to another presentation on the improvement of Rural Development Programmes' target and baseline indicators. DG AGRI received 83 out of 88 replies from MS to an invitation to improve and complete their RDP's targets (output, result and impact indicators) and baseline indicators. Most of the programmes have considerably improved their sets of targets. However, there are still many programming authorities who need

Second meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee, Brussels, 23 June 2009.



Leo Maier, head of DG Agriculture & Rural Development's evaluation unit, chairs the second meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee.

to complete the quantification of targets, mostly for impact indicators. Furthermore, almost all the programmes have some missing baselines. Baselines for water quality (gross nutrient balances), biodiversity (population of farmland birds), High Nature Value farmland and forestry and climate change (Utilised Agricultural Area devoted to renewable energy) are among the most problematic ones. The aim was to improve the target indicators by the end of June and MS were invited to complete the set of baseline indicators and to update these baselines at the level of 2006 by the end of 2009.

The Helpdesk then outlined the progress to date and some preliminary findings of the Thematic Working Group (TWG) relating to assessment of socio-economic and environmental impacts of the RDPs (read brief article on page 12). This TWG was launched in May 2009 to consider and highlight relevant approaches for measuring impacts in relation to areas covered by the seven common impact indicators. The work is envisaged to be finalised towards the end of the year.

The participants were then informed about the results of an EU-wide Synthesis of the first set of Annual Progress Reports concerning ongoing evaluation, which were submitted to the EC in June 2008. These reports covered the early (2007) activities related to the development of the ongoing evaluation systems for 2007-2013 (read article on page 5).

The meeting concluded with presentations about the ongoing evaluation systems in two Member States: Austria (read article on page 7) and Spain. Time was allocated for questions following each presentation, and many MS took good advantage of the opportunities for discussion of issues and clarification of issues. The next meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee is planned for 7 December 2009.

News in Brief

Helpdesk missions to Member States



Missions to Member States (MS) by the Helpdesk are an important part of the functioning of the Evaluation Expert Network. These visits are a useful and “human” way of exchanging information and developing partnerships between the Helpdesk

and evaluation stakeholders – in other words, making the Network a more effective service.

A plan for the missions to be undertaken in the first half of 2009 was approved by the Commission earlier this year. In line with the Annual Work Programme, **priority for the missions is given to:** MS where no focus groups (for needs assessment) could be held in 2008; MS facing particular challenges and difficulties; and New Member States.

As far as possible, meetings during the missions take place with **Managing Authorities, evaluators and national rural networks**. The main areas for discussion are the work being undertaken by the Helpdesk (particularly content and guidance related), improving the visibility of the Network, getting feedback on programme implementation and discussing the main evaluation issues emerging in MS.

The first mission, in early April, took place to Germany, being a large MS with considerable complexity due to its 14 Rural Development Programmes. Discussions with the Managing Authority and contracted evaluators

Photo: Courtesy of LIFE project LIFE02/NAT/P/008476



Methodological challenges for assessment of impacts are a focus of Member States' attention.

included methodological challenges for assessment of impacts, and possible contributions to the Thematic Working Group (see article page 12).

In May missions occurred to Denmark and Netherlands (neither held focus groups in 2008). Methodological aspects, including the challenge of assessing impacts following programme modifications due to the Health Check and the economic recovery package, were discussed.

At the end of June/early July missions took place to the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Austria (efficient use of Helpdesk resources to visit neighbouring country). Similar discussions on methodological challenges and support arose as with the earlier visits.

Missions are tentatively planned to all other MS from July 2009 to June 2010.

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The contents of this newsletter do not necessarily express the official views of the European Commission.