



European Evaluation Network
for Rural Development



European Commission
Agriculture and Rural Development

SYNTHESIS REPORT ON FOCUS GROUP RESULTS 2012

DRAFT (DECEMBER 2012)

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European Evaluation Network
for Rural Development

The European Evaluation Network for Rural Development (abbreviated to “Evaluation Expert Network”) operates under the responsibility of the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development. The overall aim of the Network is to increase the usefulness of evaluation as a tool for improving the formulation and implementation of rural development policies by helping to establish good practice and capacity building in the evaluation of Rural Development Programmes up until 2013.

Additional information about the activities of the Evaluation Expert Network and its Evaluation Helpdesk is available on the Internet through the Europa server (<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/>)

**SYNTHESIS REPORT ON
FOCUS GROUP RESULTS
2012**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEQs	Common Evaluation Questions
CMEF	Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
FADN	Farm Accountancy Data Network
FG	Focus Group
LAG	Local Action Group / Leader
MA	Managing Authority
MS	Member States
MTE	Mid-Term Evaluation
MC	Monitoring Committee
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NRN	National Rural Networks
PA	Paying Agency
RDP	Rural Development Programme

1 INTRODUCTION

In early 2012 the Evaluation Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development screened through its Geographic Experts potential topics for the yearly Focus Groups. Several issues in relation to the transition from the current to the next programming period were suggested. Finally, it was agreed to organize the Focus Groups under the heading:

Monitoring and Evaluation of RDPs on the way from the current to the next programming period:

- What are the main changes?
- How well are rural development stakeholders prepared for it?
- What are the consequences for ongoing, ex post and ex ante evaluation?

The findings of the Focus Groups have been summarized in **country specific Focus Group Newsletters** that have been shared with the respective Managing Authorities and focus group participants. The synthesized findings of this report have been presented to the Member States on 18 December 2012 at the Evaluation Expert Committee Meeting in Brussels and will be shared with responsible Geographic Desks of DG Agriculture and Rural Development.

N.B: The present draft report summarizes the reports of 22 Focus Group meetings and covers 25 Member States. It does not include findings from Lithuania, where a Focus Group will take place in January 2013 and from Bulgaria where a Focus Group has not yet been agreed). The report is a draft document and is still missing the final quality control, language and layout check. The conclusions and several minor parts (Acronyms, Annex etc.) still need to be included in the final version.

2 CONDUCTING THE FOCUS GROUPS 2012

2.1 Method used to conduct the Focus Groups

As part of a yearly exercise, from **September to December 2012**, the Geographic Experts of the Evaluation Helpdesk organized Focus Groups in the Member States in order to collect needs, ideas, opinions and experiences of evaluation stakeholders. As topic for the 2012 Focus Groups the following topic has been agreed:

Monitoring and Evaluation of RDPs on the way from the current to the next programming period:

- What are the main changes?
- How well are rural development stakeholders prepared for it?
- What are the consequences for ongoing, ex post and ex ante evaluation?

The topic was chosen with a view to share information on the main changes on monitoring and evaluation in the next programming period with evaluation stakeholders in the Member States and to give the opportunity to exchange opinions on the new framework and the state of preparation for the next RDP.

In a **collaborative setting** the representatives of Managing Authorities, evaluators, members from the Monitoring Committee and the Paying Agency mapped the preparedness of their RDPs for the next programming period and reflected on the needs that still exist in relation to the current period.

The **methodological framework** was developed by the Helpdesk in collaboration with its Geographic Expert. Flexibility was given to the Geographic Experts to agree with the Managing Authorities the thematic priorities for their specific Focus Group discussions and to adapt the suggested methodology. The meetings were animated by the **Geographic Experts** of the Evaluation Helpdesk in an interactive way based on the suggested methodology, which included the following core elements:

- ▶ A SWOT analysis on the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework 2014-2020
- ▶ A collection of open issues in relation to the new Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
- ▶ An interactive discussion of the timeplan with regard to the preparation of the RDP and ex ante evaluation 2014-2020

Several Focus Groups have additionally chosen to cover further topics which were of specific interest for evaluation stakeholders in the countries. In such cases additional information material has been provided by the Evaluation Helpdesk as input for the meeting. In Italy, France and Poland, for instance, the Guidelines for RD ex ante evaluation were presented to and discussed with Focus Group participants. In Germany a specific session dedicated to the draft context indicators of the next programming period was held.

The following table gives an overview which core topics have been covered in the Focus Group discussions in the respective countries:

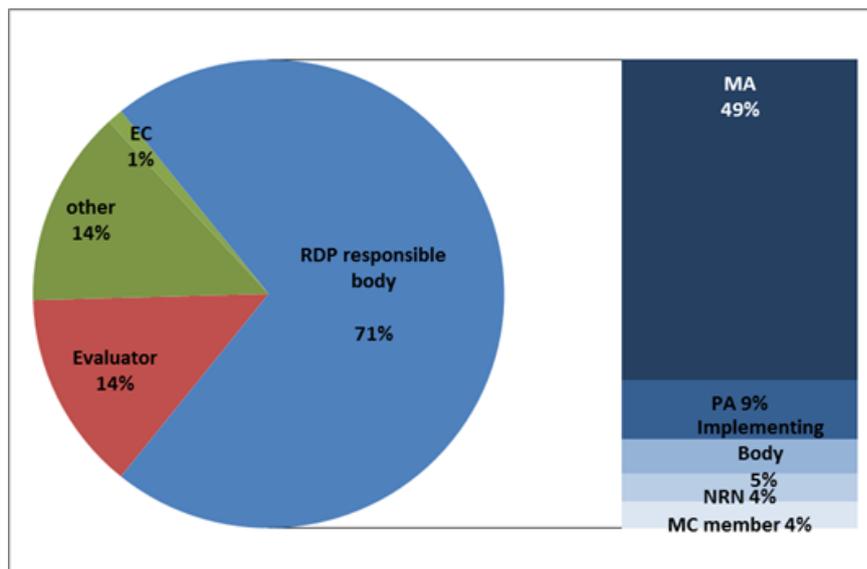
No.	Member State	Monitoring and Evaluation Framework 2014-2020					Timeplan preparation RDP & ex-ante 2014-	Follow-up MTE Recommendations 2007-2013
		S	W	O	T	Open Issues discussed		
1	AT (BE-Wa, NL, LU)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	BG	Focus Group date not yet agreed						
2	BX	x	x	x	x	x	x	
3	CY			x	x	x	x	x
4	CZ+SK			x	x	x	x	x
5	DE	x	x			x	x	
6	DK	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
7	EE	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
8	ES			x	x	x	x	
9	FI	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
10	FR			x	x	x		x
11	GR			x	x	x	x	x
12	HU			x	x			x
13	IE			x	x	x	x	x
14	IT					x		
15	LV	x	x	x	x	x	x	
	LT	Focus Group agreed for January 2013						
16	MT	x	x	x	x		x	x
17	PL			x	x	x		
18	PT			x	x	x	x	x
19	RO			x	x	x	x	x
20	SE	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
21	SI			x	x	x	x	x
22	UK	x	x	x	x	x	x	

2.2 Who participated in the Focus Groups?

In total, **464 persons** participated in the 22 Focus Group meetings which covered 25 Member States. The composition of the Focus Groups in the Member States is presented in Figure 1:

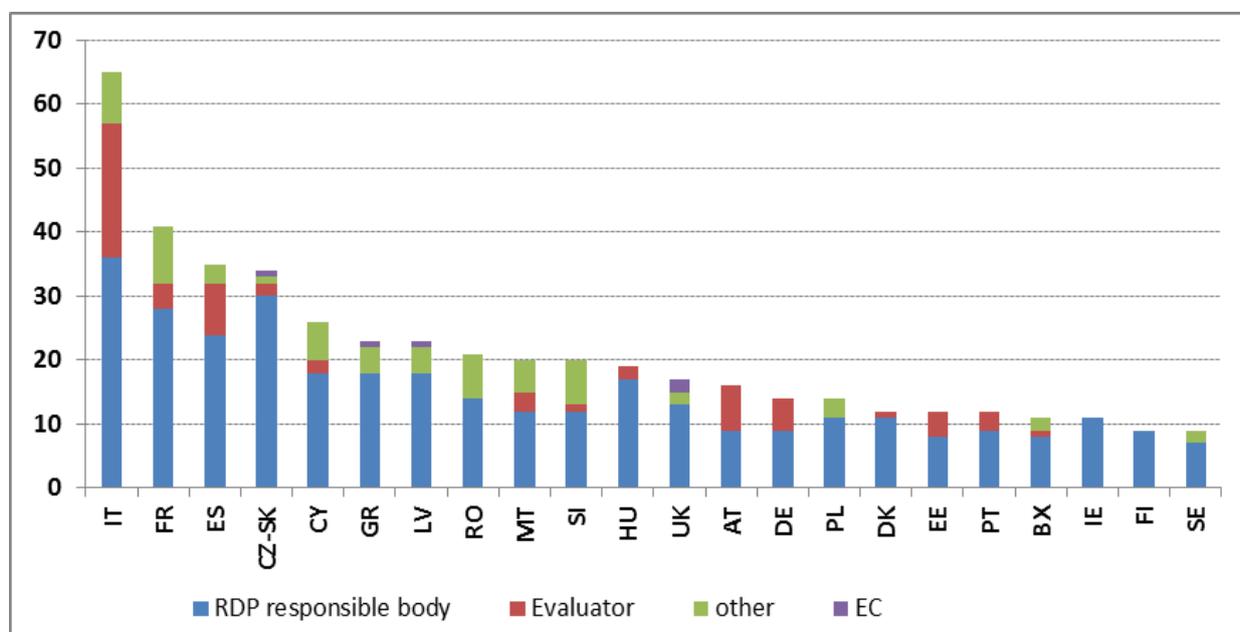
The category 'RDP responsible bodies' (composed mainly of representatives of the Managing Authority, Paying Agency, National Rural Network representatives, Monitoring Committee members and implementing bodies) is most prevalent (71%), That evaluators constituted only 14% of all FG-participants can be explained with the fact, that the topic is currently still most relevant for RDP responsible bodies. Other bodies (EC Desk Officers, experts, research institutes, data providers) are also represented with about 14% of all participants. EC Desk Officers were present in the Focus Groups in CZ-SK, GR, LV, UK.

Figure 1: Focus Groups' composition in 2012



Looking at the size of each group, a minimum of 10 participants was reached (with the exception of Sweden and Finland) and even in some small Member States, (e.g. Malta), up to 20 stakeholders participated in the discussions. In Italy, the Focus Group meeting was combined with an event organized by the Italian Rural Network and reached the size of more than 60 participants. In France the Focus Group was organized back to back to a meeting with representatives of the French outermost regions. Combined Focus Group meetings were carried out between Belgium-Wallonia, Luxembourg and the Netherlands; and in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In the case of Ireland and the United Kingdom the respective Focus Group meetings were combined with a Helpdesk visit in the respective Member State.

Figure 2: Focus Group size



3 FINDINGS

3.1 What are the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of Monitoring and Evaluation 2014-2020?

The discussion in the FGs 2012 focused mainly on key differences in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of rural development policy between the current and the next programming period.

Following the introductory presentations¹ by the Evaluation Helpdesk's Geographic Experts, participants identified the main Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. In most countries the participants split up into smaller working groups and carried out either a full SWOT analysis or assessed at least the opportunities and risks of the new system.

The comments were collected on moderation cards and jointly clustered on a poster. In total **around 350 comments related to Monitoring & Evaluation** have been collected in the Focus Groups.

The presentation of the FG findings in the following chapter is structured around the main topics of the proposed M&E system and addresses the following issues: main changes per topic, SWOT assessment by FG participants (summarized) and conclusions (see table below).

Main topics	Structure
1. Views on the general system of RDP indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the main changes in 2014-2020 (per topic)? • How did stakeholders assess these changes during the Focus Groups? • Open issues/remarks mentioned by FG participants? • Conclusions (per topic)
2. The whole CAP, Impact indicators cover both Pillar 1 and Pillar 2	
3. Pillar 2 result/target indicators	
4. Outputs – the operations database, Data provision/electronic storage	
5. Evaluation Plan	
6. New evaluation approach: No MTE, Two enhanced AIRs (Annual Implementation Reports), ex ante evaluation more integrated into programme design	
7. Information from beneficiaries	
8. New architecture of Priorities/Focus Areas/Measures under a Common Strategic Framework – a challenge for M&E	
9. General needs identified by FGs	

¹ based on the presentation given to the Evaluation Network Geographical Experts' meeting by Zélie Peppiette, 6th September 2012.

3.1.1 Views on the general system of RDP indicators

What are the main changes in 2014-2020?

The following types of programme related indicators are used within the proposed rural development monitoring and evaluation system:

- ▶ Context indicators are used to describe the situation in the programme territory
- ▶ Output indicators which are directly linked to the measures and operations
- ▶ Results indicators which capture the direct effects of interventions and are linked to focus areas
- ▶ Impact indicators, which are related to the overarching goals of the Common Agricultural Policy, and link it to the EU2020 Strategy
- ▶ Indicators used for target setting, which are a sub-set of the output and result indicators.

There will be a set of common indicators for use in all RDPs. This indicator set is not finalized yet and will be specified in the implementing acts. Moreover, where appropriate, additional programme-specific indicators should be defined in order to address the specificities of the individual RDP (identified needs, territory, etc.).

How did stakeholders assess these changes during the Focus Groups?

Strengths (approx. 2) ²	Weaknesses (approx. 10)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator system seems to be simplified to some extent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common EU level indicators do not fit to the national needs of Member State. • Indicators and actions for RDP implementation do not fit together. • Too many indicators, they are complex, might be hard for stakeholders to interpret their meaning. • Reduced capture of achievements in specific measures (superficial indicators); No indicator that captures the aim of LFA payments to secure cultivation of land • There will always be differences in the calculation of common indicators between MS (how to assure common understanding and data quality?)
Opportunities (approx. 9)	Threats (approx. 9)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The only positive issues in the new indicator system may be the simplification of the calculation of impact indicators (but only if finally these are calculated at MS level). • Target indicators can be determined by using coefficients • Opportunity for better and clearer definition of (result) indicators and baselines • Simpler Pillar 2 indicators could be aggregated across MS, giving better info on European position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The system is not likely to be any simpler. • The utility of some of the proposed indicators is not straightforward • Lack of specificity about the determination of indicators: which one should be calculated by the MA and which one by the Evaluator Team? • Final context indicators are not available, yet though the designing process has already been started. • Result Indicators at focus area level will not show impact of individual measures • Indicators which are not 'mastered' (in terms of where to find the information, how to aggregate

² The number represents the actual number of comments collected by the FGs. In the Synthesis Paper identical comments have been summarized to a certain extent

	it, which calculation rules are to be used...) are more numerous than before and will make the evaluation exercise both complicated to implement and useless.
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Open issues/remarks mentioned by Focus Group participants

...concerning simplification

- The European Commission is proposing **simplification**, but it seems in reality the system is becoming more and more complicated. One of the key problems is caused by the attempt to show that the whole CAP and cohesion policy automatically respond to the EU2020 strategic objectives. (PL)
- **For whom** should programming and monitoring be simplified? (SE)
- Does an **assessment of administrative costs** of monitoring and evaluation for end users exist? (DK)

...concerning comparability and consistency of indicators

- The set of indicators for the next Programme are **not in line with priorities and focus areas** of the new RD policy. They rather follow the current programming period. (FI)
- To ensure comparability between MS, there should be a **common approach in calculating indicators**. By whom and when will the methods be developed? (LV)
- Concern that the common set of **indicators will not be compatible** with information already collected in Portugal. Will the Member State be consulted in this respect? (PT)
- Are the impact indicators going to be calculated at **RDP or MS level**? (ES)

...concerning definition of indicators

- Evaluation **indicators are weakly defined**, the example of displacement effects was provided. (SE)
- Indicators should be selected only after it has been decided what should be achieved by the programme; however, very often indicators are **imposed in a top-down way** and then the question is to see what a given indicator can tell us, rather than looking for indicators that would be adapted to measure what we are trying to achieve. (PL)

Conclusions

Overall the proposed RDP indicator system is met with some scepticism by Focus Group participants. While incremental improvements (e.g. regarding calculation, aggregation and merging of Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 impact indicators) are acknowledged, there are many critical remarks related to the number, complexity, fitness to single measures, reliability and comparability of the indicator system.

Regardless of the structural weaknesses expressed, the stakeholders identified also a number of threats related to the timing of the introduction, the level of maturity of the indicators' definition and applicability, the vague definition of the collecting method and the teething problems associated with these threats during implementation. Although a number of opportunities were seen (impact indicators, use of coefficients, better aggregation), it was felt that there is still some way to go before reaching a M&E system fits the purpose.

3.1.2 The whole CAP, Impact indicators cover both Pillar 1 and Pillar 2

What are the main changes in 2014-2020?

For 2007-2013 the CMEF (Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework) relates only to rural development. For 2014-2020 there will be one monitoring and evaluation system for the CAP as a whole (Article 110 of CAP Horizontal Regulation proposal³). Accordingly one set of impact indicators for the CAP as a whole, covering both pillars. Some of more relevance for Pillar 1 (e.g. trade related) some of more relevance for Pillar 2 (e.g. territorial development). As far as possible the indicators proposed use existing datasets (EUROSTAT, Farm Structure Survey, FADN etc) available at national and/or regional level to avoid any additional burden on MS.

How did stakeholders assess these changes during the Focus Groups?

Strengths (approx. 7)	Weaknesses (approx. 4)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ambition to evaluate the entire CAP together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few experience with evaluation of the first pillar of CAP Global approach means less focus on Rural Development Introducing indicators across pillars is complex, it will be difficult to attribute change to measures (capturing impacts will be difficult)
Opportunities (approx. 15)	Threats (approx. 8)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common impact indicators for both 1st and 2nd pillar of the CAP (this can lead to a better coherence between the pillars) The consideration of Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 as part of a whole in the new programming period, would allow a more global view of the territory and be more suitable to solve their needs The coherence between first and second pillar which comes out of what is foreseen for the future programming period should enable to clarify things in terms of public financial intervention and public policies Possibility of thematic evaluations (even across funds) Evaluation of both pillars might identify that measures of Pillar II are more efficient than those in Pillar I 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common impact indicators for pillar I and II: complex and at the same time not specific enough! Monitoring and evaluation of RDP is linked on the one hand to pillar 1, on the other to cohesion policy, it will be difficult to combine both. Since Pillar I is included in evaluation, the system will be more complex. It is difficult to establish general indicators that measure added value of both pillars together. Usefulness of CMEF for both pillars is questionable (how will reported data be used, system set up more for the needs of the EC than MS) Will indicators take into account the effects of Greening Pillar 1?

Open issues/remarks mentioned by Focus Group participants

...concerning the use and purpose of impact indicators:

- How feasible or valuable is the **whole CAP evaluation**? (IE)
- Should **impact indicators have a specific target value** during the submission of the initial programme by the Member State? (GR)
- Until today, **result indicators count the gross outcome** and impact indicators the net outcome (by the programme). Will this also apply in the programming period 2014-2020? (GR)

...concerning the overall responsibility for Pillar 1 and 2 evaluation

- Farms and territories might be supported with several CAP measures. How will it be possible to **distinguish effects from Pillar I and Pillar II** in the new CAP? (SE)
- Who has the responsibility for the assessment of Pillar 1 Impact indicators? (CY)

3 COM(2011) 628/3

- EU responsibilities on the **evaluation of Pillar 1**, how do they relate to the responsibilities of each Member State regarding the evaluation of Pillar 2? (GR)
- Who has the **responsibility for collecting Pillar 1** output and result indicators? (CY)
- If the evaluation of Pillar 1 actions is EU's responsibility, how would the RDP evaluator assess the **impacts of Pillar 1**? (CY)
- **When and by whom** are the impacts (impact indicators) measured? (GR)

...concerning the monitoring of Pillar 1

- Will the **monitoring of pillar 1 and 2** be separated? Indicators will be given in top down manner and the role of Member State will be only to collect data for indicators? How useful will be these indicators for Member States? (FI)
- In relation to Pillar 1: Will it be monitored with an **indicator system**? (ES)
- Would **Pillar 1 have output and result indicators**? Should any change be linked to a programme revision or could they be changed on an individual basis? (GR)
- How will the **structural measures implemented under Pillar 1** be evaluated in the light of Pillar 2? (SI)

...concerning the methodological challenges of assessing impacts between Pillar 1 and 2

- How will **evaluation of Pillar 1 and Pillar 2** be carried out in practice? Only impact indicators are set commonly. Pillar 1 is to be evaluated by the EC, while Pillar 2 by the MS and synthesized by the EC. Relevant information for the evaluation of impacts for the RDP will need to be secured from Pillar 1. (SI)
- How to combine **Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 evaluation**? No specific methodology for Pillar 1 available. (LV)
- How will **public goods** be measured in future e.g. under Pillar 1? (IE)

...concerning the methodological challenges of assessing impacts in general

- The system is focusing on isolated impacts instead of **real impacts**. How is the total achievement followed/evaluated and **what methods** can be found for this? (DK)
- How to measure **long term impacts** that become visible only many years after the end of the programming period, for example in relation to Natura 2000 areas and environmental objectives? (DK)
- How to deal with the **impact across programming periods** (e.g. for AE measures)? (UK)
- Will the **indicators be available** to facilitate whole CAP evaluation? (IE)

... concerning the flexibility in evaluating impacts

- Will it be possible to **use programme-specific indexes** (e.g. Farmland Bird Index) without using the common calculation method? (AT)
- How much flexibility have RDPs to do **evaluations on national priorities**? (UK)

Conclusions

In relation to the common set of impact indicators for the whole CAP, the stance of stakeholders is rather controversial. The same elements which are mentioned as advantages (comprehensive evaluation of the two pillars, the common indicators used, the global approach, better comparison and coherence) are also mentioned as disadvantages. Criticism has been raised concerning the lack of focus on Rural Development as such, the overall complexity of the system, the "impossibility" of monitoring and evaluating Cohesion Policy and Pillar I at the same time, the difficulties of attribution to the Pillars and the clarification of the contents of the "new CMEF".

3.1.3 Pillar 2 result/target indicators

What are the main changes in 2014-2020?

Target setting will become more important. At least one quantifiable target indicator is required for each Focus Area. Quantified targets will be established for all Focus Areas included in the RDP. These are based as far as possible on result indicators, although some are closer to output indicators (for Priority 1 which is horizontal, and where the results will be captured through other priorities, the target indicators proposed are output indicators). The target indicators will be reported on annually in the AIRs. The indicator values should be obtained using monitoring data, in some cases combined with coefficients which will be supplied in the guidance (e.g. to estimate the production of renewable energy from new investments).

How did stakeholders assess these changes during the Focus Groups?

Strengths (approx. 1)	Weaknesses (approx. 1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The system seems to be very strong on quantitative targets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicators and objectives (targets) are very quantitative
Opportunities	Threats (approx. 4)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A measure contributing to several priorities implies difficulties in quantifying indicators; Setting inappropriate target indicators. Difficult to set annual targets on results The problem will occur with comparisons across national borders as only national targets and estimates will be employed

Open issues/remarks mentioned by Focus Group participants

...concerning the distinction between result and target indicators

- There are still **many uncertainties about result indicators**: they are supposed to be established at the level of the focus areas, but since these focus areas can comprise different types of activities (measures), it isn't clear what should be analysed; in addition, the efforts to simplify indicators at EU level may lead to a situation when these indicators will be too general and vague to be useful. (PL)
- Will there be **no other result indicators apart from "target indicators"**? or Member States will have the flexibility to go beyond the "target indicators"? (PT)
- What are the targets?** programme level or beneficiary level? (FR)
- Is the **quantification of the targets** a duty of the evaluator? (IT)

...concerning the use of target indicators

- How to get **target indicator's values** realistic and measurable? (GR)
- Do the target indicators need to be quantified ex-ante for each year? (UK)
- How to link 5 main „headline targets“ of the EU 2020** with rural development target indicators and measures and how to assess their contribution to „headline targets“? (CZ-SK)
- What is the **logic of the quantitative objectives** of RDP? Regions which shall use the RDP shall also set up the quantitative objectives. (FI)
- Difficulty to **connect financial budget** with target indicators (IT)
- The level of **financial incoherence** in connection to the target quantification (IT)

...concerning the implications of target indicators

- What happens if target indicator **values are not achieved?** (IE)
- What are the implications for a programme when **not meeting the target indicators?** (UK)
- **What are the consequences** for Member States if targets are not met during the evaluation across the programming period (PT)

Conclusions

In relation to result/target indicators overall a rather cautious position is taken. The strong quantification of the new system is seen both as strength and as weakness. However when assessing the implementation aspects, the risks dominated in the stakeholders' perceptions. Identified threats relate to the operational difficulties of setting reliable targets, the of annual reporting, the comparison with other MS and the attribution of the results, when a measure serves more than one priority. While stakeholders overall seem rather indifferent on the strategic approach of the quantified targets, the operability of the system is regarded with scepticism.

3.1.4 Outputs – the operations database, Data provision/electronic storage**What are the main changes in 2014-2020?**

Each approved operation will be included in an operations database (at RDP level) containing key information about the project and beneficiary. This database will be used to generate aggregate information for the AIRs. It will allow the monitoring data necessary to measure progress in implementation to be extracted and will simplify data handling and reporting. The legal proposals contain additional specifications concerning data provision and storage, which are intended to facilitate collecting and managing data needed for M&E.

How did stakeholders assess these changes during the Focus Groups?

Strengths (approx. 3)	Weaknesses (approx. 10)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are large existing databases, which can be used for monitoring and evaluation of RDP • Relevant and valid data are collected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed operations database contains a lot more detailed information (risks to data security) • Complex and more data collection required • Complexity in data collection (same problems as in a current period for data collection for indicators) • Monitoring system of RDP is not harmonized enough with the statistical system • Relevant and valid data are not collected. Limitations in the quality of suggested data sets. Further, evaluation data are omitted through ambitions to simplify programming and evaluation.
Opportunities (approx. 15)	Threats (approx. 34)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring is being taken more seriously • Electronic system will give us more information and more quickly • Operations database provides all data in one place • Better communication and cooperation of institutions collecting and using data • This transition period should enable to anticipate on the collection of data as well as on the verification that this data is existing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will be difficult to commission and implement the Operations Database in time. • IT systems need to be newly structured now, but guidelines won't be available until next year; • Danger of delayed IT development not matching the programme, Very limited time for the upgrade of the information monitoring system • Changes in IT system are also very costly. • Implementing new data collection system (even a part of it) is very costly • Improvement of IT system and electronic systems

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compatibility of information systems, which will allow to compare and aggregate information needed from monitoring and evaluation • An opportunity for establishing a national monitoring system for all programmes • A basic M&E system is already established, upgrade is needed in terms of data collection and procedures (e-applications, e-request for payment, e-reporting) • If other delivery bodies (e.g. LAGs) can input into operations database it would be very useful 	<p>(e-Government) is very costly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economics of scale - IT system is too complex and costly for a small MS • The double storage of information (by the EC and by the MS) can be costly • The administrative burden will be much higher and therefore will be increase the costs. Moreover, the computer system (of monitoring) could be made more complex. • At present, access to national data sources for the purpose of M&E has not been ensured through contractual agreements. It is not regulated who and when provides data for M&E. • For the time being, the connection among data sources (e.g. national and SCF) is not adequate. If proper access to different data sources will not be ensured, more human resources should be employed for data collection/dissemination. • Relevance of schemes: transaction cost for beneficiaries are increasing; e.g. to provide additional data in applications; lack of simplification for beneficiaries; the proposal introduces extra-layers of administration; so only high-level grants would be worth while, for small 3-4000 EUR grants this does not pay off. • Lacking IT capacity and knowledge of beneficiaries to broadly apply e-governance • Incompatibility of current information systems in some MS with the information system that the Commission will create • Broad and complex monitoring system of the contributions of measures to several priorities
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Open issues/remarks mentioned by Focus Group participants

...concerning the operations database in general

- How does the **operational database** looks like? (CZ-SK)
- **Operation at RDP level**: What does that exactly mean? (ES)

...concerning the establishment of the data collection system

- Can Member States develop the data collection system as soon as the **final definition of indicators** will be published? (PT)
- Will the databases that are to be built by MS allow to collect the information needed to **calculate the full set of indicators**? (PT)
- There is a risk of **loss of the huge investment** made in the development of information systems that are currently in operation. (PT)

...concerning the data transfer

- Not clear how the **electronic data transfer** will exactly take place. It was a common understanding that improved SFC system will be used, but there were concerns regarding amount of data input and extra burden on the MS. (LV)
- Need to clarify the **mode of transmission** of data through the SFC in view of the suitability of the information system of the Member State. (PT)
- Will there be an **interface** between the new SFC and indicators. (AT)

- Need to **safeguard and articulate information needs** for monitoring and assessment (PT)
- **How often** will it be necessary to send information to the Commission - permanently? or periodically? (PT)

...concerning the kind of data to be collected

- **What kind of data** and how detailed the beneficiary shall supply the operations database? (RO)
- **Level of detail** and what kind of information will be required for each operation, is still unclear. (PT)
- Will the EC ask for "**single counting**" instead of multiple counting of beneficiaries of training measures? (AT)
- Defining the **methodology of data collection** to ensure the necessary reliability of the information gathered in the case of "inputs" which do not arise from "simple" programme execution (PT)
- When establishing the M&E systems, what possibilities exist for **collection of data including spatial/geographical dimension** (geographic information system – GIS), which would allow analysis and evaluation of some specific areas? (SI)
- If indicated **data sets like EUROSTAT, FADN** etc. are used where will be the gap at least for 3 years. Is this gap acceptable in the evaluation exercise? (LV)
- The **FADN has a limited value** (in Sweden) due to limitations in data access. (SE)

...concerning the availability of regional data

- To enable MS to have **access to the content of the operational database** would facilitate the process of completing this database respecting national/regional needs and the evaluation requirements, consequently also the monitoring and IT system for the next programming period. (CZ-SK)
- When the information requested is not available at **regional level**, what should we do? (ES)
- In relation to the collection of economic indicators: are you working on data **availability at regional level**? (ES)
- **Monitoring concerning regions** shall be conducted as well, in order to observe the results of the RDP gained at the regional level. (FI)

...concerning the use(fulness) of the data collected

- What is the use in gathering some **individual data** (linked to each of the implemented project / action) if it is only for statistical purposes? Would it not be possible to make the system lighter while still ensuring the reliability of data? (FR)
- What is the meaning that we give in order to **justify the collection of some indicators** and the consolidation of data (said differently: how to justify the balance between energy and costs necessary to collect these data?) (FR)
- Which part of the information provided by the Member states will be **made public**? Will only be the content of the databases be disseminated and/or will other types of information, presented in different formats also be? (FR)
- What will be the level of requirements from the Commission on what concerns **traceability of the proposed indicators** and of the provided data? Will it be necessary to give, for each indicator, a note explaining how the services came up with the given data? (FR)

Conclusions

The discussion on the outputs and the databases is one of the most prominent topics. The stakeholders clearly acknowledge the operational advantages of a dedicated output monitoring system especially regarding rapid provision of information for decision making, interoperability, aggregation and efficiency.

Negative aspects are related mainly to the lack of capacity to introduce the system in the first place, the time needed for an effective system to be put into use, the operational constraints posed on the architecture of the system and the needs to be satisfied and the overall complexity and cost of the system. Last but not least a well elaborated monitoring system has also its downsides especially towards beneficiaries and small operations, which might get overburdened.

3.1.5 Evaluation Plan

What are the main changes in 2014-2020?

An Evaluation Plan must be submitted with each RDP, and will be approved as part of it. It should set out the main elements foreseen for conducting evaluations throughout the programming period, including topics, timeline, resources etc. The EP's purpose is to ensure that appropriate and sufficient evaluation activities will be carried out so that the information required on programme achievements and impacts is obtained. The elements to be included will be established in implementing rules, and the intention is also to provide guidance on the content of the EP. There is no longer a specific mention of "ongoing evaluation" in the legal texts, but the Evaluation Plan should ensure that the necessary activities are implemented.

How did stakeholders assess these changes during the Focus Groups?

Strengths (approx. 1)	Weaknesses (approx. 3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of evaluation plan with RDP puts greater emphasis on need for evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will be difficult to develop a good evaluation plan because future needs will be hard to predict. In case the plan is too general, it will not make a lot of value added. • It will be difficult to forecast all main areas for evaluation in advance, so there may be a need to update the evaluation plan (flexibility) • There should be a flexible evaluation plan, not included in the RDP, too
Opportunities (approx. 8)	Threats (approx. 10)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New M&E evaluation approach is more operational (evaluation plan) • The integration of the Evaluation Plan as a required part of Programme is an advantage because it allows organize the evaluation tasks from the beginning. • Evaluation plan of the next RDP can consider also evaluation needs of regions. • Inclusion of evaluation plan in the RDP will improve the design of M&E activity and allocation of resources for this purpose. • Evaluation plan agreed in advance • Evaluation Plan: will enable the appropriate monitoring of indicators, better decision-making process, and assess what goes wrong. • Able to plan M&E strategically and tailor it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation Plan represents an additional administrative burden • Timely and clear guidance required for the Evaluation Plan • Potential lack of flexibility regarding the evaluation plan, highly demanding to establish but may require modifications e.g. if RDP amended • Evaluation plan developed as part of the programme (as a result, any change in the plan would require changes in the programme) • Evaluation plan on LEADER (lack of experiences in the evaluation of LEADER strategies, lack of experts and expertise on LEADER evaluation) • Evaluation Plan can't be too detailed as it has to be approved together with the programme and changes might require the modification of the RDP. (Should be in two levels, one more general, approved with the RDP, other more detailed, flexible and adaptable in time according to the needs) • Moreover, it indicates that the evaluation plan should be flexible, but some participants commented that establishing the Plan from the beginning will eliminate this flexibility and potential adaptation to emerging needs.

Open issues/remarks mentioned by Focus Group participants

...concerning the availability of guidelines for the Evaluation Plan

- When will the **guidelines for the Evaluation Plan** become available? (EE, RO, SE, UK)
- Is there going to be a **minimum requirement**? To which extent? (ES)
- Particular for RD programming: what will be included in the **Implementing Acts** for the evaluation plan? And when will final lists of indicators be available? (BX)

...concerning the content of the Evaluation Plan

- **What needs to be defined** in the Evaluation Plan? (It is not clear enough). (ES)
- Does the Evaluation Plan also **include monitoring**? (UK)
- **How detailed** has to be the Evaluation Plan approved together with RDP? Would be possible to have more detailed working plan not included in the RDP? (EE)
- The information available so far about the next period is **still very general** and lacks detail; it is not clear how to organise evaluation in the next period so as to ensure that good quality evaluation studies are not lost in the process of mechanical collection of indicators. (PL)

...concerning the flexibility of modifying the Evaluation Plan

- Is it possible to **change the Evaluation Plan** once approved? Would this mean that any modification of the Evaluation Plan requires and RDP modification? (ES)
- What will be the **role of the evaluation plan**? How strictly it has to be followed? It is better to have a general evaluation plan so that Member State can be flexible depending on their specific circumstances? (FI)
- How to make a **good evaluation plan**? It would be difficult to predict needs for the longer period until 2020. It means the evaluation plan should be rather general. (LV)
- Evaluation Plan: Will it have the mandatory content? Or will there be the **flexibility** for the Member State?(PT)

Conclusions

Overall the added value of an evaluation plan as an ex-ante strategic planning document with a binding character as part of the RDP is appreciated. An important aspect is the fact that the evaluation plan can be used as a guide for the necessary capacity building in the RDP area.

However criticism also exists; apart from the inevitable limited possibility to foresee all future developments and needs, the evaluation plan is seen also as an administrative burden. This is partly due to its novelty and the lack of appropriate guidance, the operational rigidity imposed by the fact that it is part of the RDP and the need to be strategic yet specific. An observation of the stakeholders is the possibility to have one strategic evaluation plan within the RDP and its operational specification as a flexible guide; a choice remedying some of the threats.

3.1.6 New evaluation approach: No MTE, Two enhanced AIRs (Annual Implementation Reports), ex ante evaluation more integrated into programme design

What are the main changes in 2014-2020?

There will be no MTE as there was for 2007-2013. This period's experience showed that the timing of the MTE was too late to lead to changes in programme design (as much of the resources were already committed) and too early to be able to identify concrete achievements.

In 2017 and 2019 the AIRs will contain additional elements compared to the standard AIRs. In 2017 these are essentially geared to improving programme design and implementation, e.g. reasons for slow progress towards targets or lack of take up of certain measures, and in 2019 focus on establishing interim achievements of the programme, including in relation to 2020 objectives. Much of this information will come from evaluation activities undertaken in line with the EP. The AIRs are drafted and submitted by MS, and subject to admissibility and approval procedures.

The ex ante evaluation has become more deeply integrated into the programme design process by involving the ex ante evaluator from an early stage of programme development.

How did stakeholders assess these changes during the Focus Groups?

Strengths (approx. 9)	Weaknesses (approx. 9)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No MTE needed, less bureaucracy, it was too late for improving programme, ongoing evaluation is better tool for programme assessment Good idea to remove MTE requirement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of continuity in the M&E system (low comparability) The 2017 and 2019 enhanced annual implementation reports risk becoming too invisible and too internal in comparison to the mid-term evaluation and thereby result in a lack of communication about the Rural Development Programme
Opportunities (approx. 20)	Threats (approx. 16)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater flexibility in the evaluation approach by taking away MTE, Possibility for organizing internal evaluation capacities Easier to address problem areas The possibility to capture the most important aspects of the programme Regional evaluations can support the evaluation of RDP as a whole. Setting up a new framework should enable to move towards a more qualitative approach The enhanced AIR is much better than the old MTE structure Involvement of ex-ante evaluation at an early stage of the program development could highly improve the design process. The ex-ante evaluation follows the development of the RDP thus anticipating and highlighting the meaning of the evaluation as integral part of programme design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No MTE: Potential for MS not to put as much effort into the enhanced annual report as they did for MTEs Risk of reaching the end of the next period (Ex Post Evaluation) with no evaluation at all. Two enhanced AIR can in practice lead to 2 MTEs The reporting deadline for AIR is earlier, which means that the reporting quality may get worse (data is not available early enough for analyses). It might be very difficult to establish a logical and consequent link from the ex-ante to the ex-post. The fact that a measure may be linked to several priorities can complicate programming and subsequent monitoring and evaluation of these measures. This is a huge inconvenience, because complexity means bigger need of resources (time and people) and higher costs. Risks related to monitoring and evaluation of a Sub-thematic Programme

Open issues/remarks mentioned by Focus Group participants

...concerning the responsibility for evaluation

- **Division of evaluation tasks** between MS and the Commission is not clear. It is expected that the Commission will carry on evaluation on the EU level, what will be required from the MS to deliver? (LV)

...concerning the Annual Implementation Reports (AIR)

- When is the **deadline for the AIR**? (May or June) (UK)
- Could the planned **deadline for the AIR** be moved from May to June as for current APRs? (EE)
- To what extent will the EC **assess the quality of the evaluations** in 2017 and 2019? (AT)
- Will the assessment in the AIR of 2017 allow the **modification of the measures** and goals (target indicators)? (PT)
- When is the **last APR** of the current period due? (UK)

...concerning the contents and tasks of ex ante evaluation

- Short **time to select the evaluator** by means of a public tendering (IT)
- What is the evaluator's role as regards ex ante conditionalities? (IT)
- How to **evaluate human resources and administrative capacity**? While Ex-ante guidelines are helpful document, the indicative number of man-days for ex-ante and SEA in the annex is not clear – how to interpret average range of man-days. (LV)
- How to **include specific SEA needs in the RDP** in term of measurable, exact indicators providing practical value when used? (SI)
- Tendering of ex-ante: is it possible to **use the trust piece rate** instead of public tendering (IT)
- The **indicative working-days** suggested in the ex ante guidelines are not adequate considering the actual needs. (IT)
- What should be the indicative length of an ex ante contract? (IT)

...concerning Annual Review Meetings

- Annual Review Meetings – what are they, **what kind of function** are they performing? (SE)
- What will Annual Review Meetings look like (in particular **in 2017 & 2019**)? (UK)

Conclusions

The removal of the mid-term evaluation will be seen as a mixed blessing. The MTE has barely delivered what it promised in the last period; hence its removal is seen positively and provides more flexibility. The ongoing approach allows for a smooth embedding of the evaluation activities and the evaluator in the programme structures at an early stage.

On the downside, the lack of the MTE milestone can negatively affect the efforts of the MAs, since the compulsory nature of the evaluation might be diluted. The enhanced AIR of 2017 and 2019 might not be as prominent as the MTE. For some RDP the temptation of not conducting any serious evaluation might be strong. Other threats concern the possible mutation of the two enhanced AIR into mini-MTEs, thus duplicating the drawbacks meant to be avoided, and the cost and time needed for the evaluation of complex interventions and Sub-programmes.

Overall the concern is avoiding the negative aspects of the MTE exercise in 2007-2013 while maintaining the benefits of a serious evaluation.

3.1.7 Information from beneficiaries

What are the main changes in 2014-2020?

Article 78 of the RDR legal proposal requires RDP beneficiaries to provide data needed for RDP M&E to the MA, evaluators, or other relevant bodies. This will be done mainly through the application forms which will feed the operations database. For evaluation, subsequent participation in surveys may also be required. This provision is intended to address the difficulties some MAs and evaluators have experienced in obtaining access to beneficiaries, and/or data concerning RDP support.

How did stakeholders assess these changes during the Focus Groups?

Strengths	Weaknesses (approx. 10)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beneficiaries have obligation to present data and participate in studies for monitoring and evaluation (extremely important) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently difficulties in obtaining data from beneficiaries
Opportunities (approx. 12)	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possibility to collect data for indicators from application forms, which strengthen reliability of indicators Rural Development legal proposal requires RDP beneficiaries to provide data needed for RDP M&E to the MA, evaluators, or other relevant bodies The new requirement on beneficiaries to provide data is a useful tool for evaluation The obligation of the beneficiaries to provide data needed for the RDP is more evident, which would be an opportunity for the M&E system (mainly detected by the evaluator teams). Increased involvement of beneficiaries (obligatory reporting) Monitoring data are expected to be better available, Article 78 allows for a better regulated data provision by beneficiaries Potential for greater beneficiary involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Request from beneficiaries to provide more information might form a negative attitude towards new RDP regulations.

Open issues/remarks mentioned by Focus Group participants

- What happens if **beneficiaries do NOT provide data**? Are there any sanctions foreseen? (EE, PT, UK)
Can these be set up by the MS? (EE)
- Is Article 78 of the RDP legal proposal which requires RDP beneficiaries to provide more data in the line with the **smart regulation policy**? (LV)
- What **level of data** are beneficiaries required to provide in the operations database? (UK)

Conclusions

Overall the stakeholders identify positive aspects of the obligation of beneficiaries to provide data in a structured way. Apart from the immediate feed-in through application forms and standardised programme documents, the obligation to participate in surveys etc. is also seen as a positive development. Increased involvement of beneficiaries, availability and reliability of data and speed are obvious advantages.

The main negative aspect is the burden imposed upon beneficiaries, the inherent difficulties of providing the data and the eventual loss of popularity of the RDPs.

3.1.8 New architecture of Priorities/Focus Areas/Measures under a Common Strategic Framework – a challenge for M&E

What are the main changes in 2014-2020?

In contrast to 2007-2013, where each measure is linked to one of the Axes, for 2014-2020 measures will be selected according to the needs of the Focus Area and can be used to contribute to more than one Focus Area and/or Priority. An intervention logic will be drawn up for each RDP showing which measures are intended to contribute to each of the selected Focus Areas. This structure reflects the reality of the potential multiple contributions of each measure more accurately. A basic intervention logic has been developed covering the most commonly expected combinations, but MAs have the flexibility to develop a specific intervention logic appropriate to their territory and its needs.

With respect to the new Common Strategic framework all Structural Funds, RD and fisheries programmes are covered by the Partnership Agreements drawn up at MS level. These are intended to show how the different programmes contribute to EU2020 objectives, and complement each other to develop synergies.

How did stakeholders assess these changes during the Focus Groups?

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexibility increased in drafting the intervention logic of the new programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The possibility to link some activities/measures with several focus areas – this might help to bring out in the process of evaluation the specific value added by certain types of instruments More flexibility to define the intervention logic during 2014-2020 programming phase. There will be a greater choice to select measures, higher flexibility to allocate funding to several priorities, etc. It seems that a measure can be linked to several priorities simultaneously, which allows for RDPs to tailor better policies to respond to territories needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The fact that a measure may be linked to several priorities can complicate programming and subsequent monitoring and evaluation of these measures. This is a huge inconvenience, because complexity means bigger need of resources (time and people) and higher costs. Broad and complex monitoring system of the contributions of measures to several priorities Linking the RD measures to the focus areas is a very difficult exercise (especially the contribution of each measure to different focus areas, how to calculate the weights?) The strategic approach to EU funds within the Partnership Agreement and links between its elements will be difficult to evaluate Difficult to net out impacts of the RDP if other CSF funds interventions are involved (especially in case of Leader)

Open issues/remarks mentioned by Focus Group participants

...concerning the CSF in general

- **How to report** on the indicators for other CSF funds? (UK)
- To what extent does RD operate differently in **relation to other funds**? (IT)
- Why is the **RDP evaluated together with Pillar 1** instead with the Cohesion Fund, the Social Fund, the Regional Fund and the Fisheries Fund? (DK)

...concerning the practical organisation of the Partnership Agreement

- How will the Partnership Agreement work in practice? The MS are now forced to **harmonize a lot of processes**, while there is no real harmonization of Funds from the EU side. (BX)
- How to deal with the Partnership Agreement if prepared in a „top down manner“, **neglecting priorities** of the EU Common Agriculture Policy (CZ-SK).
- How should the Partnership Agreements be organized? **What kind of data** is needed (SE)
- There are **uncertainties over the fit within the Partnership Agreement** which is the responsibility of the Finance Ministry. The DAFM is engaging with this as the EAFRD is the largest EU fund in Ireland. (IE)
- The Partnership Agreement is a great possibility but **how to evaluate it?** (DK)
- **Assessment of net impact** on the level of Partnership Agreement to avoid struggles in assessing net impact of the RDP? Is it envisaged to evaluate Partnership Agreements? (SI)

...concerning the use of indicators across funds

- How to deal with **different deadlines** for setting up target indicators between funds (for SF 2022, for RD 2020). (CZ-SK)
- How to deal with **different approaches to the calculation** of some equivalent indicators among various policies (RD versus CSF), e.g. P6A – „job created in supported projects“ (CZ-SK)

...concerning evaluation across funds

- To what extent will the **evaluation across funds** be covered? How is the evaluation of the rural development programs linked with the evaluation of other EU funds? (DK)
- How can effects from CAP Pillar II and the Regional Fund be separated? How to measure added value and synergies among them? (SE)
- How to conduct evaluation in light of the **2020 targets?** (DK)
- The function of the intervention logic is to prove the logical link between single actions and measures and the overall objectives. However, it is very difficult to **demonstrate that connection in evaluations.** (SE)
- Does the overall/comprehensive diagram exist which provides the complete **overview of types of objectives** towards interventions shall be evaluated? (DK)

...concerning programming and intervention logic

- Lots of new elements create interdependencies and increase the **level of uncertainty** for all the Funds involved in the programming process, how will this affect RD programming? (BX)
- If a **measure contributes to several priorities**, how can this be programmed? Will there be considered a main priority to which the measure contributes?; or should it be allocated for each priority how much the measure contributes? (ES)
- The simplification proposed by the Commission may **reduce the degrees of freedom** for the Member State provide specific measures tailored to their needs and reality (islands, for example) (PT)
- How can we determine the **weight of a measure contribution** to achieve the target areas of several priorities, especially in case of priority 4? (RO)
- Is it possible for a **beneficiary to choose** from the very beginning that his/her project contributes to only one priority? (RO)
- Need to make sure that the **opinion of social partners** will be taken in consideration before finalization of the Programme document (PT)

...concerning the attribution of measures to focus areas / priorities / objectives

- How to identify the partial **attribution of several measures to more than one RD priority/focus area.** The lack of guidance in this field will cause difficulties in assessing the contribution of individual measures to envisioned impacts and consequently also difficulties connected to their assessment. (CZ-SK)
- Therefore it is necessary to simplify the evaluation system **linking contribution of measure/activities to priorities/focus areas.** This shall be done already in the programme design stage to be able to set up at the monitoring system and create the IT system suitable also for evaluation. (CZ-SK)
- How can the EU Funds together contribute to the strategic objectives? (DK)

...concerning LEADER / CLLD

- In LEADER, where multiple funds will contribute what would be the effect on the whole of **underperformance in one fund?** (IE)
- The Partnership Agreements are about co-ordination. Concerns were raised about potential difficulties arising from different ambitions of the EU and MS level compared with those at e.g. LAG level. They are built on different backgrounds, resources and come in different times (typically EU and MS objectives are established before LAG strategies). (SE)
- LAGs want to start working with their strategies but are awaiting instructions for **how to use the different funds.** (SE)
- What will be the effect of the **evaluation of LEADER local strategies** in the light of the scope of work for the MA? (SI)
- How will it be possible to identify and **evaluate effects in the CLLD** in a better way? How it will be possible to identify the “place utility” (concept established during SE focus group 2011) when funding comes from different funds? Should common indicators be developed? (SE)

...concerning indicator plan / monitoring / performance framework

- How this will be reflected in the **Indicators plan** and how it can be introduced in the information system? (RO)
- How flexible can the **Indicator Plan** be? (SE)
- Is it possible to have in advance an informatics’ simulation on how the **monitoring tables** have to be filled in? (RO)
- How does the **performance reserve** relate to the milestones? Through target indicators? Will there be specific indicators to assess the performance reserve? When will the performance be checked, only at the end of the period? (ES)
- Need to clarify the application of the **performance reserve** (PT, IE)
- Early clarification of the **Key Performance Indicators** for evaluation would be helpful. Are the KPIs being defined at global level? (IE)

Conclusions

Overall the flexibility to select measures according to the needs of a Focus Areas, introduced by the new architecture, is seen as positive. However, the implementation of this new system bears a lot of threats in terms of complexity, cost, difficulties in programming, implementing and assessing this system. Attributing (net) effects to single measures requires advanced M&E systems.

3.1.9 General needs identified by FGs

1) Need for guidance and support in the transition period – to a certain extent

Since there are so many uncertainties and risks in the transition to the new programming period some FGs raised the importance to establish knowledge transfer elements and to strengthening networking for evaluation. It is partly criticised that many working documents are only available in English (and even the German translations are hard to understand). On the other hand, it is mentioned that excessive guidance can lead to less possibility to adapt to national systems

2) Support a common understanding of terminology used for M&E

A lack of common understanding within the EU on M&E issues was identified in some FGs. The common understanding of terminology used for programming and M&E in the current and next period has not been ensured yet. There is no common understanding /unified terminology between the MS-s of the definitions regarding the new terminology used in monitoring an evaluation (result and target indicators, Focus Areas, priorities, targets etc).

3) Assure the fundamental organisational settings and resourcing for M&E in the MS

In some FGs it is a central theme, that fundamental prerequisites for M & E are not in place. This concerns for instance too little resources to conduct the relevant research about evaluation methods. The

availability of the required skill sets and resources, lack of capacity building; Limited evaluation capacity and lack of human resources in evaluation, Risks of long term process in public procurement.

General open issues/remarks raised by FG participants

...concerning the timing of the regulatory framework and the availability of guidance documents and information

- Without **early agreement of the MFF** the whole process will be stalled.(IE)
- **Missing regulatory documents** do not allow to adopt a time schedule (DE)
- There is no operational COM guidance on programming and implementation for 2014+ (DE)
- There is a major risk of programming and evaluation that will **need substantial revision** once the complete and final regulatory package has been issued (DE)
- When will the **guidance for the ex post evaluation** of the RDP 2007-2013 become available? (EE)
- Is it possible to provide more **information where each MS stands regarding implementation of RDP**? More feedback could provide better incentives to improve RDP implementation performance. Could CIRCA database contain more information on this issue? (LV)

...concerning the use of evaluation

- What will be the **impact of the evaluation** (evaluation results and recommendations) in relation to the implementation of the RDP? (FI)
- How the **results of current ongoing evaluation** will be used for the implementation of RDP 2007-2013? The seminar will be organized in January 2013, where results of ongoing evaluation will be presented. Further on the use of results for the preparation of the next RDP will be discussed in the specific workshop session during the seminar. (FI)
- It is difficult to **feed back any evaluation lessons** learnt into the Programme implementation. Would it be possible to provide routines and tools for self-assessment and reflective monitoring to improve and speed up the feedback (from MS to LAG level)? (SE)
- The current programming period shows some advantages of having a common system of M&E, however it also clearly shows some shortcomings of it. Will the new M&E system for RDPs be able to **produce the expected evaluation results** (in terms of quality, net effects, etc.)? (BX)

...concerning any other topics

- Also RDP has to respect principles and obligations linked to **environmental protection** and its implementation must not produce outputs which are contradictory with them. (FI)
- There is an opportunity to improve the **criteria for selecting projects** (PT)
- Would **ex-ante conditionality** look at general economic trend (e.g. contribution of EAFRD job-creation?) If we commit to a certain number, but EAFRD would not achieve it, will we be held responsible? (IE)
- The problem of ambitious objectives. E.g. if pastures are included in a measure, the challenge is to find the control group. (SE)
- The monitoring and evaluation system is very structured and based on the electronic registration of quantitative measurements. But how can **qualitative achievements** be evaluated? (DK)

3.2 Where do the RDPs stand in preparing M&E for the next programming period?

Following the SWOT analysis, a table regarding the planning for the next programming period was filled in by the FG-participants. In this table, the timing of several activities related to the RDP preparation and the ex ante evaluation was indicated.

Here it has to be noted that the ex ante evaluation accompanies the development process of the RDP and it has to be closely coordinated with the other relevant parallel processes (e.g. Partnership Agreement, SEA) and actors. The ex ante evaluation is an iterative process which needs to be managed and documented. The timelines and requirements in the new programming period will result in a significantly longer duration of the ex ante evaluation compared to the current funding period. Moreover an early involvement of ex ante evaluators is required by the draft regulation. Accordingly it is of major interest where the MS stand in preparing and carrying out the ex ante evaluation.

In a group exercise, the participants were asked to indicate an approximate time plan for the preparation of their RDP and the Ex-ante evaluation. In a first step the participants formed a little group to indicate the timing on a printed-time plan. In a second step the ending points of the different working steps were indicated with coloured dots on big time plan on the wall.

Overall, the participants see numerous **uncertainties** in relation to the timing of the combined tasks programming, ex ante evaluation and SEA and some delays might be encountered for example with respect to budgetary provisions, regulatory framework and national procedures. Therefore the drafted time plans represent an ideal case and are not deemed too realistic.

A critical point in the timing is the **selection of the ex ante evaluator**. Here, more valid information exists (in contrast to the timing of other tasks). About half of the MS started with selection and contracting already in 2012, the other will follow in 2013. In some MS there is a risk of delay in the contracting of the ex ante evaluator due to legislation on procurement procedures. MSs where selection and contracting is not done yet will face a great challenge to meet Article 84 of the draft regulation (early stage involvement).

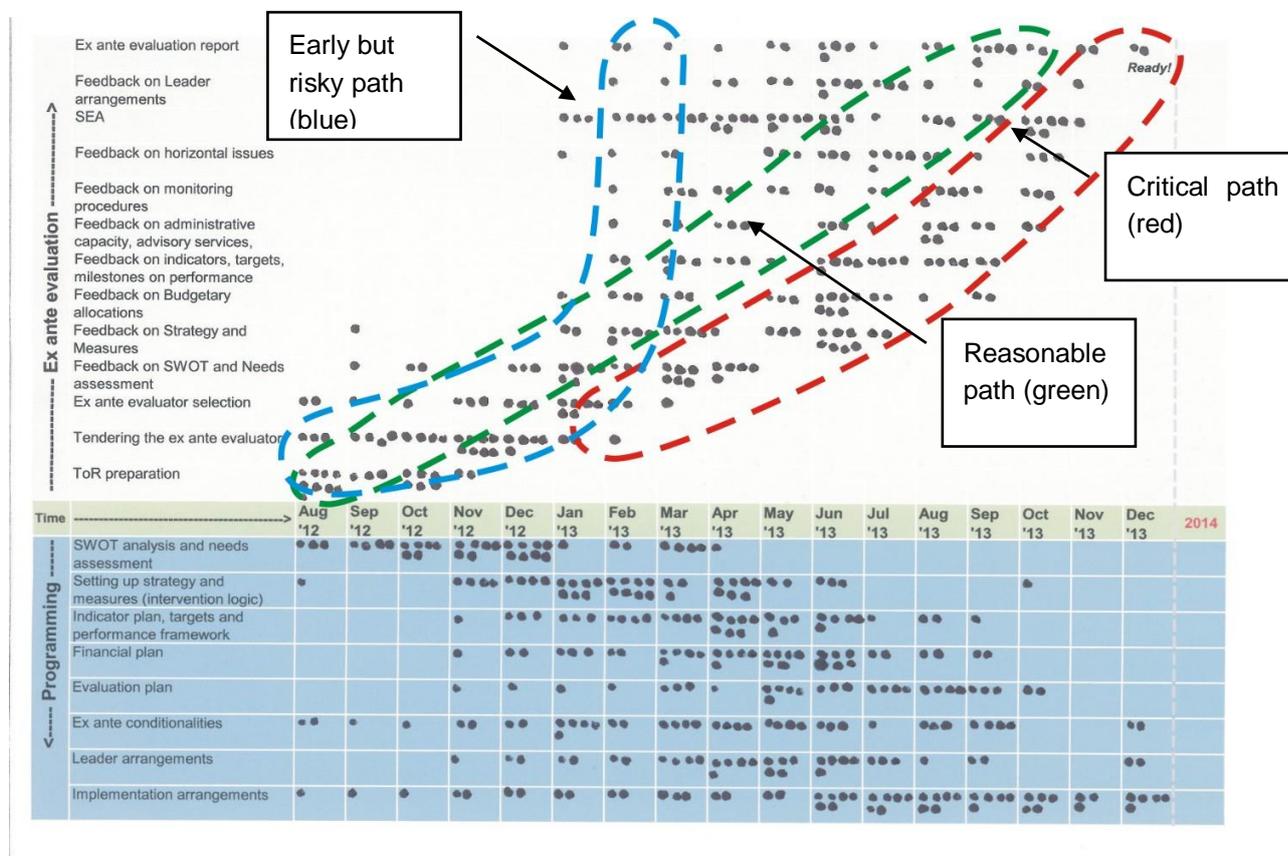
Overall, it was commented that the target to complete the ex-ante evaluation report in due time in 2013 is very ambitious. Moreover, certain milestones are not realistic to achieve as proposed (e.g. preparation of a Partnership contract by mid 2013 which should entail inputs from ex-ante evaluation report). The biggest concern is a **time pressure** that will likely affect:

- Quality of collected data, establishing of proper baselines that will have to be understood correctly and that will also enable defining meaningful and realistic targets with adequately allocated resources (where and how much). At present indicators are still being elaborated on EU level.
- Programming, SEA and ex-ante evaluation will be parallel processes – establishing a clear picture on the state of the environment is critical in order to assess contribution of RDP to environmental objectives
- Preparation of a good evaluation plan that needs to be submitted along with the programming documents (well prepared and strategically focused RDP) is needed.
- In addition, scarce human resource capacities for M&E within the MA, that at present deals with implementation of the current programme, programming and soon ex-ante evaluation.

In the present synthesis all available time plans have been put on top of each other to gain a **complete picture of the timing of activities**. It shows a heterogenous picture with a wide spread regarding the completion of tasks. Nevertheless it was possible to identify three basic paths in carrying out the ex ante evaluation tasks (which are shown in the illustration below). It is assumed that ex ante evaluation has to be completed in 2013 in due time and there will be no prolongation to 2014.

- **Early but risky path:** Ex ante evaluation starts in a limited number of MS already in 2012 and is planned to be completed in spring 2013. There is a risk that ex ante evaluation will need substantial revisions once the complete and final regulatory package has been issued. Moreover it is not assured that all interactive processes can be accommodated in a short time period. On the other hand early results of the ex ante may support a following consultation phase.
- **Reasonable path:** Workflow of ex ante evaluation can be managed within a longer time period (starting already in autumn 2012); a time buffer is available. MS taking this path have already selected their ex ante evaluators. In that case it is assured that the ex ante evaluator is engaged from an early stage as proposed in the draft regulation Article 84
- **Critical path:** Workflow of ex ante evaluation has to be managed in a short period (starting in spring 2013), timing problems will occur and sound interaction of processes is not assured. Ex ante will become a more formalistic and not a functional exercise. It seems to be that a significant proportion of MS will follow this critical path.

Figure: The big picture – overlay of ALL time plans elaborated during the FG meetings



In some FGs practical **recommendation** were discussed in relation to the time plan to increasing the probability of implementation (e.g. re-assure that all relevant stakeholders are involved; establish an ex-ante co-ordinator, try to consider national needs before choosing the measures, consider summer breaks, coordinate SUP consultation if possible, plan for slippage).

3.3 What are the needs in relation to ongoing and ex post evaluation of the 2007 – 2013 RDP?

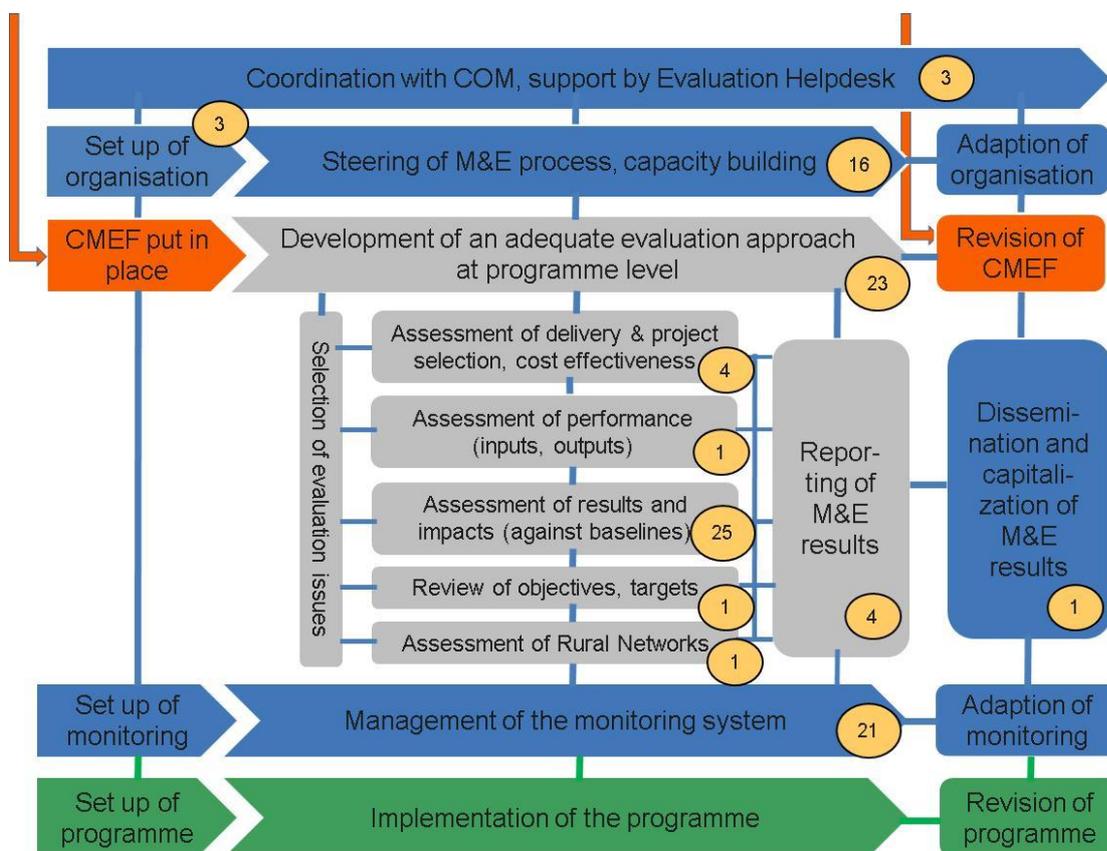
The focus groups were asked to look at the needs and recommendations put forward in the 2011 focus groups and inform on what has been implemented. A number of focus groups concentrated on new needs and recommendations without going into the implementation so far. The first part of this section looks at what has been implemented.

This section looks at the implementation of the recommendations developed in the framework of the focus groups in 2011 in the course of the following year. Not all focus groups in 2012 actually addressed this question so the information is not complete. On the basis of the available information, the following questions have been addressed:

- Which recommendations were implemented (and reported on in the focus groups) in the individual Member States (see table 1)?
- Which types of recommendations were implemented?
- Which issues arose with implementation?
- Which recommendations remain to be implemented?

The following figure (presented in the Synthesis report on focus group results 2011) shows where the recommendations developed by the Member States in 2011 were located in relation to the monitoring and evaluation framework.

Figure 1 Number of recommendations per M&E activity field, 2011



Source: Synthesis report on focus group results 2011

3.3.1 Which recommendations were implemented (and reported on in the focus groups) in the individual Member States?

In the focus groups in 2012, the stakeholders were asked to look back at the recommendations developed in 2011 and discuss which had been implemented. The results for those focus groups which a) completed the exercise and b) recorded the results are described here.

Table 1. Implementation of MTE recommendations discussed at the FG 2011

MTE recommendations discussed at the FG 2011 (or identified with the group)	Implemented? YES/NO/PARTLY	What needs to be done in view of the ex-post evaluation? (suggested by FG-participants)
Austria		
Improving quality of data and ensuring continuity in data provision by the administrative data providers (e.g. timely delivery of data, adaptation of application forms, provision of evaluation indicators) (4)	Partly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AMA will develop new options for analyzing data in the monitoring system: many small and detailed analyses instead of a few large ones. Otto Hofer will provide all data for evaluators; evaluators have no direct access to the AMA database • In case of data discrepancies, data will be settled accordingly • Earmarking in 10-15 categories possible (e.g. categories related to alpine pastures) • Partly adaptations of the database lagging, e.g. in M 123
More field research on specific issues (environmental aspects: climate, nitrate, and animal welfare. Socio-economic topics: tourism, diversification, SME's, training and Leader shall be examined more extensively) (9)	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluations in the field of education and training are being implemented, thematic studies are prepared related to (a) benefits of "Schools on the Farm" or forest education, and to (b) impacts and relation to other measures • Evaluation of alpine pastures finalized • Evaluation study for Leader is under procurement, focus on participation and social innovation • Diversification in road making (about to start) and tourism (evaluation planned) • Climate protection still expandable, two evaluations are under way • Animal protection/welfare: one evaluation under way
Broadening the scope of evaluation topics (e.g. cost effectiveness of delivery of the existing programme, in depth analysis of the National Rural Network, evaluation of biogas, broadband) (9)	Partly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of administrative cost efficiency (in cooperation with the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, currently in a concept stage) • Issue of broadband, rather considered in the ex-post evaluation 2015 • Rural Network: only superficial analysis in the mid-term evaluation 2010; should be better addressed until the new tendering of the network
BENELUX⁴		
(3)		Reconsider the usefulness of the synthesis ex-post evaluation 2000-2006 for EU and MS, and draw lessons for the ex-post evaluation of RDPs 2007-2013

⁴ The BENELUX countries have identified a new set of needs.

MTE recommendations discussed at the FG 2011 (or identified with the group)	Implemented? YES/NO/P ARTLY	What needs to be done in view of the ex-post evaluation? (suggested by FG-participants)
(3)		Reconsider the purpose of ex-post evaluation for the different users (EC, MS) and carry out ex-post evaluation at two levels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU level: under the responsibility of the EC, providing results for EU goals. MS have to provide the data. Therefore, data needs have to be defined at the beginning of the programming period. • RDP level: under the responsibility of the MA, with a focus on the RDP specific objectives, RDP relevant sectors.
(3)		Provide flexibility to the MS for the ex-post evaluation, e.g. to focus on measures that cover the most relevant budget of the RDP
(3)		Revise and reduce the list of common evaluation questions (EQs) of the CMEF also for the current ex-post evaluation, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define one relevant common EQ per axis and one horizontal EQ for the RD policy, for which sound methodologies and data collection needs are provided. The answers on these five common EQs should provide quality and meaningful information for EU purposes. • Develop a limited set of programme specific EQs relevant for the programme (to be agreed between MA and the EC). These EQs should cover relevant sectors, relevant measures and programme objectives.
(3)		Provide guidance for the ex-post evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with the inconsistencies in the current CMEF, e.g. weak link between EQ and indicators, breakdown of some indicators, cumulated values of area-based indicators; • Providing methodological support for calculating net effects, e.g. how calculating the added value of the RDP on the MS' economy, environment, etc.
Cyprus		
The development of a mechanism for coordinating the collection of data relevant to the assessment of results and impacts should be the primary concern of the ongoing evaluation. The Managing Authority is kindly requested to review its data management and collection activities in order to ensure the availability of up-to-date data in order to make best	Partly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some new studies were elaborated but the MA has not covered the problem of data lack regarding counterfactual analysis.

MTE recommendations discussed at the FG 2011 (or identified with the group)	Implemented? YES/NO/P ARTLY	What needs to be done in view of the ex-post evaluation? (suggested by FG-participants)
use of quantitative and counterfactual analysis in future evaluations. (4)		
As implementation of the programme advances, the Managing Authority is invited to ensure that quantification of result and especially impact indicators becomes the priority of the ongoing evaluation. An updated overview table of indicators should be provided for the next Annual Examination Meeting and included in all future evaluations.(3)	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Done during the 5th programme's revision, in the Strategic Report of 2011 and the APR 2011
The need to define a public service as the coordinator for collecting data and information concerning the environmental situation in Cyprus and to create national databases on biodiversity, soil quality, water quality, air quality and climate change. (3)	Partly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Environment has been ordered to collect data for climate change, water quality and biodiversity. No data are collected for soil quality.
Czech Republic		
Identification and application of exact definition of key terms such as restructuring, innovation, products with higher added value, quality of life etc., with the aim to prepare, manage and evaluate the programme. These definitions shall be prepared ahead of the specification of indicators. (3)	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk connected with wrong definition of the term“ innovation“, „restructuring“ • Define innovation at the level of beneficiary/enterprise, Member State, EU (by the MA or via consultation process in 2013) • Good knowledge and definition of terms is the key condition for clear targeting of the measure effect (quality of water, soil etc.)

MTE recommendations discussed at the FG 2011 (or identified with the group)	Implemented? YES/NO/PARTLY	What needs to be done in view of the ex-post evaluation? (suggested by FG-participants)
To equip the result indicators for individual axes and the entire programme with sufficient amount of empirical data because of their methodological complexity and the short time dedicated to evaluation. (4)	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic data collection – online, directly from applicants (e.g. via monitoring sheets) • In connection with Axis II it is difficult to distinguish/net out effects of the RDP and other external factors
Evaluation of programme impacts is the task of the evaluator, but basic data for assessment of impacts shall be collected via monitoring of outputs and especially results. In fact the indicators shall be defined sufficiently in time, which is not a difficult task. (7)	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem is a limited influence of the RDP on the impact indicators, which is the same time difficult to measure and evaluate. The role of MA is to secure data from RDP beneficiaries, the role of evaluator is to secure counterfactual data and methods how to collect them • Proportionality of financial allocations and evaluation findings shall be in balance, this means that costs for data collection should reflect the quality of findings • EC guidelines on impact assessment are useful
Slovak Republic		
Current system of utilisation of IACS data is not sufficiently detailed. For the future programming period it is necessary to create the sophisticated monitoring of outputs and results for the area-based measures (Axis 2) utilising GIS or other already existing systems (monitoring of plots organised by the National forestry Centre) (4)	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure the communication of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development with the Ministry of Environment, so that Ministry of Environment will take care of the part of data collection linked to environment also for the purpose of the RDP evaluation • In the same way the communication with other agencies shall be secured, e.g. Slovak hydro-metrological institute, Research Institute for Water Management, State nature protection, Slovak Agency for Environment. • New programme must contain also methods for data collection based on data sources mentioned in the third recommendation
Improve the communication and coordination between institutions involved in monitoring and data collection for the CMEF indicators including contextual ones, which was	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create the working group for RDP development 2014-2020 (outside of MC)

MTE recommendations discussed at the FG 2011 (or identified with the group)	Implemented? YES/NO/PARTLY	What needs to be done in view of the ex-post evaluation? (suggested by FG-participants)
<p>not the case up to now in the area of water quality, biodiversity, climate change, HNV. To create the Steering group for this purpose. (2)</p>		
<p>Closer cooperation will be set up with the WRI for the adaptation of water monitoring in the areas, which are selected for the RDP measures. Water quality, which flows out of agriculture land areas is the best indicator to measure the quality of water at the beneficiary level, because this water is connected directly with agriculture. (2)</p>	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Institute and Slovak hydro-metrological institute → indicator B21 – water quality • There is a need to communicate among ministries • Do effective monitoring
<p>Specifically – the part of the systems is the urgent request to establish and use monitoring modules, which could monitor changes⁰ in HNV farmlands, biodiversity, typical agricultural activities, water quality and other suitable indicators in the areas supported by the PRD measures. The MA as actor responsible for monitoring must initiate the establishment of the single database of the HNV farmlands in Slovakia and accompany them with suitable indicators. For the monitoring of water is necessary to identify pilot areas, where the quality of water will be regularly monitored. For this purpose the effective collaboration</p>	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukončiť a dopracovať návrh metodiky HNV, vrátane vytvorenia súhrnu „špecifických ukazovateľov“ (EK: HNV je nielen NATURA ale aj iné) a zadefinovať územie v SR – udržateľnosť územia) • FADN – by mala byť reprezentatívna vzorka podnikov (celá škála) – návrh preskúmať z hľadiska finančných nárokov rozšírenie vzorky FADN)

MTE recommendations discussed at the FG 2011 (or identified with the group)	Implemented? YES/NO/PARTLY	What needs to be done in view of the ex-post evaluation? (suggested by FG-participants)
<p>with institutions of the ministry of Environment is needed, so that changes caused by the RDP 2007 - 2013, compared with other interventions, would be visible. Lack of monitoring data has compromised several times the decisions in evaluation of impacts in relation to Axis 2, because of lack of access to meta-data on payments via LPIS, e.g. synthetic data on enterprises and measures, which could be monitored using indicators for HNV farmlands. (original grasslands and semi-grasslands etc.). (4)</p>		
Denmark		
<p>Better use of electronic registration of data (4)</p>	Partly	On their way to implementation but hard to fully implement. Understanding among participants that the use of better electronic registration as well as registration of qualitative impact would be the challenge for the ongoing evaluation within the next years.
<p>Use of research institutes for specific analysis (1)</p>	Partly	See above
<p>Registration of impact under axis 3 to be used more actively for communication purposes (2)</p>	Partly	See above
Estonia		

MTE recommendations discussed at the FG 2011 (or identified with the group)	Implemented? YES/NO/PARTLY	What needs to be done in view of the ex-post evaluation? (suggested by FG-participants)
(12)		Participants agreed that if there will be guidance on ex post evaluation, it should be available before countries start its preparation.
France⁵		
No information available		
Finland⁶		
(3)		How the evaluation takes into account the general obligations of environmental protection and ecological aspects of sustainable development?
(9)		Impacts of RDP on regions should be evaluated and some comparisons between regions should be made
(9)		In Finland there have been different themes employed inside of the on RDP. The impacts of these themes should be evaluated. The impacts of the communication on the RDP should be considered for evaluation too.
(7)		Assessment of the environmental impacts of axis 1 and 2 should be made
(7)		Planning the ex post evaluation should be very well made so that evaluation can deal with all the questions which are expected to answer

⁵ France has provided a series of elaborated recommendation for the future period only.

⁶ Finland has identified a new set of needs/recommendations.

MTE recommendations discussed at the FG 2011 (or identified with the group)	Implemented? YES/NO/P ARTLY	What needs to be done in view of the ex-post evaluation? (suggested by FG-participants)
(2)		More communication between evaluation, evaluators and bodies implementing the RDP shall take place
(5)		Evaluation should make cost benefit analyses of different implementing acts. The results show which are the most cost-efficient acts. These results should be taken into account for current as well as next programming period
(11)		Further development of the public net portal of RDP (Maaseutu.fi) is needed so that it serves better to the public
(11)		Annual progress reports should be written in more communicative format
Greece		
<p>Improve capacities of MA and MC members, including training on CMEF or dissemination of best practice in order to promote and enhance the evaluation culture, focus more on the ongoing evaluation and its effective management, e.g. via establishing the Steering group for this purpose, and prepare the detailed evaluation plans with tasks and content and allocate sufficient human resources in monitoring, evaluation studies and reports. (2)</p>	Yes	
<p>Data management should be one of the main focuses of the ongoing evaluation, including the identification and filling of data gaps and create or improve the functional IT systems for the collection</p>	Yes	Directions are needed on what should be done for projects that their impacts would be measured after the ex-post evaluation

MTE recommendations discussed at the FG 2011 (or identified with the group)	Implemented? YES/NO/P ARTLY	What needs to be done in view of the ex-post evaluation? (suggested by FG-participants)
and processing of high quality monitoring data. (4)		
Improve the collection and processing of monitoring data in line with CMEF standards, and use projects applications, payment request forms, and business plans, project implementation reports for data collection. (4)	Partly	Many improvements in the MIS has already been done but problems remain in project applications, business plans etc. and in those Measures where applications were submitted before 2009 (past invitations) and did not contain sufficient data.
Hungary		
Specific relation to recommendation missing (2)	Yes	On-going evaluation is a new task for the MA but it is a good learning process. End of last year, an Evaluation Plan was set up, which determined the tasks and time frame of evaluation activities, the necessary human and financial resources and the responsibilities of the relevant stakeholders. Besides the MA and MRD staff, experts of NAERDI and other external professionals have been also involved in the evaluation process. A new colleague was hired by MA for internal monitoring and evaluation activities
Specific relation to recommendation missing (2)	Yes	An external evaluation expert has been assigned to train the staff of MA and NAEDI on evaluations, particularly on the method of counterfactual impact assessment
Specific relation to recommendation missing (3)	Yes	The MA has launched the revision of data collection system and the review of indicators and output data in order to simplify the data collection system
Specific relation to recommendation missing (4)	Yes	The MA drew on a TOR for the monitoring data collection. The task is to develop primary and secondary data collection and processing methods, collect and adapt Good Practices, elaborate new proposals for determining the value of indicators. The evaluation task covers the review of all result, impact and context indicators.
Ireland		

MTE recommendations discussed at the FG 2011 (or identified with the group)	Implemented? YES/NO/P ARTLY	What needs to be done in view of the ex-post evaluation? (suggested by FG-participants)
Ensure full implementation of agreed indicators for new NATURA 2000 (Measure 213) and new AEOS (Measure 214) schemes under Axis 2. (3)	Yes	In relation to recommendation 1 the group consider that they were well progressed with improved definitions and stronger working links with an improved IT reporting system. Work here has been mainly on the operational rather than the policy side where there remains a lack of clarity. They have been able to focus on delivery prioritising 'Health Check' priorities and with improved inspections backing this up, take up under the AEOS scheme has improved as a consequence of improved tailoring. There is still work to do on improving the identification and definition of Natura areas which although improved is still less than ideal.
Complement EU Common Indicators with development of qualitative data tools, including case studies and primary research, to assess performance of Axes 3 and 4 measures. (3)	Partly	In relation to recommendation 2 there remains a need for qualitative indicators especially for case studies. A lot of work has been done by LAGs but there are still inconsistencies. Time and resources are still needed and remain limiting factors; greater flexibility is needed in this regard. Additional resources have been provided mainly to deal with IT. The manual approach to data collection has highlighted the need for improvement and qualitative assessment remains challenging. There is more to do here.
Develop an annual census of Axis 3 results and impacts, to include project-level quantitative and qualitative output, result and impact indicators collected by LAGs and inputted to a DCEGA centralised data system. (6)	Partly	Recommendation 3 has been pursued as part of the work undertaken in relation to number 2, once again further work is needed to build e.g. on strong case study work and take this to a higher level.
Investigate potential to develop alternative measurement for economic growth (gross value added) and labour productivity impact indicators for Axis 1 and Axis 3 measures. (7)	Partly	Recommendation 4 has seen the GVA problem more clearly identified but this has not yet been resolved. There are difficulties with making use of farm survey data arising from the mix of national (substantially greater than EU in scale) and RDP funded interventions resulting in a lack of comparative data. There appears to be a need for a simpler approach to the GVA indicator and the approach piloted in Scotland to get a basis for comparison of supported and non-supported businesses for later assessment of impacts and netting out was discussed, information on this will be provided by the Geographical Expert who is leading this work. Recommendations: go for simplified approach.
Address as a priority collection of data to support provision of up-to-date (incl. 2009) data for all EU Common output indicators for Axes 3 and 4 (Measures 312 and 413 re beneficiaries). (4)	Yes	Work on Recommendation 5 has been progressed along with numbers 1 and 2 and is largely complete.
Provide training to LAGs to support implementation of monitoring and evaluation framework. (2)	No	There has been very little progress made with relation to Recommendation 6 , training is impossible in advance of the improvements in the IT system, this should be done as soon as is practicable with a view to improving the quality of the data. The Helpdesk will provide access to relevant support and guidance materials e.g. re HNV

MTE recommendations discussed at the FG 2011 (or identified with the group)	Implemented? YES/NO/P ARTLY	What needs to be done in view of the ex-post evaluation? (suggested by FG-participants)
examples.		
Malta		
Set up of statistical compilation system (3)	Partly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing evaluators are on board • Survey is being carried out to obtain data from beneficiaries, this data will be used for the calculation of indicators • A strategy to assess result indicators has been set up • A strategy to assess result indicators has been set up • International benchmarking Leader
Undertake a real evaluation on RDP impacts based on a sound methodology (7)	Partly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact indicator values are calculated on basis of results obtained from surveys • Through the contracting of ongoing evaluators it has been ensured that evaluation is now not aimed only to produce reports which are required by the commission but also to inform the MA on the progress of the programme and what is required to improve on it.
Develop a short term/medium/long term orientation to guide M&E activities (3)	Partly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drafters of the RDP should develop an adequate evaluation plan (expert team from UK has been already selected and this team will be drafting the RDP for 2014-2020). • The MA is currently organising working groups with various stakeholders in order to assess the needs of the sector. The findings from these working groups and NRN meetings will form the basis of the new RDP. • Within the short term, ongoing evaluators were contracted and are in the process of updating baseline and result indicators. • The IT system is being updated which should make it more accessible to MA staff for the extraction of Data. • On the medium/long term, findings from MTE and other evaluation reports will lead to the update of targets for all indicators following transfer of funds.
Portugal		

MTE recommendations discussed at the FG 2011 (or identified with the group)	Implemented? YES/NO/P ARTLY	What needs to be done in view of the ex-post evaluation? (suggested by FG-participants)
Increase human capacities in evaluation within MA (2)	partly	ongoing resolution for the time of ex-post evaluation
Guarantee information flows, cooperation and consultation between evaluation stakeholders (2)	partly	ongoing resolution for the time of ex-post evaluation
Apply full set of common indicators (3)	partly	ongoing resolution for the time of ex-post evaluation, HNV, forest and biodiversity more difficult for resolution
Unburden and simplify the future CMEF (3)	partly	ongoing resolution
Overcome operational problems in running monitoring systems (4)	partly	ongoing resolution for the time of ex-post evaluation
Include result indicators in the monitoring (4)	partly	ongoing resolution for the time of ex-post evaluation
Fill data gaps (7)	partly	ongoing resolution for the time of ex-post evaluation
Further develop suitable methodologies and exchange information between countries with similar situations (7)	partly	ongoing resolution
Pay specific attention to methodological challenges posed by certain measures (7)	partly	ongoing resolution for the time of ex-post evaluation
Romania		
Adopting an integrated informatics system for all information regarding the programming, execution, monitoring and evaluation (4)	Partly	<p>The system has been developed, but there are some challenges related to its functionality and its adaptation to the requests of the new Programme;</p> <p>It is important to ensure that all operational flows are operational;</p> <p>It is emphasized the need to keep a balance between data demand and the monitoring and processing capacity (in order not to charge beneficiaries).</p> <p>Solutions:</p> <p>It is essential that the existing system adapts to the requirements of the new programme and in this regard it should be clarified as soon as possible the entire operation flow from financing requests to generated reports. This is required also for ex-post evaluation.</p>

MTE recommendations discussed at the FG 2011 (or identified with the group)	Implemented? YES/NO/P ARTLY	What needs to be done in view of the ex-post evaluation? (suggested by FG-participants)
It is recommended that the MA should carry out successive thematic evaluations (7)	Partly	<p>Problems with procurement procedures are still reported. Nearly 80% of projects launched on thematic evaluations were either delayed or cancelled; At the same time, there is a certain lack of expertise from the part of those participating in the tenders; It is proposed to amend the EU Directive on the criteria regarding the experience of experts involved in the evaluation.</p> <p>Solutions: Improving evaluation skills; it was already created a Master's Program with a specialty in evaluation organized by the Higher National School for Public Administration; It was established the Association for the Evaluation Development, similar to national societies for evaluation, whose aim is to develop the capacity to evaluate Public Policies and Programs; The evaluation market will develop, and the evaluation supply will react according to the evaluation demand.</p>
Improve the participatory process at all management levels in order to consolidate the monitoring process (2)	Partly	<p>It has been noticed an improvement of the participatory process at all levels; common working groups are organized with the participation of institutions involved in the European funds administration; national and international conferences are organized in order to improve the knowledge on monitoring and evaluation; thematic working groups are also organized within NRDN; It has already created a site dedicated to the evaluation of structural funds: www.evaluare-structurale.</p>
Sweden		
Place utility (evaluation of multiple effects), from FG 2011 (7)	No	<p>Not much can be done since, as much of the discussion during the focus group showed, it is an intriguing task. If it was complex before, the level of complexity increases even more when the entire CAP is included in the "CMEF". Further, the majority of the evaluation questions to be answered in the ex-post are already established. The MA has been studying these issues already through co-operation with Jönköping International Business School.</p>
Further comments		
Resourcing evaluation (1)		<p>As a share of the total programme budget, the resources set aside for monitoring and evaluation are small. As a consequence more complicated issues, such as the place utility, cannot be dealt with in-depth. This is also the case with preparatory analyses, such as the TULPAN project.</p> <p>Further, the MTE should ideally establish priorities in what to deal with through the latter parts of programming;</p>

MTE recommendations discussed at the FG 2011 (or identified with the group)	Implemented? YES/NO/PARTLY	What needs to be done in view of the ex-post evaluation? (suggested by FG-participants)
		how to reach objectives, how to improve evaluation data, how to develop evaluation methods (perhaps through funded calls for research). However, no one seems to accept the responsibility for that. Further, evaluation matters are not really focused in the Swedish MTE.
Relevance of ex-post (8)		Who will need and read the ex-post evaluation? Is it better to reduce any ambitions concerning the ex-post evaluations and basically summarize monitoring data? Discussion concluded that politicians, the public and others are interested. Still, can the ex-post be simplified, and the resources it consumes be used for methods development, and data collection, in order to produce a very good AIR 2017? If yes, any strengthening of the AIR 2017 should include a very good communication plan (politicians, public etc.).
Relevance of objectives (8)		The ex-post naturally measures whether programme objectives have been reached, but should it also evaluate whether the objectives were the best ones?
Evaluation methods (7)		Should also the evaluation methods used be evaluated?
External knowledge input (12)		Some focus group participants have been participating previous years, and they were curious to know what happens with the focus group syntheses. None of them could remember having received one.
Slovenia		
It is vital that the database is updated, adapted to the volume of data and the needs of its users – in order for it to become an analytical and planning tool. (4)	No	The MA is well aware of the problem of separate databases and efforts needed for aggregation of data for the analytical and reporting purposes or calculation of indicator values. Solution to identified problem is not possible under this programming period (time, resources), however it is critical to prepare for 2014-2020. This will require good cooperation between the Ministry and PA using and building on experience from the current period.
Recipients of support should be ensured simple reporting, while at the same time they should be required to meet obligations of submitting due reports and subject to sanctions for any breaches, otherwise monitoring of outputs and results under RDP will continue to be based on approximate figures and extrapolations of available data. (4)	Partly	PA began improving the system in 2010. A record of beneficiaries subject to obligatory reporting was established per measure, call for proposals, type of reporting (FADN, reporting form) and year. E-reporting not yet introduced, however from 2012 all reports available in a digital form (scanned). A record of beneficiaries not submitting reports for 2011 established and beneficiaries requested. Sanctions foreseen for those not complying with obligations. Further activities for collection of reports needed.

MTE recommendations discussed at the FG 2011 (or identified with the group)	Implemented? YES/NO/P ARTLY	What needs to be done in view of the ex-post evaluation? (suggested by FG-participants)
MA should establish a system of indicators for reporting by LAGs on implementation of the LEADER approach, which will enable a thorough assessment of results and impact of implementation, including further planning. (4)	Yes	Collection of indicator data established in APR 2010 and 2011 by introduction of a specific form that is filled in by LAGs and submitted to the MA Leader Office. Received data serve for preparation of APRs and analysis (e.g. allocation of projects in priorities and priority areas).
It would make sense to develop methods to monitor results and impacts of agricultural policy, adapted to structural characteristics of agriculture in Slovenia, and accordingly adapt collection of data and building databases. (3)	Partly	Ongoing evaluation in 2012 focused on 4 themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Geographical aspects of RDP implementation (simulation of division to 2 cohesion regions) - Assessment of impact of RDP 2007-2013 and other national and EU programmes/measures/policies (possible synergies) - Methodology and calculation of impact indicators (are they possible to calculate – if not, what data is missing, proposal of alternative methods) - Innovation: establishment of methods and pilot evaluation of measures with innovation potentials. It is likely that ex-post will not assess all impact indicators with equal effort. Economic indicators e.g. are aggregated on national level and therefore impact of RDP will not be possible to measure. Time and cost for gathering data needs to be considered.
Websites should be kept better updated and new approaches should be introduced for all measures across the board - from electronic applications to electronic reporting and the possibility of insight into output indicators. (4)	Partly	Electronic submission of applications introduced to 4 biggest measures: 112, 121, 122, 123 for farm holdings. E-reporting not yet introduced (see Rec.2), however scanned applications will be available.
M 211, 212 Improve the monitoring of measure implementation, which is based on actual areas included in both measures each. Establish a record of agricultural holdings in LFA that are not included in the measure. Aside of that such a registry would serve as a "control group" for the comparison between beneficiaries and those who farm in similar circumstances,	Partly	Monitoring of measure implementation based on actual areas practiced. It was mentioned that data for establishing a control group from existing databases will have to be reconsidered again. Where control groups are not possible to determine, other methods will have to be used for assessing impacts.

MTE recommendations discussed at the FG 2011 (or identified with the group)	Implemented? YES/NO/P ARTLY	What needs to be done in view of the ex-post evaluation? (suggested by FG-participants)
but are not included, and that would enable a more accurate valuation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the measures. (4)		
M 214: The indicators related to nature preservation should be, in cooperation with other institutions (MOP, IRSEP), correctly split into individual sub-measures, and realistic target values set for these sub-measures, which would be desirable to attain with RDP 2007–2013. This way we could coordinate the two programmes that affect biodiversity (among other factors). (2)	Yes	Monitoring regularly done on a sample of holdings.
M 311, 322 - the current monitoring process has no appropriate indicators that would directly measure the improvement of life in rural areas. Due to the above we propose that the ongoing evaluation of RDP be supplemented with appropriately defined and coordinated indicators and that measurements are commenced. (3)	Partly	Methodology and indicator system for quality of life in rural areas (Axis 3) and Leader (Axis4) are part of the 2012 ongoing evaluation. Results will be presented in APR for 2012.

3.3.2 Which types of recommendations were implemented?

Table: Statistics on recommendations implemented

Types of recommendation	Yes	No	Partly	Total Yes and Partly
1. Organisational settings & resourcing			1 (DK)	1
2. Steering of ongoing evaluation process, accompanying capacity building	4 (GR, HU, SI)	3 (IE, SK)	4 (DK, PT, RO)	8
3. Development of an adequate evaluation approach	3 (CY, HU, IE)	1 (CZ)	8 (CY, IE, MT, PT, SI)	11
4. Management of the monitoring system	4 (GR, HU, IE, SI)	4 (CZ, SK, SI)	10 (AT, CY, DK, GR, PT, RO, SI)	14
5. Assessment of delivery and project selection; cost effectiveness of delivery				
6. Assessment of performance (input, outputs)			1 (IE)	1
7. Assessment of results & impacts (against baselines)		2 (CZ, SE)	6 (IE, MT, PT, RO)	6
8. Review of objectives and targets				
9. Assessment of other specific issues such as National Rural Networks	1 (AT)		1 (AT)	2
10. Reporting				
11. Dissemination and capitalization of evaluation results				
12. Coordination with EC, Support by Evaluation Helpdesk				

In the table above information from BENELUX, Estonia, France and Finland is not counted as the information does not relate to recommendations presented in the Focus Group Report 2011.

Although the picture is by no means complete as only eleven Member States reported any progress at all in implementing recommendations and three reported having made no progress. Other countries (EE, FI, FR, SE, BENELUX) presented a new set of recommendations or needs. Ten Member States did not report on progress at all. The above table shows that most recommendations were implemented in those M&E activity fields where most recommendations had been produced in the 2011 focus groups (fields highlighted in green):

- M&E activity field 2. Steering of ongoing evaluation process, accompanying capacity building
- M&E activity field 3. Development of an adequate evaluation approach
- M&E activity field 4. Management of the monitoring system
- M&E activity field 7. Assessment of results & impacts (against baselines)

Moreover, the table above shows that only in 7 activity fields out of 12 answers were found. Thus, no information is available on the ways recommendations in five fields were tackled. Also, the information

collected varied largely between the countries. Some countries provide exhaustive information (AT, CZ, IE, MT, RO, SI), from others only key words are available (e.g. DK, PT). Moreover, the degrees of implementation vary. Some countries have mixed results (e.g. SI), most have partly implemented the recommendations and while CZ and SK have not implemented any of the recommendation hitherto. Of course, in this regard one has to keep in mind that many countries have not provided any information.

3.3.3 What issues arose in implementation?

M&E activity field 2. Steering of ongoing evaluation process, accompanying capacity building

Eight recommendations have been implemented either fully (in three countries) or partly (in three countries). Little information is available on the types of measures implemented. However, based on anecdotal information one can assume that the range of measures was rather broad. In **Romania**, improved participation has been noticed, e.g. institutions involved in the European funds administration participated in common working groups. Moreover, thematic working groups are organized within NRDN, national and international conferences were organised in order to improve M&E knowledge and a website has been set up for the evaluation of structural funds. Improved participation was also noticed in **Hungary**, where also an evaluation plan has been set up and support from external experts in the evaluation process has been sought (in particular for the method of counterfactual impact assessment). In **Ireland**, the Helpdesk will provide access to relevant support and guidance materials, e.g. HNV examples. In Slovenia, regular monitoring is undertaken based on a sample of holdings.

As for issues which arose in implementation, only Ireland and Romania provide information. In Ireland, little progress has been made related to the provision of trainings to LAGs in order to support the implementation of the M&E framework as trainings to LAGs could not be organised in advance of the improvements in the IT system, which were necessary for the enhanced data quality.

M&E activity field 3. Development of an adequate evaluation approach

In this activity field eleven recommendations have been implemented either fully (in three countries) or partly (in five countries). Based on given information, the types of measures concentrate on improved data organisation and collection as well as reviews/(re-) definition/identification of indicators.

Examples for measures in order to **improve data organisation** are:

- the provision of an updated overview table of indicators, the identification of a public service as the coordinator for data collection and information on the environmental situation (Cyprus)
- Revision of that data collection system in Hungary
- A survey is being carried out to obtain data from beneficiaries. These data will be used for the calculation of indicators and the IT system is being updated which should make it more accessible to MA staff for the extraction of Data. (Malta)

Examples for measure related to the improvement of indicators are:

- Methodology and indicator system for quality of life in rural areas (Axis 3) and Leader (Axis4) are part of the 2012 ongoing evaluation in Slovenia
- Operational work for improved definitions and stronger working links with an improved IT reporting system related to indicators for new NATURA 2000 (Ireland)
- A strategy to assess result indicators has been set up and ongoing evaluators are in the process of updating baseline and result indicators. (Malta)

Most difficulties still lie in the **lack of data**, e.g. in Cyprus no data are collected for soil quality. In Ireland there is still a **need for qualitative indicators** for case studies and in Malta an evaluation plan is outstanding. Also, the MA is currently organising working groups with stakeholders for a needs

assessment. The Focus Group in Ireland mentions the limited time and resources for the development of qualitative tools complementing EU common indicators. In this regard, there is still need for improvement in data collection in particular related to Axes 3 and 4. While Ireland mentions the necessity to improve the identification and definition of Natura areas, in Slovenia still the issue of missing methods for the monitoring of results and impacts exists. However, the development of a methodology and indicator system for quality of life in rural areas (Axis 3) and Leader (Axis4) are part of the 2012 ongoing evaluation. Results will be presented in APR for 2012.

M&E activity field 4. Management of the monitoring system

This is the activity field with the highest number of implemented recommendations. Eight recommendations have been implemented partly (in five countries) and three fully (in three countries). Information provided contains many details on improvements in the management of the respective monitoring systems, which are difficult to sum up without the elaboration of the particular background. Therefore, the focus in this section is on the issues which arose during the implementation of recommendations. The information is again anecdotal and highlights a few examples:

- In Slovakia, cross-sectoral communication among different ministries is an issue in the data collection. This is true also for various agencies, e.g. acting in the field of environment.
- Though many improvements were implemented in Greece, problems remain in project applications, business plans etc. and in those measures where applications were submitted before 2009 (past invitations) and did not contain sufficient data.
- In Romania, an integrated informatics system has been developed. However, there are some challenges related to its functionality and its adaptation to the requests of the new Programme (e.g. ensuring the operational flows)
- In Slovenia, the issue of separate databases persists. Efforts for the aggregation of data for the analytical and reporting purposes or calculation of indicator values are still needed and a solution of this is not possible in the ongoing programming period because of time and resources. However, e-reporting for the beneficiaries is being introduced in 2012 and the electronic submission of applications for four measures for farm holdings has been already introduced.

M&E activity field 7. Assessment of results & impacts (against baselines)

For activity field 7, all in all, six recommendations have been implemented partly in four countries. A few prominent issues are listed here:

- The development of an alternative measurement for economic growth and labour productivity impact indicators has not been possible hitherto due to difficulties in making use of farm survey data and a lack of comparative data in Ireland. There appears to be a need for a simpler approach to the GVA indicator and the approach piloted in Scotland to get a basis for comparison of supported and non-supported businesses for later assessment of impacts and netting out was discussed, information on this will be provided by the Geographical Expert who is leading this work.
- In Romania, problems with procurement are reported and almost 80% of projects launched on the recommended thematic evaluations were either delayed or cancelled. Also a certain lack of expertise from the part of those participating in the tenders has been identified and it is proposed to amend the EU Directive on the criteria regarding the experience of experts involved in the evaluation. – As a first reaction, the Association for Evaluation Development has been established aiming at capacity building.
- In Sweden, a series of difficulties arose related to the evaluation of multiple effects (place utility). It has been recognised that the level of complexity increases even more when the entire CAP is included in the CMEF. Further, the majority of the evaluation questions to be answered in the ex-post are already established. However, progress was sought and the MA has already studied these issues in cooperation with Jönköping International Business School.

4 CONCLUSIONS

(currently under preparation)



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