



European Evaluation Network
for Rural Development



GUIDELINES ESTABLISHING AND IMPLEMENTING THE EVALUATION PLAN OF 2014-2020 RDPs

DRAFT NOVEMBER 2013

This draft document has been drawn up on the basis of the proposals for Regulations after the political agreement on the reform of the common agricultural policy reached on 24 September 2013. It does not prejudice the final nature of the Regulations, nor of any related delegated or implementing act. Feedback on the content of the draft guidance is welcome! Please send remarks, questions and suggestions to info@ruralevaluation.eu



Copyright notice

© European Communities, 2013

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

Draft Manuscript November 2013

The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the official views of the European Commission.



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, Unit L.4 (Evaluation of measures applicable to agriculture; studies). 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/>)

GUIDELINES

**ESTABLISHING AND
IMPLEMENTING THE
EVALUATION PLAN OF
2014-2020 RDPs**

DRAFT NOVEMBER 2013

DRAFT

CONTENT

Foreword.....	iii
Acronyms.....	iv
Introduction	1
PART I: Evaluation Plan in the RDP.....	3
1 What are the benefits of having an Evaluation Plan?	4
2 The legal framework.....	5
3 Elements of the Evaluation Plan to be covered in the RDP.....	6
3.1 Objectives and Purpose of the Evaluation Plan	7
3.2 Governance and Coordination	7
3.3 Evaluation topics and activities.....	8
3.4 Data and information.....	10
3.5 Timeline	11
3.6 Communication	12
3.7 Resources.....	13
4 Setting up and using the Evaluation Plan.....	15
4.1 Preparing the Evaluation Plan	15
4.2 Implementing the Evaluation Plan	15
4.3 Modifying the Evaluation Plan	15
4.4 Monitoring and reporting on the Evaluation Plan.....	15
PART II: From Plan to Practice	17
5 Governance and management of evaluation	19
5.1 Governance issues to consider when setting up a monitoring and evaluation system	19
5.2 Timing	23

5.3 Quality control	24
5.4 Resources	25
5.5 Reporting and communication	28
6 Evaluation topics and activities	30
6.1 Common and programme-specific elements of the evaluation system	30
6.2 Evaluation topics	31
6.3 Cross-cutting and specific evaluation topics	35
6.4 Evaluation activities	50
PART III: TOOLBOX.....	55
1 Indicative outline of a non-binding internal evaluation plan	57
2 Timeline for evaluation during the programming period	66
3 Indicative template for Terms of reference for evaluation during the programming period.....	68
4 Indicative resource plan for evaluation	72
5 Glossary of terms.....	77

FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

The Evaluation Plan (EP) is a new element within the rural development monitoring and evaluation system for the programming period 2014-2020, and is a formal requirement for Rural Development Programmes (RDP) on the basis of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) and the Rural Development Regulation (RDR). In previous years programme authorities have used various planning tools to structure, manage and steer the evaluation of their Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), to strategically build-up evaluation capacity, and to ensure that necessary prerequisites are in place for the assessment of the impacts and results of rural development interventions. The Evaluation Plan is a way of presenting tools already used by Managing Authorities (MAs), and provides an opportunity to set the corner-stones for a more targeted evaluation system at RDP-level.

The purpose of these non-binding guidelines is to illustrate what an Evaluation Plan consists of, to outline why it is important and to show how it can help to ensure that evaluation activities are conducted effectively. The guidelines aim to interpret the binding minimum requirements of the Evaluation Plan. The guidelines also provide recommendations on how to set up and run evaluations during the programming period. A broader spectrum of stakeholders (Steering Groups, Monitoring Committees, Paying Agencies, evaluation units, evaluators and Desk Officers) involved in programme development and evaluation may also find these guidelines helpful. They contain practical tools and recommendations but encompass the different situations and choices taken by Member States in organizing their evaluation systems.

This document has been drafted by a Thematic Working Group of the *Evaluation Expert Network* in close collaboration with the relevant services of the European Commission and the Evaluation Expert Committee for Rural Development. Selected experts - Rolf Berghs, Lenka Brown, Simona Cristiano, Maria Coto Sauras, Judit Habuda, John Grieve, Miroslav Kosik, Morten Kvistgaard, Isabel Naylor, Sari Rannanpää, Andreas Resch, Angelos Sanopolous, Jela Tvrdonova and Hannes Wimmer - have contributed their wealth of evaluation experience to the text. Draft documents of these Guidelines have been shared with members of the Evaluation Expert Committee in May and June 2013 in order to enable them to act as a sounding board and to check whether successive drafts of the text were adapted to the needs of the main target audience. Representatives of DG Agriculture and Rural Development have ensured the coherence of the guidelines within the EU policy framework. Experts of the Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development supported and facilitated the drafting process.

The Evaluation Plan guidelines are non-binding in nature and complement related legal acts. The present document has been drawn up on the basis of the proposals for Regulations published after the political agreements on new direction of the Common Agriculture Policy reached on 24 September 2013. It neither prejudices the final nature of the act which is agreed by the Council and the European Parliament, nor the final content of any delegated or implementing acts that may be prepared by the Commission. The final version of the Evaluation Plan guidelines will be published after adoption of the related legal acts.

Brussels, November 2013

ACRONYMS

AIR	Annual Implementation Report
AWP	Annual Work Plan
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CEQ	Common Evaluation Question
CF	Cohesion Fund
CLLD	Community-Led Local Development
CMEF	Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation
CSF	Common Strategic Framework
DG AGRI	Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development
DG BUDG	Directorate-General for Budget
DG EMPL	Directorate-General for Employment Social Affairs and Inclusion
DG ENV	Directorate-General for the Environment
DG MARE	Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional Policy
EAE	<i>Ex ante</i> evaluation
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EC	European Commission
EIP	European Innovation Partnership
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
ENRD	European Network for Rural Development
EP	Evaluation Plan
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESI Funds	European Structural and Investment Funds
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
FADN	Farm Accountancy Data Network
FSS	Farm Structure Survey
GAEC	Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions
HNW	High Nature Value
IACS	Integrated Administration and Control System
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies

LAG	Local Action Group
LDS	Local Development Strategy
LULUCF	Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NRN	National Rural Network
PA	Paying Agency
RDP	Rural Development Programme
RDR	Rural Development Regulation
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TA	Technical Assistance
ToR	Terms of Reference
WFD	Water Framework Directive

DRAFT

INTRODUCTION

In May 2012, a Good Practice Workshop entitled "From Ongoing Evaluation towards the Evaluation Plan" was organised in Vienna by the Evaluation Helpdesk¹. It was attended by 47 participants among them representatives from 18 Member States, the European Commission, the Evaluation Helpdesk and evaluators. One of the key findings of the workshop was that an Evaluation Plan can serve as an effective tool for Managing Authorities to plan their evaluation activities during the programming period, as long as it remains flexible to newly emerging evaluation needs.

What is the Evaluation Plan all about?

The Evaluation Plan is a new element within the rural development (RD) monitoring and evaluation system for the programming period 2014-2020. It is a mandatory component of the RDP in which the Managing Authority specifies in seven sub-sections the arrangements that need to be made to carry out monitoring and evaluation activities in the period 2014-2020. While the Evaluation Plan is an element in all Common Strategic Framework (CSF) Programmes, in Rural Development (similarly to programmes financed with European Maritime and Fisheries Funds (EMFF)) it is an integral part of the RDP. It is therefore subject to *ex ante* evaluation and is submitted as part of the RDP. During programme implementation, the Evaluation Plan serves as a reference document for the management, conduct and follow-up of evaluation activities, as well as the basis for reporting in the Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs)². It is therefore a key tool for evaluation during the programming period (formerly 'ongoing evaluation').

Who are the main stakeholders of the Evaluation Plan?

The drafting of the EP will be the responsibility of the **Managing Authority**, with the assistance of **programming bodies** or an **evaluation unit** (if different from the Managing Authority). The Evaluation Plan will be a foundation for planning, steering and coordinating evaluation tasks. **Evaluators** may use the EP as a reference document for designing their evaluation approach and for communicating with the MA and other relevant bodies (e.g. data providers). **EC Desk Officers** will assess the Evaluation Plan to ensure that it meets minimum requirements, and will subsequently refer to it when assessing the evaluation activities undertaken and reported in the Annual Implementation Reports (AIR). **Other evaluation stakeholders** such as Paying Agencies (PAs), Monitoring Committee (MC) members, evaluation steering groups, bodies managing local development strategies, and RDP beneficiaries may use the Evaluation Plan as an information source to clarify their role in evaluation and to get a clearer insight into the evaluation process.

How to use the non-binding Evaluation Plan guidelines for rural development?

These guidelines are designed to help **Managing Authorities** to

- build and draft the Evaluation Plan as a part of the RDP (see **PART I** "Evaluation Plan in the RDP")
- implement the Evaluation Plan during the programming period (see **PART II** "From plan to practice" and **PART III** "Toolbox").

The structure aims to satisfy both Member States who prefer concise guidance limited to fulfilling minimum requirements (**Part I**) and those who prefer more extensive recommendations (**Part II and III**). In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the process, we recommend to read **Part II** "From plan to practice" before drafting the Evaluation Plan.

¹ The newsletter and presentations from this workshop can be found at http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/good-practices-workshops/from-ongoing-evaluation-towards-the-evaluation-plan_en/en/from-ongoing-evaluation-towards-the-evaluation-plan_en.cfm

² CPR, Art. 44 and RDR, Art. 82

DRAFT

PART I: EVALUATION PLAN IN THE RDP

*Recommendations on how to fulfil the minimum requirements for drafting the
Evaluation Plan*

1 WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF HAVING AN EVALUATION PLAN?

The **overall purpose** of the Evaluation Plan as outlined in the *revised proposal for minimum requirements for the Evaluation Plan to be included in 2014-2020 RDPs* is to ensure that sufficient and appropriate evaluation activities are undertaken, and that sufficient and appropriate resources are available for such tasks. From an RDP point of view, assessing this in advance brings a number of benefits, such as

Better planning and structuring of RDP evaluations

- **Fitting evaluation into RDP-implementation right from the programme start.** Evaluation needs to be understood as an integral part of programme implementation which helps to provide relevant feedback to evaluation stakeholders and policymakers at the right time.
- **Clarifying roles and responsibilities of stakeholders** and providing the possibility of an early dialogue between relevant stakeholders.
- **Fostering a multi-annual approach for evaluation tasks and activities** and linking them to the information needs of Managing Authorities and EC and other evaluation stakeholders.
- **Ensuring appropriate resources** for administrators and evaluators in order to carry out the intended monitoring and evaluation tasks.
- **Reducing the administrative burden** through the design of a data-management and monitoring system that is tailor-made to address evaluation needs.

More targeted monitoring and evaluation activities

- **Organizing monitoring and evaluations activities targeted at the needs of the RDP stakeholders** and at the same time compliant with respective EU Regulations.
- **Specifying thematic priorities for evaluations during the programming period** and outlining what is needed to allow for the application of advanced evaluation methods.
- **Providing a clear referencepoint for flexible annual planning of evaluation activities.** For example, a voluntary Annual Work Plan could be used by the Managing Authorities as a tool that helps administrators to implement the individual evaluation tasks.
- **Establishing links between monitoring, evaluation and reporting activities**, such as evaluation during the programming period, AIRs, *ex ante* evaluation and *ex post* evaluation.

Making better use of evaluation results

- **Strengthening the communication of evaluation findings** to decision-makers and stakeholders through evaluation results which are based on robust evidence.
- **Fostering transparency on evaluation and a common understanding about the effects of rural development policy** of all those involved in programming, managing, implementing and evaluating the RDP including RDP beneficiaries and a broad public.
- **Providing a comprehensive overview on evaluation of rural policy interventions** in the RDP area, prepared at the very beginning of the RDP implementation in order that all actors know the results to be expected.

2 THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

In September 2013 the European Parliament, the EU Council and the European Commission have reached an agreement on reforming the common agriculture policy (CAP) for the 2014-2020 Programming Period. Proposals for Regulations (hereafter '*legal proposals*') published in October 2011 and adjusted after the political agreement establish a **reinforced monitoring and evaluation system** compared to previous periods.

The **building blocks of the monitoring and evaluation system for RDPs** are set out at different levels³ by the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR)⁴, the Rural Development Regulation (RDR)⁵ and the respective RDR Implementing Acts.

- At the overarching level, the **CPR** defines the fundamental requirements with respect to the purpose and objectives of evaluation (Art. 44, 47, 48, 49, 50), the use of indicators (Art 24), the provision of resources and capacities (Art. 4, 47, 49,), the responsibilities, independence of evaluations.

It is clearly stated that the evaluations shall be carried out to improve the quality of the design and implementation of programmes including evaluation of impacts (...) according to Art. 47(1). Furthermore, Managing Authorities shall ensure that evaluations are carried out during the programming period to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of each programme on the basis of the Evaluation Plan at least once during the programming period (...) Art. 49(3). Moreover, the Member States shall provide the resources necessary for carrying out evaluations including data collection (...) according to Art. 47(2).

- At the fund-specific level the **RDR** specifies the objectives of evaluation (Art. 75), the requirements for the use of indicators, including the establishment of common indicators (Art. 9, 74, 76), data provision and data management (Art. 76, 77, 83, 78), the tasks of evaluators, for reporting on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in the AIR and to the Monitoring Committee (Art. 81, 82, 83) and for the Evaluation Plan (Art. 9, 83).

Against this background the Evaluation Plan sets up the foundation to ensure the implementation of all building blocks of the reinforced monitoring and evaluation system as set out by the legal provisions at different levels.

³ The proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agriculture policy, (art. 110) lays down the general monitoring and evaluation framework for the CAP as a whole .

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/pdf/2014/proposals/regulation/general/general_proposal_en.pdf

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/legal-proposals/com627/627_en.pdf

3 ELEMENTS OF THE EVALUATION PLAN TO BE COVERED IN THE RDP

This section is based on the **draft proposal for minimum requirements for the Evaluation Plan to be included in 2014-2020 RDPs**. Legal references: CPR Articles 49(1); 49(2), RDR Articles 9(1)(g) ; 83(1).

This proposal covers the minimum requirements for the Evaluation Plan (EP) to be submitted as part of the RDP and approved by Commission Decision. The Evaluation Plan forms part of the future monitoring and evaluation system for rural development and outlines how the evaluation during the programming period will be conducted and reported. The minimum requirements will be included in the implementing act for the RDR and as such will be legally binding. Compliance with them will be required for the RDP to be approved. As with all other elements of the RDP, the Evaluation Plan may only be modified through a formal modification procedure.

The implementing act will also specify minimum reporting requirements on the implementation of the Evaluation Plan, which will be included in the structure required for the Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs). The Evaluation Plan as described here (and in particular sections 1, 4 and 7) is considered to fulfil the requirements of Article 9(m)(ii) as regards the description of the monitoring and evaluation procedures. Therefore no additional separate description of the monitoring and evaluation system will be required in the RDP.

Figure 1: The minimum requirements for the Evaluation Plan



The seven sub-sections of the Evaluation Plan as part of the RDP are further described in the following chapters. For each sub-section, the respective **paragraph of the minimum requirements** is shown in a green box. **Key terms** are discussed for each sub-section with a view to achieve a common understanding on the main issues and concepts. A number of guiding questions outline **what should be considered** when drafting the respective section of the Evaluation Plan. **Practical tips** show the most important dos and don'ts. Finally, selected cross-references indicate to the interested reader where **further information** can be found in **Part II** and **III**.

3.1 Objectives and Purpose of the Evaluation Plan

What is the minimum requirement?

This sub-section should contain a statement of the objective and purpose of the Evaluation Plan. It should be based on the overall Evaluation Plan objectives but may also include additional specific programme-related objectives if the Managing Authority considers it appropriate to do so.

What are the related key terms?

Objectives and **purpose** relate to those that are mentioned in the minimum requirements, namely “The purpose of the Evaluation Plan is to ensure that sufficient and appropriate evaluation activities are undertaken, and that sufficient and appropriate resources are available, in particular: to provide the information needed for programme steering and to feed the enhanced AIR in 2017; to provide the information needed to demonstrate interim progress to objectives and to feed the enhanced AIR in 2019; to ensure that data required for evaluation purposes is available at the right time in the appropriate format”.

What should be considered when drafting this section of the Evaluation Plan?

- **Objectives of the Evaluation Plan** as listed in the minimum requirements (see above).
- **Additional** specific programme-related objectives: What other objectives do you intend to pursue with the Evaluation Plan?

Practical tips when drafting the Evaluation Plan chapter in the RDP

- Ensure that the objectives as listed in the minimum requirements are mentioned.
- Add any additional objectives that you intend to achieve with your Evaluation Plan (e.g. those identified in a brief working session with relevant evaluation stakeholders).

Where can further information be found?

- Chapter 1 (**Part I**) of this guidance document explores what can be achieved with the Evaluation Plan, and may be used as an inspiration when drafting the programme-specific “objectives and purpose” section.

3.2 Governance and Coordination

What is the minimum requirement?

This sub-section should contain a brief description of the organisation of the monitoring and evaluation system for the RDP. It should identify the main bodies involved and their responsibilities. It should explain how coordination of evaluation activities with RDP implementation is organised.

What are the related key terms?

Monitoring and evaluation system is understood as the system of actors, activities and mechanisms that is set up to monitor and assess RDP implementation. The **bodies involved** are those defined by the regulation (Managing Authority, Monitoring Committee, Paying Agency, beneficiaries), as well as others that may already exist within the Member State/region (e.g. evaluation unit, advisory institutes, etc.) and those that may be additionally set up (e.g. evaluation Steering Group, technical working groups, etc.). **Coordination** of evaluation activities is understood as the mechanisms and arrangements that are taken to bring together the information and needs of RD implementation and evaluation.

What should be considered when drafting this section of the Evaluation Plan?

- **Organisation of the monitoring and evaluation system of the RDP:** How are the tasks and responsibilities in relation to monitoring and evaluation divided between different parts of your Managing Authority and other involved actors? How do they relate to each other? What division of labour is envisaged? Which processes are foreseen? Which lessons from the last

programming period have been learnt and how have you incorporated them into the new system?

- **Main bodies involved and their responsibilities:** What roles do the following actors play specifically in your monitoring and evaluation system: Managing Authority, Monitoring Committee, Paying Agency, beneficiaries, Local Action Groups (LAGs), National Rural Network (NRN), evaluation Steering Group, technical working groups, beneficiaries, data providers, evaluators? How and in which way(s) do they contribute to monitoring and evaluation? Is the body responsible for each key task clearly identified?
- **Coordination of evaluation activities with RDP implementation:** How do you intend to assess the data needs for evaluations? How do you adjust your monitoring system so that the required data will be obtained on time? How do you agree on the responsibilities to develop these processes?

Practical tips when drafting the Evaluation Plan chapter in the RDP

- Use organograms to illustrate the monitoring and evaluation system and describe it also in the text.
- Clearly identify the actors, but avoid naming any companies (e.g. of evaluators) that might change.
- Note that the composition of the Monitoring Committee shall not be described in the Evaluation Plan but in the appropriate chapter of the RDP.
- Make sure to describe responsibilities of the actors specifically in relation to monitoring and evaluation.

Where can further information be found?

For a detailed description of the role of different actors in relation to monitoring and evaluation see **Part II** (chapter 5.1) of this guidance document.

3.3 Evaluation topics and activities

What is the minimum requirement?

This sub-section should contain an indicative description of the evaluation topics and activities anticipated for the programming period to support effective implementation and achievement of objectives, and to report on programme achievements, including (but not limited to) fulfilment of EU requirements. It should cover activities needed to ensure that the contribution to objectives of each of the RD priorities and any programme-specific elements are adequately evaluated. This would include the assessment of result and impact indicator values and analysis of net effects, thematic issues (including sub-programmes), cross-cutting issues such as sustainable development and climate change, the National Rural Network, the contribution of local development strategies, the added-value of the Leader approach and the partnership principle. It should also include planned support for evaluation at LAG level. It should mention any specific additional activities needed to fulfil the requirements of the monitoring and evaluation system (e.g. further work on developing methodology for specific indicators, such as High Nature Value (HNV), or policy areas, such as innovation or short supply chains, or programme-specific indicators and evaluation questions). **Descriptions of methodologies to be used are not required.**

What are the related key terms?

Evaluation topics are understood as the specific subject/s that the evaluation is focused on. **Evaluation activities** are activities that Managing Authorities and other stakeholders have to carry out in evaluation **during the programming period** in order to assess the **contribution of the RDP to rural development priorities** and programme **results and impacts**. The programme **result indicators** are tools to measure the effects of the programme on the group of beneficiaries and are

used in assessing programme results. Programme **impact indicators** are tools used in measuring programme impact on changes observed in the programme context/area. **Analysis of net effects** is the process of identifying changes which are due to the programme, rather than other external factors. **Cross-cutting issues** (sustainable development, climate change, innovation) and **specific evaluation topics** (National Rural Network, Leader) will require **additional evaluation activities**.

What should be considered when drafting this section of the Evaluation Plan?

- **Major evaluation topics in evaluation during the programming period:** What are the most important evaluation needs in relation to the programme and when do they occur? (e.g. programme strategy, achievements of rural development priorities/focus areas/ group of measures, assessment of cross-cutting issues, programme delivery, cost-effectiveness of the programme implementation?). What will be the focus of evaluation in relation to these needs? Which evaluation topics will be chosen for the evaluation during the programming period? What will be the timing for the evaluation of individual topics?
- **Major evaluation activities to be conducted in evaluation during the programming period:** Which evaluation activities have to be conducted in relation to assessment of programme results? Which activities have to be assessed in relation to programme impacts and identifying the programme's net effects? Which specific additional activities are required to address particular thematic issues (including those addressed by sub-programmes)? Which specific additional evaluation activities have to be conducted in relation to the cross-cutting issues of sustainable development, climate change and innovation? What will be required to evaluate adequately the National Rural Network, the contribution of local development strategies, the added value of the Leader approach and the partnership principle?

Practical tips when drafting the Evaluation Plan chapter in the RDP

- Use brief descriptions of proposed evaluations emphasising only the cornerstones in relation to the evaluation topics, major evaluation tasks and usage of common and programme-specific elements.
- Provide a list of major evaluation topics only.
- List and describe very briefly overall evaluation activities (relate to all the topics) and major topic-specific activities in preparation and implementation of evaluation and reporting the evaluation results.
- Include a general mention of *ad hoc* evaluations and studies to keep flexibility to respond to newly emerging evaluation needs.
- Do not list very specific, small-scale, complementary and *ad hoc* evaluation topics.
- Avoid too detailed description of evaluation activities.
- Do not propose specific evaluation methods to be used in answering evaluation questions, assessing impacts and achievements of programme objectives.

Where can further information be found?

For examples evaluation topics see **Part II** (chapter 6.2 and 6.3) of this guidance document.

For examples of evaluation activities see **Part II** (chapter 6.4)

3.4 Data and information

What is the minimum requirement?

This sub-section should cover the system to record, maintain, manage and report statistical information on RDP implementation and the provision of monitoring data for evaluation purposes. It should identify the various data sources to be used (e.g. monitoring data, surveys, external data e.g. Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN)). It should identify data gaps, potential bottlenecks, and/or potential institutional issues related to obtaining the necessary data (e.g. data protection issues or access to disaggregated data) and propose solutions (with references to activities proposed in the previous sub-section if appropriate). It is recognised that systems may still be in the process of development whilst the RDP is being drafted, but this section should demonstrate that the necessary planning has been done and that the work is underway to ensure that appropriate data management systems will be operational in due time.

What are the related key terms?

As part of the *ex ante* conditionalities, Member States must ensure the existence of a **statistical information system** with indicators that are necessary for undertaking evaluations⁶. The Member State is also required to organise the production and gathering of the required data and to supply the various pieces of information provided by the monitoring system to the evaluators⁷.

The **monitoring data** submitted to the European Commission will be derived from the application forms (operations database) and the payment system. Some of this information is specifically included to facilitate evaluations, but the Managing Authority should anticipate any additional data needs for the evaluation topics and activities included in the previous section.

What should be considered when drafting this section of the Evaluation Plan?

- **System of statistical information on RDP implementation and monitoring for evaluation purposes:** What are the overall provisions to ensure data availability in the right format at due time (e.g. for AIR, for the assessment of impacts, etc.)? What are the links between the application forms and the monitoring database? What mechanisms are foreseen to ensure data quality?
- **Data sources to be used** (monitoring data, surveys, external data, FADN): What data will be obtained from monitoring (beneficiary data) and what from other databases? What will be done to match different data with monitoring data? What kind of data will be collected by evaluators and by other bodies (Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, etc.)? How to ensure that beneficiaries report on time, and that time series are obtained? What strategies are envisaged to establish control groups?
- **Data gaps identified/bottlenecks/issues:** What have been the major bottlenecks for data provision in the 2007-2013 period? How is data availability being assessed in the programme design phase? How will you check the risks of mistakes in data from third sources? In which way will the access to non-anonymous or semi-anonymous micro-data be granted? What are the conditions and legal consequences of access to restricted data? In which way will clear and common definitions for data collection for different actors be ensured?

Practical tips when drafting the Evaluation Plan chapter in the RDP

- Build on experiences from previous evaluations (e.g. MTE) when describing data bottlenecks and issues for the assessment of impacts.
- Be specific with regard to different data types.

⁶ CPR Annex IV *Ex ante* conditionalities, general *ex ante* conditionalities

⁷ RDR Article 73(2)

- Consult with the *ex ante* evaluator or ongoing evaluator before specifying possible strategies to achieve control groups.

Where can further information be found?

For more information in relation to data and information system, see **Part II** (chapter 5.4) of this guidance document.

3.5 Timeline

What is the minimum requirement?

This sub-section should contain the major milestones during the programming period (production of evaluation results required for the enhanced AIRs in 2017 and 2019, and the *ex post* evaluation) and an indicative outline of the timing needed in order to ensure that the necessary results are available on time (preparation and launching of major tenders, preparatory work needed on data preparation or methodology development prior to launching evaluations, etc.).

What are the related key terms?

Major evaluation milestones comprise the enhanced AIRs in 2017 and 2019, and *ex post* evaluation. The **indicative outline of the timing** shows the average duration and the starting and ending point of each process. It requires a backward scheduling starting from the last step of the process needed in order to ensure that the necessary results are available on time.

What should be considered when drafting this section of the Evaluation Plan?

- **Major milestones during the programming period:** What are the mandatory elements and deadlines at EU and national level that have to be respected when developing your timeline? What kind of information needs to be available by the end of 2016, 2018 and 2024? What other evaluation activities (studies, intermediary evaluations, and updates, etc.) do you envisage as needed to ensure that these requirements are fulfilled and when? Are there additional issues or milestones specific to your programme?
- **Indicative outline of the timing:** What are the major risks related to the timing? What have been the lessons from the previous period regarding the timing of evaluations? What kind of preparatory steps (e.g. data preparation, methodology development, review of Evaluation Questions, launch of tenders, etc.) are needed to ensure the first evaluation of programme impacts for the AIR in 2019? What experience from previous programming periods do you have concerning the average length of time required for each action? When will you start preparing and launching of major tenders and other preparatory work? How will the indicative outline of the timing be fine-tuned (e.g. multi-annual work plan, action plan, etc.) and followed up during the programming period?

Practical tips when drafting the Evaluation Plan chapter in the RDP

- Base the indicative lengths of processes on experiences from the previous period.
- Be specific with regard to required preparatory working steps, but include sufficient buffers in the timing.

Where can further information be found?

For examples of good practice in relation to drafting a timeline and how to establish the non-binding internal evaluation plan, see **Part III** (Toolbox) of this guidance document.

3.6 Communication

What is the minimum requirement?

This sub-section relates specifically to the communication of evaluation findings. It is not a duplication of the communication strategy for the RDP as a whole. It should describe how the results of evaluation activities will be made available to the various target recipients (stakeholders, policymakers, etc.). Information channels, and information needs for the different target groups should be identified. It should describe the mechanisms established to follow-up on the use of evaluation results.

What are the related key terms?

Communication ensures that evaluation findings (WHAT) are transmitted to the right recipients (WHO), in the right format (HOW) and at the right time (WHEN). The **target recipients** are evaluation stakeholders at EU, national and RDP level, such as policymakers, evaluators, researchers, beneficiaries, and the wider public. **Information channels** are the means (e.g. e-mail, internet, intranet, newsletter, events, etc.) through which evaluation findings are disseminated. The **follow-up of evaluation results** can be done through different mechanisms (e.g. action plans, seminars, workshops, committees, etc.) in order to feed lessons and recommendations from evaluations back to programme implementation and to the policy cycle.

What should be considered when drafting this section of the Evaluation Plan?

- **How to make the results of evaluation activities available?** What are the lessons on communication of evaluation results from the previous programming period? Who is the main actor responsible for the drafting and implementation of the communication strategy related to evaluation? Is this actor supported by any working group or other bodies during its implementation? How will the implementation of the communication strategy in relation to evaluation results be monitored?
- **Target recipients and their information needs:** Which actors of the overall M&E System of the RDP (e.g. Managing Authority, Paying Agency, Monitoring Committee, possible technical working groups and/or evaluation Steering Group) are targeted by the communication strategy on evaluation? Which other stakeholders (policymakers, general public, research, etc.) are addressed? How are the information needs of the target audience assessed? What are the specific information needs of the target recipients? When do they need which kind of information? Who needs information which could lead to further improvement of the programme management and/or implementation? Who needs information about real effects and impacts of the supported interventions? What consequences does the information need of the target recipients have in relation to the scope and focus of the planned evaluation activities?
- **Information channels:** Which information channels do you have at your disposal? What use will be made of classical information channels (e.g. events, web pages)? What use will be made of interactive information channels (e.g. workshops, focus groups, interactive web pages) ? How will the information channels be used to satisfy the information needs for the different target groups?
- **Follow-up of evaluation results:** What procedures and mechanisms do you have to follow up the findings and recommendations of evaluation? How will you ensure that evaluation is brought back to programme implementation? Which role do the Managing Authority, measure managers, Paying Agencies, EC Desk-Officers, etc. play in this?

Practical tips when drafting the Evaluation Plan chapter in the RDP

- Summarize the communication strategy in a table showing: who, who for, what, when and how.
- Do not name contractors/companies that might change.
- Do not put fixed dates.

Where can further information be found?

For an example of how the essential elements of a communication strategy can be presented in the form of a table see **Part II** (chapter 5.5) of this guidance document.

3.7 Resources

What is the minimum requirement?

This sub-section should describe the resources needed and foreseen to implement the plan, including an indication of administrative capacity, data, financial resources, IT needs. It should also describe the capacity building activities foreseen to ensure that the Evaluation Plan can be implemented properly.

What are the related key terms?

Resources are, in this context, understood as the financial and human resources required for the implementation of the Evaluation Plan.

What should be considered when drafting this section of the Evaluation Plan?

- **Resources:** What is the total cost for the implementation of the outlined Evaluation Plan activities, i.e. the daily management of the monitoring and evaluation system, costs for capacity building in the field of monitoring and evaluation; evaluation contracts, evaluation studies, other measure-related analysis, case studies, costs for establishment and running of IT systems, data collection and management, data purchase, costs for methodological developments and guidance, costs for the implementation of the evaluation communication strategy, etc.? What other national/regional funds go into the monitoring and evaluation budget? What funds are set aside to cover emerging evaluation and data needs?
- **Staff resources:** should consider the level of resources needed to implement the Evaluation Plan, what type of profile and which competencies are needed?. Is there sufficient existing staff or will additional personnel be recruited? Are there any periods where higher resource input will be expected?
- **Capacity building activities in relation to monitoring and evaluation:** What are the lessons learnt from the previous period? How are you identifying the need for capacity building in relation to monitoring and evaluation? What training activities do you plan? For whom? What manuals and other support material for capacity building are you developing?

Practical tips when drafting the Evaluation Plan chapter in the RDP

- Provide an indicative outline of the staff responsible for implementing the Evaluation Plan.
- Make an indicative break-down of the financial resources for monitoring and evaluation.
- Calculate estimated costs based on previous experiences but adapt to new requirements.
- Make sure to reserve resources for *ad hoc* evaluations and unforeseeable costs.

Where can further information be found?

For a further discussion on human and financial resources see **Part II** (chapter 5.4). For more information on the role of different actors in capacity building see **Part II** (chapter 5.1).

For implications of evaluation topics and activities on resources see **Part II** (chapters 6.2, 6.3. and 6.4) of this guidance document.

DRAFT

4 SETTING UP AND USING THE EVALUATION PLAN

4.1 Preparing the Evaluation Plan

The **Managing Authority** or its delegated representative (e.g. evaluation unit) will lead the development of the Evaluation Plan to be submitted as part of the RDP, in the stage of programme design. This process may involve different stakeholders that are concerned with programme design as well as with steering, managing, coordinating and conducting the evaluation tasks (Paying Agencies, evaluators, local stakeholders, National Rural Networks, decision-makers and beneficiaries). In each case, this process should build on stakeholders' experiences with RD evaluation in previous periods and critically assess what has worked well and what needs to be improved.

The **ex ante evaluator assesses whether** the Evaluation Plan complies with the legal requirements and if it sets up an adequate framework for evaluation during the programming period. For this purpose, the *ex ante* evaluator will assess the content of the Evaluation Plan for its completeness, usability and integration with other information processing activities. The evaluator will check whether the activities included in the Evaluation Plan match with the information needs of the MA and the EU for evaluation and whether the resources allocated appear sufficient to cover the proposed activities and to generate the outputs foreseen. If necessary, the *ex ante* evaluator will provide suggestions to improve the quality of the Evaluation Plan (see [Guidelines for the ex ante evaluation of 2014-2020 RDPs](#), chapter 4.2).

EC services will assess the Evaluation Plan in line with the legal framework, and will consider whether it meets the minimum requirements and fulfils the stated objectives. The EC approves the Evaluation Plan as part of the RDP.

4.2 Implementing the Evaluation Plan

The **body** (Managing Authority, evaluation unit) specified in the Evaluation Plan as having the primary responsibility for implementing the Evaluation Plan, will be expected to play the leading role in establishing the suggested structures and in steering the evaluation activities during the programming period. With a view to ensure timely provision of evaluation results a close coordination with other relevant bodies and evaluation stakeholders will be needed (see Chapter 5 Governance)

4.3 Modifying the Evaluation Plan

The Evaluation Plan may be **subject to modification**, particularly if there are substantial changes in the RDP strategy or content (e.g. inclusion or elimination of focus areas). As with all other elements of the RDP, the Evaluation Plan can only be modified through a formal modification procedure.

4.4 Monitoring and reporting on the Evaluation Plan

An internal monitoring system on the implementation of the Evaluation Plan must be put in place to ensure that the plan remains on track or that potential deviations are shown. The responsibility for this monitoring should be clearly attributed, together with responsibility for deciding on any modifications to plan or process to ensure that requirements are met. Similarly, the responsibility for reporting on the implementation of the Evaluation Plan should be made explicit.

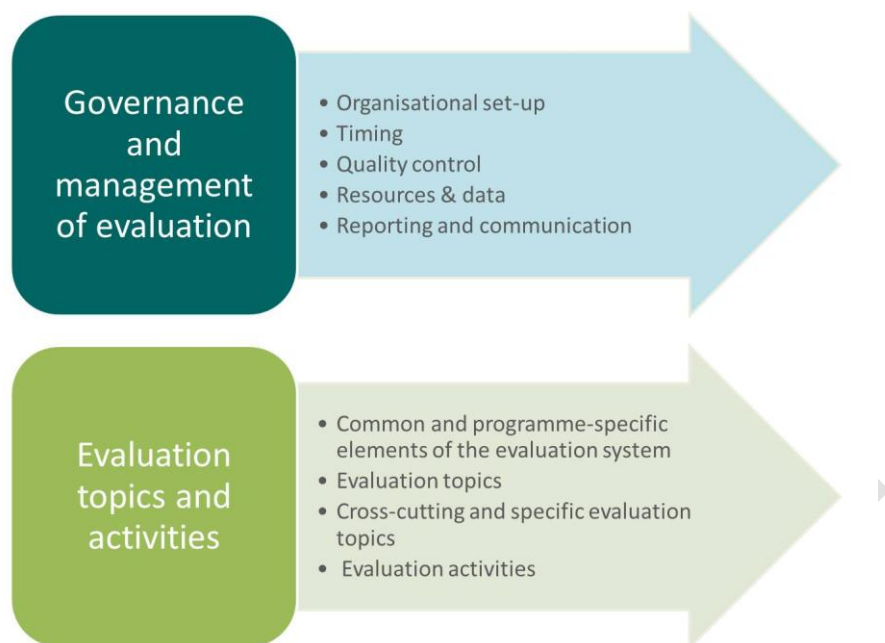
DRAFT

PART II: FROM PLAN TO PRACTICE

Recommendations on how to implement the Evaluation Plan

In the **second part of the guidelines**, we describe good practice in implementing the Evaluation Plan, paying particular attention to (1) governance and management of evaluation and (2) evaluation topics and activities.

Figure 1 **Structure of Part II of the guidelines:**



5 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF EVALUATION

The individual parts of a **monitoring and evaluation system** for a Rural Development Programme (RDP) should come together to make a logical, well-functioning entity. Monitoring and evaluation systems consist of deliverables (“what”), actors (“who”), and processes (“how”) that are time-bound (“when”). In order to function, the system also needs resources (“with what”) as inputs. This chapter looks at the governance issues to consider when setting up an monitoring and evaluation system in sequence; the organizational set-up of the monitoring and evaluation system; timing; quality control; resources; and finally, communication of evaluation results.

Governance is mainly concerned with actors and processes; in other words *who does what* and *how things are done*. Important aspects of governance are transparency and accountability. A well-designed governance system ensures that decisions are made in a consistent and fair manner. It also enables stakeholders to be involved in decision-making, and openness about governance fosters public trust in the spending of public funds. Furthermore, a robust governance system is a vital element in ensuring that the monitoring and evaluation system is able to deliver results. A well-designed governance system also increases efficiency.

5.1 Governance issues to consider when setting up a monitoring and evaluation system

When setting up an M&E system, the first thing to do is to identify *what needs to be done*, i.e. to identify tasks and intended outputs. Actors should then be identified and their responsibilities outlined, i.e. *who does what*. If tasks and responsibilities are divided between several units of one body (such as the Managing Authority), a coherent overall picture of the division of labour should be provided. Finally, process descriptions should illustrate how the monitoring and evaluation system actually works by showing *how things are done*. Later on, the processes can be improved by concentrating on *how things could be done better*.

Organizational set-up of monitoring and evaluation system

The main bodies involved in monitoring and evaluation of RDPs are typically the Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, Monitoring Committee and, on occasion, an evaluation Steering Group, technical working groups, evaluators, beneficiaries, Local Action Groups (LAGs), National Rural Networks (NRNs) and data providers. In regionalised countries, there are sometimes additional stakeholders, for instance a national evaluation network, an evaluation coordinator, or national and regional ministries.

As the specific organisational set-up for monitoring and evaluation varies greatly amongst Member States, it is not possible to recommend any single model of governance. The monitoring and evaluation governance should be planned to suit the specificities of the RDP and the Member State or region. However, it is obviously advisable to consider the lessons learnt from previous programming periods when planning governance processes.

The general roles and responsibilities of the main bodies involved in monitoring and evaluation are summarised below.

► **Managing Authority**

The Managing Authority shoulders responsibility for the functioning and governance of the monitoring and evaluation system and the quality, timeliness and communication of results. There are several legal requirements concerning the monitoring and evaluation activity of the Managing Authority.

In terms of monitoring, the Managing Authority must ensure a secure electronic information system⁸, provide the European Commission with relevant indicator data on selected and completed operations and draw up the Annual Implementation Report (AIR)⁹. The Managing Authority also monitors the quality of programme implementation by means of indicators¹⁰ and provides the Monitoring Committee with information and documents necessary to monitor programme progress¹¹.

The Managing Authority is responsible for drawing up an Evaluation Plan¹² and ensuring that it is consistent with the monitoring and evaluation system.¹³ The Managing Authority organises evaluations and related activities on the basis of the Evaluation Plan¹⁴. In the 2014-2020 programming period the RDP's contribution to each priority's objectives should be evaluated at least once during the programming period¹⁵. This requirement reflects the need for enhanced AIRs in 2017¹⁶¹⁷ and 2019¹⁸¹⁹, as well as the requirements of *ex post* evaluation²⁰. The Managing Authority must also make sure that the *ex ante* and *ex post* evaluations conform to the monitoring and evaluation system and that the *ex post* evaluation is conducted within the given time limits.²¹ The Managing Authority is also responsible for communicating each evaluation to the European Commission²² and for making evaluation reports public.²³

In addition to such legal requirements, the Managing Authority often takes on other tasks relating to monitoring and evaluation, such as chairing the evaluation Steering Group, managing evaluation tenders, coordinating evaluations through an evaluation unit or an evaluation coordinator, facilitating cooperation amongst the monitoring and evaluation stakeholders and ensuring capacity building of stakeholders. The Managing Authority is typically also in charge of communicating the evaluation results to internal and external stakeholders, as well as to the wider public. In some Member States, the Managing Authority is also directly involved in collecting and processing monitoring data.

Given the range of monitoring and evaluation-related tasks within the Managing Authority, it is important that tasks are clearly assigned and procedures are well thought through, agreed on and documented.

► **Monitoring Committee**

The Monitoring Committee reviews the implementation of the programme and its progress towards its objectives²⁴, principally through the use of indicators²⁵. The Monitoring Committee also considers and approves the Annual Implementation Reports before they are sent to the European Commission²⁶. The Monitoring Committee monitors all evaluation activities²⁷ and outputs related to the Evaluation Plan²⁸ and may issue recommendations to the Managing Authority regarding programme implementation and evaluation and then monitor actions taken as a result of its recommendations²⁹.

⁸ RDR, Art. 73(1)

⁹ RDR, Art. 73(1)

¹⁰ RDR, Art. 79

¹¹ RDR, Art. 73(1)

¹² CPR, Art. 49

¹³ RDR, Art. 73(1)

¹⁴ CPR, Art. 49(3)

¹⁵ CPR, Art. 49(3)

¹⁶ CPR, Art. 44(3)

¹⁷ RDR, Art. 82(3)

¹⁸ CPR, Art. 44(4)

¹⁹ RDR, Art. 82(4)

²⁰ RDR, Art. 85

²¹ RDR, Art. 73(1), 84 and 85

²² RDR, Art. 82(1) and 83

²³ RDR, Art. 83(3)

²⁴ CPR, Art. 43(1)

²⁵ RDR, Art. 79

²⁶ RDR, Art. 73(1)

²⁷ CPR, Art. 49(3)

²⁸ RDR, Art. 81(1)

²⁹ CPR, Art. 43(4)

The size and composition of the Monitoring Committee varies greatly between the RDPs. As a minimum, the Monitoring Committee should be composed of representatives of the Managing Authority, intermediate bodies and partner organisations³⁰.

► **Paying Agency**

The accreditation of Paying Agencies depends on, *inter alia*, monitoring³¹. Based on this, the Paying Agency has an important role in monitoring and evaluation activities as it holds information regarding applications, supported projects, payments and controls. Much of the data required for the Annual Implementation Report (AIR) is provided by the Paying Agency. Therefore the Paying Agency needs to work in close partnership with the Managing Authority on monitoring and evaluation issues, for instance through a joint technical working group and participation in the evaluation Steering Group work. In some cases, it may be necessary to formalise the Paying Agency's responsibilities through memorandums, for example.

As the Paying Agency typically records and holds much of the information required for monitoring and evaluation, provisions and procedures for the Managing Authority's and the evaluators' access to data should be put in place so that timely data flow can be secured. Ideally, there will be a common Paying Agency and Managing Authority data system or interface to facilitate the transfer and handling of data. In some Member States, the Paying Agency itself may be decentralised or supported by delegated bodies, in which case information flow and responsibilities should be clarified to avoid confusion.

► **Evaluation Steering Group**

Establishing a Steering Group to support evaluation processes is highly advisable and is regarded as a good way to facilitate and coordinate stakeholder consultation. It can also contribute positively to the governance of monitoring and evaluation processes and help ensure the relevance of monitoring and evaluation activities to programme needs. Evaluation Steering Group members can contribute specialist skills and expertise and help ensure the availability of data, information and relevant contacts to evaluators. An engaged evaluation Steering Group also enables interaction with and between partners and other stakeholders.

An evaluation Steering Group typically oversees the evaluation process during the programming period, including the drafting of the Evaluation Plan (if the evaluation Steering Group is constituted before submission of the RDP) and each evaluation that takes place. A single evaluation Steering Group fosters continuity and capacity building. It is also possible to convene separate Steering Groups for each evaluation, if appropriate, but this may be burdensome. A compromise may be for a core group to be augmented temporarily with expertise specific to the requirements of individual evaluations.

An evaluation Steering Group is typically convened by the Managing Authority. The composition³² of the evaluation Steering Group depends on the specifics of the programme (priorities, scale and delivery) and the tasks assigned to the group. As a minimum the evaluation Steering Group should include the Managing Authority and others involved in programme delivery, the Paying Agency, those responsible for programme design and policymaking and members of the evaluation unit (if applicable). It may also be useful to include representatives of other European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds) and experts from research institutions. The Evaluation Steering Group

³⁰ CPR, Art. 42(1)

³¹ Commission proposal for a Regulation on the Financing, Management and Monitoring of the Common Agricultural Policy (19 November 2011) Article 8(1)

³² Members of the evaluation Steering Group can be identified via analysis of the RDP evaluation Stakeholders. This covers the review of RDP stakeholders and the clarification of their roles, responsibilities and relevance in the programme and its evaluation.

should be large enough to be representative of RDP stakeholders and contain a range of relevant skills and knowledge. However, the group should not be so large that its effectiveness is hampered.

► **Technical working groups**

Technical working groups are sometimes established by the Managing Authority or the Monitoring Committee to assist in technical tasks and to consult with stakeholders on specific issues, e.g. environmental issues, such as water protection and nature conservation, or Leader. The Managing Authority may also wish to set up evaluation working groups to ensure coordination between the Managing Authority and the Paying Agency. Obviously the composition and tasks of each technical working group varies according to the issue at hand.

► **Beneficiaries**

Beneficiaries of RDP interventions are directly involved in the monitoring and evaluation process in two ways. Individual beneficiaries are often obliged to provide information pertinent to the monitoring and evaluation of a programme³³. Secondly, the organisations representing beneficiaries, such as farmers' unions and small and medium enterprises (SME) associations are important RDP stakeholders. In many countries, organisations representing beneficiaries are therefore involved in the Monitoring Committee and the evaluation Steering Group.

► **Local Action Groups**

LAGs are involved in monitoring and evaluation activities in several ways. They are duty bound to provide information pertinent to a programme's monitoring and evaluation³⁴. LAGs also carry out self-evaluations and monitor the development of Local Development Strategies (LDS). Representatives of LAGs also often participate in regional or national level evaluation Steering Groups or technical working groups. LAGs can bring invaluable local knowledge and contacts, as well as a practical perspective of the monitoring and evaluation process.

► **National Rural Networks**

The NRNs via networking aim to improve the quality of implementation of rural development programmes, increase stakeholders' involvement in RDP implementation, inform broader public about the RDP and potential beneficiaries on funding opportunities and foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas³⁵. NRNs have also an important role in sharing and disseminating monitoring and evaluation findings³⁶. Their role can be particularly important in regionalised countries, where the NRN can be an important source of expertise and capacity building, and can contribute to the development of harmonised approaches to evaluation, such as the establishment of regional proxies when only national data is available for impact indicators.

► **Regional governments and agencies**

When regional governments and/or agencies are involved in RDP implementation, they are typically involved in monitoring and evaluation through data collection and the monitoring of programme progress at regional level.

► **Data providers and other relevant institutions and organisations**

It is useful to consider data providers (national statistical office, relevant ministries, research institutes, etc.) as stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation and to involve them early on. They may hold data of relevance to RDPs, conduct research on relevant topics, be a source of expert knowledge or even collect specific monitoring data for the Managing Authority on a contractual basis. In many Member

³³ RDR, Art. 78

³⁴ RDR, Art. 78

³⁵ RDR, Art. 55(2)

³⁶ RDR, Art. 55(3)

States, representatives of data providers also participate in the Monitoring Committee, evaluation Steering Groups or technical working groups.

► **Evaluators**

RDP evaluations must be carried out by experts that are functionally independent of the authorities responsible for programme implementation³⁷. Evaluators can gain important insights into the programme and its governance that can help the Managing Authority improve RDP implementation. RDP evaluators are usually chosen through a tendering procedure and are typically either a single company or research institution, or a consortium made up of several companies and/or research institutions. Evaluators may be selected for the entire programming period or for individual evaluations.

Coordination of evaluation activities with RDP implementation

Evaluation should be considered at the planning phase of the RDP and form an integral part of RDP operations; this is one of the reasons for including the Evaluation Plan as part of the RDP. It is important to assess the data needs for evaluation and adjust the monitoring system so that the data required is obtained in time for each evaluation. It may take time to adjust the collection and recording of data from sources external to the Managing Authority and Paying Agency (such as the statistical office) so it is important to agree on responsibilities and processes early on.

Coordination of evaluation activities with Pillar I and other ESI Funds programmes

Given that there is now one set of common impact indicators for the entire Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)³⁸, it may be useful at times (e.g. for thematic evaluations of environmental impacts) to coordinate some Pillar I and Pillar II monitoring and evaluation activities. It is therefore important to foster cooperation within and between the Managing Authority and Paying Agency. An early review and development of common data sources and evaluation methodologies can contribute to an evaluation of the impact of the CAP as a whole within the RDP territory.

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) is one of the funds that contributes to the Union's strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and its associated priorities through the Partnership Agreement. It may be useful to coordinate some evaluation activities with other ESI Funds programmes; however this will depend on arrangements in the individual Member State and the degree of integration and coordination between the programmes.

Such coordination of evaluation activity can be fostered in different ways. Evaluations, monitoring and related activities across programmes can be monitored within a single Monitoring Committee for programmes co-financed by the ESI Funds³⁹, or representatives of other ESI Funds programmes can be included in the RDP evaluation Steering Group. Alternatively the Managing Authority of the RDP might take part in the other ESI Funds programmes' Monitoring Committees and evaluation Steering Groups. In order to foster cooperation and to find synergies, the Member State may wish to organise common evaluation-related training for ministries and other bodies responsible for all the ESI Funds programmes. It may also be useful to draft guidelines on evaluation for all ESI Funds. Whilst there are many fund-specific considerations, a set of guidelines covering common issues would both foster cooperation and transparency as well as ensure similar evaluation standards for all funds.

5.2 Timing

The complexity of the monitoring and evaluation system necessitates timely planning and appropriate sequencing of actions, which helps managers to anticipate tasks and workloads and manage deadlines. In terms of monitoring, certain timing-related issues arise from the CPR and RDR

³⁷ CPR, Art. 47

³⁸ Commission proposal for a Regulation on the Financing, Management and Monitoring of the Common Agricultural Policy (19 November 2011), Article 110

³⁹ CPR, Ar. 41

regulations, such as the date of submission of AIRs⁴⁰ and the submission of monitoring data^{41 42}. The Member State must have processes in place to plan and take action to meet such deadlines. Advanced planning is essential as the whole process from evaluation planning to results dissemination can last up to three years. A lack of available data may lengthen the evaluation process considerably and it cannot be stressed enough how important it is to start planning an evaluation well in advance.

In practice, it may be useful for a Member State or region to address all monitoring and evaluation-related issues in a non-binding **detailed internal evaluation plan** or **multi-annual workplan** including a timeline for actions, divided into annual segments. (see **table 1: Examples of internal planning tools for M&E**). These can, in turn, be split into smaller projects for which different scheduling methods can be used. A widely used method is retro planning, also known as backward scheduling.

Retro planning

Retro planning involves building up a schedule starting from the last step of the process. It is a highly useful tool in calculating an evaluation's timeline. Experience from previous programming periods will be useful in determining the length of time required for each action.

Example of the retro planning timeplan template, which can be used in planning monitoring and evaluation tasks and activities, can be found in the Toolbox (excel table - Timeplan: Evaluation during the programming period). The table is filled in by using approximate temporal information (e.g. year 2017 or second quarter of year 2017), more specific details (e.g. June 2017) or specific dates (e.g. 31 June 2017). The more detailed the retro planning table, the easier it is to utilise as an internal management tool. Retro planning of all major evaluation reports should be completed by the beginning of the programming period so that evaluation tasks can be scheduled well in advance.

5.3 Quality control

It is advisable to apply quality control to all aspects of a monitoring and evaluation system. Internal quality control procedures and quality criteria should be applied to data, activities, and processes. The description of the quality control procedures for monitoring and evaluation should clearly identify responsible bodies and their sub-units.

A good set of quality criteria pertaining to evaluation activities considers the evaluation process (relevance, timeliness and inclusiveness), normative issues (focus on independence and impartiality of the evaluator), as well as technical criteria (relevance of the evaluation, appropriate design, reliable data, sound analysis, credible findings, evidence-based answers to evaluation questions, valid conclusions, helpful recommendations, and clarity of the report⁴³).

⁴⁰ RDR, Art. 82(1)

⁴¹ RDR, Art. 73(1)

⁴² CPR, Art. 102

⁴³ Annex 6 'Quality Assessment Form', DG Markt Guide to Evaluating Legislation at http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/internal_market/docs/evaluation/evaluation_guide_annexes.pdf , pages 87-97

Table 1 Examples of internal planning tools for M&E

Whereas the Evaluation Plan that is submitted as part of the RDP will contain only a general description of actions, Member States may wish to produce more detailed internal documentation to assist M&E tasks. Typically, the development of internal tools is the responsibility of the MA. However, in most cases coordination with and cooperation from other M&E stakeholders is necessary and desired. Some examples of possible internal documents are listed below	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detailed internal planning document for evaluation (internal evaluation plan) 	
A more detailed internal version of the EP	
Pros <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Gives a clear picture of the EP items. ▶ Helps in M&E work planning. ▶ Proof of M&E work for external actors. 	Cons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Workload in writing the detailed plan. ▶ Difficulty of defining certain processes. ▶ Requires revision when EP updated.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual or Multi-Annual Work Programme 	
A time-based action plan based on the Evaluation Plan	
Pros <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Gives a clear time line for M&E work. ▶ Assists in advance planning. ▶ Clarifies resource allocation. ▶ Helps to highlight and schedule issues requiring further development (e.g. processes, skills). ▶ Makes reporting on EP in the AIR easier. 	Cons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Preparation requires time and resources. ▶ Danger of excluding additional items or actions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal M&E Manual 	
A comprehensive handbook that covers all aspects of M&E in the Member States for the programming period	
Pros <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ All documents and procedures related to M&E in one document: easy and quick reference. ▶ Helps in development, stabilisation, analysis and review of processes. ▶ Ensures consistency of processes. ▶ Improves efficiency and effectiveness. ▶ M&E system has to be considered as a whole: aids in identifying gaps and weaknesses. ▶ Assists in knowledge management and knowledge transfer: trains employees in their job functions and serves as orientation tool for new employees. ▶ Proof of and information on M&E work for external actors. ▶ Fosters transparency and accountability. 	Cons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Heavy workload when drafting and approving. ▶ Requires stringent quality control to avoid unequal level of detail in document. ▶ Coordination amongst M&E actors in drafting and revising. ▶ Requires frequent updates and revisions. ▶ MA may prefer not to disclose all internal procedures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ad hoc documentation 	
Separate documents relating to M&E in the Member States	
Pros <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Quick to draft and approve. ▶ Tailoring to the needs of end users. 	Cons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Danger of gaps and overlaps. ▶ Difficult to keep track of versions. ▶ Unequal level of detail. ▶ Unclear/late/lacking instructions cause inefficiency. ▶ Lack of holistic view may lead to inconsistencies

5.4 Resources

The CPR and RDR spell out several obligatory monitoring and evaluation-related tasks for the Member State to carry out. In addition to the specific tasks listed in the governance section above, the Member State must also ensure that appropriate evaluation capacity is available⁴⁴. The Member State must analyse its monitoring and evaluation needs relating to the Evaluation Plan and provide sufficient

⁴⁴ CPR, Art. 49(2)

resource and capacity to address them⁴⁵. The principle of proportionality also applies to the financial and administrative resources allocated to monitoring and evaluation⁴⁶.

In general, the quality of monitoring and evaluation obviously depends on the resources allocated to it so it is critical to budget adequate financial and human resources. The Member State or region must also consider other resources fundamental to monitoring and evaluation, such as IT and data systems. As these resources are typically included in the budgets of different institutions (mainly Managing Authority and Paying Agency) it is important to gather relevant information from separate budgets into one to get a picture of all the resources allocated to the RDP's monitoring and evaluation.

Financial resources

Most of the monitoring and evaluation tasks and activities can be co-financed through Technical Assistance (TA) which can be used to support:

- Institutional strengthening and administrative capacity building;
- Evaluations, expert reports, statistics, studies;
- Analysis, management, monitoring, information exchange and programme implementation;
- Measures relating to the implementation of control systems and technical and administrative assistance;
- Installation, operation and interconnection of computerised systems for management, monitoring, audit, control and evaluation;
- Actions to improve evaluation methods and the exchange of information on evaluation practices⁴⁷.

However, monitoring and evaluation is only one of the RDP management-related activities funded from the TA budget. In order to calculate the financial resources needed for the entire monitoring and evaluation system, the Member State or region must consider each monitoring and evaluation action and estimate their costs in terms of person days and, ultimately, money. Experience from the previous programming periods can be used in budgeting but it is important to note the additional needs arising from the new monitoring and evaluation framework.

The monitoring and evaluation budget should take into account the duration and scope of evaluation activities and the availability and accessibility of data. In most cases, evaluations and larger studies are tendered, but the Member State or region should be able to estimate the cost range in advance.

In addition to the production of specific reports, methodological and process development should also be accounted for in the monitoring and evaluation budget, as should the costs of governance and liaising with stakeholders. Furthermore, communication costs should be estimated based on the communication plan of the Evaluation Plan.

Other major cost items, such as staffing, capacity building and IT systems are discussed below. It is also sensible to set funds aside to cover needs that emerge during programme implementation. The need for a certain study or a new data source may become apparent only after the beginning of the programme. It is good to have some flexibility within the monitoring and evaluation budget to cover also *ad hoc* evaluation needs.

⁴⁵ RDR, Art. 9(1)

⁴⁶ CPR, Art. 4(5)

⁴⁷ CPR, Art. 51

Human resources and administrative capacity

Appropriate human resources are critical for effective monitoring and evaluation. In addition to appropriate and sufficient staff time, the staff entrusted with monitoring and evaluation should possess adequate technical expertise.

In most Member States and regions, the monitoring and evaluation system is managed predominantly through Managing Authority's and Paying Agency's internal resources. In some cases, the tasks are delegated to other bodies, or external institutions or consultants are contracted for monitoring and evaluation management tasks.

An *ex ante* conditionality is that the Member State must ensure institutional capacity and efficient public administration.⁴⁸ Development of skills at all levels and the development of procedures and tools for monitoring and evaluation are essential parts of this conditionality. As well as adequate institutional capacity, it is also important to develop staff capacity and ensure capacity building of other actors involved in monitoring and evaluation. Needs should first be identified and training/manuals, etc. should be planned and implemented. The cost of solutions to address needs therefore constitute the capacity building budget line.

IT systems

The Managing Authority is responsible for ensuring a secure electronic system which records, manages and reports statistical information on the programme and its implementation, in particular information required to monitor progress towards defined objectives and priorities⁴⁹.

The Member State or region can either develop its current monitoring system for the next programming period or create a new one, either in-house or by using contractors such as specialised monitoring and evaluation data providers. Modifying the current IT system is typically cheaper and easier in the short term. However, if the system requires too many modifications, it can become complex, slow, tedious and more costly than a new IT system. Developing a new system to reflect new data needs and specifications requires a substantial upfront investment. In addition to a contractor delivering the project, the internal IT department(s) must make specifications for the new system and migrate data from the old system. End users will require training in the use of a new system and depending on their specifications, continuity between the old and the new systems may be a challenge. However, a new system, designed to meet new data needs, may end up being more beneficial in terms of both usability and total cost. Whether creating a new IT system or modifying an existing one, it is important to ensure compatibility and interconnection of systems between institutions (especially between the Paying Agency and Managing Authority).

In terms of budgeting, the development and maintenance of an IT system requires software, hardware and internal and external human resources.

Data

As part of the *ex ante* conditionalities, the Member State must ensure the existence of a statistical system necessary to undertake evaluations to assess the effectiveness and impact of the programmes⁵⁰. The Member State is also required to organise the production and gathering of requisite data and to supply evaluators with information provided by the monitoring system.

A lot of monitoring data will be submitted to the European Commission on a bi-annual basis, mainly derived from application forms, the payment system, the rural development operations database and other IT applications such as the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS). In addition, the Member State or region must obviously consider the data needs for different evaluations and reports. In order to deliver the required data on time, initial assessment of data availability should be prioritised.

⁴⁸ CPR, Annex IV *Ex ante* conditionalities, thematic *ex ante* conditionalities

⁴⁹ RDR, Art. 73(1)

⁵⁰ CPR, Annex IV *Ex ante* conditionalities, general *ex ante* conditionalities

Often data has to be transformed into a different format to fit the specifications of a research task. In some cases, data has to be purchased from external data sources, such as a statistical office or research institute. At times, data is inaccessible or accessible only under very strict conditions (e.g. micro-data).

In terms of budgeting, cost of data should include the expert work required for definition, gathering, assuring quality, transforming, and transmitting.

5.5 Reporting and communication

Evaluation results can only be utilised and implemented if they are communicated to the target audience in a timely manner. Developing an appropriate communication strategy for evaluation results is therefore an essential part of evaluation activity planning.

In this section communication is specifically discussed from the point of view of evaluation (and differs as such from related communication activities on the implementation of the RDPs).

Establishing a communication strategy in relation to evaluation

When establishing a communication strategy, it is important to first identify the target audience (who for) and their information needs (what). The methods and means of communication suitable for each audience should also be outlined (how). Finally, the timing of communication (when) and the persons responsible should be decided (who).

The essential elements of the communication strategy can be presented in the form of a table.

WHO	WHO FOR	WHAT	WHEN	HOW

It is advisable to consider links between the evaluation's communication strategy and the RDP's overall communication strategy, because the most relevant target audiences for an evaluation's communication strategy may well also be interested in other types of information concerning RDP implementation.

► *Persons responsible (who)*

The main actor responsible for the drafting and implementation of the evaluation results' communication strategy is the Managing Authority, who may choose to task a technical working group or the evaluation Steering Group to assist them.

As the Managing Authority usually has a communication department, the preparation of the communication strategy for evaluation results may be communicated or even developed by in-house experts. When this is the case, it is important that the department responsible for evaluation is an active co-owner of the process.

► *Target audience (who for)*

The target audiences of the evaluation results' communication strategy are not only the actors involved in the overall monitoring and evaluation system of the RDP (e.g. Managing Authority, Paying Agency, Monitoring Committee, technical working groups, and evaluation Steering Group) but also other stakeholders e.g. RDP beneficiaries and policymakers. In order to ensure wider accountability, it is also necessary to include the general public amongst the target audiences of the communication strategy.

► *Information needs (what)*

It is also important to clearly identify target audiences' specific information needs. While the Managing Authority and Paying Agency usually focus on evaluation findings which could lead to further improvements in the RDP's management and/or implementation processes, policymakers usually

focus more on the real effects and impacts of the interventions supported in order to devise adjustments in longer term policy strategies.

It is also important that an early identification of target audiences' information needs is taken into consideration when scoping and focusing planned evaluation activities, to ensure that evaluation results are available when the target audience needs them.

► **Right timing (when)**

When identifying the information needs of all the main target audiences, it is important to link planned evaluation activities with the policy making and reporting cycle. This helps make sure that evaluation results are delivered and communicated on time to all the main target audiences during RDP implementation, or during the preparation of the next programming period's RDP.

► **Communication channels (how)**

After the main target audiences and their information needs have been identified, it is necessary to identify the main information channels which will be used to communicate with the different target audiences. As a minimum prerequisite⁵¹, all the evaluation reports should be made available to all the relevant actors as well as to the general public (e.g. via the Managing Authority's website). In the case of the target audience being the Managing Authority and Paying Agency staff, the communication of the evaluation results can be ensured through internal meetings and workshops, internal newsletters or other internal communication channels. In the case of the target audience being members of the Monitoring Committee, evaluators can be invited on a regular basis to individual Monitoring Committee meetings to report on their progress and results. In the case of policymakers and other stakeholders, e.g. executive summaries of the reports can be prepared and specific presentations organized. The identified information channels should suit the needs of both the respective target audiences and the Managing Authority responsible for implementation of the communication strategy of the Evaluation Plan.

► **Monitoring of the implementation of the communication strategy**

The communication strategy of the evaluation results should also be regularly monitored and evaluated in order to see its effectiveness and efficiency in reaching the target audience and receiving feedback on the evaluation result. It is also advisable to describe the responsibilities and procedures for following up the evaluation results in the Evaluation Plan.

If the communication strategy of the Evaluation Plan is interlinked with the overall communication strategy of the RDP, the general mechanisms for the monitoring and evaluation of the overall communication strategy should cover both, whilst ensuring that the specificities of communication of evaluation results are adequately covered.

⁵¹ RDR, Art. 83(3)

6 EVALUATION TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES

The European Union legal proposals⁵² for the programming period 2014-2020 describe the overall purpose and objectives of EU rural development policy and the common evaluation approach to be employed. Evaluation assesses the achievements and contribution of Rural Development Programmes towards CAP objectives and the European Union's strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth⁵³. It must also consider the socio-economic and environmental situation in Member State's rural areas. In line with the legal proposals, evaluation is carried out to improve programme design and implementation by answering the following questions:

- *Relevance*: Are the programme's interventions addressing the most important needs?
- *Effectiveness and achievements*: To what extent are objectives and targets being met?
- *Efficiency*: Does the programme get the most out of employed resources?
- *Impact*: To what extent do interventions contribute to desired change in the programme area?

While the purpose, objectives and common approach of evaluation are framed by the relevant EU legal requirements, an evaluation's specific focus and content is for the EU Member State to decide upon. During programme design, Managing Authorities identify programme-specific monitoring and evaluation **needs**⁵⁴ and outline the evaluation set-up and approach in the pertinent chapter of their Evaluation Plan. The chosen evaluation approach should relate to the **evaluation system**, which consists of the EU common and programme-specific elements (intervention logic, evaluation questions and indicators), and related evaluation topics and activities.

6.1 Common and programme-specific elements of the evaluation system

The EU rural development policy of the CAP Pillar II is implemented via Rural Development Programmes, which are developed in Member States and regions and tailored to their specific needs and context. Common and programme-specific elements support the evaluation of RDPs and are specified in the Regulations and implementing acts. The **common elements** comprise:

- **EU common intervention logic** for rural development, which consists of the **hierarchy of objectives**; CAP horizontal and specific objectives, Union priorities for rural development, and specific objectives of **focus areas**. The **rural development measures** and sub-measures can be programmed flexibly under different focus areas of rural development priorities.
- **Common evaluation questions**, which are formulated by the European Commission and linked to CAP objectives, cross-cutting issues of Rural Development and focus areas of rural development priorities.
- **Common indicators** on context, impacts, results and outputs, and quantified targets linked to focus areas, in order to measure the effects of the policy (EU **data sources** for common context and impact indicators).
- **Guidance documents** explain the common approach towards the evaluation of Rural Development Programmes. The guidance complements legal proposals and implementing acts, but has a non-binding character.

Programme-specific elements, such as programme-specific intervention logic, evaluation questions and indicators complement the common elements.

⁵² Legal proposals for the ESI Funds including the EAFRD

⁵³ CPR, Art 47 and RDR Art. 75

⁵⁴ RDR, Art. 9.1.h

6.2 Evaluation topics

Managing Authorities carry out evaluations to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of a programme. At least once during the programming period, evaluation must assess how the support from ESI Funds has contributed to the objectives of each rural development priority⁵⁵. Evaluations conducted during the programming period should assess the programme's intervention logic and its implementation, including complementarities and synergies with other instruments such as Pillar I of the CAP.

The evaluation topics should be specified, to the extent possible at the stage of programme design as they have consequences on the evaluation governance and management, the allocation of resources and the planning of evaluation tasks and activities.

What are evaluation topics in relation to the RDP?

Legal acts outline the principles of the Union's support for ESI Funds⁵⁶, Rural Development priorities and focus areas, cross-cutting objectives⁵⁷ and specific interventions (Leader and National Rural Networks⁵⁸) which represent evaluation topics.

In addition there may also be RDP-related evaluation topics which reflect specific country or regional conditions. Such topics are either defined in relation to the composition and focus of the RDP intervention logic and the volume of allocated funds, and/or are based on the specific interests of policymakers or rural development stakeholders.

Evaluation topics linked to the composition and the focus of a programme's intervention logic relate to the programme territory's needs. For example, if programme objectives focus significantly on improving the quality of life in rural areas, evaluation should also be directed towards assessing programme effects on issues linked to the quality of life in rural areas. One of the topics to evaluate might be rural infrastructure and services, (if the SWOT analysis and needs assessment identified a critical need in this area,) in which case the programme objective could be *"To increase the rural population's access to infrastructure and services"*. The related evaluation question will be *"To what extent has the programme contributed to an increase in the access of the rural population to infrastructure and services?"* and the evaluation topic will be *"The assessment of the programme effects on improved access through the development of rural infrastructure and services"* (Figure 1).

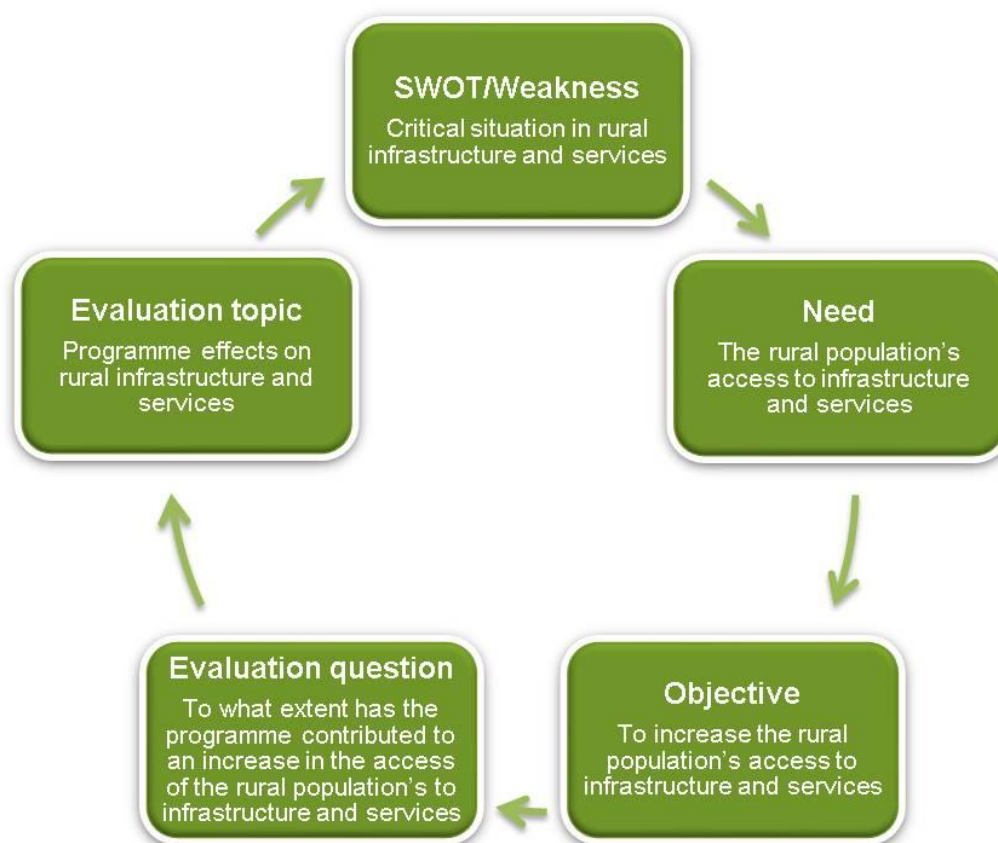
⁵⁵ CPR, Art. 49

⁵⁶ CPR, Art. 3 - 8

⁵⁷ RDR, Art. 5

⁵⁸ RDR, Art. 42 – 45 and 55

Figure 2 Example of the link between SWOT/needs assessment, programme objectives, evaluation questions and evaluation topics



The selection of evaluation topics may also take account of specific needs which may not necessarily correspond to the most prominent programme interventions in terms of allocation of funds, but have significant importance to society (e.g. increased awareness towards the environment, or increased capacity for local development).

Examples of evaluation topics in relation to the *programme intervention logic*:

- Results/impacts of the RDP/ focus areas on the **competitiveness** of agriculture;
- Results/impacts of the RDP/focus areas on **job creation and maintenance**;
- Results/impacts of RDP/focus areas on **environmental public goods** (biodiversity, water quality, climate change, HNV, etc.);
- Results/impacts of the RDP/group of measures on **local development** (village renewal, local economic development and diversification, integrated local development, Leader/Community-led Local Development (CLLD), etc.);
- Effects of the RDP on rural development cross-cutting objectives such as **environment, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and innovation**;
- Contribution of **networking** to the achievements of the RDP, etc.

The majority of evaluation topics can be identified in the programme design stage and included in the Evaluation Plan chapter of the RDP. Other topics may need to be added during the programme implementation phase, either due to possible changes in the intervention logic and related funds allocation or because specific evaluation needs arise in relation to existing evaluation topics (e.g. originally proposed topic on water quality is broadened to include water efficiency).

What evaluation tasks have to be performed in relation to the programme?

- **Observation of development trends and context analysis⁵⁹**; ongoing observation of changes in the context in which the programme's interventions take place against set baselines (using common and programme-specific context indicators).
- Assessment of programme **effectiveness, efficiency and impacts⁶⁰ and contribution to CAP objectives**. This includes the analysis of the net effects of the programme towards observed changes in the contextual situation (based on impact indicators).
- Assessment of programme **results⁶¹ and contribution to focus areas under rural development priorities**; assessment of multiple effects and synergies and analysis of the complementary result indicators.
- Monitoring⁶² of the RDP **progress in relation to target indicators** and output indicators.
- Assessment of **progress and achievement on specific evaluation topics**, such as National Rural Networks.
- Assessment of progress made in ensuring an integrated approach in the use of the EAFRD to **support territorial development** of rural areas through Leader local development strategies⁶³, and if relevant, a multi-fund approach to CLLD.
- Assessment of RDP **contributions to rural development cross-cutting objectives⁶⁴** such as innovation, environment and climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Assessment of RDP **contributions to delivering the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth⁶⁵**, including the contribution of RDPs to the headline targets;
- Assessment of the use of **technical assistance funds**.

⁵⁹ CPR, Art. 47, RDR, Art. 75

⁶⁰ CPR, Art. 47, RDR, Art. 75

⁶¹ RDR, Art. 44.3

⁶² CPR, Art. 44.2, RDR, Art. 79.2

⁶³ RDR, Art. 82.4

⁶⁴ RDR, Art. 75

⁶⁵ RDR, Art. 44

Figure 3 Evaluation topics and tasks

Evaluation topics (examples)	Major evaluation tasks in relation to evaluation topics	Evaluation questions		Indicators		Reporting ⁶⁶
		EU	RDP	EU	RDP	
Focus Areas (1-18)	Observation of development trends and context analysis			Context Indicators	Proxies Specific context indicators	1. <i>Ex ante</i> Enhanced AIR <i>Ex post</i>
Viable food production	Assessment of RDP effectiveness, efficiency and impacts and contribution to CAP general objectives	Common horizontal	Specific horizontal	Common Impacts	Specific impacts	Enhanced AIR <i>Ex post</i>
Environment	Assessment of results of RDP interventions and contribution to focus areas under Rural Development priorities	Common FA related	Specific FA related	Common compl. results	Specific results	Enhanced AIR <i>Ex post</i>
Biodiversity	Monitoring of the RDP progress in relation to target indicators and output indicators			Target Outputs	Specific target outputs	Quarterly, yearly
Water quality	Assessment of progress and achievements with respect to the specific evaluation topics	Common horizontal	Specific horizontal	Common Results	Specific results	Enhanced AIR <i>Ex post</i>
Innovation	Assessment of progress made in ensuring an integrated approach to the use of EAFRD and other EU financial instruments to support territorial development, including the LDS	Common	Specific	Common results in relation to Leader/CL LD	Specific results in relation to Leader/CL LD	Enhanced AIR <i>Ex post</i>
Balanced territorial development	Assessment of RDP contributions to Rural Development cross-cutting objectives	Common horizontal	Specific horizontal	Common Results	Specific results	2. Enhanced AIR Enhanced AIR <i>Ex post</i>
Local development	Assessment of RDP contributions to the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, including CSF thematic objectives, including contribution to EU 2020 headline targets	Common horizontal	Specific horizontal		Specific	Enhanced AIR 3. <i>Ex post</i>
Jobs creation						
Quality of life						
Etc.						
Technical assistance	Assessment of the use of technical assistance funds		Specific		Specific	Enhanced AIR <i>Ex post</i>

⁶⁶ To be finalised and further specified after publication of the related implementing acts.

6.3 Cross-cutting and specific evaluation topics

This chapter outlines the cross-cutting evaluation topics (1) Innovation; (2) Environment; (3) Climate Change; and specific evaluation topics (4) Leader/CLLD; (5) National Rural Networks.

Innovation

Innovation could be defined as “**a new idea put into practice with success**”. The new idea could be a new product, practice or service or a new production process or method. It could also involve opening to new markets or a new way of managing or organizing things. The substance of **innovation can differ** by the structure of the sector, regionally, different stages of development and the type of constraint faced. Innovation is **only identifiable ex post**, when the new approaches are successfully transformed into practice. It is impossible to be sure in advance whether an idea will become an innovation. We can distinguish **between linear and system innovation**:

- **Linear innovation**: dissemination of research results; it is based on information actions, linear advising methods and training
- **System innovation**: it occurs as a result of the **interplay and mediation between actors** for combining new and/ or existing knowledge (not only purely scientific). This model relies mainly on co-operation, sharing of knowledge and intermediating advisory methods.

► *What is the legal basis?*

Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” gives innovation and research a crucial role in preparing the European Union for future challenges. Thereby, the “**Innovation Union**” is one of the seven **flagship initiatives** of the EU 2020. Among the thirty action points that this flagship comprises we highlight (1) **Spreading the benefits of innovation across the Union**: Member States should initiate the preparation of post-2013 ESI Funds programmes with an increased focus on innovation and smart specialisation; and (2) **Pooling forces to achieve breakthroughs**: European Innovation Partnerships (EIP).

The Common Strategic Framework (CSF) is established to increase coherence between policy commitments made in the context of Europe 2020 and investment on the ground. CSF encourages integration by setting out how the ESI Funds⁶⁷ can work together through common thematic objectives, of which one is **strengthening research, technological development and innovation**⁶⁸.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) also foresees fostering innovation as one of its specific objectives and highlights its role in sustainable agriculture and rural development: The “Budget for Europe 2020” under the CAP heading foresees 4.5 billion Euros for research and innovation in the field of food security, bio-economy and sustainable agriculture. Innovation represents as well the horizontal **Rural Development priority**⁶⁹ under Pillar II of the CAP programme. The measures that will play a prominent role in supporting innovative approaches in RDPs will be:

- Measures addressed to knowledge transfer and advisory services⁷⁰;
- Investments in physical assets⁷¹ ;
- Co-operation⁷² establishing “operational groups; pilot demonstration projects;
- LEADER.

⁶⁷ European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF), Cohesion Fund (CF) and European Maritime and Fisheries Funds (EMFF)

⁶⁸ CPR, Art.9

⁶⁹ RDR, Art. 5, Priority 1: Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas.

⁷⁰ RDR, Art.15 and 16

⁷¹ RDR, Art.18, 20 and 27

⁷² RDR, Art. 36

In fostering innovation the **European Innovation Partnership (EIP) for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability** aims to provide a working interface between agriculture, bio-economy, science and others at EU, national and regional level. **Two headline targets** have been identified for the EIP:

- Promoting productivity and efficiency of the agricultural sector (reversing the recent trend of diminishing productivity gains by 2020); and
- Promoting sustainability of agriculture (securing soil functionality at a satisfactory level by 2020).

The EIP **will cover multiple stages**: from the core research process and the dissemination of research results to the development of products and techniques and their integration in the production process. An important role will be assumed also by certification processes that confirm the increased added value of the research products. An **EIP network facility** has been established to transpose innovation into agricultural practice via funding concrete innovative actions through RDPs.

► **What are the key issues to be addressed?**

The key issues to be addressed in evaluation are:

- Analyse how the RDP is improving the conditions for innovation, research and development in the rural areas.
- Assess the contribution of Priority 1, as a *cross-cutting priority*, to reinforce the rest of RDP priorities (draw out the contribution of the "innovation" measures from the evaluation of the results of the other priorities).
- Evaluate the contribution of innovative actions developed under the EIP Operational Groups and funded with the RDP to the rural development cross cutting objective on innovation and consequently
- to EU2020 Strategy

What are the proposed approaches?

Innovation is a complex phenomenon, taking place within a dynamic and constantly evolving system that is adapting to a range of internal and external factors. Innovation is difficult to quantify and **often with long time lags before an impact** can be measured and can be **identifiable ex post**, when the new approaches are successfully transformed into practice.

In response to these challenges the **following types of approaches are suggested**:

- Use a **mix of methods** to fit the needs and the context of the innovation evaluation (no single method can address all the main evaluation questions or be applied across the range of analysis). Combine quantitative and qualitative research methods.
- **Be participative** and draw on the expertise of EIP partners, academics, managers, authorities and policymakers. Evaluators should ensure that the opinions of the different stakeholder groups are captured.

Possible methods to develop this approach include:

- **Desk research based on** documents and literature directly or indirectly related to the RDP, e.g. administrative manuals, application forms, assessment forms, existing evaluation reports and broader policy reports.
- **Interviews** with RDP Managing Authorities, measure managers, beneficiaries and other stakeholders.
- **Case Studies** based on pilot projects applying detailed data collection and analysis and having a restricted number of participants/ beneficiaries.

- **Peer review panels:** evaluation or assessment of programme activities programme and outcomes/outputs involving qualified experts.
- **Focus groups, workshops and meetings** with EIP Operational Groups partners.
- **Network analysis**, aiming to map the social interaction between the actors involved in evaluation, including the beneficiaries.

Environment

► What is the legal basis?

The rural development policy shall contribute to the Europe 2020 Strategy by promoting **sustainable rural development** throughout the rural development Union priorities in a complementary manner with other instruments of the Common Agricultural Policy, Cohesion Policy and to the Common Fisheries Policy. It should contribute to a **more territorially and environmentally balanced, climate friendly** and resilient, competitive and innovative agricultural sector and rural areas in the EU⁷³ taking in account that all of the Union priorities for rural development should contribute to the cross-cutting objectives of innovation, environment and climate change mitigation and adaptation.⁷⁴ *Ex ante* evaluation should verify the adequacy of planned measures to promote sustainable development⁷⁵.

Environment as a rural development cross-cutting objective can be approached as a subset of sustainable development dealing in particular with the condition of environmental goods and elements.

What are the key issues to be addressed?

The RDPs are already familiar with the **evaluation of the environment as a cross-cutting issue** via the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process in the programming stage. SEA in most cases focuses on a number of “environmental issues”⁷⁶, i.e. biodiversity, population and human health, fauna and flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage (architectural and archaeological) and landscape.

Therefore, the indicator set used for RDP programming, monitoring and evaluation, already includes a relevant number of environmental indicators.

► What are the proposed approaches?

The SEA approach offers a robust analytical framework⁷⁷ and is already used as an *ex ante* appraisal of the cross-cutting environmental impact of the programme. The same tools can be further used for the evaluation of the impacts during the programming period, offering snapshots of the programme's impact at certain stages.

The steps that could be followed are:

- Define a number of “**environmental issues**” relevant for the programme area (See “What are the key issues?”).
- Collect documents such as laws, regulations, strategies, guidelines, to review “objectives” that the RDP actions have to comply with. For example the “Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC)” element of the Cross-compliance mechanism could set the frame for related RDP measures.
- Formulate guiding questions per “environmental issue” (3-4 questions should be sufficient), e.g. in the case of “soil”, one of the guiding questions could be “Is the RDP accelerating soil

⁷³ RDR, Article 3

⁷⁴ RDR, Article 5

⁷⁵ CPR, Article 48

⁷⁶ Directive 2001/42/EC, Annex I, lit.f

⁷⁷ see also Greening Regional Development Programmes Network (2006), Handbook on SEA for Cohesion Policy 2007-2013

erosion even if GAEC provisions are respected?” This question might seem superficial in a measure under e.g. Union Priority 4 but it could be of importance under Union Priority 2 due to unintended effects caused by farms’ restructuring.

- Identify the relevant context indicators for each “environmental issue”.
- Identify the relevant RDP measures/group of measures/focus areas for each “environmental issue” and link them to relevant result and impact indicators.
- Complement the quantitative figures with a qualitative description of the impact of the measure/group of measures/focus areas on the environmental issue and the effect of the RDP based on the relevant indicators.
- Summarize RDP effects per environmental issue and formulate synthetic judgments.

Regarding relevant indicators and related monitoring and evaluation provisions, the effort should be to use readily available information and data, whenever possible. The Common Context Indicators collected during programming already offer a useful starting base. Apart from them there is a number of sources that each RDP could make use of. Overall, the possible sources for indicators are:

- Common Context Indicators relevant for environmental issues;
- The SEA indicators for the description of the environmental situation and the monitoring as described in the SEA Report of each RDP,
- If not yet included in the SEA Report, relevant indicators from other EU Directives (e.g. Birds Directive, Habitats Directive, Water Framework Directive, etc.).

The table below proposes an overview of suggested relations between Union Priorities and focus areas for rural development and relevant environmental issues. Depending on the strategy of the RDP and the importance given to each of the focus areas, the Managing Authority will choose those “issues” of highest relevance.

Table 2 Indicative relations between environmental issues and RD Focus Areas

UP	Focus Area	Environment
1	<p>Fostering innovation, cooperation and the development of the knowledge base in rural areas</p> <p>Strengthening the links between agriculture, food production and forestry and research and innovation, including for the purpose of improved environmental management and performance</p> <p>Fostering lifelong learning and vocational training in the agricultural and forestry sectors.</p>	All issues
2	<p>Improving the economic performance of all farms and facilitating farm restructuring and modernisation, notably with a view to increase market participation and orientation as well as agricultural diversification.</p> <p>Facilitating entry of adequately skilled farmers into the agriculture sector and in particular generational renewal.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Biodiversity/fauna and flora - Soil - Climate/Air - Water - Landscape - Material assets
3	<p>Improving competitiveness of primary producers by better integrating them into the agri-food chain through quality schemes, adding value to agriculture products, promotion in local markets and short supply circuits, producer groups and organisations and inter-branch organisations.</p> <p>Supporting farm risk prevention and management.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Soil - Climate/Air - Landscape - Population and human health
4	<p>Restoring, and preserving and enhancing biodiversity, including in Natura 2000 areas, areas facing natural or other specific constraints and high nature value farming, and the state of European landscapes.</p> <p>Improving water management, including fertiliser and pesticide management.</p> <p>Preventing soil erosion and improving soil management.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Biodiversity/fauna and flora - Soil - Water - Climate/Air - Landscape - Population and human health - Material assets
5	<p>Increasing efficiency in water use by agriculture.</p> <p>Increasing efficiency in energy use in agriculture and food processing.</p> <p>Facilitating the supply and use of renewable sources of energy, of by-products, wastes, residues and other non-food raw material for purposes of the bio-economy.</p> <p>Reducing green house gas and ammonia emissions from agriculture.</p> <p>Fostering carbon conservation and sequestration in agriculture and forestry.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Biodiversity/fauna and flora - Soil - Water - Climate/Air - Landscape - Population and human health
6	<p>Facilitating diversification, creation and development of small enterprises and job creation.</p> <p>Fostering local development in rural areas.</p> <p>Enhancing accessibility to use and quality of information and communication technologies (ICT) in rural areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Population and human health - Material assets - Cultural heritage

Climate Change

► What is the legal basis?

Climate Change mitigation and adaptation is a subset of the environment cross-cutting issue dealing with the impact of anthropogenic emissions (CO², Methane, Nitrous Oxides, etc.) released in the atmosphere (“mitigation” aiming at the reduction of these emissions) and with the impact of climate changes on environmental elements and processes (e.g. the hydrological cycle, biodiversity, etc.) affecting human activities (“adaptation” aiming at the reduction of the risks).

► What are the key issues?

For each RDP, a number of “**climate change issues**” needs to be defined, e.g.⁷⁸:

- On mitigation, e.g. regarding the RPDs contribution to
 - Reducing GHG emissions from agriculture and other sources (keyword Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF));
 - Increasing the production of electric power or biogas production from renewable energy sources ;
 - Increasing the ability of soil to capture carbon;
 - Reducing soil erosion;
 - Improving manure storage and reducing methane emissions;
 - Reducing fertiliser use and nitrogen emissions,
 - Improving maintenance of Wetlands/peatlands and their ability to capture carbon.
- On adaptation, e.g. regarding the RPDs contribution in responsiveness, resilience and adaptive capacity against climate change related hazards and processes, such as:
 - Droughts,
 - Forest fires,
 - Floods,
 - Rain/hail,
 - Habitat fragmentation,
 - Loss of biodiversity,
 - Temperature increase and stress,
 - Pests and diseases, etc.

► What are proposed approaches?

A similar approach as the one described under the cross-cutting objective environment, is proposed. However considering climate change there is need for a distinction between mitigation and adaptation.

The quantification of the mitigation contribution (in terms of CO₂ tonne equivalent avoided) should be relatively straightforward (and is partly directly or indirectly available through the RDP output and target indicators). The main questions are

- Which are the main GHG emission sources (usually fossil energy use, methane/biogas releases and fertilizer use)?
- How has the programme affected the relevant context indicators?
- How has the programme reduced overall GHG emissions by improving/extending the potential for carbon sequestration (e.g. via afforestation, peatland management, soil organic matter improvement, etc.)?

This is not the case with the contribution to adaptation. Here a more qualitative approach, based on guiding questions in the SEA logic, is recommended. For example the climate change issue

⁷⁸ DG CLIMATE, presentation on 30.04.2013, Questions and Answers Session at DG AGRI

“temperature increase”, the guiding question could refer to the contribution of the RDP in reducing heat stress (e.g. by adapted designs in investments, heat-resilient varieties in crops or afforestation, in evaporation-reducing irrigation systems, etc.).

The table below proposes an indicative overview of climate change issues linked to Union Priorities and RD focus areas. Depending on the strategy of the RDP and the importance given to each of the focus areas, the Managing Authority will choose those “issues” which are of relevance.

Table 3 Indicative relations between Climate Change Issues and RD Focus Areas

UP	Focus Area	Climate Change Mitigation	Climate Change Adaptation
1	Fostering innovation, cooperation and the development of the knowledge base in rural areas	All issues	All issues
	Strengthening the links between agriculture, food production and forestry and research and innovation, including for the purpose of improved environmental management and performance		
	Fostering lifelong learning and vocational training in the agricultural and forestry sectors.		
2	Improving the economic performance of all farms and facilitating farm restructuring and modernisation, notably with a view to increase market participation and orientation as well as agricultural diversification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GHG emissions - Renewable energy sources - Ability of soil to capture carbon - Manure storage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Habitat fragmentation; - Loss of biodiversity - Temperature increase and stress; - Pests and diseases, etc.
	Facilitating entry of adequately skilled farmers into the agriculture sector and in particular generational renewal.		
3	Improving competitiveness of primary producers by better integrating them into the agri-food chain through quality schemes, adding value to agriculture products, promotion in local markets and short supply circuits, producer groups and organisations and inter-branch organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GHG emissions - Ability of soil to capture carbon - Fertiliser use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Temperature increase and stress, - Pests and diseases, etc.
	Supporting farm risk prevention and management.		
4	Restoring, and preserving and enhancing biodiversity, including in Natura 2000 areas, areas facing natural or other specific constraints and high nature value farming, and the state of European landscapes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GHG emissions - Ability of soil to capture carbon - Erosion - Fertiliser use - Maintenance of Wetlands 	All issues
	Improving water management, including fertiliser and pesticide management.		
	Preventing soil erosion and improving soil management.		
5	Increasing efficiency in water use by agriculture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GHG emissions - Renewable energy sources - Ability of soil to capture carbon - Erosion - Fertiliser use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Droughts, - Temperature increase and stress.
	Increasing efficiency in energy use in agriculture and food processing.		
	Facilitating the supply and use of renewable sources of energy, of by-products, wastes, residues and other non-food raw material for purposes of the bio-economy.		
	Reducing green house gas and ammonia emissions from agriculture.		
	Fostering carbon conservation and sequestration in agriculture and forestry.		
6	Facilitating diversification, creation and development of small enterprises and job creation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GHG emissions - Renewable energy sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Temperature increase and stress; - Pests and diseases, etc.
	Fostering local development in rural areas.		
	Enhancing accessibility to use and quality of information and communication technologies (ICT) in rural areas.		

Regarding relevant indicators, monitoring and evaluation provisions, the effort should be to use readily available information and data insofar as is possible. The CMEF and the Common Context Indicators collected during programming already offer a useful starting base. Apart from them, there is an inexhaustible number of sources that each RDP could make use of. In overall the possible sources for indicators are:

- Common Context Indicators, which relate to:
 - Sectorial Analysis
 - 18 Agricultural Area
 - 19 Agricultural Area under Organic Farming
 - 20 Irrigated land
 - 21 Livestock Units
 - 29 Forests and other wooded land
 - Environmental
 - 31 Land Cover
 - 33 Extensive Agriculture
 - 34 Natura 2000
 - 35 Farmland Birds
 - 36 Biodiversity habitats related to Grassland
 - 38 Protected Forest
 - 40 Water Quality (also an Impact Indicator)
 - 41 Soil Organic Matter (also an Impact Indicator)
 - 42 Soil Erosion
 - 43 Production of renewable energy
 - 44 Energy use in agriculture, forestry and food industry
 - 45 GHG Emissions (also an Impact Indicator)
- Indicators used in reports from national obligations towards international organizations e.g. UNFCCC reports (mainly agriculture and LULUCF)⁷⁹,
- The SEA indicators as described above.

LEADER/CLLD

EC proposals for the minimum requirements for the Evaluation Plan specify a sub-section on evaluation topics which should include “the assessment of the contribution of Local Development Strategies, the added value of the LEADER approach and the partnership principle. It should also include planned support for evaluation at LAG level”.

► A common framework

Whether stand alone or part of a wider approach Community-led Local Development (CLLD)⁸⁰ LEADER is implemented within the framework of the RDP Operational Programme. It contributes to the RDP intervention logic and the achievement of its objectives through LAGs achieving the objectives of their Local Development Strategies (LDSs). These LDSs tailor rural development interventions to local needs via their own specific intervention logic. Consequently, the RDP Evaluation Plan should set out a framework to enable the achievement of LDS objectives to be incorporated into those of the RDP as a whole including the assessment of progress in the 2017 and 2019 Annual Implementation Reports. Thus, LEADERs contribution is fed in through the hierarchy of objectives for the CAP and EU2020.

⁷⁹ Here countries with regional programmes will have to find either a source or a methodology for “translating” the national numbers to regional ones.

⁸⁰ Guidance on the approach to CLLD evaluation is set out in the Common guidance of the European Commission’s Directorates-General AGRI, EMPL, MARE and REGIO on Community-led Local Development in European Structural and Investment Funds (29 Apr 2013)

► **The added value of the LEADER approach**

LEADER is a development approach, not just an RDP delivery scheme. As such it has specific features which bring the added value in mobilising local resources for the integrated development of rural areas. These specific features and LEADER approach' share on the overall local development must be addressed and planned for if its added value is to be evaluated effectively⁸¹ both in its own right and as part of CLLD. The effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery arrangements should also be evaluated. The Evaluation Plan should therefore address these specificities as noted in the EC minimum requirements and CLLD common guidance⁸⁰.

► **The Local Development Strategy**

LEADER is implemented on the principle of subsidiarity through Local Action Groups responsible for the development, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of their local development strategy (LDS)⁸². This LDS must contain descriptions of its own arrangements for monitoring and evaluation and of the associated LAG capacity⁸³, in effect an LDS evaluation plan. It should be noted, however that no description of methodologies to be used is required in the RDP Evaluation Plan. As LAGs are obliged to provide the necessary information for RDP level monitoring and evaluation to the Managing Authority and its evaluators or agents,⁸⁴ it therefore follows that these LDS plans should respect the framework of the RDP Evaluation Plan as well as the LDS specificities. This should be a prerequisite of the contractual agreement between the Managing Authority and the LAG.

► **Evaluation support**

LAGs will therefore:

- contribute to the evaluation of the RDP as a whole;
- contribute to the assessment of the added value of the approach; and
- undertake the monitoring and evaluation of their own LDS.

In order to enable LAGs to contribute effectively they will require support and capacity building from the Managing Authority or National Rural Network⁸⁵. The CPR makes explicit provision for this stating that "*Member States shall ensure that appropriate evaluation capacity is available*"⁸⁶ and this is clearly reinforced in the proposed minimum requirements for the Evaluation Plan and the CLLD common guidance⁸⁰. The Evaluation Plan should therefore clearly set out the proposed support to be made available for LAGs in these activities⁸⁷.

► **Key issues in planning the evaluation activities of LEADER**

In planning the evaluation activities of LEADER the following key issues should be taken into account:

In the framework of CLLD, the LEADER approach is part of the overall EU2020 intervention logic, the priorities and objectives of which are declined into the Partnership Agreement, the whole CAP and the RDPs. Although LEADER fits within this it remains a bottom-up local development approach with defined principles. The regulatory framework foresees programming under Focus Area 6(b)⁸⁸ but with the clear expectation of a wider relevance and contribution across, and possibly outwith the RDR.

⁸¹ This particular issue has been stressed by the European Court of Auditors (Report 10/2010).

⁸² Common Provisions Regulation Articles 30.3 (g)

⁸³ Common Provisions Regulation Articles 29.1(f)

⁸⁴ Article 78(1) RDR

⁸⁵ RDR Article 55(3)(b)(iii)

⁸⁶ CPR Article 49(2)

⁸⁷ The ENRD LEADER Toolkit will contain a section on LDS evaluation for LAGs

⁸⁸ For a comprehensive outline on the potential contribution of LEADER to focus areas and cross-cutting objectives see the "Measure Fiche LEADER local development".

As LEADER delivers to the RDP objectives through the LDSs, evaluation activities at local and RDP level should be coordinated. This will benefit the utility, efficiency and effectiveness of evaluation activities, their resourcing, their respective contributions, the expected outcomes and the follow-up activities.

Given the minimum of two levels of involvement (local/regional and national) in evaluation the respective roles of Managing Authorities and LAGs should be clearly defined and coordinated. The implementation of RDP and LDS level evaluation plans should be carefully monitored and managed to ensure the coordination and progress of the respective evaluation activities and iteration between the different levels

The evaluation of the added value attributable to the LEADER approach is complex and involves the assessment of three main strands:

- The extent to which the MA enabled the effective implementation of the LEADER approach through RDP design and delivery.
- The extent to which and effectiveness of the implementation of the LEADER specificities by the LAGs.
- The extent of added value attributable to the implementation of the specific LEADER methodology by comparison with other development methods (including at the level of the whole CAP, CLLD and EU2020)

LAGs have not previously been formally required to conduct evaluation activities and have varying degrees of experience, knowledge and expertise; so there is a considerable lack of consistency of approach and there are significant skills gaps⁸⁹. Assessing and acting to ensure adequate LAG monitoring and evaluation skills and capabilities is essential to strengthen the consistency and quality of evaluation and the robustness and the timing of outcomes⁹⁰.

The monitoring and data collection arrangements necessary in order to capture the added value of LEADER and its contribution to the RDP and more widely are complex and need careful planning. Evaluation plans at both RDP and LDS level should clarify the different responsibilities and tasks related to the provision of data needed for MA and LAGs' monitoring and evaluation activities.

► **What are the proposed approaches?**

Further and more detailed guidance on approaches to LEADER evaluation are available in the publication of the Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, the 'Working Paper on Capturing impacts of LEADER and of measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas'. The ENRD LEADER Toolkit will contain a section on LDS evaluation for LAGs which will contain details of specific methods and approaches. The following paragraphs provide some general principles.

At the level of the RDP, the Managing Authority should provide:

- a framework for the overall assessment of LEADER;
- the means to incorporate LDS achievements and evaluations' outcomes into RDP level evaluations;

⁸⁹ See European Court of Auditors (Report 10/2010) and ENRD LEADER Focus Group 4 report.

⁹⁰ Ideally via the *ex ante* evaluation of the RDP.

- the support actions necessary for preparing the LAGs for evaluation activities⁹¹ e.g. data needs assessment, definition/interpretation of indicators, evaluation techniques, quality control, etc.

At the level of the LDSs, the LAGs should provide:

- a framework for assessing their own performance in implementing the LEADER specificities including the specification of the relevant data to capture relevant procedural, physical, financial and relational elements;
- the systems and mechanisms to manage financial and output data with specific relevance to indicators and targets. This should include suitable links to other relevant databases e.g. the RDP electronic information system⁹²;
- proposals for disseminating⁹³ and utilising evaluation results e.g. through amending the LDS and its delivery;
- the structure through which they will complement RDP level evaluation of LEADER

Due to the specificities of LEADER, its inherently participative methods and its strong socio-economic dimension, a participative evaluation approach is recommended. Active participation in the evaluation process strengthens its relevance and the understanding and ownership of the outcomes. This in turn can strengthen the trust within the partnership and between the LAGs and MA. Participative approaches are also particularly relevant to the process elements of LEADER and its methodology e.g. in assessing aspects of its added value by comparison with other approaches. It must be noted, however, that great care is required to avoid an overly strong focus on qualitative or methodological aspects, a tendency which has been prominent in the past. The use of mixed-methods may better address the need to capture different aspects of the effects of LEADER with reference to quantitative, qualitative, procedural and relational issues⁹⁴.

The RDR envisages strong LAG involvement in evaluation activities. In addition to strengthening ownership this can be beneficial in supporting institutional learning, developing evidence-based policies and social accountability and enhancing understanding of the territory, the LDS and its effects across the population. This reflexivity is an essential component of the development of a mature LAG.

⁹¹ These activities should be scheduled prior to LDS implementation to support the LAGs in designing their own EPs. During implementation on-the-job support such as mentoring, dissemination of good practices, tutoring and peer reviewing can be provided to maintain or improve quality.

⁹² RDR Article 73(1).

⁹³ Including to the local community empowering them through making policies more visible and effective at local level as is specifically outlined for CLLD.

⁹⁴ European Evaluation Helpdesk (2010): Working Paper on 'Capturing Impacts of LEADER and of Measures to Improve Quality of Life in Rural Areas'. Brussels.

National Rural Networks

► What is the legal basis?

Member States establish the National Rural Network (NRN) or National Rural Network Programme (NRNP)⁹⁵ **to group administrations and organisations in rural development**, including partnership created for the purpose of the RDP and Partnership Agreement development. NRN and NRNP should **support networking in rural areas, which aims to:**

- improve the quality of rural development programmes;
- ensure the involvement of RD stakeholders in programme implementation and evaluation;
- inform broader public and potential beneficiaries on the rural development policy; and
- foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas⁹⁶.

NRN and NRNP are instruments for inter-institutional and cross-scale learning, fostering exchange of experiences, know-how and facilitating the dissemination of good practice between rural areas and rural stakeholders. NRN and NRNP ensure that EAFRD support either in form of Technical Assistance (in the case of NRN) or programme budget programme (in the case of NRNP) is given **for setting up structures to run the network and for the action plan of the programme. The Action Plan** should contain activities for sharing and disseminating monitoring and evaluation findings, training and networking activities for Local Action Groups, collection of examples, networking activities for advisors, etc.⁹⁷.

► What are the key issues to be addressed?

Aims and activities of NRNs and NRNPs, as outlined in the legal proposals, represent the base for their assessments. However rural networks should not only **strengthening the accomplishment of RDP objectives**, but also **creating an added value** by generating broader rural networking, enhancing social capital and improving governance in rural areas. Therefore the key issues to be addressed in the evaluation of rural networks are linked to:

A. The **enhancement of the implementation of rural policy**, where the assessment is focused on the contribution of rural networks to:

- Achievements of EU2020, CAP and rural policy objectives (e.g. innovation, environment/climate change, competitiveness, social inclusion, combating poverty, etc.);
- RDP specific objectives (improvement of the quality of RDP, involvement of stakeholders in evaluation, etc.);
- Quality of RDP implementation and delivery (involvement of RDP stakeholders in programme implementation, information of broader public and potential beneficiaries, participation of the rural networks in monitoring, data collection, etc.).

B. The **generation of added value**, where the assessment is focused on the contribution of rural networks to:

- Enhancement of broader rural networking among individuals, organisations, associations active in rural development, etc. at local, regional and national level;
- Cooperation among various RDP stakeholders, beneficiaries, e.g. farmers, entrepreneurs, foresters with researchers, between municipalities, local action groups, etc.;
- Improvement of governance in rural areas;

⁹⁵ RDR, Art.55.1 : "MS with regional programme may submit for approval a specific programme for the establishment and the operation of their national rural network".

⁹⁶ RDR, Art. 55

⁹⁷ RDR, Art. 55.3

- Development of partnership and multi-level governance as one of the main principles of ESI Funds;
- Exchange and transfer of knowledge, information, experiences, expertise, and good practice and related capacity building within a broad spectrum of rural stakeholders in various fields of rural development;
- Exchange and transfer of knowledge, information, experiences, expertise, and good practice on evaluation, development of evaluation methods, support for evaluation processes, etc.

Although rural networking should be encouraged across the whole spectrum of rural development interventions, the following **focus areas** of rural development priorities play a prominent role in promoting rural networking:

- Focus area 1b: strengthening links between agriculture, food production and forestry, research and innovation, including for the purpose of improved environmental management and performance;
- Focus area 3a: improving competitiveness of primary producers by better integrating them into the agri-food chain through quality schemes, adding value to agriculture products promotion of local markets and short supply circuits, producers groups and inter-branch organisations; and
- Focus area 6b: fostering local development in rural areas.

The following rural development measures are significantly encouraging rural networking and cooperation:

- Art. 15 Knowledge transfer in information actions;
- Art. 16 Advisory services, farm management and farm relief services;
- Art. 21 Basic services and village renewal in rural areas (§1.c: broadband infrastructure);
- Art. 28 Setting up producers groups;
- Art. 36 Cooperation;
- Art. 42 – 44 Leader.

Additionally, the following articles of the RDR are supporting grouping of farmers, foresters and municipalities and therefore can have a co-operation and networking character:

- Art. 19 Restoring agriculture production potential damaged by natural disasters and catastrophic events and introduction of appropriate prevention actions (support is granted to farmers or group of farmers).
- Art. 23 Afforestation and creation of woodland (support is granted to private landowners and tenants, municipalities and their associations).
- Art. 24 Establishment of agro-forestry systems (support is granted to private landowners and tenants, municipalities and their associations).
- Art. 25 Prevention and restoration of damage to forests from forest fires and natural disasters and catastrophic events (support is granted to private, semi-public and public forest, municipalities, state forest and their associations).
- Art. 26 Investments improving the resilience and environmental value of forest ecosystems (support is granted to natural persons, private forest owners, private law and semi-public bodies, municipalities and their associations).

- Art. 27 Investment in new forestry technologies and in processing and marketing of forest products (support is granted to private forest owners, municipalities and their associations).
- Art. 30 Organic farming (support is granted to farmers or group of farmers).

► **What are the proposed approaches?**

The starting point for the evaluation of the NRN/NRNP is the **network structure and its intervention logic**.

Different scenarios can be applied in setting up the network and its coordination unit, in the composition of local, regional structures, division of responsibilities and competencies, which might influence the choice of assessment methods, including considering self-assessment approaches.

In relation to the network intervention logic, the first step is to review the network objectives (overall and specific), measures and activities, employed via NRN/NRNP. EU common evaluation questions and indicators need to be linked to the objectives and activities. Since the networks are functioning in the RDP-specific context, programme-specific evaluation questions and indicators will have to be applied in order to measure specific networks outputs, results and impacts. In formulating programme-specific evaluation questions and in developing network result and impact indicators the contribution of NRN/NRNP both to the implementation of rural policy and to the generation of added value of networks should be considered.

The evaluation of NRN/NRNP should be based on **sufficient evidence**. In preparing and planning the evaluation of networks, all NRN/NRNP related common and programme-specific indicators should be equipped with data collection methods, data sources (both quantitative and qualitative, as appropriate) and data management. The following data, for example, could be considered for the evaluation of networks:

- Quantitative data for input, output and result indicators (monitoring);
- Quantitative and qualitative data for result indicators collected on beneficiaries of the NRN/NRNP (surveys using questionnaires/interviews/focus groups, case studies, etc.);
- Quantitative and qualitative data for impact indicators collected on both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the NRN/NRNP in order to conduct counterfactual analysis (surveys using questionnaires/interviews/focus groups, case studies, etc.);
- Using official statistics if possible (in case needed data is available);

Collected evidence with the means of indicators should be analysed using various evaluation approaches and methods in order to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, results and impacts of rural networks.

The NRNPs are subject of **evaluation** as any other RDP or programme financed out of ESI Funds. The evaluation of NRN is part of the RDP evaluation. Next to this, the network can also decide to conduct a self-assessment, e.g. in times of enhanced AIRs in 2017 and 2019, applying **self-evaluation techniques**⁹⁸. Results of self-assessment may contribute to independent network evaluation, but also enhance network members to improve the governance of the network and consequently the networking as such.

It is important to acknowledge that establishing and running rural networks represent so called “soft” interventions which with evaluation are difficult to capture in terms of impacts. The following methods may be used in the evaluation of NRN/NRNP:

- Desk analysis of the monitoring data;

⁹⁸ http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/en/index_en.cfm

- Case studies⁹⁹;
- Interviews and focus groups¹⁰⁰;
- Stakeholder analysis¹⁰¹;
- Network function analysis¹⁰²;
- Network and organization diagnosis¹⁰³;
- Social network analysis¹⁰⁴.

In choosing the methods to assess the result and impact of rural networks, it is important to note, that there is not a single method which would satisfy the evaluation requirements and the suitable combination of above methods allowing triangulation of evaluation outcomes should be applied. E.g. desk analysis of monitoring data shall be combined with interviews and case studies.

⁹⁹ Capturing impacts of Leader and of measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas, European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, 2010

¹⁰⁰ Capturing impacts of Leader and of measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas, European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, 2010

¹⁰¹ FAO Socio-economic and gender analysis (SEAGA) - <http://www.fao.org/knowledge/goodpractices/bp-gender-equity-in-rural/bp-seaga/en/>

¹⁰² Enrique Mendizabal: Understanding Networks: The Functions of Research Policy Networks, Overseas Development Institute, London, 2006

¹⁰³ Bauer-Wolf, S. et al., (2008), Erfolgreich durch Netzwerkkompetenz (successful through Network competence), Springer-Verlag, Vienna

¹⁰⁴ European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, (2010), Capturing impacts of Leader and of measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas, Brussels

6.4 Evaluation activities

What activities should be conducted to prepare the evaluation?

Well-structured preparation activities at the start of the programme are a precondition for a cost-effective evaluation during the programming period capable of delivering high quality evaluation results; and for setting up a solid base for the *ex post* evaluation.

Evaluation planning takes place both before and at the start of programme implementation hence the value of establishing the Evaluation Plan as part of the RDP. Already when establishing an Evaluation Plan as part of the RDP, a close collaboration with the **ex ante evaluator** is advisable. The *ex ante* evaluator assesses the programme's intervention logic, common and programme-specific indicators, budget, governance and delivery mechanisms and may give important hints for structuring evaluation activities. In addition, during the programming period the Managing Authority, as owner of the Evaluation Plan, may seek an exchange with the ongoing evaluator when updating the Evaluation Plan.

Activities linked to the preparation of evaluation comprise:

- Review of the common evaluation questions (including links to indicators).
- Development of programme-specific evaluation questions linked to programme intervention logic, definition of judgment criteria and links to indicators.
- Preparation of fiches for programme-specific indicators.
- Identification of additional types of data to be collected and screening of information sources.
- Review of potential approaches to the assessment of results and impacts¹⁰⁵.
- Agreement with data providers as to data availability.
- Filling the gaps and addressing identified weaknesses in data collection, e.g. developing a method for data collection for HNV, collectin additional data for those indicators for which temporary proxies have been employed.
- Preparing Terms of Reference (ToR) and conducting a tendering procedure (if external evaluators conduct the evaluation).

Review evaluation question, define judgment criteria and links to indicators

Common evaluation questions (horizontal and Focus Area related) are linked to CAP objectives, EU 2020 headline targets, and objectives of focus areas. They cover the major aspects of EU rural development interventions to be examined by evaluation. If the RDP contains programme-specific objectives reflecting specific needs of the programme territory, programme-specific evaluation questions should also be employed. All evaluation questions, common and programme-specific, must be equipped with judgment criteria and linked to common and programme-specific indicators, which will be used in answering evaluation questions. Additional indicators (e.g. programme-specific indicators) may be necessary when answering common evaluation questions (CEQs) and complement the analysis with aspects which are not covered by the common set of indicators.

Prepare fiches for programme-specific indicators

If the Managing Authority employs programme-specific result and impact indicators, these need to be defined and elaborated in the indicator fiche (similarly to those of common indicators). The fiche should contain the name of the indicator, the related objective, its definition, unit of measurement, methodology, data source and location, collection level, frequency, etc. Programme-specific output indicators should be clearly defined and linked to reliable data sources.

¹⁰⁵ CPR, Art. 44.4, 47, RDR, Art. 75

Review potential data collection methods

The proposed methods for the collection of data for common and programme-specific result and impact indicators, as described in the indicator fiches¹⁰⁶, should be reviewed by the MA in collaboration with evaluators. (Additional guidance is expected on data collection methodology for complementary result indicators.) Potential evaluation methods to be used in the assessment of results and impacts, including the use of counterfactual analysis, methods for netting out intervening factors, and approaches to observe contextual trends, should be considered, as they influence data collection and management. Potential approaches to answer evaluation questions should be reviewed in order to enable a better screening of data sources and the utilisation of methods in a cost effective manner.

Identify data needs and potential sources

Identifying the data types needed in relation to common and programme-specific indicators is one of the key activities in evaluation preparation in order to make sure data of sufficient quality is available during the whole programming period at reasonable cost. The identification of data types, including those to be collected through programme monitoring, should follow indicator fiche guidance (EU fiches in the case of common indicators and fiches prepared by the Member State in the case of programme-specific indicators). In general, the following information and data sources are important for evaluation:

- Monitoring data, including data in relation to programme results, collected by and from beneficiaries via monitoring tables or via documents (e.g. application forms, payment requests).
- Disaggregated data collected from non-beneficiaries (counterfactual analysis) or from sector representative samples (sector analysis) via regular surveys (e.g. FADN, Farm Structure Survey (FSS), country-specific research).
- Regularly collected specific data via different institutions which relate to various RD priorities and focus areas (e.g. Ministry of Environment and its agencies, Ministry of Economy and its agencies, Ministry of Interior).
- Statistical data (used for the sector or contextual analysis) aggregated in line with RDP requirements.

When screening data it is important to identify potential data providers. If they are located outside of the programme-responsible ministry or sector, it could be difficult to access the required data unless the necessary inter-institutional communication, legal procedures and financial measures to purchase data have been established.

Prepare the ToR and conduct the tendering procedure (in case of external evaluation)

If the Managing Authority has decided to contract an external evaluator to conduct evaluation during the programming period, it is important to prepare Terms of Reference (ToR) which list and clearly describe evaluation objectives, tasks and activities to be conducted by the external evaluator during the structuring, observing, analysing and judging phase¹⁰⁷. (Detailed information on the content of the ToR can be found in Part III of these guidelines.) It is essential that the Managing Authority has sufficient capacity to tender, steer and control the evaluation of RDPs.

¹⁰⁶ European Commission Working Document: Draft Target indicator fiches for Pillar II + complementary result indicators and Working Document: Impact indicators:

¹⁰⁷ http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=6A65BD6F-CB22-6660-7E91-321F04E742E2

Which evaluation activities should be conducted and reported upon during the programming period?

Evaluation activities conducted by programme authorities (Managing Authority, Paying Agency) during the programming period relate to:

- **Evaluation** of achievements towards the RDP's objectives, contribution to the CAP and EU2020 objectives, assessment of programme results, impacts, RD cross-cutting and specific issues, , answering evaluation questions, developing conclusions and recommendations and using evaluation results for the improvement of programme design and implementation (steered by Managing Authorities, conducted by evaluators),
- **Reporting** and communication of evaluation results (Managing Authorities).

Which activities relate to the evaluation of achievements of RDP objectives, contribution to the CAP and EU2020 strategic objectives and the assessment of programme results and impacts?¹⁰⁸

The following activities should be **conducted by evaluators**:

- Preparing and following suitable and robust evaluation methodologies.
- Collecting, processing and synthesising relevant information:
 - in conjunction with relevant information supplied by the Managing Authority **on the multiple effects** of interventions and synergies between activities.
 - in conjunction with relevant information supplied by the Managing Authority in line with the selected evaluation methods, and conducting an assessment of **complementary result indicators** and programme-specific results.
 - in line with the selected evaluation methods and conducting an assessment of programme **impacts**, attributing them to programme interventions (netting out impacts).
- Analysing the RDP's contributions to the CAP general objectives, the EU 2020 objectives and to cross-cutting issues (innovation, environment, climate change mitigation and adaptation), and the contribution of specific interventions such as National Rural Networks.
- Assessing the progress made in relation to the integration of EAFRD and other EU financial instruments to support the territorial development of rural areas, including through local development strategies.
- Analysing the programme achievements along with RDP objectives.
- Processing and analysing of any sub-programmes.
- Answering evaluation questions.
- Providing conclusions and recommendations in relation to programme design and implementation, etc.

The quality of the assessment of impacts depends on the methods utilised by evaluators, on data management and the quality of the data collected. Whenever possible, an advanced assessment of impacts should be conducted, using counterfactual analysis with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, and the netting out of programme effects.

¹⁰⁸ Programme results relate to effects observed on programme beneficiaries across the programme's implementation. Programme impacts are effects observed in the programme territory attributed to the RDP interventions in relation to the evaluation topics.

What are the expected reporting activities on evaluation results?

The evaluation activities described above should be reported in a specific section of the Annual Implementation Report (AIR)¹⁰⁹. More detailed reporting on the evaluation's related activities will be required in the two enhanced AIRs submitted in 2017 and 2019. The *ex post* evaluation report, to be submitted to the EC services by 31 December 2024 at the latest, will complete all evaluation tasks and activities in relation to all evaluation topics. It should assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme and its contribution to the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth¹¹⁰, provide answers to evaluation questions and make conclusions and recommendations for rural development policy. It is advisable to start the preparations for the *ex post* evaluation at the end of 2020.

Enhanced Annual Implementation Reports 2017 and 2019

In 2017 and 2019 enhanced AIRs must be submitted and will combine monitoring and evaluation issues. As such, they will require thorough advance planning. The presentation structure for the AIRs will be specified in the implementing acts, and complementary guidance will follow at a later stage. In comparison to the elements of standard AIRs, enhanced AIRs will require supplementary analytical activities on the progress of the programmes. As a consequence preparatory assessment activities will have to be finalised prior to the drafting of the AIRs, so that their results can be incorporated. By 2016, evaluation activities should ensure the delivery of the AIR 2017.

Programme authorities may also want to prepare shorter versions or extracts of evaluation reports in order to provide “user friendly” information for a broader spectrum of rural development stakeholders and/or decision makers. These reports may be disseminated through various media and channels, such as webpages, TV and radio broadcasting, National Rural Network publications, leaflets, activities and events (See Chapter 1 of **Part II** on “Governance and management of evaluation”).

¹⁰⁹ CPR, Art 49

¹¹⁰ CRP, Art 50

PART III: TOOLBOX

DRAFT

1 INDICATIVE OUTLINE OF A NON-BINDING INTERNAL EVALUATION PLAN

The Evaluation Plan submitted as part of the RDP contains a general description of monitoring and evaluation procedures. Managing Authorities may wish to develop in coordination with other M&E stakeholders a more detailed internal planning document (**internal evaluation plan**) that is non-binding and not shared with the European Commission. Such an internal evaluation plan aims to assist evaluation managers to implement M&E tasks and activities, to anticipate the expected workload, to manage deadlines and to ensure the provision of data for evaluation purposes.

An internal evaluation plan is usually divided into annual segments. A widely used method is “retro planning”, also known as backward scheduling, which is done by building up a schedule starting from the last step of the process. In this way the experience from previous programming periods concerning the expected lengths of preparatory steps can be used for scheduling each action.

The Evaluation Plan guidelines provide a time plan for evaluation in the toolbox: It summarizes all evaluation steps, tasks and activities to be conducted during the programming period and from 2021 to 2024 (e.g. governance, preparation and implementation of evaluation, reporting and dissemination of evaluation results).

The following indicative outline explains the timeplan for evaluation together with an indicative resource plan for evaluation (toolbox). It aims to complement the minimum requirements with explanations and recommendations how different steps, tasks and activities could be projected.

Year 2014

Governance of evaluation

From the start of the RDP the Managing Authority sets up a RDP monitoring and evaluation system and coordinates all evaluation activities in collaboration with other evaluation stakeholders. This comprises the following activities:

- **Screening of** evaluation stakeholders (MA, MC, PA, data providers, evaluators, local action groups, national rural networks, various technical working groups, etc.) and definition of their roles, responsibilities and expected contributions to evaluation;
- **Establishing** evaluation capacities inside of the MA or inside of the Ministry of Agriculture (e.g. if organized in a separate coordination unit);
- **Setting up** of an evaluation Steering Group to **steer** monitoring and evaluation activities. Such a Steering Group can for example include of the following stakeholders: MA, MC, PA, data providers, local action groups, national rural networks, etc.;
- **Deciding on optimal** division of tasks and responsibilities; introduction of a communication system for all parties involved in M&E;
- **Checking** the clarity, consistency and functionality of monitoring and evaluation processes;
- **Making** necessary arrangements **with data providers** to ensure access to data in the required format and quality. This includes also data providers outside of the agriculture and forestry sector (e.g. environment, municipalities, NGOs, etc.);
- **Preparation of** a capacity building plan for evaluation stakeholders (MA, MC, PA, LAGs, NRN) in line with their roles, responsibilities and tasks in relation to evaluation;
- **Starting** the ToR preparation, tendering and contracting procedure in case the Managing Authority **outsources specific evaluation tasks** during the programming period **to external evaluators/experts**.

Preparation of evaluation

During the first year of programme implementation the Managing Authority will ensure that all necessary preparatory activities in relation to evaluation take place. This comprises:

- **Agreements** with decision makers and key stakeholders on the focus of evaluation and selection of evaluation topics for evaluation during the programming period;
- **Review** of Common Evaluation Questions and indicators, identification of data needs and screening of available data sources;
- **Identification** of programme specific evaluation needs, definition of programme specific evaluation questions and indicators, identification of evaluation data requirements and screening of data sources;
- **Review** of potential approaches and related activities linked to the assessment of results and impacts;
- **Identification** of potential data gaps and solutions how to bridge them (e.g. primary data collection done by the evaluator, conducting evaluation studies, etc.);
- **Decision** on the data to be collected for evaluation through the monitoring system from application forms, payment requests and other monitoring tools. Specification of which data needs to be collected by evaluators;
- **Set up** of a monitoring and IT system for data collection from beneficiaries to be used in evaluation, including the design of application forms and payment requests. Making provisions to ensure that beneficiaries report on time covering the required scope.

Implementation of evaluation

Throughout the whole programming period and starting in 2014, the Managing Authority and/or Paying Agency **observes** the programme implementation and collects relevant data via monitoring for programme steering and evaluation. This includes:

- **Monitoring the RDP progress** in relation to target and output indicators as the key information for programme steering.
- **Collection** and provision of information and data on non-beneficiaries for designing control groups which allow to conduct a counterfactual analysis during the assessment of programme impacts.

Year 2015

Governance of evaluation

In the second year of programme implementation the Managing Authority continues to **coordinate** evaluation during the programming period. The **evaluation Steering Group** involves evaluation stakeholders apart from evaluators and steers the evaluation processes and tasks. Targeted **capacity building** takes place among relevant stakeholders to improve the know how on evaluation, improve the understanding about respective responsibilities within the M&E system and the role of evaluation in programme steering and managing, e.g. a training for paying agency staff on the purpose of data collection for evaluation, etc.

In case the Managing Authority aims to **outsource specific tasks** for the enhanced AIR submitted in 2017, it is advisable to start the preparation of the ToR and the tendering and contracting procedure for external evaluators/experts.

If there are major changes in the implementation of the Evaluation Plan, the respective chapter in the RDP is **revised** and the Managing Authority submits the RDP modification to the EC.

Preparation of evaluation

Preparation of evaluation continues also during the second year of RDP implementation. The Managing Authority in collaboration with other evaluation stakeholders **reviews data collection methods** and discusses potential approaches for a robust assessment of results and impacts. The Managing Authority continues **to fill data gaps** for evaluation, securest he access to databases which allow to construct control groups (e.g. FADN or similar databases) and makes necessary arrangements to **obtain data in the right format** and aggregation/disaggregation level.

Implementation of evaluation

The Managing Authority and/or Paying Agency observe the RDP progress, collect data on beneficiaries via **monitoring** systems for output, target and complementary result indicators in order to prepare the AIR covering the years 2014 and 2015. Collected **data and information** is **processed and synthetized** in order to **assess the progress and achievements** of the RDP in line with the selected evaluation methods and reporting requirements. Existing databases (such as FADN, forestry databases) are used to **collect data and information** to enable the design of control groups for future RDP evaluations. The external evaluator and/or experts are contracted to collect additional information/data to **fill data and information gaps** and to conduct **ad hoc evaluations**.

Year 2016

Governance of evaluation

The Managing Authority is managing evaluation tasks and collaborates with the evaluation Steering Group. In case the Managing Authority has contracted an **external evaluator** for specific evaluation tasks and activities, he/she **prepares inputs** for the first standard AIR 2016 (covering the years 2014 and 2015).

If there are major changes in the implementation of the Evaluation Plan, the respective chapter in the RDP is **revised** and the Managing Authority submits the RDP modification to the EC.

The Managing Authority in coordination with the evaluation Steering Group **develops and implements a capacity building plan** for evaluation stakeholders (MA, MC, PA, LAGs, NRN) in line with their roles, responsibilities and tasks in relation to evaluation.

Implementation of evaluation

The Managing Authority and/or Paying Agency continues **observing** the progress of RDP implementation, collects data on beneficiaries via the monitoring system for output, target and complementary result indicators. The collection of data from existing data sources such as FADN continues in order to construct control groups for future evaluations. Collected **data and information** is **processed and synthetized** in line with the selected evaluation methods and reporting requirements. **Ad hoc evaluations** are conducted if existing information sources are not sufficient to carry on the evaluation during the programming period.

Reporting

The first standard **Annual Implementation Report (AIR)** assessing the progress and achievements of the programme in the two previous years (2014 and 2015) will be presented and discussed with the Monitoring Committee and submitted to the European Commission by 30 June 2016.

Year 2017

Governance of evaluation

The Managing Authority is **managing** evaluation tasks and coordinates them with programme implementation. Coordination among evaluation stakeholders and steering the evaluation process is ensured by the evaluation Steering Group, which collaborates with evaluators to **conduct evaluation** tasks and activities and prepare inputs to the evaluation chapter of the enhanced AIR submitted in 2017. The Managing Authority conducts a **quality control** of evaluation findings and of any other input the evaluator provides for the AIR. Evaluation results are discussed with the evaluation Steering Group and with the Monitoring Committee.

The Managing Authority prepares an RDP **modification** in case the Evaluation Plan chapter needs to be revised, and implements an evaluation **capacity building** plan. The Managing Authority prepares the **ToR** and carries out a tendering procedure in case an external evaluator will be involved in the preparation of the enhanced AIR to be submitted in 2019. The Managing Authority also monitors the implementation of the evaluation communication strategy.

Implementation of evaluation

In addition to **observing** the RDP progress and implementation, collecting data on beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, in 2017 the evaluator processes and synthesizes the collected **data and information** in line with the selected evaluation methods and reporting requirements, assesses **RDP results** and contributions to focus areas under the RD priorities and answers common and programme-specific **evaluation questions** related to focus areas whenever relevant (in case of reasonable programme uptake within the RDP focus areas has taken place). The assessment also includes Technical Assistance and National Rural Networks (if financed from TA). It is considered good practice to assess the administration and management of programme (delivery mechanisms) and the efficiency of programme outputs and results and impacts (e.g. through cost – benefit analysis).

Ad hoc evaluations are conducted if existing information sources are not sufficient to carry out the evaluation during the programming period.

Reporting

The first enhanced **AIR 2017** is finalised, presented and discussed with the Monitoring Committee and submitted by the Managing Authority to the EC by 30 June 2017.

Dissemination of evaluation results

The AIR 2017 is uploaded to the **web page** of the Managing Authority and evaluation findings are disseminated to **RDP stakeholders, policy makers and the general public** in the most appropriate format, e.g. a simpler version of the evaluation chapter of the AIR in the form of a PPT which can be used for various RDP information events, rural development conferences and seminars, etc.

Year 2018

Governance of evaluation

The **management** of evaluation tasks and activities and their coordination with the RDP implementation is ensured by the Managing Authority. The evaluation Steering Group continues to **steer and coordinate** the various RD stakeholders involved in evaluation and collaborates with evaluators to **conduct the evaluation tasks and activities** for the preparation of the standard AIR 2018 (covering the year 2017).

The Managing Authority prepares an RDP **modification** in case the Evaluation Plan chapter needs to be revised, and implement the evaluation **capacity building** plan. The Managing Authority also monitors the implementation of the **communication strategy**.

Preparation of evaluation

With a view to prepare the enhanced AIR 2019, the Managing Authority and evaluator will in 2018 **review again** the Common and programme specific Evaluation Questions and indicators, identify evaluation data needs and screen data sources.

The evaluation findings and conclusions of the enhanced AIR 2017 can trigger new programme specific evaluation needs and topics. In this case, the Managing Authority and evaluator will need to define or modify programme specific evaluation questions and indicators, identify evaluation data requirements and screen data sources.

Implementation of the evaluation

The Managing Authority or/and Paying Agency continues **to observe and analyse** the progress of RDP implementation, to collect data on beneficiaries via monitoring system for output, target and complementary result indicators. **Data** from existing databases, data collected by evaluators and available information is **processed, analysed and synthesized** to prepare inputs for the AIR 2018. Ad hoc **evaluations studies** are conducted if needed.

Reporting

The **standard AIR 2018** (covering the year 2017) assessing progress and achievements of the programme is prepared and submitted to the European Commission by 30 June 2018. This report contains the information on the implementation of the programme and its priorities.

Dissemination of evaluation results

The AIR 2018 is uploaded to the **web page** of the Managing Authority and evaluation findings are disseminated **to RDP stakeholders, policy makers and the general public** in the most appropriate format, e.g. a simpler version of the evaluation chapter of the AIR in the form of PPT which can be used for various RDP information events, rural development conferences and seminars, as it is defined in the communication strategy of the Evaluation Plan.

Year 2019

Governance of evaluation

The evaluation Steering Group **steers** the evaluation and **coordinates** evaluation stakeholders. The Managing Authority **organises** evaluation along the programme implementation and collaborates with evaluators to implement the **evaluation tasks and activities**. The Managing Authority conducts the **quality control** of the evaluation reports and of the evaluator's inputs to the enhanced AIR 2019 (covering the year 2018). The enhanced AIR 2019 is presented and discussed with the Monitoring Committee.

The Managing Authority prepares RDP **modifications** in case the Evaluation Plan chapter needs to be revised, and implement an evaluation **capacity building** plan. In addition the Managing Authority also monitors the implementation of the evaluation communication strategy.

Implementation of evaluation

The evaluator processes and synthesizes the collected monitoring data on beneficiaries and the data/information on non-beneficiaries and conducts counterfactual and other analysis. The evaluator also provides the **assessment of programme's results and impacts**, including the analysis of net effects and the **observation of general development trends and context analysis**. In line with the

selected evaluation methods, the evaluator develops **answers** to common and programme-specific evaluation questions (focus area-related and horizontal) and provides **conclusions/recommendations** for improving the RDP design and implementation.

Furthermore, the evaluator conducts the **assessment of RDP contributions** to achieving rural development cross cutting and CAP objectives, the EU2020 Strategy and headline targets, the CSF thematic objectives and the progress made in ensuring an integrated approach to support territorial development.

The assessment also includes Technical Assistance and National Rural Networks (if financed from TA). It is considered good practice to assess the administration and management of programme (delivery mechanisms) and the efficiency of programme outputs and results and impacts (e.g. through cost – benefit analysis).

Reporting

The **second enhanced AIR 2019** is finalised, presented and discussed with the Monitoring Committee and submitted to the EC by 30 June 2019.

Dissemination of evaluation results

The AIR of 2019 is uploaded to **web page** of the Managing Authority and evaluation findings are disseminated **to policy makers and the general public** in the most appropriate format, e.g. simpler version of the evaluation chapter of the AIR or in the form of PPT. Presentation clips for media can be also used to disseminate evaluation results to the general public.

Year 2020

Governance of evaluation

The Managing Authority continues **managing** the programme implementation and evaluation and the evaluation Steering Group **steers** the evaluation and **coordinates** evaluation stakeholders in implementing and monitoring evaluation tasks and activities similarly to previous years. The Managing Authority continues supporting the implementation of the capacity building plan and **monitoring the implementation of the communication strategy**.

The standard AIR 2020 (covering the year 2019) is presented and discussed with the Monitoring Committee.

The last year of the programming period represents also the last opportunity to **modify the Evaluation Plan**. At the same time the Managing Authority ensures that the necessary resources are available to undertake evaluation tasks and activities until 2024.

Implementation of the evaluation

The Managing Authority and Paying Agency conducts the same tasks in relation to **monitoring** RDP progress, **collection of information and data** on beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries and adapting the M&E system in line with any relevant RDR modification and new evaluation topics. The evaluator processes and synthesizes the collected **data and information** in line with the selected evaluation methods and reporting requirements. In addition, *ad hoc* **evaluations studies** are conducted if needed.

Reporting

The Managing Authority presents and discusses the **standard AIR 2020** with the Monitoring Committee and submits it to the European Commission by 30 June 2020.

Dissemination of evaluation results

The AIR 2020 is uploaded to the **web page** of the Managing Authority and evaluation findings are disseminated **to RDP stakeholders, policy makers and the general public** in the most appropriate format, e.g. a simpler version of the evaluation chapter of the AIR in the form of PPT which can be used for various RDP information events, rural development conferences and seminars, as it is defined in the communication strategy of the Evaluation Plan. Presentation clips for media can be also used to dissemination of evaluation results to general public.

Year 2021 and 2022

Governance of evaluation

After 2020 the implementation of the RDPs is still running and the Managing Authority ensures the **continuation of all evaluation tasks and activities**. It manages the evaluation during the programming period until the last standard AIR and *ex post* evaluation of the programme. The evaluation Steering Group continues to **steer** the evaluation and coordinate evaluation stakeholders until 2024. It might overlap with the Steering Group of the new programming period. As in previous years, the evaluation results published in the AIR are presented and discussed at the Monitoring Committee.

In 2021 the Managing Authority starts to prepare the *ex post* evaluation of the RDP that shall be submitted to the EC in December 2024. If MAs decide to contract an external evaluator for the *ex post* evaluation, in 2021 they shall prepare the Terms of Reference and conduct the tendering procedure to avoid potential time constraints and ensure that adequate time is given to the external evaluator to properly conduct a quality *ex post* evaluation.

Preparation of evaluation

For the preparation of the AIR and in anticipation of the *ex post* evaluation to be submitted by 31 December 2024, the Managing Authority and evaluator review the Common and programme specific evaluation questions and indicators, identify evaluation data needs and screen data sources.

The last RDP projects are committed by the end of 2020 and therefore, in 2021 new evaluation needs and topic can be identified. The Managing Authority and evaluators may define programme specific evaluation questions and indicators, identify evaluation data requirements and screen data sources.

Implementation of evaluation

In 2021 and 2022 the evaluation tasks and activities continue as in previous years – observing the RDP progress, processing, analysing and synthesizing data collected on beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the RDP, conducting *ad hoc* evaluations, etc.

Reporting

The standard **AIR 2021** (covering 2020) **and the AIR 2022** (covering 2021) are presented to and discussed with the Monitoring Committee and submitted by the Managing Authority to the European Commission by 30 June of 2021 respectively 2022.

Dissemination of evaluation results

The AIR 2021 and the AIR 2022 are uploaded to the **web page** of the Managing Authority and evaluation findings are disseminated **to RDP stakeholders, policy makers and the general public** in the most appropriate format, e.g. a simpler version of the evaluation chapter of the AIR in the form of PPT which can be used for various RDP information events, rural development conferences and seminars, as it is defined in the communication strategy of the Evaluation Plan. Presentation clips for media can be also used to dissemination of evaluation results to general public.

Year 2023

Governance of evaluation

The Managing Authority continues to manage evaluation including the activities to prepare the **ex post evaluation**. The evaluation Steering Group steers the evaluation and coordinates evaluation stakeholders for this task. The progress of RDP implementation is presented in the AIR 2023 (covering the year 2022) and is discussed with the Monitoring Committee.

Implementation of evaluation

In 2023 all projects contracted under the RDP 2014–2020 programming period will be **finalised**, including the **collection of monitoring data** for output, target and complementary result indicators, on beneficiaries. In addition, data on non-beneficiaries is collected, processed synthetized in line with the selected evaluation methods and reporting requirements and to conduct the assessment of programme impacts and achievement towards the EU and rural development objectives in the RDP *ex post* evaluation of 2024.

Reporting

The standard **AIR 2023** (covering the year 2022) are presented to and discussed with the Monitoring Committee and submitted by the Managing Authority to the European Commission by 30 June 2023.

Dissemination of evaluation results

The AIR 2023 is uploaded to the **web page** of the Managing Authority and evaluation findings are disseminated **to RDP stakeholders, policy makers and the general public** in the most appropriate format, e.g. a simpler version of the evaluation chapter of the AIR in the form of PPT which can be used for various RDP information events, rural development conferences and seminars, as it is defined in the communication strategy of the Evaluation Plan. Presentation clips for media can be also used to dissemination of evaluation results to general public.

Year 2024

Governance of evaluation

By the end of 2024 the **ex post evaluation** has to be submitted. The *ex post* evaluation is coordinated by the Managing Authority, who is also responsible for its quality while the actual evaluation is carried out by an evaluator. The report is discussed with the Monitoring Committee. However, as also outcomes of monitoring the RDP progress are expected, a standard AIR 2024 (covering the year 2023) **will be prepared and discussed with the Monitoring Committee and submitted**.

Implementation of evaluation

The evaluator processes and synthetizes collected monitoring data on beneficiaries and data/information on non-beneficiaries with the selected evaluation methods (incl. counterfactual analysis). He/she conducts the **assessment of programme's results and impacts**, including the analysis of net effects and the **observation of general development trends and context analysis**. Furthermore, the evaluator carries out the **assessment of RDP contribution** to achieving the rural development cross cutting and CAP objectives, the EU2020 Strategy and headline targets, the CSF thematic objectives and the progress made in ensuring an integrated approach to support territorial development.

The evaluator **drafts answers** to common and programme-specific evaluation questions (focus area related and horizontal) and develops **conclusions and recommendations**.

The **administration and management** of the programme are also assessed in the *ex post* evaluation, including **Technical Assistance** and costs of the programme outputs, results and impacts (e.g. by applying a cost-benefit analysis).

Reporting

By 30 June 2024 the Managing Authority prepares and submits the standard **AIR 2024** (covering the year 2023) and by 31 December 2024 the **ex post evaluation report**.

The standard AIR 2024 focuses on the progress of the RDP in 2023 whereas the *ex post* evaluation report provides results of the *ex post* evaluation, demonstrates the impact, progress, effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of the RD policies implemented from 2014 as well as the achievements of the RDP towards EU common policy objectives and programme specific objectives.

After discussion of each report with the Monitoring Committee, they are submitted to the European Commission within the given time frame (30 June for AIR, 31 December for *ex post* evaluation report).

Dissemination of evaluation results

Evaluation results, conclusions and recommendations of the *ex post* evaluation report are disseminated to the main RD stakeholders and target audience (e.g. Managing Authority, Paying Agency, Monitoring Committee, technical working groups, and evaluation Steering Group, policymakers, RDP beneficiaries and general public), in the format and via communication channels as defined in the communication strategy of the Evaluation Plan of the RDP.

2 TIMELINE FOR EVALUATION DURING THE PROGRAMMING PERIOD

The following indicative **Timeplan for evaluation** is an example of a retro planning table, which starts with the last activity to be carried out and is scheduled backwards to the first activity to be carried out. The table should therefore be read from the bottom left corner to the upper right corner).

The table contains tasks and activities broken down by years in the period 2014 – 2024 linked to:

- governance of evaluation,
- preparation of evaluation (structuring),
- implementation of evaluation (observing)
- implementation of evaluation (analysing and judging),
- reporting on evaluation,
- dissemination of evaluation results.

The table is interlinked (and harmonized) with:

- the indicative outline of a non-binding evaluation plan (see **PART III** Toolbox);
- the indicative resource plan for evaluation (see **PART III** Toolbox).

The *Indicative outline of a non-binding evaluation plan* describes in detail all task and activities on the *Timeplan* on annual basis. The *indicative resource plan* is harmonised with the *Timeplan* and outlines when the resources for each evaluation task and activity mentioned in the *Timeplan* table shall be planned and financed.

For Timeplan table is also mentioned in the part 5.2 of the Evaluation Plan Guidelines (Timing, p. 23).

Stage		Evaluation during programming period																															
		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024											
		30.6.2016				30.6.2017				30.6.2018				30.6.2019				30.6.2020				30.6.2021				30.6.2022				30.6.2023			
EVALUATION	DISSEMINATION								Review and dissemination of evaluation findings																								
	REPORTING				Standard AIR		Enhanced AIR		Standard AIR		Enhanced AIR		Standard AIR		Standard AIR		Standard AIR		Standard AIR		Standard AIR		Standard AIR and <i>Ex Post</i> Evaluation Report (EPE)										
	IMPLEMENTATION	Analyzing & Judging							Assessment of the use of TA funds (MA, Ev)				Answering EQs and providing conclusion and recommendations in relation to programme design and implementation (MA, Ev)										Answering EQs and providing conclusion and recommendations in relation to programme design and implementation (MA, Ev)										
									Answering EQs and providing conclusion and recommendations in relation to programme design and implementation (MA, Ev)				Assessment of the use of TA funds (MA, Ev)										Assessment of the use of TA funds (MA, Ev)										
									Assessment of results of RDP interventions and contribution to FAs under RD Priorities (including to programme specific FAs) (MA, Ev)				Assessment of progress made in ensuring an integrated approach to the use of EAFRD and other EU funds to support territorial development, including LDS (MA, Ev)										Assessment of progress made in ensuring an integrated approach to the use of EAFRD and other EU funds to support territorial development, including LDS (MA, Ev)										
													Assessment of RDP contribution to achieving the EU 2020 headline targets and the Union strategy including CSF thematic objectives (MA, Ev)										Assessment of RDP contribution to achieving the EU 2020 headline targets and the Union strategy including CSF thematic objectives (MA, Ev)										
													Assessment of RDP effectiveness, efficiency and impacts (netting out impacts) and contribution to the three CAP general objectives (MA, Ev)										Assessment of RDP effectiveness, efficiency and impacts (netting out impacts) and contribution to the three CAP general objectives (MA, Ev)										
													Assessment of RDP contributions to Rural Development cross-cutting objectives (MA, Ev)										Assessment of RDP contributions to Rural Development cross-cutting objectives (MA, Ev)										
													Assessment of results of RDP interventions and contribution to FAs under RD Priorities (target, complementary result and programme specific indicators) (MA, Ev)										Assessment of results of RDP interventions and contribution to FAs under RD Priorities (target, complementary result and programme specific indicators) (MA, Ev)										
							Conducting ad-hoc evaluation studies (MA, Ev)																										
					Processing and synthesizing relevant information in line with the selected evaluation methods (Ev)																												
					Assessment of progress, achievements of RDP contributing to conducting the above evaluation tasks (MA, Ev)																												
			PREPARATION	Structuring	Set up an efficient IT system for data collection from beneficiaries (MA)		Arrange access to beneficiaries and non beneficiaries data to the evaluator (MA)						Review potential data collection sources; Identification of data needs and potential sources based on AIR 2017 evaluation results (MA, Ev)						Review potential data collection sources; Identification of data needs and potential sources based on AIR 2019 evaluation results (MA, Ev)														
	Review potential data collection sources; Identification of data needs and potential sources (MA, Ev)				Fill the gaps and address identified weaknesses in data collection (e.g. HNV, etc.) (MA, Ev)						Development of programme specific evaluation questions (prepare fiches for programme specific indicators) based on AIR 2017 evaluation results (MA)						Development of programme specific evaluation questions (prepare fiches for programme specific indicators) based on AIR 2017 evaluation results (MA)																
	Development of programme specific evaluation questions (prepare fiches for programme specific indicators) (MA)				Review of potential data collection methods (MA, Ev)						Identification of programme specific evaluation needs and decide evaluation topics based on AIR 2017 evaluation results (Ev)						Identification of programme specific evaluation needs and decide evaluation topics based on AIR 2017 evaluation results (Ev)																
	Identification of programme specific evaluation needs and decide evaluation topics (Ev)		Review of potential approaches for a robust assessment of results and impacts (Ev)						Reviewing CEQs, define judgement criteria and links to indicators based on AIR 2017 evaluation results (MA, Ev)						Reviewing CEQs, define judgement criteria and links to indicators based on AIR 2017 evaluation results (MA, Ev)																		
	Reviewing CEQs, define judgement criteria and links to indicators (MA, Ev)																																
	GOVERNANCE	Prepare the ToR and tendering procedures and conduct a tendering procedure (if external evaluator is contracted) for the programming period (MA)		Prepare the ToR and tendering procedures and conduct a tendering procedure (if external evaluator is contracted) for the enhanced AIR 2017 (MA)				Prepare the ToR and tendering procedures and conduct a tendering procedure (if external evaluator is contracted) for the enhanced AIR 2019 (MA)		Monitoring the communication strategy (MA)						Prepare the ToR and tendering procedures and conduct a tendering procedure (if external evaluator is contracted) for the Ex post evaluation(MA)								Monitoring the communication strategy (MA)									
		Preparation of the communication strategy (MA)						Quality control of evaluation reports (MA)				Quality control of evaluation reports (MA)														Quality control of evaluation reports (MA)							
		Organizational set up of the M&E system (MA, MC, PA, evaluation Steering Groups, technical working groups, beneficiaries, LAGs, NRN, data providers, evaluators) (MA)				Presentation and discussion of AIRs at the Monitoring Committee (MA, Ev)																											
						Ongoing coordination of evaluation activities with RDP implementation via establishing and running an evaluation Steering Group (MA)																											
Agreement with data providers as to data availability (MA)				Revision of Evaluation Plan (MA)																													
Planning resources for evaluation and capacity building (MA)				Support common learning process (MA)																													

* (Main responsible of the evaluation activity, task), e.g. Managing Authority (MA), Evaluator (Ev).

DRAFT

3 INDICATIVE TEMPLATE FOR TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR EVALUATION DURING THE PROGRAMMING PERIOD

Introduction

The Terms of Reference (ToR) help to structure the evaluation activities to be carried out by external evaluators. They are developed by the Managing Authority or the evaluation Steering Group on the basis of the activities outlined in the Evaluation Plan. External evaluators respond to the ToR with an offer and both elements together (ToR and offer) form the basis of the contract for the delivery of the evaluation.

The ToR for the evaluation contract should specify the evaluation requirements, the expected activities, the outcomes and also the way in which the different parties will work together. They usually consist of a general introduction for the tenderer, the specifications of the requirements (for the technical part) and various annexes (e.g. reference to key documents, evaluation questions, templates for price offer, draft service contract, etc.).

The following indicative outline provides some recommendations for the development of the ToR and in particular its technical part. However, the contracting authorities will also need to ensure that the ToR are consistent with respective provisions for public procurement in the Member State. The following elements of the technical specifications of the ToR may be considered:

1. Context, objective and purpose of the evaluation

This starting section should set out the statutory requirements and the framework for the evaluation (e.g. legal references at EU and national level). A description of the background and purpose of the evaluation should be provided. It should also be clarified what is the subject (RDP) that needs to be evaluated.

When drafting this section the purpose and objectives stated in the minimum requirements for the Evaluation Plan 2014-2020 should be considered as a starting point and be further complemented with programme-specific objectives ([see](#) chapter 3.1 of the EP Guidelines).

2. Scope and tasks of the evaluation

In this section the ToR specify the scope and the content of the evaluation. The most important evaluation needs and the expected focus of the evaluation may be explained. The chosen evaluation topics for the evaluation during the programming period should be listed (e.g. evaluation of the programme strategy, achievements of rural development priorities/focus areas/ group of measures, assessment of cross-cutting issues, programme delivery, cost-effectiveness of the programme implementation). The ToR also indicate the time when the evaluation topics shall be addressed during the programming period and what evaluation tasks and activities relate to these topics.

When drafting this section the provisions set out in the minimum requirements for the Evaluation Plan on evaluation topics and activities should be considered ([see](#) chapter 3.3 of the EP Guidelines).

3. Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Questions in the ToR specify the focus of the evaluation and contribute to more targeted evaluation activities. The ToR should specify which kind of Evaluation Questions are expected be answered:

- (a) **Common Evaluation Questions** related to the rural development policy objectives, both horizontal and focus area-specific;

- (b) **Programme-specific Evaluation Questions** which have been defined at RDP level in order to take account of the specificity of the programme and its objectives.

When drafting this section the working document “Evaluation Questions for Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020” should be considered. (see chapter 3.3 of the EP Guidelines).

4. Methodological approach

The aim of this section is to specify the methodological approach for the evaluation: this can either be achieved by asking the tenderer to propose and describe in its offer the approach for the evaluation topics and activities or, alternatively, by asking specific methodologies to be applied by the contractor (e.g. counterfactual analysis). It is generally recommended to give flexibility to the contractor to propose a method and to provide a detailed description of the approach for the assessment of results, impacts and RDP achievements. However, it must be kept in mind that the Managing Authority will need to arrange for sufficient capacity to judge the quality and robustness of the proposed approaches. Examples of possible methods include:

- Basic analysis using descriptive statistics;
- Statistical analysis using counterfactuals;
- Regional input-output econometric models;
- System dynamics modelling (systemic view on complex cause-chain effects);
- GIS-based tools (observation of changes in territories);
- In-depth analysis through case studies;
- Desk and field research (incl. surveys, interviews, focus groups, etc.).

5. Information sources

The ToR should contain an overview of the available data and information sources relevant for the evaluation task. This includes the specification of the information collected via the monitoring system, other available databases and documents, who is in charge of them and how they can be assessed, what relevant analysis and research work has already taken place. It is also helpful to highlight, which information/data is not available and is expected to be collected by the evaluator. This information is also essential for a realistic calculation of the offer.

When drafting this section the provisions set out in the Minimum Requirements for the Evaluation Plan on data and information should be considered (see chapter 3.4 of the EP Guidelines).

6. Time schedule and deliverables

The ToR specify the duration of the evaluation contract and the timing of the deliverables. One should also mention concrete events or deadlines in decision-making to which the deliverables are linked. The ToR may further specify the purpose and the target audience of the main deliverables: e.g. improvement of the implementation of the RDP, programme modifications, communicating evaluation findings to RDP stakeholders, policy makers and the general public, etc.

The expected deliverables, their length, format and contents should be carefully described (e.g. content of evaluation reports, contribution to standard and enhanced Annual Implementation Report, executive summaries (in English), other required deliverables for a broader dissemination of evaluation results, etc.)

A link between expected deliverables and (interim) payments is provided in the invoicing arrangements of the ToR.

When drafting this section the provisions set out in the in the Minimum requirements for the Evaluation Plan on the timeline should be considered (see chapter 3.5 and 3.6 of the EP Guidelines).

7. Management of the evaluation contract

This section describes how the evaluation contract will be steered and managed. If there is an evaluation Steering Group, the ToR may list its members and describe their roles.

It should also be specified how the evaluators are expected to interact with the contracting authority (e.g. contact persons, frequency of meetings, presentations to specific target groups, etc.).

When drafting this section of the ToR the provisions set out in the minimum requirements for the Evaluation Plan on governance, coordination and communication should be considered (see chapter 3.2 and 3.6 of the EP Guidelines).

8. Budget

The budget for the evaluation contract should be clearly specified (costs for data purchase should be listed separately). It is considered good practice if the contracting authority specifies a maximum and minimum budget for the offers. This allows the tenderer to develop more realistic financial offers and avoids at the same time that tenderers unreasonably undercut the price for the required evaluations tasks.

When drafting this section the provisions set out in the Minimum requirements for the Evaluation Plan on the resources should be considered (reference to chapter 3.7 of the EP Guidelines).

9. Qualification of the team

The requirements related to the qualification of the team are closely linked to the requested methodology and the project management needs. Frequently, expected categories of experts are specified (e.g. years of professional experience, academic degrees, etc.). More flexible ToR limit themselves to ask only what kind of skills and experience must be available in the evaluation team rather than specifying it for each position. This gives more choice to the contractor to compose a well-functioning team.

10. Submission rules

The information concerning the submission of the offers include:

- the exact deadline for submission (specific date and time, proved by the post stamp or the day of delivery); and
- the institution and address to which the offer has to be sent.

The ToR also specify if offers have to be submitted in one or two envelopes (with separate financial parts, or anonymous technical parts), the number of copies, the date of the opening of the offers (if public), a contact address for questions concerning the ToR.

11. Exclusion, selection and award criteria

The ToR inform about the criteria for the selection of contractors in line with the national procurement legislation. Selection criteria can be divided into three groups: exclusion, selection and award criteria:

Exclusion criteria refer to the exclusion of a tenderer, who is in a bankruptcy situation, has shown grave professional misconduct or has not fulfilled obligations towards tax office, social security, etc. In most cases a simple 'Declaration of honour' is required as evidence. In addition a proof that the tenderer is not in conflict of interest (e.g. was involved in the implementation of the RDP) can be requested.

Selection criteria usually refer to the legal position, economic, financial, technical and professional capacity of the tenderer. If the national legislation allows for it, the contracting authority may request only copies of relevant documents, whereas the originals are collected only from the successful bidder. This simplifies the tendering procedure.

Furthermore the categories of experts and expertise are described in the ToR, including requested qualification and professional experience. For instance, in case of a counterfactual evaluation design, the ToR requests an experienced expert in this field. All the required qualification proves are specified. Requesting too detailed formal proves will create unnecessary administrative burden for the tenderer.

Award criteria refer to the quality of the technical offer and the financial offer. Besides the price, they generally relate to the proposed evaluation approach/understanding of the task, methodology, and the roles of the team members and to the overall organisation/management of the work. A clear idea of the contracting authority on what makes an offer a good one will allow for a clear assessment and – most important – for choosing the best offer.

Clarity and transparency of the weighting of award criteria is important, in particular between the evaluation of the technical offer (content) and the financial offer (price). It is highly recommended to consider carefully if the lowest price offer is also the best one from a technical point of view. A lower weight for the financial offer usually allows choosing the technical offer of a higher quality. Often the ratio between content and price is between 60:40 and 80:20. Recent experiences suggest a weight between 20 and 25% for the price. In general, an overview table listing the criteria and related proves (including where they can be found in the offer) is helpful during the assessment.

4 INDICATIVE RESOURCE PLAN FOR EVALUATION

The following tables aim to support MAs when planning the Technical Assistance resources to conduct evaluation tasks and activities mentioned in the Evaluation Plan. The tables complement the “Indicative outline of the *non-binding* internal Evaluation Plan” and the „Time plan for evaluation“ (see Toolbox). The tables break down the single evaluation related tasks and activities for which Managing Authorities may need to reserve man-days/resources of their Technical Assistance budget. As the allocated resources will depend on the specificities of the respective RDP, no numbers are given. Moreover it shall be noted that the MAs may want to reserve resources for unforeseeable evaluation tasks and activities.

1. Governance and coordination

Governance and coordination of evaluation activities during the programming period comprises several tasks not only at the beginning of the programming period but also throughout its implementation. The **grey shadowed fields** in the table below indicate roughly in which years resources will need to be foreseen.

Table 1 Template for planning resources in relation to governance and coordination of evaluation activities and tasks

EVALUATION TASKS AND ACTIVITIES - GOVERNANCE AND COORDINATION OF EVALUATION	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Planning resources for evaluation and capacity building											
Agreement with data providers as to data availability											
Organizational set up of the M&E system (MA, MC, PA, evaluation Steering Groups, technical working groups, beneficiaries, LAGs, NRN, data providers, evaluators)											
Preparation and monitoring the communication strategy											
Prepare the ToR and conduct a tendering procedure (if external evaluator is contracted) for the programming period, enhanced AIR 2017, 2019, and <i>ex post</i> evaluation											
Support common learning process											
Revision of Evaluation Plan											
Ongoing coordination of evaluation activities with RDP implementation via establishing and running an evaluation Steering Group											
Presentation and discussion of AIRs at the Monitoring Committee											
Quality control of evaluation reports											
Total											

Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

2. Evaluation

Preparation of the evaluation

Well-structured preparation activities at the start of the programme are a precondition for a cost-effective evaluation during the programming period capable of delivering high quality evaluation results. The **grey shadowed fields** in the table below indicate roughly in which years resources will need to be foreseen.

Table 2 Template for planning resources for evaluation tasks and activities in relation to the preparation of evaluation

EVALUATION TASKS AND ACTIVITIES - PREPARATION OF EVALUATION		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Structuring	Reviewing CEQs, define judgement criteria and links to indicators											
	Identification of programme specific evaluation needs and evaluation topics											
	Development of programme specific evaluation questions (prepare fiches for programme specific indicators)											
	Review potential data collection sources; Identification of data needs and potential sources											
	Set up IT system for data collection from beneficiaries											
	Review of potential approaches and related activities to assess results and impacts											
	Review of potential data collection methods											
	Fill the gaps and address identified weaknesses in data collection (e.g. HNV, etc.)											
	Arrange access to beneficiaries and non beneficiaries data to the evaluator											
	Total											

Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

Implementation of the evaluation

When implementing evaluation, Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies observe the progress of RDP implementation and collect data (beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries) to be further analysed when assessing the RDPs. The **grey shadowed fields** in the table below indicate roughly in which years resources will need to be foreseen.

Table 3 Indicative resources plan for evaluation tasks and activities in relation to the implementation of evaluation

EVALUATION TASKS AND ACTIVITIES - IMPLEMENTATION OF EVALUATION		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Observing	Collection and provision of information and data on non-beneficiaries for designing control groups											
	Observation of development trends and context analysis											
	Monitoring of the RDP progress in relation to target and output indicators											
	Assessment of progress and achievements of RDP contributing to conducting evaluation tasks											
	Processing and synthesizing relevant information in line with the selected evaluation methods											
	Conducting ad-hoc evaluation studies											
Analysing and judging	Assessment of results of RDP interventions and contribution to FAs under RD Priorities (target, complementary result and programme specific indicators)											
	Assessment of RDP contributions to Rural Development cross-cutting objectives											
	Assessment of RDP effectiveness, efficiency, impacts (netting out impacts) and contribution to the three CAP general objectives											
	Assessment of RDP contribution to achieving the EU 2020 headline targets and the Union strategy including CSF thematic objectives											
	Assessment of progress made in ensuring an integrated approach to the use of EAFRD and other EU funds to support territorial development, including LDS											
	Assessment of the use of TA funds											

EVALUATION TASKS AND ACTIVITIES - IMPLEMENTATION OF EVALUATION	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Answering EQs and providing conclusion and recommendations in relation to programme design and implementation											
Total											

Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

3. Reporting and dissemination of evaluation results

Evaluations results are reported to the European Commission in the standard and enhanced AIRs and in the *ex post* evaluation report. The compilation and development of different reports will require resources as well as the dissemination of the evaluation results to the target audience (according to the communication strategy). The **grey shadowed fields** in the table below indicate roughly in which years resources will need to be foreseen.

Table 4 Template for resource planning of evaluation tasks and activities in relation to the reporting and dissemination

EVALUATION TASKS AND ACTIVITIES - REPORTING AND DISSEMINATION OF EVALUATION RESULTS	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Standard AIR											
Enhanced AIR											
<i>Ex post</i> evaluation report											
Review and dissemination of evaluation findings											
Total											

Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

4. Overview of resources to be considered in preparing and implementing evaluation and monitoring of 2014-2020

The table below can be used to summarise the resources needed to implement evaluation during the programming period. This table may support Managing Authorities to project resources to be allocated from Technical Assistance in the Evaluation Plan chapter of the RDP.

Table 5 Template for resource planning of Monitoring and Evaluation for RDPs 2014-2020

<i>Financial overview</i>	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
GOVERNANCE ¹¹¹												
PREPARATION ¹¹²												
IMPLEMENTATION ¹¹³												
REPORTING & DISSEMINATION ¹¹⁴												
Total												

¹¹¹ Summary of planned resources for governance

¹¹² Summary of planned resources for preparation of evaluation

¹¹³ Summary of planned resources for the implementation of evaluation

¹¹⁴ Summary of planned resources for reporting and dissemination

5 GLOSSARY OF TERMS

A

Ad hoc evaluation

Evaluation activity, which completes planned evaluation during the programming period, in case there are specific evaluation needs or information gaps. *Ad hoc* evaluation can be conducted in the form of specific evaluation study, survey, set of case studies, etc.

Administrative capacity

Synonymous to 'administrative and institutional capacity' as defined in the glossary of DG REGIO: it relates to the ability of public structures to identify and solve implementation problems. Capacity deals with a set of functional conditions that allow governments to elaborate and implement programmes with better performance. These conditions are shaped by important factors such as human resource characteristics, management strategies, diffusion of ICT applications, etc., but also by strategies aimed at building cooperation between governments and stakeholders, etc.

Annual Implementation Report

Comprehensive report on implementation of the rural development programme in the previous financial year. The required contents of the report are spelled out in the Common Provisions Regulation, the Rural Development Regulation and related implementing acts. The report is submitted to the Commission.

B

Baseline

State of the economic, social or environmental situation relevant in the context of a programme, at a given time (generally at the beginning of the intervention), and against which changes will be measured.

Beneficiary

A person or organisation directly benefitting from the intervention whether intended or unintended. Some people may be beneficiaries without necessarily belonging to the group targeted by the intervention. Similarly, the entire eligible group does not necessarily consist of beneficiaries.

C

Capacity building

Fostering the development of knowledge and skills of people involved in implementation, monitoring and evaluation of rural development programmes.

Common Evaluation Question

An element of the common evaluation framework which focuses the evaluation on achievements towards EU policy objectives. The common evaluation questions should be complemented with programme-specific evaluation questions.

Common Indicator

An indicator is a quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to measure achievement, to reflect changes connected to an intervention, or to help assess the performance of a development actor. In the context of the rural development policy, the set of common indicators, binding for all Member States, serves to measure achievements and changes at both RDP and European level.

Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

It consists of a common set of indicators, as defined in article 80 of Council Regulation No 1698/2005. The list of common baseline, output, result and impact indicators for the Rural Development Programmes 2007-13 is found in Annex VIII of Commission Regulation (EC) No 1974/2006 of 15 December 2006. Guidance on the CMEF was drawn

up by the European Commission, in cooperation with the Member States, and has been published in the form of a handbook.

Common Strategic Framework (CSF)

The document translating the objectives and targets of the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth into key actions for the CSF Funds, establishing for each thematic objective the key actions to be supported by each CSF Fund and the mechanisms for ensuring the coherence and consistency of the programming of the CSF Funds with the economic and employment policies of the Member States and of the Union.

Community-led Local Development

To facilitate the implementation of multi-dimensional and cross-sectorial interventions at sub-regional and local level, the Commission proposes CLLD to strengthen community-led initiatives, facilitate the implementation of integrated local development strategies and formation of Local Action Groups, based on the experience and following the methodology of the LEADER approach. The implementation of CLLD is regulated by Articles 28 to 31 of the CPR and further detailed by corresponding provisions in the regulations governing the ERDF, ETC, ESF, EMFF and finally the EAFRD, where CLLD is implemented through LEADER.

Complementarity

Several public interventions (or several components of an intervention) that contribute towards the achievement of the same objective.

Consistency

The harmony, compatibility, correspondence or uniformity among the parts of a complex thing. In European legal texts and working documents it is often used equivalently to coherence.

Context

The socio-economic and environmental situation in which an intervention is implemented. The contextual situation and trends are taken into account in programming as well as in programme evaluations.

Context indicator

It provides information on relevant aspects of the external environment that are likely to have an influence on the design and performance of the policy, e.g. GDP per capita, rate of unemployment, water quality.

Control group

A group of study participants who have not been exposed to a particular treatment. The term is typically used in experimental designs with random assignment.

Control group

A control group is closely related to a comparison group. However, whereas a comparison group is exposed to all the same conditions as the experimental group except for the variable that is being tested, the control group is not exposed to any condition.

Comparison group

A group of study participants which resembles beneficiaries in all respects, except for the fact that it is unaffected by the intervention (i.e. non-beneficiaries).

Comparison group is closely related to control group. However, whereas a comparison group is exposed to all the same conditions as the experimental group except for the variable that is being tested, the control group is not exposed to any condition.

Counterfactual situation

A situation which would have occurred in the absence of a public intervention, also referred to as "policy-off" situation. By comparing the counterfactual and real situations, it is possible to determine the net effects of the public intervention. Various tools can be used for the

construction of the counterfactual situation: shift-share analysis, comparison groups, simulation using econometric models, etc. At the baseline, the real situation and the counterfactual situation are identical. If the intervention is effective, they diverge.

Cross-cutting issues

Issues that affect horizontally all areas of the policy. Important cross-cutting issues for rural development include innovation, environment and climate change.

D

Delivery mechanism

The way in which a policy is implemented, more specifically the set of administrative arrangements and procedures which ensure that policy objectives become concrete actions on-the-ground. The delivery mechanisms vary amongst Member States (and sometimes also between regions and measures) due to differences in the legal and administrative set-up related to policy implementation.

E

Effectiveness

This is the extent to which objectives pursued by an intervention are achieved. An effectiveness indicator is calculated by relating an output, result or impact indicator to a quantified objective.

Efficiency

Best relationship between resources employed and results achieved in pursuing a given objective through an intervention. Efficiency addresses the question whether the more effects could have been obtained with the same budget or whether the same effects could have been obtained at a lower cost. An indicator of efficiency is calculated by dividing the budgetary inputs mobilised by the quantity of effects obtained.

EIP Operational Group

Groups that are set up by interested actors (farmers, researchers, advisors, businesses) for developing, testing, adapting or implementing an innovative project related to agricultural productivity and sustainability. The tasks of the groups are defined in the Rural Development Regulation.

Europe 2020 strategy

As laid down in the Communication from the Commission (COM [2010] 2020 from 3.3.2010) it sets out a vision of Europe's social market economy for the 21st century, with the aim to turn the EU into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. The EU2020 Strategy is the common reference document for all European policy support instruments for the programming period 2014-2020

Evaluation

Evaluation is a process of judgement of interventions according to their results, impacts and the needs they aim to satisfy. Evaluation looks at the effectiveness, the efficiency and at the relevance of an intervention. Rural development evaluation must provide information on the implementation and impact of the co-financed programmes. The aims are, on the one hand, to increase the accountability and transparency with regard to the legal and budget authorities and the public and, on the other hand, to improve the implementation of the programmes by contributing to informed planning and decisions concerning needs, delivery mechanisms and resource allocation.

Evaluation activity

Covers all the activities that the Managing Authorities and other stakeholders have to carry out in evaluation during the programming period. The aim of evaluation activity is to enable the evaluators to conduct evaluation tasks and to assess the programme result and impact, as well as the contribution of the RDP to Union priorities.

Evaluation approach

A conceptually distinct way of designing and conducting evaluations.

Evaluation capacity

Necessary personal resources and their evaluation-related skills for fulfilling evaluation tasks and evaluation activities.

Evaluation during programming period

Evaluation which takes place throughout the implementation of a programme (formerly known as ongoing evaluation). It includes all evaluation activities to be carried out during the whole programming period, comprising *ex ante* evaluation, reporting in enhanced Annual Implementation Reports, *ex post* evaluation as well as other evaluation-related tasks such as the compilation and refinement of indicators, data collection, etc.

Evaluation governance

The set of appropriate institutional arrangements for managing evaluation aimed at ensuring effective processes and for making full use of the information generated by monitoring & evaluation systems. The institutional arrangements must address three requirements: developing a policy and a set of guidelines for evaluation; ensuring impartiality and independence; linking evaluation findings to future activities.

Evaluation management

This is the targeted employment of resources and coordination of processes with the aim to carry out an effective evaluation. Evaluation governance sets the institutional frame for evaluation management.

Evaluation plan

It sets out the evaluation activities including the institutional arrangements (evaluation governance) and management provisions (evaluation management) for a whole programme implementation period. For the programming period 2014-2020, Managing Authorities of

programmes under the five funds covered by the Common Strategic Framework shall draw up an Evaluation Plan. For rural development the Evaluation Plan will be included in each RDP and must conform to the minimum requirements established in the implementing act.

Evaluation/evaluative question

A question that needs to be answered by evaluators. These are usually posed by those commissioning an evaluation. Evaluation questions normally feature in the terms of reference of evaluation projects. In the case of the evaluation of Rural Development Programmes, evaluation questions form part of the common guidelines. Evaluation questions have three dimensions: descriptive (what happened?), causal (to what extent is what has happened really an effect of the intervention?) and normative (is the effect satisfactory?).

Evaluation results

Outcomes of the assessment of efficiency, effectiveness, impact and achievements of an intervention to the policy objectives.

Evaluation stakeholders

Groups or organizations with an interest in the evaluation of the policy in question. The evaluation stakeholders typically include but are not limited to programme management, decision-makers, beneficiaries and the evaluators.

Evaluation task

Tasks to be completed by evaluation, defined in the legislative texts and the EU evaluation guidelines or by the Managing Authority (programme-specific evaluation tasks). In case an external evaluator is involved in evaluation the terms of reference specify the evaluation tasks to be carried out.

Evaluation topic

Specific subject that a particular evaluation is focused on. For example, Rural Development priorities and focus areas, or cross-cutting issues.

Ex ante conditionality

It seeks to ensure that the necessary preconditions for investments to flourish are in place. Four types of preconditions can be identified: (i) regulatory, (ii) strategic, (iii) infrastructural-planning and (iv) institutional. Regulatory preconditions primarily relate to transposition of EU legislation. Strategic preconditions are linked to strategic frameworks for investments; while infrastructural-planning preconditions relate to major infrastructure investments. Institutional preconditions aim to ensure institutional effectiveness and adequate administrative capacity.

Ex ante evaluation

Evaluation which is performed before programme implementation. Its purpose is to gather information and to carry out analyses which help to ensure that an intervention is as relevant and coherent as possible. Its conclusions are meant to be integrated at the time decisions are made. *Ex ante* evaluation mainly concerns an analysis of context, though it will also provide an opportunity for specifying the intervention mechanisms in terms of what already exists. It provides the relevant authorities with a prior assessment of whether development issues have been diagnosed correctly, whether the strategy and objectives proposed are relevant, whether there is incoherence between them or in relation to Community policies and guidelines, whether the expected impacts are realistic, etc. Moreover, it provides the necessary basis for monitoring and future evaluations by ensuring that there are explicit and, where possible, quantified objectives. In fulfilling these functions, *ex ante* evaluation supports the preparation of proposals for new or renewed community actions. Its purpose is to ensure that the policy objectives will be delivered successfully, that the measures used are cost-effective, and that the ground is prepared for reliable mid-term and *ex post* evaluations.

Ex post evaluation

Evaluation which recapitulates and judges an intervention when it is over. It aims at accounting for the use of resources, the achievement of intended and unintended effects. It strives to understand the factors of success or failure of programmes. It also tries to draw conclusions which can be generalised to other interventions. For impacts to have the time to materialise, *ex post* evaluations need to be performed some time after implementation.

F

Focus area

The sub-field of policy on which the intervention is targeted. The six Union priorities for rural development are broken into 18 operational focus areas so as to better structure the attribution of measures and planned interventions.

G

Governance

It can be understood as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. In contrast to older (narrower) definitions the term does not only indicate what a government does, but also includes structures set up and actions undertaken in partnership with the civil society and the private sector.

H

Hierarchy of objectives

This is a tool that helps to analyse and communicate programme objectives and shows how interventions contribute to global, intermediate and operational objectives. It organizes these objectives into different levels (objectives, sub-objectives) in the form of a hierarchy or tree, thus showing the logical links between

the objectives and their sub-objectives. It presents in a synthetic manner the various intervention logics derived from the regulation, that link individual actions and measures to the overall goals of the intervention.

Human resources

The set of individuals who make up the workforce of an organization, business sector or an economy. The definition includes the treasure of knowledge embodied by these individuals. 'Human capital' is sometimes used synonymously with human resources, although human capital typically refers to a more narrow view; i.e., the knowledge the individuals embody and can contribute to an organization. Likewise, other terms sometimes used include 'manpower', 'talent', 'labour' or simply 'people'.

Impact

Effects of an intervention lasting in medium or long term. Some impacts appear indirectly, (e.g. turnover generated for the suppliers of assisted firms). Others can be observed at the macroeconomic or macro-social level (e.g. improvement of the image of the assisted area); these are global impacts. Impacts may be positive or negative, expected or unexpected.

Impact indicator

These refer to the benefits of the programme beyond the immediate effects on its direct beneficiaries both at the level of the intervention but also more generally in the programme area. They are linked to the wider objectives of the programme. They are normally expressed in "net" terms, which means subtracting effects that cannot be attributed to the intervention (e.g. double counting, deadweight), and taking into account indirect effects (displacement and multipliers). Example: increase in employment in rural areas, increased productivity of agricultural sector, increased production of renewable energy.

Indicator

Tool to measure the achievement of: an objective; a resource mobilised; an output accomplished; an effect obtained; or a context variable (economic, social or environmental). The information provided by an indicator is a quantitative datum used to measure facts or opinions (e.g. percentage of regional enterprises which have been assisted by public intervention; percentage of trainees who claim to be satisfied or highly satisfied). An indicator must, among other things, produce simple information which is communicable and easily understood by both the provider and the user of the information. It must help the managers of public intervention to communicate, negotiate and decide. For that purpose, it should preferably be linked to a criterion on the success of the intervention. It should reflect as precisely as possible whatever it is meant to measure (validity of construction). The indicator and its measurement unit must be sensitive, that is to say, the quantity measured must vary significantly when a change occurs in the variable to be measured.

Innovation

It can relate to products, processes, organisations, governance arrangements or complex systems comprising all these. For pragmatic reasons it is therefore indicated to define this term within the wide limits of existing definitions, according to the definer's purpose. Here are four examples of well-established definitions.

"The act of introducing something new" (the American heritage dictionary)

"A new idea, method or device" (Webster online)

"Change that creates a new dimension of performance" (Peter Drucker)

"The introduction of new goods (...), new methods of production (...), the opening of new markets (...), the conquest of new sources of supply (...) and the carrying out of a new organization of any industry" (Joseph Schumpeter)

Input

Financial, human, material, organisational and regulatory means mobilised for the implementation of an intervention.

For example, sixty people worked on implementing the programme; 3% of the project costs were spent on reducing effects on the environment. Monitoring and evaluation focus primarily on the inputs allocated by public authorities and used by operators to obtain outputs. Private inputs mobilised by assisted firms, for example, are considered to be results of public intervention. The above definition gives a relatively broad meaning to the word "input". Some prefer to limit its use to financial or budgetary resources only. In this case, the word "activity" can be applied to the implementation of human and organisational resources. The term "financial outputs" is sometimes used in the sense of consumption of budgetary inputs.

Input indicators

These refer to the budget or other resources allocated at each level of the assistance. Financial input indicators are used to monitor progress in terms of the (annual) commitment and payment of the funds available for any operation, measure or programme in relation to its eligible costs. Example: expenditure per measure declared to the Commission.

Intermediate bodies

Delegated bodies (local authorities, regional development bodies or non-governmental organisations) that the Member State or the Managing Authority has designated to carry out the management and implementation of rural development operations.

Intervention logic

Represents a methodological instrument which establishes the logical link between programme objectives and the envisaged operational actions. It shows the conceptual link from an intervention's input to its output and, subsequently, to its results and impacts. Thus intervention logic allows an assessment of a measure's contribution to achieving its objectives.

J

Judgement criterion

Also known as evaluation criterion. Specifies an aspect of the evaluated intervention that will allow its merits or success to be assessed. The judgement criteria are closely connected to evaluation questions. The criterion is used to answer an evaluation question. One or more judgement criteria are derived from each question.

K

L

LEADER

LEADER stands for 'Links between actions for the development of the rural economy'. It used to be the name of a Community Initiative (LEADER I: 1991-1993; LEADER II: 1994-1999; LEADER+: 2000-2006) and is currently known as the method by which Axis 4 measures of the current RDP are implemented (2007-2013).

The LEADER method is used for mobilising and delivering rural development in rural communities through local public-private partnerships ('Local Action Groups'). It is designed to help rural people, groups and enterprises, etc. to consider the potential of their area and to encourage the implementation of integrated, high-quality and original strategies for sustainable development. The LEADER method is the mode of delivery stipulated for Community-Led Local Development/CLLD (2014-2020). CLLD continues to be called LEADER in the framework of the EAFRD.

M

Method

Methods are families of evaluation techniques and tools that fulfil different purposes. They usually consist of procedures and protocols that ensure systemisation and consistency in the way evaluations are undertaken. Methods may focus on the collection or analysis of information and data; may be quantitative or qualitative; and may attempt to describe, explain, predict or inform action. The choice of methods follows from the evaluation questions being asked and the mode of enquiry - causal, exploratory, normative, etc. Understanding a broad range

of methods ensures that evaluators will select suitable methods for different purposes.

Methodology

Most broadly, the overall way in which decisions are made to select methods based on different assumptions about what constitutes knowing (ontology) what constitutes knowledge (epistemology) and more narrowly how this can be operationalized i.e. interpreted and analysed (methodology).

Minimum requirements of the Evaluation Plan

The legally required aspects that of the Evaluation Plan that must be submitted as part of the RDP and approved by Commission Decision. The minimum requirements, which are defined in the implementing acts, contain seven sections (objectives and purpose of the evaluation plan, governance and coordination, evaluation topics and activities, data and information, timeline, and communication).

Monitoring

An exhaustive and regular examination of the resources, outputs and results of public interventions. Monitoring is based on a system of coherent information including reports, reviews, balance sheets, indicators, etc. Monitoring system information is obtained primarily from operators and is used essentially for steering public interventions. When monitoring includes a judgement, this judgement refers to the achievement of operational objectives. Monitoring is also intended to produce feedback and direct learning. It is generally the responsibility of the actors charged with implementation of an intervention.

Monitoring data

Data regularly gathered on beneficiaries of the programme through the monitoring system. This data includes information on the inputs and outputs and permits the monitoring of the progress of the programme.

Monitoring and evaluation system

A system for collecting information at regular intervals; reporting, analysing and evaluating programme performance with evaluation methods. The system covers all monitoring and evaluation activities, including the governance of the system itself. The monitoring and evaluation system is coordinated by the Managing Authority and is the basis for communicating evaluation findings internally and externally.

In the Rural Development Regulation the term describes more specifically the *common* system, developed by the Commission and the Member States with the aim to demonstrate the progress and achievements, assess the impact, effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of RD policy interventions. It contains a limited number of common indicators relating to the context, outputs, results, and impacts of the programmes.

Multi-annual Work Plan

A work plan that extends over several years and covers all the items to be accomplished over the time period and a breakdown of tasks and their timelines. The multi-annual work plan can be divided into smaller segments, such as annual work plans.

N

Net effect

Effect imputable to the public intervention and to it alone, as opposed to apparent changes or gross effects. To evaluate net effects, based on gross effects, it is necessary to subtract the changes (netting out) which would have occurred in the absence of the public intervention, and which are therefore not imputable to it since they are produced by confounding factors (counterfactual situation). For example, the number of employees in assisted firms appears to be stable (change or gross effect equal to zero). However, it is estimated that without support there would have been 400 redundancies (counterfactual situation). Thus, 400 jobs were maintained (net effect).

O

Objective

Clear, explicit and initial statement on the effects to be achieved by a public intervention. A quantitative objective is stated in the form of indicators and a qualitative objective in the form of descriptors, e.g.: 30% of all outputs must be accomplished by the end of the third year; the public intervention must first benefit the long-term unemployed. Specific objectives concern the results and impacts of an intervention on direct beneficiaries. A global objective corresponds to the aim of the intervention. The aim of an intervention is to produce an impact expressed in global terms, e.g. reducing regional disparities in development levels. Objectives may also be intermediate. Objectives which specify outputs to be produced are called operational objectives. If the objectives of a public intervention have not been clearly defined beforehand, the evaluation can try to clarify them afterwards. In that case, it is preferable to refer to implicit objectives. Objectives may incorporate targets.

Output

Action which is financed and accomplished (or concretised) with the money allocated to an intervention. A project promoter undertakes to produce an output in immediate exchange for the support granted. Outputs may take the form of facilities or works (e.g. building of a road, farm investment; tourist accommodation). They may also take the form of immaterial services (e.g. training, consultancy, information).

Output indicator

These measure activities directly realised within programmes. These activities are the first step towards realising the operational objectives of the intervention and are measured in physical or monetary units. Example: number of training sessions organised, number of farms receiving investment support, total volume of investment.

P

Partnership

This is an arrangement where parties agree to cooperate to advance their mutual interests. Partners in the understanding of the Common Strategic Framework are the parties involved in the Partnership Agreement concluded between the Member State and the Commission. According to the legal requirements, these partners shall comprise:

- (a) competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities;
- (b) economic and social partners; and
- (c) bodies representing civil society, including environmental partners, nongovernmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting equality and non-discrimination.

These partners, in accordance with the multi-level governance approach, shall be involved by Member States in the preparation and evaluation of programmes. They shall also participate in the Monitoring Committees for programmes.

Partnership Agreement

It is the document prepared by the Member State with the involvement of partners in line with the multi-level governance approach, which sets out the Member State's strategy, priorities and arrangements for using the CSF Funds in an effective and efficient way to pursue the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, and which is approved by the Commission following assessment and dialogue with the Member State.

Programme-specific evaluation question

Programme specific evaluation questions are formulated for the purpose of the evaluation of a specific programme, in view of providing a deeper insight into the overall implementation of that programme or to reflect specific objectives of that programme. Contrary to them, "common" evaluation questions apply to all the programmes.

Programme-specific indicator

An indicator is a quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to measure achievement, to reflect changes connected to an intervention, or to help assess the performance of a development actor. The set of common indicators, binding for all Member States, serves to measure achievements and changes at programme and European level. Since common indicators may not fully reflect all effects of programme activities, the Managing Authorities in the Member States are asked to complement the common indicator set by defining additional indicators to capture the full range of intended effects of a given programme, in particular for national priorities and site-specific measures. These additional indicators are called programme-specific indicators.

Proxy indicator

Also known as indirect indicator. A variable that is used to approximate or be representative of the change or results where it is difficult to measure them directly.

Q

R

Relevance

The extent to which an intervention's objectives are pertinent to needs, problems and issues. Questions of relevance are particularly important in *ex ante* evaluation because the focus is on the strategy chosen or its justification. Within the framework of mid-term evaluation, it is advisable to check whether the socio-economic context has evolved as expected and whether this evolution calls into question the relevance of a particular initial objective.

Reporting

Comprehensive summary and presentation of monitoring and evaluation findings on effectiveness, efficiency, impacts and achievements of the intervention. Precedes communication on the evaluation results to stakeholders and general public.

Result

Advantage (or disadvantage) which direct beneficiaries obtain at the end of their participation in a public intervention or as soon as a public facility has been completed. Results can be observed when an operator completes an action and accounts for the way in which allocated funds were spent and managed. At this point s/he may show, for example, that accessibility has been improved due to the construction of a road, or that the firms which have received advice claim to be satisfied. The operators may regularly monitor results. They have to adapt the implementation of the intervention according to the results obtained.

Result indicators

These measure the direct and immediate effects of the intervention. They provide information on changes in, for example, the behaviour, capacity or performance of direct beneficiaries and are measured in physical or monetary terms. Example: gross number of jobs created, successful training outcomes.

Retro planning

Also known as reverse scheduling and backward planning, refers to the process of planning a project by identifying the deadline and working backwards to the start date, designating the component steps in reverse order of time.

S

Self-evaluation

Evaluation that is conducted and managed by project/LAG management.

Stakeholder

A person, group or organization that can affect or be affected by the policy in question, i.e. has an interest in the policy.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

This is a similar technique to Environmental Impact Assessment but normally applied to policies, plans, programmes and groups of projects. Strategic Environmental Assessment provides the potential opportunity to avoid the preparation and implementation of inappropriate plans, programmes and projects and assists in the identification and evaluation of project alternatives and identification of cumulative effects. Strategic Environmental Assessment comprises two main types: sectorial strategic environmental assessment (applied when many new projects fall within one sector) and regional SEA (applied when broad economic development is planned within one region). Within the EU, SEA is governed by the provisions of Directive.

T

Target

Detailed performance requirement arising from the policy objectives and which needs to be met to achieve the stated objectives. Targets are quantified whenever possible and they are typically time-bound.

Target indicator

For each focus area chosen among the six RD priorities, quantifiable target indicators are defined at Community level. Target indicators should be linked, as directly as possible, to RDP interventions, minimising the effect of external factors. They should be indicators which can be simply and regularly monitored, minimising the data requirements for beneficiaries and administrations, as the values of these indicators will be monitored regularly throughout the lifetime of each RDP. Wherever possible established indicators and methods should be used. For the most part, target indicators will be at the result level, with the exception of Priority 1, which is horizontal and whose results are captured through the outcomes of other priorities. For the focus areas under this priority, the target indicators will be established at output level.

Target level

Estimates of an impact in relation to the baseline situation, based on past experience and expert judgement. A standard approach is to use benchmarks established in past programme reporting, evaluation and studies. Evaluators generally play an important role in the context of the *ex ante* evaluation by verifying quantified targets for outputs and results and in the setting of quantified (and where appropriate qualitative) targets for impact.

Technical Assistance

With regard to public support programmes or programming frameworks, Technical Assistance is the providing of advice, assistance, and training pertaining to the setting up, implementation and management of the programme. From the Technical Assistance budget, the ESI Funds may support actions for preparation, management, monitoring, evaluation, information and communication, networking, complaint resolution, and control and audit. The ESI Funds may be used by the Member State to support actions for the reduction of administrative burden for beneficiaries, including electronic data exchange systems, and actions to reinforce the capacity of Member State authorities and beneficiaries to administer and use the CSF Funds. These actions may concern preceding and subsequent programming periods.

U

Union priority

Six European-level priorities that translate the EU2020 goals and CAP objectives into rural development interventions. The Union priorities for rural development are defined in the Rural Development Regulation.

V – W – X – Y – Z

DRAFT

DRAFT



European Evaluation Network
for Rural Development

Evaluation Helpdesk

260 Chaussée St Pierre – B-1040 Brussels

Tel: +32 (0)2 736 18 90

E-mail: info@ruralevaluation.eu