

Sixth meeting of the Expert Committee on Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes

26th November 2010

Centre Albert Borschette, rue Froissart 36, 1040 - Brussels

MINUTES

1. INTRODUCTION BY THE COMMISSION AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The Expert Committee on Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes (abbreviated to "Evaluation Expert Committee") met for the sixth time at the European Commission's premises in Brussels on 26 November 2010.

The meeting was chaired by Leo Maier, the Head of Unit L4 (Evaluation of measures applicable to agriculture, studies) in DG AGRI who introduced the agenda. The agenda was adopted, and the topics addressed during the meeting followed the agreed agenda as summarized below.

2. RESULTS OF THE SYNTHESIS OF THE ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORTS FOR 2009 CONCERNING ONGOING EVALUATION

The Evaluation Helpdesk presented a summary of the results of the synthesis of the Annual Progress Reports for 2009 concerning ongoing evaluation. The Evaluation Helpdesk stressed the general improvements of the evaluation sections in the Annual Progress Reports for 2009 compared to the previous years both in terms of quality and coverage of the information provided.

Questions & Answers:

- **Presentation of the report to Member States and possibility to comment**

A Member State asked when the synthesis report would be made available and what was the timing foreseen to address comments.

The Evaluation Helpdesk stated that the report should be sent out before Christmas. The European Commission added that the Member States will be given two weeks for submitting their comments on the report.

- **Nature of the indicative outline structure**

One Member State asked if the indicative outline structure referred to in Guidance note B – Evaluation Guidelines – of the Handbook on CMEF was to be followed and became therefore binding for the Member States although it was mentioned as indicative in the guidance note.

The Evaluation Helpdesk recalled that both the indicative outline structure and further recommendations provided in the Explanatory note (Synthesis of the Annual Progress Reports for 2008 – Annex 1) were not binding for the Member States. Nevertheless, the European Commission encouraged the Member States to follow them to allow comparison and thus improve the quality of future reports presented by the Member States.

- **Evaluation culture and awareness, capacity building and ownership**

A Member State welcomed the good results of the Evaluation Expert Committee's work who contributed to spreading some evaluation culture and awareness to Managing Authorities as it is

reflected in the synthesis of the Annual Progress Reports of this year. The Member State pointed out that capacity building activities had been organised through its Network during the year and was wondering how other Member States without a Network were stimulating their capacity building activities. It then asked how to spread the results from the report at local level in order to show the usefulness of the work carried out.

The Evaluation Helpdesk replied that it has included an activity to get an overview on evaluation-related capacity building activities in its Annual Work Programme for 2011 that will be presented under point 3 (activity 2.2.1 of the AWP 2011).

The European Commission welcomed the increasing of evaluation culture and awareness and stated that the topic will be further discussed in the afternoon session about the objectives and principles of the monitoring and evaluation system for Rural Development post-2013 (cf. point 5).

3. FINDINGS OF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT IN THE MEMBER STATES AND ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME OF THE EVALUATION EXPERT NETWORK FOR 2011

The Evaluation Helpdesk then reported on the results of an assessment of needs carried out through focus groups in the Member States during autumn 2010. The focus of the needs assessment was on assessing the needs for the current programming period and the needs for improving the CMEF post-2013. Needs concerning the current programming period have been translated into concrete activities in next year's Work Programme, whereas needs concerning the CMEF post-2013 will be fed into relevant activities at EU-level for reviewing the CMEF for the next programming period.

Questions & Answers:

- **Assessing the MTE Reports**

The Member States were generally pleased with the presentation of the needs assessment and the content of the draft Annual Work Programme (AWP) for 2011. They acknowledged that a major part of the AWP will be the assessment of the mid-term evaluation reports and some questions were asked in relation to the quality of the assessment of these technical reports. Some Member States pointed out that the quality of the assessment depended on the evaluation knowledge of the Desk Officers and expressed concerns regarding a consistent approach.

The European Commission took note of the comments and stated that for the assessment of the MTE reports it was important to look at quality and achieving a consistent approach. The Desk Officers, who have the experience of the Member States and programmes, would be supported by the Evaluation Helpdesk who has the knowledge of evaluation methodologies. The Evaluation Helpdesk is currently developing an assessment tool for the Desk Officers and will deliver a targeted training in order to implement the tool in a consistent way, and provide ongoing support after the delivery of the training session.

- **Sharing results**

Some Member States pointed out the need to share experiences with other Member States regarding the MTE results and also to disseminate results within the Member States.

The European Commission stated that the MTE will show the progress made on the ground and that it is therefore also important to disseminate the evaluation results. As underlined by the Synthesis of APRs for 2009, the preparation of evaluation processes has been improved and is expected to be mirrored in the quality of the MTE reports. The European Commission stressed that the results of the synthesis of the MTE at EU level will be disseminated widely but until then it is up to the Managing Authorities to use the MTE reports for their dissemination purposes. The reports should highlight the best practices and provide recommendations for the future. The MAs are responsible for publishing the reports on their own websites. The European Commission took note of the comments and will look at ways of disseminating the results at EU Level. In that respect, the European Commission invited the Member States to think about the possibility of organising and hosting a major conference on practical experiences during the implementation of the MTE and methodological challenges in assessing impacts of RDPs in cooperation with DG Agriculture and the Helpdesk.

- **CMEF post-2013 and ex ante evaluation**

Comments were addressed by the Member States on the AWP activities concerning the CMEF post-2013. One Member State also raised the question of the ex ante evaluation for the next programming period and regretted that the topic had not been mentioned in the AWP for next year. Concerns were raised that including the topic in the AWP 2012 would be too late to carry out the work needed.

The Evaluation Helpdesk acknowledged that the guidelines for the ex ante evaluation for the next programming period were not included in the current version of the draft AWP. The European Commission suggested that this topic will be taken into account in the CMEF post-2013 working group and that comments on the CMEF post-2013 will be dealt with during the afternoon working session (cf. point 5).

The Member States were asked to send their comments in writing regarding the draft Annual Work Programme by 10th December 2010, as the document needs to be finalised before the end of December. The paper on the 2010 needs assessment will be finalised when the results of all of the focus group reports are made available and have been included therein and sent to the Member States for comments (2 weeks are planned to receive the comments) before it is published on the website.

4. RESULTS OF THE SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE COMMON MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM

The Evaluation Helpdesk presented the final results of the updated SWOT analysis of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation System that has been carried out over the last months.

In order to illustrate the different actions and activities that Member States have undertaken to reflect on the common monitoring and evaluation system, a Member State (Germany) was invited to make a presentation on the general reflection carried out in the country: The future of monitoring and evaluation: simpler, more transparent, more efficient.

Questions & Answers

As most issues addressed in the updated SWOT analysis concerned the future monitoring and evaluation system post-2013, it was agreed to tackle and reply to open questions during the afternoon session (cf. point 5).

For issues that will not be addressed in the afternoon session, the Member States were invited to address their comments in writing by 10th December.

5. RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY POST-2013: PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES OF THE COMMON MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The Common Agricultural Policy is due to be reformed by 2013. After a wide-ranging public debate the Commission presented on 18 November 2010 a Communication on "The CAP towards 2020", which outlines options for the future CAP and launches the institutional debate with the other institutions and with stakeholders and prepares the ground for the legal proposals to be adopted by the Commission in 2011. The objective of the Communication is:

- to highlight the key challenges and the major policy issues regarding EU agriculture and rural areas,
- to outline possible policy orientations and options for the future.

As part of the preparation of legislative proposals for the post-2013 policy, the Commission has solicited input from interested parties to complete the diagnosis and exploration of options for reform outlined in the Communication and in the consultation document for the impact assessment. The consultation for the Impact Assessment of the Common Agricultural Policy 2020 aims at:

- informing and allowing stakeholders to submit their views on the problem definition, reform objectives and scenarios proposed,
- gathering facts and analytical documents to help the impact assessment.

The consultation will end on 25th January 2011 (http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/index_en.htm).

The review of the CMEF is an integral part of this process although it must follow slightly behind the establishment of the strategy and objectives to ensure full compatibility with them.

The structured review of the CMEF started in February this year and included various contributions from the Evaluation Expert Committee meetings: e.g. the production of a mind map summarizing the findings from a round table on the first Member State experiences from the implementation of the CMEF. Additionally internal working sessions took place in the European Commission. On the basis of these preparatory activities, 3 objectives for the rural development monitoring and evaluation system and 7 guiding principles have emerged, which were presented and discussed with the members of the Evaluation Expert Committee. In a group discussion (12 groups of 5 participants) the proposed text was examined in detail. In a feedback session every group had appointed a rapporteur to comment on the proposed text. (See the amended text in the annex).

The European Commission stressed that the discussions of this afternoon session aimed at providing further input for the preparation of the respective regulations and guidelines and was neither a consensus on the policy framework nor the future form of the CMEF.

6. A.O.B.

One Member State asked if the European Commission's SFC-System that receives all MTE reports had the capacity to handle big files and if the system was operational after Christmas.

The European Commission recalled that the submission of the MTE reports was first linked to the deadline of 31st December and ensured that the system could handle very big files. As for the second part of the question, the European Commission took note of it and will come back with a firm answer.

The next meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee is tentatively planned on March 15th 2011; the exact date will be communicated to the Member States in due time.