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FEAD Network
Fund for
European Aid
to the Most Deprived

Background information on "Monitoring and Evaluation of FEAD"

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18th FEAD Network Meeting on "Monitoring and Evaluation of FEAD"

1. Introduction

The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) aims to address the worst forms of poverty in the EU, including food deprivation, child poverty and homelessness. Across Member States, the fund has been implemented at national-level through Operational Programmes (OP), which consist of the delivery of food and/or basic material assistance such as school supplies and hygiene products (OP I) or social inclusion programmes (OP II).

In order to ensure optimal performance and quality improvement, as well as accountability and learning within the programme, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of FEAD is essential. Monitoring generates evidence on the activities and outputs of an intervention over time in a continuous and systematic way, whereas evaluation involves a summative or formative evidence-based judgement of the extent to which an intervention is effective, efficient, relevant and coherent. A monitoring system helps to identify whether an intervention is being applied on the ground as expected, addresses potential implementation problems, and identifies whether further action is required to ensure that it can achieve the intended objectives. Evaluation goes beyond an assessment of what has happened and considers why something has occurred and, if possible, how much has changed[1].

In the process of monitoring and evaluating FEAD, Member States and the Commission should take appropriate steps and involve relevant stakeholders in assessing the performance of the programme. According to the FEAD regulation, there are FEAD-proportionate mandatory M&E requirements at an EU and Operational Programme-level (OP). Furthermore, there are different practices in the field that benefit from more tailored M&E approaches at a programme and project-level. These tailored M&E practices depend on the way in which M&E can be useful, e.g., in managing operations, knowing the end-recipients and the target groups better, evaluating the leveraging effect of FEAD funding (e.g., in terms of raising additional resources and the mobilisation of volunteers) or assessing the impact of accompanying measures for food recipients. This paper seeks to compare a number of approaches at a programme and project-level as well as to learn from good practices and experiences within and outside FEAD.

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[1] Commission staff working document. Better Regulation Guidelines.
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/docs_autres_institutions/commission_europeenne/swd/2017/0350/COM_SWD(2017)0350_EN.pdf

2. Monitoring and evaluating FEAD at operational programme-level

2.1. Mandatory M&E requirements

According to the 2014 FEAD Regulation, in order to monitor the progress of implementation of the OP, Member States are required to submit annual and final implementation reports to the Commission, including essential and up-to-date information for the OP programmes[2]. Article 13 of the regulation stipulates the main requirements related to these reports, including the procedure and period of submission (by 30 June of each year). In addition, the same Article mentions that the content of the annual and final implementation reports including the list of common indicators, is laid down in a Delegated Act, EU No 1255/ 2014.

The intervention logic of OP I and OP II, as specified in the 'Guidance Fiche Monitoring under FEAD' provides guidance for this monitoring process. The guidance further explains the requirements set in the above Delegated Regulation [3]. Regarding OP I, the quantity of food and/or basic material assistance distributed describes the output of the intervention; the result of OP I is the estimated number of most deprived persons who are supported through the programme. Regarding FEAD OP II, the support delivered, i.e. the number of most deprived persons suffering from social exclusion participating in OP II activities, describes the output. The result of the intervention logic is that the most deprived persons are experiencing improved social inclusion,

Overall, the monitoring of OP II is more demanding than OP I, as it requires a system to record data on individual participants, and Member States are required to set up a monitoring committee in order to monitor OP II[Error! Bookmark not defined.]. Representatives of the relevant regional and local public authorities, as well as other relevant stakeholders, partake within the committee where the Commission takes an advisory role. The monitoring committee reviews the implementation of the programme and monitors the progress made towards achieving its specific objectives, using financial data, common and programme-specific indicators, and, if deemed relevant, the results of qualitative analyses.

In order to ensure the quality and design of each operational programme, Member States should have carried out ex-ante evaluations. With regard to OP I, Member States are required to carry out a structured survey of end recipients twice during the programming period (in 2017 and 2022). This survey aims to gain insight into socio-economic backgrounds, current and past situations and their satisfaction with FEAD assistance[4] in order to help Member States adapt the programme to the needs of end beneficiaries.

At the EU level, the Commission was required to present a mid-term evaluation of the Fund to the European Parliament and to the Council this year. The mid-term evaluation of FEAD was published in March 2019, covering the period of 2014–2017[5]. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, relevance and added value of FEAD implementation.

BOX I: Survey implementation in Malta

In Malta, the survey was carried out by The National Statistics Office (NSO) during the final distribution of FEAD assistance in October and November 2017. The process consisted of several phases:

1. Preparation, during which the NSO, Managing Authority, partner organisations and other relevant entities discussed the survey methodology and sample;

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[2] Regulation (EU) No 223/2014. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1477507626527&uri=CELEX:32014R0223

[3] https://circabc.europa.eu/sd/a/33ea5742-ee71-47b0-a889-21d4993087c4/FEAD_06_Draft_guidnace_note_on_monitoring_and_indicators_under_FEAD-final.pdf

[4] https://circabc.europa.eu/sd/a/9f02fa4e-8853-42a0-aefa f1b836d5bd80/00%20FEAD_guidance_note_on_structured_survey.pdf

[5] https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1089&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9331

2. Training provided to interviewers and distribution centres' staff;
3. Communication on the survey to end-recipients through a notification letter (survey was voluntary);
4. Implementation of the survey, which took place at the time of distribution of the assistance.

Source: European Commission. Detailed implementation report 2017
https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8225&furtherPubs=yes

The Managing Authorities of an OP II shall carry out at least one evaluation before 31 December 2022. By 31 December 2024, the Commission shall complete an ex-post evaluation in close cooperation with Member States to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of FEAD, as well as the sustainability of the obtained results and the added value of the Fund.

Relevant data should provide input for evaluations, such as surveys of beneficiaries as well as evaluations that were conducted during the programming period. When evaluating FEAD projects, it is important to bear in mind that evaluations should respect the privacy of end-recipients and be carried out in such a way that they do not stigmatise the most deprived persons. Moreover, it should be taken into account that deprivation is a complex concept, and is multi-dimensional in nature.

2.2. Country-specific examples of M&E

The advantage of a mandatory common approach for the M&E process is that all Member States address similar and common elements. In addition to minimal requirements for M&E, country-specific practices of additional M&E practices exist.

Several Member States conducted research studies, evaluations, and/or surveys to assess the performance of their operations and end-recipients' satisfaction with the assistance they received. For example, Italy conducted a pilot study on its food delivery at the end of 2015, which revealed that 71% of partner organisations that delivered food aid also introduced accompanying measures, such as advice or information on social and medical services. Austria sent a feedback questionnaire to 10,000 deprived households in 2016. The results demonstrated the positive impact of their 'schools kits' project. Sweden conducted an evaluation of FEAD management and the first implementation phases of projects that were carried out by an external contractor[6]. Furthermore, in Estonia, a project was set up to monitor the progress of FEAD beneficiaries and in Germany, a comprehensive evaluation of FEAD was conducted.

BOX II: Monitoring FEAD target group participation in ESF and other accompanying measures – Ministry of Social Affairs (Estonia)

Beyond the immediate need for food in Estonia, FEAD end-recipients face several social, psychological and economic challenges such as unemployment, school dropout and alcohol addiction. A number of accompanying measures to address these issues were set up by partner organisations, local government, the unemployment insurance fund and the Ministry of Social Affairs. However, a system to monitor progress of these FEAD beneficiaries was missing. Therefore, a project was established to collect and manage information concerning the participation in FEAD and recipients in non FEAD-funded accompanying measures. The Managing Authority developed its own IT system to collect and crosscheck data from different registers and monitor FEAD recipients' participation rates. The Estonian Statistics Office (ESO) collects and stores all relevant data from new and existing databases, such as employment registers, unemployment insurance fund registers, education information systems and registers for social services and benefits. The Managing Authority receives aggregated data from the ESO and monitors participation rates to identify issues and, if necessary, to intervene. This information

[6] European Commission. Summary of the annual implementation reports for the operational programmes co-financed by the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived in 2016
https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=20387&langId=en

is shared with the organisations implementing the accompanying measures. This system has significantly increased the amount and quality of information available to the Ministry of Social Affairs and the recipients. Improved knowledge of the profile of FEAD recipients, as well as encouraging participation rates in the accompanying measures have enabled the Ministry of Social Affairs to improve their offer and adapt it to the needs of the recipients. For those activities that record low participation rates, the 'Abiline' magazine was used to raise awareness of the importance of the issue at stake.

Source: FEAD 2018 Catalogue of case studies
https://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/fead_case_studies/book/23/#zoom=z

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BOX III: Evaluation of FEAD in Germany

In Germany, an evaluation was conducted to assess the initial situation of target groups, providing input for the design of the second round of FEAD funding. The evaluation consisted of an analysis of existing data and an exploratory evaluation of three projects. Telephone surveys were conducted for all 77 projects, as well as case studies of 14 projects. The telephone survey inquired about profiles in the target group, the volume and type of assistance provided to end-recipients, the methods of cooperation with partner organisations and the regional government's assistance system. Issues of gender-equality and non-discrimination were an important part of the survey. The case studies explored the initial situation of the target groups, mapped the support provided to them and assessed its results. 105 interviews were conducted in total.

Source: European Commission. Detailed implementation report 2017
https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8225&furtherPubs=yes

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3. Monitoring and evaluation at project level

3.1. Monitoring tools

Traditional data collection and reporting mechanisms are often MS Excel-based matrixes with different spreadsheets. However, reporting processes using these traditional tools are evidently time-consuming and cumbersome. Sophisticated, dynamic online monitoring tools are becoming widely available, such as the Ulysse software. These tools support the improvement of data collection through digitalisation and benefit initiatives such as 'Les Restaurants du Coeur', which supports around one million persons per year and was challenged with expanding activities[7]. In Spain, Catalonian food distribution centres, like the Red Cross and Caritas, have developed eQuàliment, a system to manage the distribution of food in an efficient, equitable and transparent way[8]. Other examples include the project 'Little Helper' in Poland; and, in Spain, an app that helps coordinate volunteers and manage their involvement in FEAD.

BOX IV: Little Helper: Using IT to facilitate food aid reporting (Poland)
'Little Helper' is an IT software that helps to reduce time-consuming reporting processes. The Federation of Polish Food Banks and the Krakow Food Bank developed the software. It supports the overall monitoring of the food distribution chain and in particular, helps to keep track of the number of food parcels received by each local partner organisation. With all information contained in a single online spreadsheet, the tool facilitates the transfer and aggregation of data. 'Little Helper' cuts down the time needed for the calculation and validation of data and, having reduced the occurrence of errors during the monitoring process, the accuracy of reporting has improved. With over half of the 1330 local organisations that cooperate with the food bank, the tool has proven to be highly popular. In fact, the use of the system has increased the willingness of local partner organisations to engage in FEAD delivery, as it reduces their administrative and monitoring burden.

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[7] https://fsws.gov.mt/en/fsws/news/Documents/Documents%202016/FEAD%20case%20studies.pdf
[8] https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8165

BOX V: An app to coordinate volunteers and help them to manage their own involvement (Spain)

Besides food distribution, Spanish Red Cross (SRC) volunteers provide information and support to access social services, psychosocial care, interventions to improve employability and labour market integration, counselling, courses on household economics and advice on healthy diets. Volunteers at the SRC are employed in a range of positions including project management, counselling and coaching, psychosocial care, logistics, warehouse keeping and administration. The efficient scheduling of thousands of volunteers with the right qualifications that can respond to a variety of requests is an everyday challenge, and the invasive planning process might easily discourage volunteers. Therefore, a back-office application was developed, which registers activities and defines the needs of volunteers according to their positions. Potential volunteers are automatically contacted when an activity is organised, based on the parameters of the activity and the volunteer's preferences. Through the self-management applications, volunteers can check proposed activities and confirm their participation. Requests are easily and quickly processed, and the app allows volunteers to update their contact details and availability. In 2015, 63,387 volunteers organised their participation in various activities through this application process. The combined use of back-office applications to plan activities and front-office applications to facilitate volunteers' self-management reduces management time by up to 65%, which also has a positive impact on FEAD delivery.

Source:
https://fsws.gov.mt/en/fsws/news/Documents/Documents%202016/FEAD%20case%20studies.pdf

3.2. Evaluation designs and approaches

In order to provide an objective judgement of project-level outcomes for end-recipients, robust impact evaluation approaches tailored to specific projects are desirable. At programme-level, the use of (quasi) experimental impact evaluation approaches to comparing national-level M&E systems can be problematic[9]. There are a number of tools and evaluation designs available for project-level evaluations that, however, vary in price and quality.

Boxes VI and VII below showcase two recent examples of project-level FEAD evaluations. Box VI highlights an impact assessment of (OP I-funded) FEAD intervention in Spain, conducted by the Spanish Red Cross Research and Social Innovation Department. Box VII examines a mid-term evaluation conducted by a Dutch research and consultancy firm of an OP II-funded FEAD intervention in the Netherlands, entitled 'Elderly in the Neighbourhood'. Both of these examples were conducted in 2018 and use a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. From these examples, it appears that while food distribution facilities present a conducive environment to enrol large numbers of end-recipients into a sample, this is arguably less so for OP II-type social inclusion interventions. It should also be stated that while these two examples provide valuable lessons learned in terms of research design and operational recommendations, neither of the studies necessarily demonstrate new or innovative ways of engaging with various types of data that is collected throughout the project. However, there are many examples of implementing partners exhibiting a strong competency to engage with process and performance monitoring data to improve service delivery in innovative ways.

BOX VI: Elderly in the Neighbourhood (the Netherlands)

The project "Ouderen in de Wijk" (OIDW, translation: Elderly in the Neighbourhood) is supported within the framework of FEAD. OIDW is carried out by public libraries in the four largest cities of the Netherlands. A mid-term evaluation was conducted to assess whether the supported activities are

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[9] See: Lessons from the EU-SPS programme, "Monitoring and Evaluating Social Protection Systems" (OECD 2019) https://www.oecd.org/dev/inclusivesocietiesanddevelopment/Lessons_learned_M-E.pdf

effective and efficient, and the extent to which the objective laid down in the Operational Programme EFMB 2014–2020 has been achieved. Four case studies were conducted for which the local project leaders, the neighbourhood networkers, hosts, volunteers, municipality and the participating elderly were interviewed. Furthermore, the national project leader was interviewed and surveys with participants were conducted at the beginning and end of the programme. Lastly, several financial reports provided input for the analysis. According to the researchers, the evaluation of the OIDW was not easy. This was primarily due to the scope of the programme and the programme theory. Creating a 'hub' for the elderly is the core objective of the programme and the added value is created if the target group is referred to appropriate help by OIDW. This is an abstract objective, however, and therefore difficult to evaluate. It was also challenging for the researchers to obtain a reliable overview of the implementation of OIDW. Although there was data gathered from the intake and exit questionnaires, there was no complete overview of organised activities, time spent by implementers, or reliable data of end-user registration. The researchers therefore indicated that they depended mainly on information from the interviews, rather than factual data.

Another important challenge faced during the evaluation was the difference between the European subsidy rules, with its objectives, indicators and a focus on accountability and added value, and the objectives and practice of the local libraries. The implementers were not accustomed to justify their activities or achieve certain goals, which affected their willingness to contribute to the evaluation.

Source: https://www.uitvoeringvanbeleidszw.nl/documenten/publicaties/subsidies/efmb-europees-fonds-voor-meest-behoeftigen/onderzoek-en-evaluatie-efmb/tussentijdse-evaluatie-efmb-230218-def-incl-summary

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BOX VII: FEAD impact assessment in Spain: Perception of beneficiaries, organisations, staff and volunteers

This impact assessment was carried out in 2018 by the Spanish Red Cross Research and Social Innovation Department. Its objective was two-fold, namely to (1) analyse the situation of food beneficiaries of FEAD assisted by the Spanish Red Cross and the Federation of Food Banks in order to understand their situation of social vulnerability, and (2) to analyse the programme's operation, strengths and the challenges it must respond to in the future.

The research team was able to enrol a very large sample size of 27,443 end-recipients, complemented with focus groups, interviews and further survey interviews with key institutional stakeholders. While the study provides an interesting insight into the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of end-recipient groups, it is limited to descriptive statistics and does not assess the impact on end-recipients with regard to the programme's intervention logic and anticipated result chains. The value of this particular assessment lies more in its potential to delineate the specific definitions of end-recipients, thereby enabling a more narrow definition of baselines and target values, which for OP I have been cited by the European Court of Auditors as problematic.

Source:https://circabc.europa.eu/webdav/CircaBC/empl/FeadEval/Library/08%20Meeting%2022%20March%202019/03a_Red_Cross_report.pdf

4. M&E systems and tools: other international experiences

When comparing experiences regarding M&E systems, tools and evaluation approaches from FEAD with other international best practices in similar programmes, it is important to make two different distinctions.

The first is the distinction between FEAD operational programme-level macro M&E, and micro M&E at the implementing partner project-level. As described in the OECD's Lessons from the EU-SPS programme, "Monitoring and Evaluating Social Protection Systems" from 2019, a programme-level macro framework can consolidate results from micro assessments into a planning framework, describing how interventions across sectors create synergies. The macro evaluation framework should thus encompass tools that link multiple interrelated interventions to cross-sectoral outcomes, and can assess both "intra-sectoral" and "inter-sectoral" linkages[10].

The second is the distinction between systems that are geared towards collecting and analysing process/performance monitoring data, and those focusing more on results with the ultimate goal of assessing a project or programme's contribution to positive impacts on the lives of end-recipients. Since much of the collective international experience in the field of food distribution M&E comes from the humanitarian assistance domain, there is an abundance of innovative examples from across the world on how to engage with monitoring data on food distribution. This is less prevalent for impact assessment-type studies related to food distribution and its linkages to other related social inclusion measures.

Programme-level (macro) monitoring: Defined as the process of identifying and tracking performance indicators and reviewing the programme's implementation at regular intervals – monitoring is critical to provide accessible details on various facets of a programme. The previously mentioned OECD guidance paper on Lessons from the EU-SPS Programme suggests that institutional arrangements such as management information systems (MIS) and integrated delivery systems including single window services are critical to enable improvements in programme design and implementation. Increasingly, countries aim to optimise the use of the gathered data for the development of efficient and effective social protection systems. In recent years, there have been positive developments on this front in East Asia, with Indonesia[11] as an example, investing in the development and utilisation of single registries to enhance their social protection systems.

Project-level (micro) monitoring: In the humanitarian sector this is commonly referred to as distribution monitoring (DM) and post-distribution monitoring data by UN agencies and NGOs, for which there are a range of tried-and-tested tools and applications. One interesting example is the Last Mile Mobile Solution (LMMS), developed by World Vision International, which is currently being used in 27 countries, reaching 9 million beneficiaries (see box VIII below). Another interesting example of how food distribution IT platforms are effectively using monitoring data to improve their effectiveness and quality of service delivery comes from the New York City Food Assistance Collaborative (NYCFAC) (see Box IX below). There are a myriad of examples in this category that complement the growing body of experience coming out of FEAD implementing partner practices described in section 3.1 of this paper. The extent to which these tools are subsequently linked to impact assessment or evaluation designs are unfortunately quite limited.

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[10] Ibid footnote 9, p32

[11] See Unified Database at the National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction (Tim Nasional Percepatan Penanggulangan Kemiskinan or TNP2K): http://www.tnp2k.go.id/data-and-indicator/unified-database

BOX VIII: Last Mile Mobile Solutions (LMMS)

Since 2008, World Vision has been implementing the Last Mile Mobile Solutions (LMMS) in 27 countries, reaching 9 million beneficiaries. LMMS is a stand-alone technology solution that was developed in collaboration with the IT industry. It combines software applications with custom hardware to digitise (and simplify) beneficiary registration, verification, distribution planning and management, monitoring and reporting with the ability to integrate with third party applications. Aid recipients are accurately tracked. Rations and supplies are calculated and distributed with precision. Web-generated reports are immediately available for donors and stakeholders at the close of key operational activities such as the distribution of humanitarian relief aid. Through automation, LMMS helps to solve operational issues that affect aid delivery, such as long waiting times for aid recipients, fraud or errors in allocations to families and inaccurate reporting or tracking of supplies and inventory.

Source: https://www.wvi.org/disaster-management/last-mile-mobile-solution-lmms

BOX IX: Automating data monitoring to help NYC food pantries

In the US, food insecurity affects millions of individuals every year. The Plentiful app, launched in 2016, is an initiative of the NYC Food Assistance Collaborative (NYCFAC) that addresses many of the perennial issues surrounding non-profit food pantries. The app's successful growth has presented the organisation with an opportunity to use existing data to achieve an even greater impact for their clients, pantries, and the sector. With this goal in mind, Plentiful and DataKind have partnered to create an interactive dashboard that tracks and monitors trends in their data, allowing the organisation to respond to issues faster and connect more people to food.

Source: https://www.plentifulapp.com, supported by https://www.datakind.org/

Programme-level (macro) impact assessments: Within the context of FEAD, an example of this is referenced in section 2.1. More generally, global experience highlights the importance of a rigorous mixed-methods approach to macro-level impact assessments, where quantitative and qualitative techniques complement each other. Comprehensive assessments are rooted in an in-depth understanding of the programme and the poverty context it seeks to address[12]. Innovative evidence-building approaches inform policy-makers on how comprehensive and integrated interventions interact to strengthen cross-sectoral policy outcomes. The European Social Network has developed a relevant evidence-based social services toolkit for planning and evaluating social services. Published in 2015[13], the toolkit consists of guidance on what type of knowledge is required for commissioning services. The toolkit focuses on which questions may be useful to consider when planning services, as well as which questions are useful when evaluating services. The toolkit also includes a review of international evidence-based social work databases or evidence hubs that may be useful for practitioners when they search for evidence-based practice that could guide their service planning and evaluation.

Project-level (micro) impact assessments: Two examples of project-level impact assessments of FEAD-funded interventions are provided in section 3.2. Both evaluations utilised a mixed-methods approach, but were focused on questions regarding relevance, coherence and efficiency. In both cases, this provided actionable operational recommendations that could be used by other FEAD implementing partners in other countries. Notwithstanding, the fundamental questions about impact and to what extent FEAD-funded interventions have made a significant change in the lives of end-recipients could not be adequately answered.

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[12] Ibid footnote 9, p37

[13] See: https://www.esn-eu.org/sites/default/files/publications/ResearchandEvidence_Report__FINAL_1pag.pdf

Over the past decade, a growing body of literature has emerged on how to evaluate the impacts of social service interventions like those funded by FEAD[14]. Quasi-experimental designs such as the Randomised Control Trial (RCT) are not suitable for evaluating impact at programme-level; however, they are particularly useful for doing so at project-level within a recipient country. RCTs and other quasi-experimental methods are much less used in the field of humanitarian research and evaluations; however, food distribution is often seen as belonging to a suite of emergency life-saving activities that are not normally evaluated using the criteria of impact and sustainability. Consequently, while FEAD implementing partners may be able to draw significantly from the humanitarian sector in learning how to effectively engage with novel approaches to utilising monitoring data, the same cannot be said for examples of impact assessment or evaluation tools. Instead, organisations that are pioneering the use of RCTs for social inclusion and protection interventions work more in the international development sector (see Box X below).

BOX X: Targeting the Hard-Core Poor: An Impact Assessment

In 2011, Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) reported the results of a randomised impact evaluation of a programme designed to reach the poorest of the poor and elevate them out of extreme poverty. The programme was initially developed in Bangladesh, where it has reached thousands of beneficiaries, and is being piloted and studied in over seven countries. The results of this study, based on a pilot in India, indicated that this intervention succeeded in elevating the economic situation of the poorest. It was found that the programme results in a 15% increase in household consumption and has positive impacts on other measures of household wealth and welfare, such as assets and emotional well-being. Results are consistent with the notion that the wealth transfer, in the form of asset distribution, directly increased consumption among beneficiary households through the liquidation of assets, but other sources of income, notably from small enterprises, appear to have contributed to the overall increase in consumption as well.

Source: https://www.poverty-action.org/sites/default/files/publications/targeting-hard-core-poor-impact-assessment.pdf

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5. Challenges in organising M&E and way forward

What are the challenges implementing partners face in relation to setting up relevant, effective and efficient M&E systems for their FEAD-related activities? This paper has provided a number of insights into the different levels and modalities of M&E in relation to FEAD programming. The following challenges may be noted:

- **Broadly defined target groups:** The definition of the "Most deprived" (Article 2 (2) FEAD Regulation) remains generic, as it is up to Member States to define those most exposed to poverty and to whom FEAD support should be targeted through their national Operational Programmes. This is in line with the shared management principle of subsidiarity. This may make it challenging for the M&E systems at Operational Programme level to be able to measure and compare the results between target groups in different countries.
- **Challenges related to monitoring and evaluation of social inclusion measures:** OP II programming aims directly at the social inclusion of the most deprived, requiring Member States to set out the expected results for the specific objectives, indicating output and results indicators with baselines and target values[15]. For OP I programmes, accompanying measures are being monitored

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[14] The following two systematic reviews from 2019 are recommended:
An, R., Wang, J., Liu, J., Shen, J., Loehmer, E., & McCaffrey, J. (2019). A systematic review of food pantry-based interventions in the USA. Public Health Nutrition, 22(9), 1704-1716.
Holley, Clare E., and Carolynne Mason. "A Systematic Review of the Evaluation of Interventions to Tackle Children's Food Insecurity." Current nutrition reports 8, no. 1 (2019): 11-27.
[15] Ibid.

in the Annual Implementation reports of Member States. They are quite diverse and monitored in a qualitative way. In addition, the survey of end recipients carried out twice over the programming period by the Managing Authorities (evaluation) gives important information on the type of accompanying measures in the various Member States and on the usefulness of advice and guidance by Managing Authorities. A 2019 report published by the European Court of Auditors (ECA) suggested that it might be beneficial to develop relevant performance indicators to monitor the achievement of the programme's objectives.[16] Further to this, the Commission provided a response stating that defining common indicators for accompanying measures would be against the principle of proportionality applied in FEAD, as accompanying measures are limited to 5% of the support.[17]

- **Lack of project-level impact data:** The project-level evaluations reviewed in this paper focused primarily on the evaluation criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and coherence. Establishing a clear evidence base for impact and sustainability is still lacking, but can be assessed through an ex-post evaluation after the projects' completion. Even though there are many aspects to deprivation that cannot easily be quantified using a quantitative evaluation methodology, and even though (quasi) experimental impact assessments and evaluations are generally expensive and time consuming, it would be very valuable in the context of country-specific FEAD projects to establish such an evidence base. This is particularly the case when assessing the joint impact of food assistance and other accompanying social inclusion measures.

- **Limited implementing partner data maturity**: Many of the FEAD implementing partners at country level are volunteer-based organisations; NGOs such as the Food Banks, Red Cross, Caritas and other civil society organisations. While there are numerous examples presented in this paper of partners harnessing data to improve their engagements with end-recipients and enhance service delivery, it is also recognised that utilising data, whether for monitoring or evaluation purposes, on an organisational level can be a slow process that lags behind the relatively fast pace at which this data is collected. A review of the FEAD project-level evidence suggests that the management of FEAD implementing partners' data assets and corresponding activities varies among implementing partners. It can be challenging to conduct an evaluation of a project where data collected is insufficient to provide a conclusion (see Box VI). However, with the increased accessibility of digital tools and modernised administrative methods, implementing partners are moving towards an improvement in data collection, storage and accessibility (see Box IX).

6. Conclusions

In order to ensure optimal performance and quality improvement, as well as accountability and learning within the programmes, monitoring and evaluation of FEAD is essential. According to FEAD regulations, there are FEAD-proportionate mandatory M&E requirements at an EU and Operational Programme-level. In addition to these minimal requirements for M&E, country-specific examples of M&E practices exist. In this paper, we have discussed several of these examples, as well as examples of monitoring tools and M&E training, both within as well as outside FEAD. Lastly, we elaborated on challenges in monitoring and evaluation FEAD.

The 18th FEAD Network Meeting provides a valuable opportunity to raise awareness and further discuss these issues. By relying on the knowledge and experience of the FEAD community on the subject, it is expected that FEAD will further strengthen its M&E skills for better accountability and learning in the future.

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[16] https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR19_05/SR_FEAD_EN.pdf

[17] Ibid.

References for consultation:

Link to downloadable Catalogue case studies 2018
Link to downloadable Catalogue of case studies 2017
Link to downloadable Catalogue case studies 2016

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