

*17<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Expert Committee  
on Evaluation of Rural Development  
Programmes*

*18<sup>th</sup> September 2013*

## 1. Introduction and adoption of the agenda

The Expert Committee on Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes (abbreviated to “Evaluation Expert Committee”) met for the seventeenth time in the European Commission’s premises in Brussels on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

The meeting was chaired by Adelina Dos Reis (Head of Unit AGRI L.4), who welcomed participants and introduced the draft agenda. The draft agenda was adopted, and the topics addressed during the meeting followed the order summarised below.

## 2. Intervention Logic and Indicators: Update following the political agreement

Zélie Peppiette (DG AGRI Unit L.4) presented the final changes to the RD intervention logic and indicators as a result of the political agreement achieved. All in all, the union priorities for rural development (Article 5 of the rural development regulation) have not undergone major changes. An overview of the changes introduced in the regulation which affect the intervention logic and indicators is as follows (details included in the PowerPoint presentation):

- *Priority 1:* wording has changed at the Focus Area level.
- *Priority 2:* wording has changed both at the Priority and Focus Area levels. “Forestry” is now included at the Priority level although not at the Focus Area level. MSs who wish to include forestry as an RDP policy objective should create a programme specific Focus Area, with appropriate programme specific targets and programme specific indicators.
- *Priority 3:* wording has changed both at Priority and at Focus Area levels.
- *Priority 4:* wording has changed both at Priority and Focus Area levels..
- *Priority 5:* wording has changed at Focus Area level. Focus Area 5D now includes reducing ammonia emissions as well as greenhouse gases, so there is an associated new common context indicator (incorporated also within an impact indicator) and a new complementary result indicator. However, the modification does not require the implementation of new programme actions (actions are similar for reduction of GHG) and the new indicators do not imply an increased workload for MSs (EEA already collects data on ammonia emission from agriculture);
- *Priority 6:* the word “development” has been added to Focus Area 6A.

Following the presentation on intervention logic and indicators, MSs raised the following questions/issues:

### Link between RD Priorities/Focus Areas and the thematic objectives

Germany asked for guidance on how to link thematic objectives to the RD Priorities and Focus Areas.

*The EC explained that the annex of the “Draft template and guidelines on the content of the Partnership Agreement” includes a standard mapping of RD Priorities and Focus Areas to the thematic objectives. Including ammonia in Focus Area 5D does not have consequences on this mapping.*

### Latest available documentation on RD intervention logic

Belgium asked to receive an updated version of the RD intervention logic. Germany asked for the changes in the document to be highlighted.

*The EC explained that the slides presented at the Evaluation Expert Committee will be uploaded on [CIRCA](#). A track-changed version and a clean version of the document on target indicators and complementary result indicators (Article 5) has already been made available to MSs. In relation to context and impact indicators the Commission informed the committee that the Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme has just released updated data for breeding birds, covering the*

period up to 2011. The data made public is at European and regional level, but national (and in some cases regional) data is available from the national contact points. A list of these national contact points was provided to delegates who were encouraged to make contact to obtain these updated figures to use both as a baseline for the next programming and also for evaluation of the current programming period.

### 3. Evaluation Questions: Lessons from the current period; proposals for 2014-2020

Eric Nieto and Jela Tvrdonova (Evaluation Helpdesk) presented the draft working document on Common Evaluation Questions (CEQs) for Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020, developed by the Evaluation Helpdesk on the basis of the outcomes of a thematic workshop with evaluation experts and European Commission representatives. The presentation comprised:

- The purpose of the Evaluation Questions.
- An outline of the main lessons learned in the 2007-2013 period.
- A new approach for CEQs for Rural Development (2014-2020) including a proposed set of CEQs (18 Focus Area-related CEQs and 12 horizontal CEQs).

In order to improve the draft working document, MS representatives were invited to participate in interactive group work on the formulation of the CEQs, the judgment criteria, the common indicators and proposed additional information. The outcomes of the group work are presented in [Annex 1](#) of this document.

The MSs appreciated the effort made to reduce the number of CEQs and to improve the links between indicators, judgement criteria and CEQs compared with the current programming period.

MS were invited to send in written comments by 30<sup>th</sup> September. A revised version of the document will be prepared for future discussion.

The following comments and questions were raised during the meeting:

#### Status of the proposed set of CEQs

France and Portugal asked whether the full set of CEQs is mandatory and when they have to be answered. Luxembourg asked if the entire set of CEQs needs to be answered even if some Priorities are not addressed in the RDP, and Finland asked who is responsible for answering the CEQs.

*The EC replied that the CEQs will not be part of the implementing acts. However, their substance is indirectly included through the requirements for reporting of the achievement of programme objectives in 2017, 2019 and in the ex post evaluation. The EC expects answers to the CEQs in reporting; e.g. in 2017 MSs are expected to answer questions on programme results and programme steering and in 2019 questions on interim impacts. Concerning the responsibility for answering the CEQs it has to be stressed that the enhanced AIRs are owned by the Managing Authority (MA) while the ex post evaluation will be conducted by an external evaluator. However, due to the content required in 2017 and 2019 reports, it is likely that MAs will wish to include inputs from an external evaluator whom they would probably ask to provide answers to the EQs.*

#### Overlap in the proposed CEQs for Technical Assistance (TA) and Networks (NRN)

Belgium and Portugal mentioned that the proposed CEQs dealing with TA overlap with the proposed CEQs on networking, and asked for clarification.

*The EC replied that there is a specific need to address TA and NRNs in the new CEQs. They are not covered in the set of CEQs for 2007-2013 and this fact was heavily criticized by the Court of Auditors. If overlaps in the draft set of CEQs exist, they will be removed in the next revision of the document.*

### Relevance of CEQs for Member States and EC

France and Belgium highlighted that the proposed set of CEQs is very general and that their answers will provide little information on the specific challenges that regions need to address. Cyprus pointed out that the nature of the horizontal CEQs will likely lead to an academic exercise with limited practical use and Portugal said that similar CEQs have already been used in previous evaluations and did not support MAs sufficiently in the analysis of their programmes.

*The EC agreed that this set is general and would not be sufficient for full evaluation of an individual RDP. The approach here has been to define a minimum common core of EQs linked to objectives at the EU level in order to allow common reporting, whilst leaving maximum flexibility for MS to use EQs appropriate for their own RDP. Agreement by the MSs on this set of CEQs is therefore important. However, in order to respond to specific challenges, MSs are invited to add programme specific EQs. Compared to the previous programming period, the CEQs are fewer in number, being linked to Focus Areas and horizontal issues (no longer linked to measures) thus providing more space for programme specific EQs.*

### RDPs' contribution towards EU2020 objectives

Germany commented that the contribution of the RD policy towards EU2020 objectives is very small compared to other policies, but programme impacts at the local level are very relevant. Belgium said that due to the limited impact of RDPs towards EU2020 objectives, the draft working document provides rather weak links between CEQs, indicators and judgment criteria.

*The EC confirmed that for some impacts, the contribution of the RDP may be relatively small compared to other interventions in the territory. However, the strategic choices set out in each programme should help MSs to identify the RDP's contribution, and result and complementary result indicators should be used for this purpose. Guidance for result and complementary result indicators will follow. Although measuring the net contribution remains challenging, improvements in estimating the net effects of the RDP are expected when using all components of the monitoring and evaluation system together.*

### Evaluation of Pillar I and Pillar II

Germany asked about the evaluation approach for Pillar I and how MSs should deal with the demarcation of the effects of both CAP pillars in a territory.

*The EC replied that the two CAP pillars have a different policy design and delivery, and therefore have different evaluation contexts; the EC is in charge for evaluating Pillar I, while MSs are responsible for RDP level evaluations. The EC is interested in assessing the net effects of all implemented instruments in a territory, and encourages the evaluation of RDPs to also consider the effects of relevant Pillar I instruments.*

*Thematic evaluations will be organized by the EC which will cover both pillars.*

## **4. Guidance document for the Evaluation Plan (EP): Presentation of current text**

Hannes Wimmer and Jela Tvrdonova (Evaluation Helpdesk) presented part II of the current draft document, including guidance on the practical implementation of the EP, with a focus on governance issues, evaluation topics and activities. Part I (basis to draft the EP chapter) was discussed in previous meetings and has now been finalised (apart from adjustments which may be needed once the new regulations are published). Before the presentation, MS representatives were asked to indicate their progress in drafting the EP chapter of their RDPs:

- 10 MSs indicated that the work on the EP has not yet started;
- 8 MSs indicated that the EP is currently under discussion;

- 6 MSs indicated that a first version of the EP has been drafted.
- 2 MSs indicated that a final version of the EP is ready
- No MSs indicated that the EP has already been assessed by the *ex ante* evaluator.

Following the presentation, MSs raised the following queries and questions:

#### EP in regionalized Member States

France asked if they may support their regional MAs by providing common components of the EP (e.g. introduction, national objectives) while leaving space for the regional MA to add in programme specific content where needed.

*The EC replied that as long as each EP reflects the content of the RDP and the EP helps each MA to implement and evaluate its RDP, regionalized MSs are free to specify common EP components for inclusion in each regional RDP.*

#### Limited space for EP on SFC (System for Fund Management in the European Community)

Austria, Germany and Belgium expressed their concern about the limited space foreseen on the SFC for the EP.

*The EC replied that it is aware of the concerns of MAs in dealing with minimum requirements and stressed the need to address the issue at the Rural Development Committee (RDC) the next day (19th September). However, part 1 of the EP guidelines support MSs to draft their EP in a concise way.*

#### Model of EP

Austria asked if it would be possible to receive a model of the EP from those MSs that have indicated that they have first drafts of the EP available.

*The EC replied that it is not able to share MS' draft documents with other MS. However, MSs are free to exchange examples or models on an informal basis.*

## **5. AIRs 2014-2020: Reporting on evaluation**

Zélie Peppiette (DG AGRI Unit L.4) presented a proposal for reporting on evaluation for the new programming period, in the standard Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) and the enhanced AIRs of 2017 and 2019. The proposal showed a clear link between the EP (i.e. planning of evaluation activities throughout the entire programming period) and the AIR (i.e. summary of activities undertaken in the programme year). As the implementing acts are still under preparation, MSs were invited to provide their comments during this meeting or in a written form after the meeting (by 30<sup>th</sup> September).

After the presentation, the following comments were raised by MSs:

#### Contribution of RDP to secondary focus areas in 2017 and 2019

France pointed out that the calculation of secondary effects might be very expensive (e.g. sampling methods and case studies), and, as shown in the current programming period, might not be very effective. Belgium added that quantifying secondary effects in evaluation contradicts the idea of simplification in programming, as suggested in the RDC.

*The EC replied that the evaluation of the RDP's secondary effects was originally envisaged within the monitoring system, but this was accepted as complex, and therefore they should be assessed through evaluation activities.. Secondary effects include substantial contributions to policy objectives and effort should be made to quantify them in order to demonstrate the full achievements of the programmes.*

### Too early to evaluate in 2017

Germany, Cyprus and Austria expressed concern regarding the quantification of programme results and secondary effects in the enhanced AIR of 2017. They suggested that in 2017 data will not be sufficiently available to assess the programme in quantitative terms.

*The EC replied that the comments received from several MSs with regard to evaluation reporting in 2017 will be further discussed internally, in order to provide input to the preparation of the implementing acts. However, Art 44 (3, 4) of the CPR already sets the scene for reporting on results in 2017 and 2019, and therefore the main rules on reporting will not change. Modification of the regulation may only occur if the MSs are able to convince their representatives within the European Council and European Parliament.*

### CEQs to be replied in 2017 and 2019, general nature of CEQs

Austria asked whether in the enhanced AIR, MSs only need to answer the CEQs relevant to their RDP(s). Germany commented that the general nature of the CEQs does not fit with the requirements for enhanced reporting in 2017 and 2019.

*The EC replied that both the implementing acts and the development of CEQs are still at a draft stage, and that all comments made today or submitted in writing will be considered for further work.*

### Standard reporting versus extended reporting on evaluation in AIR

Germany pointed out that the standard rules for reporting on evaluation in the AIR (as is also the case in the current programming period) are not sufficient to enable adequate discussion of evaluation in the Monitoring Committee, and that the German MAs currently provide yearly evaluation reports of 70-80 pages.

*The EC replied that each MS is free to develop distinct and more detailed evaluation reports if they consider it to be useful. However, the AIR chapter will only have to include a synthetic overview of evaluation, in order to provide EC Desk Officers with a concise picture of evaluation related activities which have been undertaken during the reporting year.*

### Overlap between communication activities and follow-up of evaluation results

Belgium said that there is an overlap in the reporting requirements for the standard AIRs, specifically between point 6 (communication activities) and point 7 (follow-up of evaluation results).

*The EC replied that “Communication on evaluation” is about how, what and to whom evaluation activities are communicated, while “Follow-up of evaluation results” refers to the activities organised for following up evaluation conclusions and recommendations.*

## **6. Ex-post evaluation 2007-2013: Proposals for preparation of guidance document**

Hannes Wimmer and Enrico Gaspari (Evaluation Helpdesk) presented a proposal for the guidelines on the *ex post* evaluation of RDPs. The guidelines will be developed by a Thematic Working Group and will be finished in the first half of 2014. The structure of these guidelines will be similar to the *ex ante* evaluation guidelines, namely:

- Part 1 (mainly for MA): providing practical support for Managing Authorities to steer the *ex post* evaluation process.
- Part 2 (mainly for evaluators): providing help for evaluators in applying advanced evaluation methodologies.
- Toolbox: providing a collection of good practice examples to consider in the assessment of RD impacts.



Snapshots of good practice from evaluation methods applied during the mid-term evaluation (MTE) were presented. Following the presentation, MSs raised questions related to the following:

#### Target users and the aims of the guidelines

Germany enquired as to the guideline's target group and said that some of the advanced methods that were presented require years of preparation, and therefore might be unrealistic.

*The Helpdesk replied that the target users of the guidelines are both MAs and evaluators.*

*Concerning the methodological content, MTE reports have shown a need to improve evaluation methodologies, with a specific regard to the assessment of programme impacts. MTE reports are in local languages and rarely describe methods in detail. Therefore, the second section of the guidelines will include an overview of good practices currently applied in the MSs, and will provide detailed descriptions of the methods applied.*

*The aim of the guidelines is not only to provide a detailed explanation of evaluation methodologies (as already provided in other guidelines) but also to inspire MSs to apply advanced methods in future evaluations (including ex post).*

#### Applicability of the proposed methods, lessons learned from the MTE

France was surprised to see particular emphasis on the application of counterfactual methods in evaluating RD policies, and commented that their current efforts to establish the counterfactual in forestry have been costly and have been unable to bring satisfactory results. Cyprus said that their experience was that counterfactual analysis did not lead to valid responses since the identification of reliable control groups was difficult.

Furthermore, Cyprus welcomed the guidelines and pointed out that they will be useful when making future methodological arrangements. However, together with Luxembourg, they pointed out that there is a need for easy and cost-effective methods, applicable for small MSs. Macro-economic models, for example, were considered to be too costly.

Germany acknowledged the efforts that had been made, but said that the Commission's feedback on the MTE was of rather limited use. Germany made itself available to share evaluation methods of relevance to biodiversity, farmland bird index and HNV areas for these guidelines.

*The Helpdesk replied that the main focus of the examples in the guidelines would be programme impacts and how to move from evaluating impacts at the measure level to evaluating impacts at the programme level.*

*The EC explained that feedback sent to MSs with regard to the MTE was mainly about evaluation methods, and the EC therefore sees a need to provide further support to MSs in this respect. The second part of the guidelines will offer a menu of different methodological possibilities, but the choice stays with the MSs and they do not necessarily have to comply with what is proposed in the guidelines. Furthermore the guidelines will support MSs in drafting the Terms of Reference for the ex post evaluation.*

## **7. A.O.B**

#### Future Good Practice Workshop

A Good Practice workshop on Climate Change is under preparation, and the Evaluation Helpdesk is looking for a host.

**Focus Groups on Evaluation Plan 2014-2020 in the MSs**

Focus groups are being organized by the geographic experts of the Evaluation Helpdesk and will take place in the MSs in the autumn.

**Performance Framework: need for information**

France asked for information on the Performance Framework and indicators, in order to provide further support to their regional MAs.

*The EC replied that this is a topic to be discussed in the RDC and that it will inform Unit G.3. so that the Performance Framework and Indicators will be on the agenda for the following day's meeting.*

**All presentations are available on the CIRCA platform. The next meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee is tentatively scheduled for 20<sup>th</sup> November 2013.**



## Annex I Outcomes of group work on the Common Evaluation Questions (CEQs)

### General:

- The set of CEQs are considered as general in nature.
- The group suggests collecting feedback on the proposed set of CEQs from evaluators.
- Provide examples of programme specific EQs to support MSs' reporting against RDP specific objectives.
- The horizontal CEQs need EU level evaluation with common methods.

Priority	Focus Area	CEQ/judgment criteria/ indicator	Comments
1	1A, 1B, 1C	Judg. criteria	define "sufficient", "increased"  How to define the reference situation?
2	2A	Judg. criteria	define "sufficiently supported", "sufficiently", "modernization"  It is difficult to assess the net effect of each CAP pillar
		CEQ 4	The CEQs reflects the policy objective (competitiveness)
	2B	Judg. criteria	define "adequately skilled"  develop a common approach for the evaluation of "adequately skilled young farmers"
4	4A	CEQ 8	The CEQ reflects the objective, however the nature of this CEQ is very general and therefore it is difficult to see to what extent the actions (measures) contribute to the objective. Therefore the RDPs will first need to invest a lot of work in programme specific EQs.
		indicator	It is not clear how qualitative analysis is possible
3	3B	Judg. criteria	Is only relevant for RDPs supporting risk management
	4B	CEQ 9	MSs would need examples of programme specific questions, e.g. Was the targeting responding to the hotspots regarding water pollution?  The CEQ does not show the real added value from the RDP, therefore programme specific EQs and evaluator's contributions may be expected.  The CEQ does not add any value to the target indicators.
		indicator	How to net out the contributions from Pillar I?  There is no clear link between water quality in the territory and the RDP actions.
5	5A	CEQ 11	Not possible to answer in 2017, evaluator's expertise required to answer the EQs
	5B	indicator	MSs may expect a need for additional information collection, e.g.

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Priority	Focus Area	CEQ/judgment criteria/ indicator	Comments
			trough surveys
6	6A	Judg. criteria	Define "more" Judgement criteria are too general, no added value given by them Need for explaining the judgment criteria in the document
	6B	Judg. criteria	Judg. criterion 1 does not correspond with the indicators Judg. criterion 3 is not clear
	6C	Judg. criteria	The proposed judgement criteria are not useful
HOR		CEQ 19	Not appropriate at RDP level, need to evaluate them at EU level with common methods
		CEQ 20	The question should be formulated as <i>"How has the RDP contributed to.....?"</i>  Pillar I and Greening are delivered differently, a qualitative assessment would be more appropriate as a quantitative assessment will have low real validity.
		CEQ 21	No clear link between CEQ and indicator  Separate the questions
		CEQ 22	Not very well defined. Need to look at (a) Administrative capacity, (b) burden to beneficiaries, (c) Delivery, (d) M&E, equality/diversity.
		CEQ 23	