European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

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# GUIDELINES

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

DRAFT 2.2

AUGUST 2013

This draft document has been drawn up on the basis of the proposals for Regulations adopted by the EC on 12 Oct. 2011. It does not prejudge 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Feedback on the content of the draft guidance is welcome!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**

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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/)

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# 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 in 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 (RDP), to strategically build-up evaluation capacity, and to ensure that necessary prerequisites are in place for the assessment 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 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 evaluation 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 Bergs, Lenka Brown, Simona Cristiano, Maria Coto Sauras, Judit Habuda, John Grieve, Miroslav Kosik, Morten Kvistgaard, Isabel Naylon, Sari Rannanpaa, 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 adopted by the European Commission on 12 October 2011. It does prejudge neither 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, August 2013

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# 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 | Community 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 | *Ex ante* 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 Investment Funds |
| ESF | European Social Fund |
| EU | European Union |
| FADN | Farm Accountancy Data Network |
| FSS | Farm Structure Survey |
| GAEC | Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions |
| HNV | High Nature Value |
| IACS | Integrated Administration and Control System |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technolgies |

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|---|---|
| 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 |

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# INTRODUCTION

In May 2012, a Good Practice Workshop entitled "From Ongoing Evaluation towards the Evaluation Plan" was organised in Vienna by the Evaluation Helpdesk[1]. 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 sections the arrangements made to carry out monitoring and evaluation activities in the period 2014-2020. While the Evaluation Plan is an element in all Community Strategic Framework (CSF) Programmes, in Rural Development (and European Maritime and Fisheries Funds (EMFF) programmes) 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 for annual reporting. 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



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# PART I: EVALUATION PLAN IN THE RDP

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

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# 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. 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 able 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 administrative burden** through the design of a data-management and monitoring system that is tailor-made to the effective 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 reference for flexible annual planning of evaluation activities**. 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.

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# 2 THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

In October 2011 the European Commission published a set of proposals for Regulations of the European Parliament and the Council for the 2014-2020 Programming Period (hereafter '*legal proposals*'). The legal proposals establish a **reinforced monitoring and evaluation system** compared to previous periods.

The **building blocks of the monitoring and evaluation system** are set out at different levels by the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR)[2], the Rural Development Regulation (RDR)[3] and the 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 and public 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). And, 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, 49, 83).

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

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

[3] 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) (December Presidency proposal); 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. 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.

**Table 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 to mention the two objectives as listed in the minimum requirements.
- 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.

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## 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 in 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? Which actors have you chosen, which ones do you intend to use? How and in which way 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 systems and describe it also in the text.
- Clearly identify the actors, but avoid naming any companies (e.g. of evaluators) that might change.
- 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.

For an example on how to represent this section of the Evaluation Plan in the RDP, see the Evaluation Plan template in **Part III** (Toolbox) of this guidance document.

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## 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 **result and impact indicators**. 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 and climate change, innovation) are understood as **specific evaluation topics**, which might require **specific 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? (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 including 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 focus, 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)

For an example on how to represent this section of the Evaluation Plan in the RDP, see the Evaluation Plan template in **Part III** (Toolbox) of this guidance document.

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## 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 evaluations[4]. 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 evaluators[5].

The **monitoring data** submitted to the European Commission will be derived from the application forms (operations database) and the payments' 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 do you foresee to ensure data quality and to reduce the risk of error rates?
- **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, 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?

[4] CPR Annex IV *Ex ante* conditionalities, general *ex ante* conditionalities
[5] RDR Article 73(2)

### *Practical tips when drafting the Evaluation Plan chapter in the RDP*

- Refer to the mid-term evaluation when describing data bottlenecks and issues for the assessment of impacts.
- Be specific with regard to different data types.
- 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.

For an example on how to represent this section of the Evaluation Plan in the RDP, see the Evaluation Plan template in **Part III** (Toolbox) of this guidance document.

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## 3.5 Timeline

***What is the minimum requirement?***

This sub-section should contains 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 AIR 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 2022? 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 in 2018? 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 an example of a retro planning template, see **Part II** (chapter 5.2) of this guidance document.

For examples of good practice in relation to drafting a timeline and how to establish a voluntary multi-annual work plan for evaluation, see **Part III** (Toolbox) of this guidance document.

For an example on how to represent this section of the Evaluation Plan in the RDP, see the Evaluation Plan template in **Part III** (Toolbox) of this guidance document.

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## 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 in 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? It 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? What use will be made of interactive information channels? 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?

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***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 (see example in **Part III** (Toolbox)).
- 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.

For an example on how to represent this section of the Evaluation Plan in the RDP, see the Evaluation Plan template in **Part III** (Toolbox) of this guidance document.

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## 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 related to 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, from which bodies, what type of profile, etc. Whether there is sufficient existing staff or whether additional personnel should be recruited?
- **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? Will you opt for in-house and out-house capacity building?

***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.

For an example on how to represent this section of the Evaluation Plan in the RDP, see the Evaluation Plan template in **Part III** (Toolbox) of this guidance document.

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# 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 operational and methodological 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 explicit.

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# PART II: FROM PLAN TO PRACTICE

*Recommendations on how to implement the Evaluation Plan*

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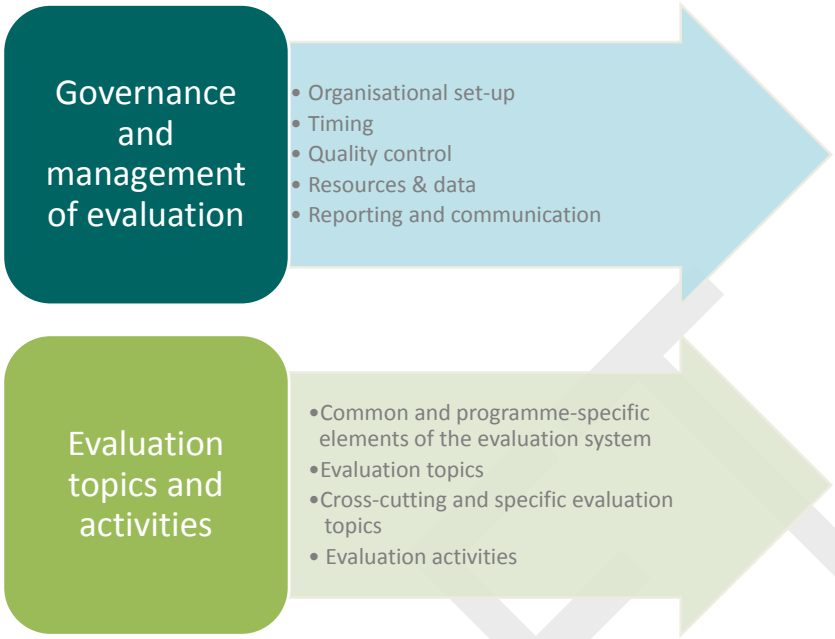
**In the second part of the guidelines**, we describe good practice in implementing the Evaluation Plan, paying particular attention to (1) governance and management of evaluation and (2) evaluation topics and activities.




Before discussing how to design a well-working monitoring and evaluation system, it is important to make a distinction between monitoring and evaluation. Even though these activities are interlinked, they have separate functions.

**Monitoring** refers to continuous and systematic review of financial inputs as well as project and measure level outputs. It generates quantitative data which helps the Managing Authority to follow the progress of the programme in relation to the set targets. Monitoring is always the responsibility of the management and operational staff.

**Evaluation**, on the other hand, examines the results and impacts of programmes and measures by assessing their effectiveness, efficiency and relevance. Evaluation results are valuable inputs in the policymaking process. Evaluation relies heavily on data and information collected through the monitoring system.

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# 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.* Governance is about 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 an 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 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 Authorities, Monitoring Committee, an evaluation Steering Group and, on occasions, technical working groups, evaluators, beneficiaries, Local Action Groups (LAGs), National Rural Networks (NRNs) and data providers are amongst the evaluation stakeholders. In regionalised countries, there are sometimes additional stakeholders, for instance a national evaluation network, 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 system 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.

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In terms of monitoring, the Managing Authority must ensure a secure electronic information system[6], provide the European Commission with relevant indicator data on selected and completed operations and draw up the Annual Implementation Report[7]. The Managing Authority also monitors the quality of programme implementation by means of indicators[8] and provides the Monitoring Committee with information and documents necessary to monitor programme progress[9].

The Managing Authority is responsible for drawing up an Evaluation Plan[10] and ensuring that it is consistent with the monitoring and evaluation system.[11] The Managing Authority organises evaluations and related activities on the basis of the Evaluation Plan[12]. In the 2014-2020 programming period the RDP's contribution to each priority's objectives should be evaluated at least once during the programming period[13]. This requirement reflects the need for enhanced AIRs in 2017[1415] and 2019[1617], as well as the requirements of *ex post* evaluation[18]. 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.[19] The Managing Authority is also responsible for communicating each evaluation to the European Commission[20] and for making evaluation reports public.[21]

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 objectives[22], principally through the use of indicators[23]. The Monitoring Committee also considers and approves the Annual Implementation Reports before they are sent to the European Commission[24]. The Monitoring Committee monitors all evaluation activities[25] and outputs related to the Evaluation Plan[26] and may issue recommendations to the Managing Authority regarding programme implementation and evaluation and then monitor actions taken as a result of its recommendations[27].

[6] RDR, Art. 73(1)
[7] RDR, Art. 73(1)
[8] RDR, Art. 79
[9] RDR, Art. 73(1)
[10] CPR, Art. 49
[11] RDR, Art. 73(1)
[12] CPR, Art.49(3)
[13] CPR, Art. 49(3)
[14] CPR, Art. 44(3)
[15] RDR, Art. 82(3)
[16] CPR, Art. 44(4)
[17] RDR, Art. 82(4)
[18] RDR, Art. 85
[19] RDR, Art. 73(1)
[20] RDR, Art. 81(1)
[21] RDR, Art. 83(3)
[22] CPR, Art. 43(1)
[23] RDR, Art. 79
[24] RDR, Art. 73(1)
[25] CPR, Art. 49(3)
[26] RDR, Art. 81(1)
[27] 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 organisations[28].

### *Paying Agency*

The accreditation of Paying Agencies depends on, *inter alia*, monitoring[29]. However, with the exception of monitoring, the EU regulations are not explicit about the role of the Paying Agency in monitoring and evaluation. Nevertheless, the Paying Agency has an important role in monitoring and evaluation activities as it holds information regarding applications, projects supported, 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 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.

### *Steering Group*

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

A Steering Group typically oversees the evaluation process during the programming period, including the drafting of the Evaluation Plan (if the Steering Group is constituted before submission of the RDP) and each evaluation that takes place. A single 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 composition of the Steering Group depends on the specifics of the programme (priorities, scale and delivery) and the tasks assigned to the group. As a minimum the 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. It may also be useful to include representatives of other European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and experts from research institutions. The Steering Group 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.

[28] CPR, Art. 42(1)
[29] Commission proposal for a Regulation on the Financing, Management and Monitoring of the Common Agricultural Policy (19 November 2011) Article 8(1)

When identifying potential Steering Group members, it is useful to first list all stakeholders. One can either review and update an existing list, or create a new one by listing all possible stakeholders and adding their roles, responsibilities and relevance in the programme and its evaluation.

- ***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 asked to provide information pertinent to the monitoring and evaluation of a programme[30]. 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 evaluation[31]. 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 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 NRN's role is to inform the broader public about the RDP and to increase stakeholder involvement in RDP implementation[32]. NRNs also support LAGs in the monitoring and development of the LDS[33]. They have an important role in communicating evaluation results, and are also able to provide monitoring and evaluation methodological support, disseminate good practice and assist in data collection. 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

[30] RDR, Art. 78
[31] RDR, Art. 78
[32] RDR, Art. 55(2)
[33] RDR, Art. 55(3)

collect specific monitoring data for the Managing Authority on a contractual basis. In many Member States, representatives of data providers also participate in the Monitoring Committee, 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 implementation[34]. 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 responsibilities and processes early on.

***Coordination of evaluation activities with Pillar I and other ESIF programmes***

Given that there is now one set of common impact indicators for the entire Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)[35], 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 contribute to the Union's strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and its priorities through the Partnership Agreement. It may be useful to coordinate some evaluation activities with other ESIF 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 and monitoring and evaluation activities across programmes can be monitored within a single Monitoring Committee for programmes co-financed by the ESIF funds[36], or representatives of other ESIF programmes can be included in the RDP evaluation Steering Group. Alternatively the Managing Authority of the RDP might take part in the other ESIF programmes' Monitoring Committees and 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 ESIF programmes. It may also be useful to draft guidelines on evaluation for all ESIF 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

[34] CPR, Art. 47
[35] Commission proposal for a Regulation on the Financing, Management and Monitoring of the Common Agricultural Policy (19 November 2011), Article 110
[36] CPR, Ar. 41

regulations, such as the date of submission of AIRs[37] and the submission of monitoring data[38] [39]. 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 an internal **multi-annual work** plan including a timeline for actions, divided into annual segments. 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.

Below is a possible retro planning template for an evaluation. The same kind of template can be applied to monitoring, as well as other tasks. 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.

**Table 2 Retro planning template**

| Stage | Actions | Length (months) | Deadline |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Dissemination** | Date for which results needed | | |
| | Approval of report, dissemination | | |
| **Implementation** | Quality assessment of final report | | |
| | Submission of final report | | |
| | Submission of draft final report | | |
| | Submission of interim report(s) | | |
| | Independent and interactive evaluation process (structuring, observing, analysing, judging) | | |
| **Preparation**[40] | Contract with evaluator | | |
| | Tendering procedure | | |
| | Preparation of specifications and ToR[41] | | |
| | Establishment of evaluation mandate | | |
| | Establishment of a Steering Group | | |
| | Data collection and review, information gathering | | |
| | Review of common and specific evaluation questions | | |
| | Methodology development | | |

## 5.3 Quality control

It is advisable to apply quality control to all aspects of an 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.

[37] RDR, Art. 82(1)
[38] RDR, Art. 73(1)
[39] CPR, Art. 102
[40] Practical information on the preparatory steps required for an evaluation can be found in the Guidelines on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the RDPs at http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=6A65BD6F-CB22-6660-7E91-321F04E742E2
[41] General information on the recommended contents of TOR can be found in the Guidelines on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the RDPs at http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=6A65BD6F-CB22-6660-7E91-321F04E742E2

A good quality criterion 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 report[42]).

**Table 3 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 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

- **Detailed internal Evaluation Plan**

| **A more detailed internal version of the EP that was sent to the EC as a part of the RDP** | |
|---|---|
| *Pros*<br>▸ Gives a clear picture of the EP items.<br>▸ Helps in M&E work planning.<br>▸ Proof of M&E work for external actors. | *Cons*<br>▸ Workload in writing the detailed plan.<br>▸ Difficulty of defining certain processes.<br>▸ Requires revision when EP updated. |

- **Annual or Multi-Annual Work Programme**

| **A time-based action plan based on the Evaluation Plan** | |
|---|---|
| *Pros*<br>▸ Gives a clear time line for M&E work.<br>▸ Assists in advance planning.<br>▸ Clarifies resource allocation.<br>▸ Helps to highlight and schedule issues requiring further development (e.g. processes, skills).<br>▸ Makes reporting on EP in the AIR easier. | *Cons*<br>▸ Preparation requires time and resources.<br>▸ Danger of excluding additional items or actions. |

- **Internal M&E Manual**

| **A comprehensive handbook that covers all aspects of M&E in the Member States for the programming period** | |
|---|---|
| *Pros*<br>▸ All documents and procedures related to M&E in one document: easy and quick reference.<br>▸ Helps in development, stabilisation, analysis and review of processes.<br>▸ Ensures consistency of processes.<br>▸ Improves efficiency and effectiveness.<br>▸ M&E system has to be considered as a whole: aids in identifying gaps and weaknesses.<br>▸ Assists in knowledge management and knowledge transfer: trains employees in their job functions and serves as orientation tool for new employees.<br>▸ Proof of and information on M&E work for external actors.<br>▸ Fosters transparency and accountability. | *Cons*<br>▸ Heavy workload when drafting and approving.<br>▸ Requires stringent quality control to avoid unequal level of detail in document.<br>▸ Coordination amongst M&E actors in drafting and revising.<br>▸ Requires frequent updates and revisions.<br>▸ MA may prefer not to disclose all internal procedures. |

- ***Ad hoc* documentation**

| **Separate documents relating to M&E in the Member States** | |
|---|---|
| *Pros*<br>▸ Quick to draft and approve.<br>▸ Tailoring to the needs of end users. | *Cons*<br>▸ Danger of gaps and overlaps.<br>▸ Difficult to keep track of versions.<br>▸ Unequal level of detail.<br>▸ Unclear/late/lacking instructions cause inefficiency.<br>▸ Lack of holistic view may lead to inconsistencies |

[42] 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

## 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 available[43]. The Member State must analyse its monitoring and evaluation needs relating to the Evaluation Plan and provide sufficient resource and capacity to address them[44]. However the principle of proportionality also applies to the financial and administrative resources allocated to monitoring and evaluation [45].

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. 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 issues related to monitoring and evaluation 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 practices[46].

However, monitoring and evaluation is only one of the RDP management-related activities funded from the Technical Assistance 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 needs arising from the new monitoring and evaluation framework.

The monitoring and evaluation budget should take into account the duration and scope of research 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

[43] CPR, Art. 49(2)
[44] RDR, Art. 9(1)
[45] CPR, Art. 4(5)
[46] CPR, Ar. 51

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 service such needs.

### *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.[47] 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. The cost of solutions to address needs therefore constitute the capacity building budget line.

### *IT systems*

The Managing Authority is responsible for 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 priorities[48].

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 management providers. Modifying the current system or constructing a new one have both advantages and disadvantages. Modifying the current IT system is typically cheaper and easier in the short term. However, in the long run it may become complex, slow and tedious to use due to heavy modifications which can end up costing more 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 with indicators for evaluation delivery[49]. 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.

[47] CPR, Annex IV *Ex ante* conditionalities, thematic *ex ante* conditionalities
[48] RDR, Art. 73(1)
[49] CPR, Annex IV *Ex ante* conditionalities, general *ex ante* conditionalities

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 in time, initial assessment of data availability should be prioritised. 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 the following section, communication is discussed from the point of view of evaluation. Monitoring information should also be communicated to stakeholders and the general public in formats that suit the specific target audience.

### *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.

- ***Role of Managing Authority (who)***

The main actor responsible for the drafting and implementation of the evaluation result's 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 result's 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 and, especially, policymakers. In order to ensure accountability, it is also necessary to include the general public amongst the target audiences of the communication strategy.

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- ***Information needs (what)***

It is also important to clearly identify target audiences' individual 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.

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 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 prerequisite[50], 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***

As in the case of all the communication strategies, the communication strategy of the evaluation results should also be regularly monitored and evaluated. In this case it is particularly important to keep track of how the conclusions and recommendations of evaluations are taken into account e.g. through RDP modifications, or changes to implementation procedures. 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 mechanisms of its monitoring and evaluation should be interlinked with the general mechanisms for the monitoring and evaluation of the overall communication strategy, whilst ensuring that the specificities of communication of evaluation results are adequately covered.

[50] RDR, Art. 83(3)

# 6 EVALUATION TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES

The European Union legal proposals[51] 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 relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and impact of Rural Development Programmes in accordance with CAP objectives and the European Union's strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth[52]. 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**[53] 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 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 (RDR and CPR) 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 for each focus area, in order to measure the effects of the policy (EU **data sources** for common context and impact indicators).
- **Guidance on methodology** explains 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.

[51] Legal proposals for the CSF Funds including the EAFRD
[52] CPR, Art 47 and RDR Art. 75
[53] 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 CSF funds has contributed to the objectives of each rural development priority[54]. 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 the specific evaluation focus has consequences on 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?***

For the new programming period several types of evaluation will be conducted, including the evaluation of thematic sub-programmes[55], CAP cross-pillars evaluation, and multi-fund evaluation[56].

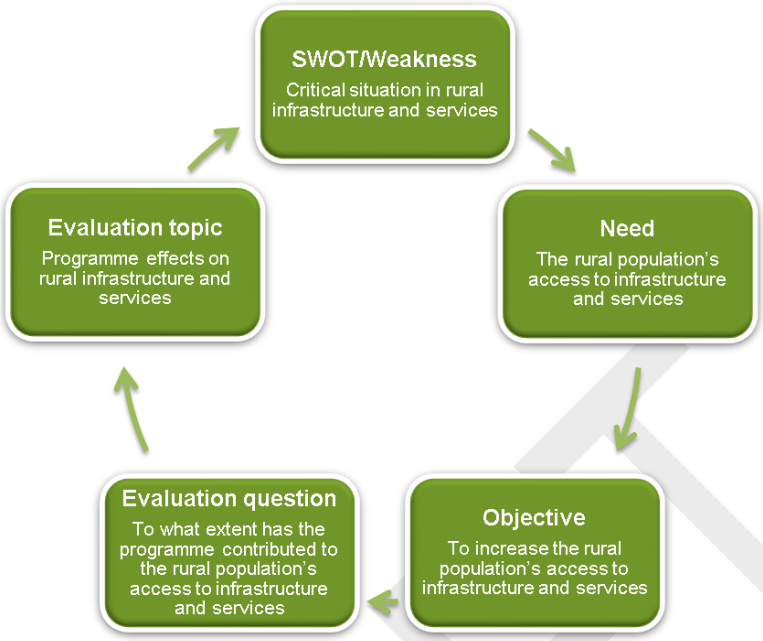
Legal acts outline the principles of the Union's support for CSF funds[57], Rural Development cross-cutting objectives[58] and specific interventions (Leader and National Rural Networks[59]) which represent EU common evaluation topics.

In addition to common requirements for evaluation 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 the development of rural infrastructure and services*".

[54] CPR, Art. 49
[55] RDR, Art. 82
[56] E.g. CLLD, http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/what/future/experts_documents_en.cfm#3
[57] CPR, Art. 3 - 8
[58] RDR, Art. 5
[59] RDR, Art. 42 – 45 and 55

**Figure 1** **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 analysis[60];** 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 **impacts[61] 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 **results[62] and contribution to rural development priorities and focus areas;** assessment of multiple effects and synergies and analysis of the complementary result indicators.
- Assessment **of progress and achievement on specific issues**, 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 strategies[63], and if relevant, a multi-fund approach to CLLD.
- Assessment of RDP **contributions to rural development cross-cutting objectives** such as innovation, environment and climate change mitigation and adaption.
- Assessment of RDP **contributions to delivering the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth[64]**, including the contribution of RDPs to the headline targets;
- Assessment of the programme's **administration and management** (delivery mechanisms) including the assessment of technical assistance funds and the cost of programme outputs, results and impacts, through specific economic evaluation (cost-benefit analysis). For instance, the costs of implementing measures and activities or achieving results and impacts can be assessed, as well as comparative analysis of the cost-effectiveness of various measures' results and impacts.
- Activities needed to address gaps in **evaluation capacity** and the evaluation system in order to fulfil evaluation requirements (e.g. HNV assessment; establishment of regional proxy indicators).

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[60] CPR, Art. 47, RDR, Art. 75
[61] CPR, Art. 47, RDR, Art. 75
[62] RDR, Art. 44.3
[63] RDR, Art. 82.4
[64] RDR, Art.44

**Figure 2 Evaluation topics and tasks**

| **Evaluation topics** (examples) | **Major evaluation tasks in relation to evaluation topics** | **Evaluation questions** | | **Indicators** | | **Reporting**[65] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Tasks** | **EU** | **RDP** | **EU** | **RDP** | |
| Focus Areas (1-18)<br><br>Viable food production<br><br>Environment<br><br>Biodiversity<br><br>Water quality<br><br>Innovation<br><br>Balanced territorial development<br><br>Local development<br><br>Jobs creation<br><br>Quality of life<br><br>Etc. | Observation of development trends and context analysis | | | Context Indicators | Proxies Specific context indicators | *Ex ante*<br>Enhanced AIR<br>*Ex post* |
| | Assessment of RDP impacts and contribution to CAP general objectives | Common horizontal | Specific horizontal | Impact | Specific impact | Enhanced AIR<br>*Ex post* |
| | Assessment of results of RDP interventions and contribution Rural Development priorities | Common FA related | Specific | Compl. result | Specific result | Enhanced AIR<br>*Ex post* |
| | Monitoring of the RDP progress in relation to target indicators and output indicators | | | Target Output | Specific target output | Quarterly, yearly |
| | Assessment of progress and achievements with respect to the specific issues | Common | Specific | Result | Specific result | Enhanced AIR<br>*Ex post* |
| | Assessment of RDP contributions to Rural Development cross-cutting objectives | Common | Specific | Results | Specific result | Enhanced AIR<br>Enhanced AIR<br>*Ex post* |
| | Assessment of RDP contributions to the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, including CSF thematic objectives | | Specific | | Specific | Enhanced AIR<br>*Ex post* |
| | Assessment of RDP contributions in relation to general principles of the implementation of CSF funds | | Specific | | Specific | Enhanced AIR<br>*Ex post* |
| | 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 | Specific | Enhanced AIR<br>*Ex post* |
| Programme administration and delivery | Assessment of the **administration and management of the programme and its delivery** including assessment of technical assistance funds, the costs of programme outputs, results and impacts through specific economic evaluation (cost-benefit analysis) | | Specific | | Specific | Enhanced AIR<br>*Ex post* |

[65] 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 and specific evaluation topics (1) Innovation; (2) Environment; (3) Climate Change; (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**: disseminations 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 Structural Fund 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)** covers the EAFRD, European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF), Cohesion Fund and EMFF, and reflects EU2020 through common thematic objectives to be addressed by key actions for each of the funds.

- **One of these common thematic objectives is:** strengthening research, technological development and innovation[66]
- **Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3 strategies):** national/regional innovation strategies in the framework of the EU cohesion policy.

**The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)** reform package gives innovation a key role for sustainable agriculture and rural development. In fact, one of the five **CAP specific objectives** is to **foster innovation.** 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.

For the evaluation of innovation under the **Rural Development Programmes** we must consider that innovation is one of the **cross-cutting objectives** of the programme and at the same time **Priority 1** (Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas) a horizontal priority. The measures that will play a prominent role in supporting innovative approaches will be:

- Measures addressed to knowledge transfer and advisory services[67];
- Investments in physical assets[68] ;

[66] CPR, Art.9
[67] RDR, Art.15 and 16
[68] RDR, Art.18, 20 and 27

- Co-operation[69] establishing "operational groups; pilot demonstration projects;
- LEADER.

**The European Innovation Partnership 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. In order to transpose innovation into agricultural practice, the EIP will make use of a range of existing policies, in particular **CAP rural development policy** and **Union research and innovation policy**, to fund concrete innovative actions though Rural Development Programmes.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">EUROPE 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Europe 2020 flagship initiative "<u>Innovation Union</u>" is one of the seven flagship initiatives of the EU; between the thirty action points that it has, we can highlight:<br>▸ Spreading the benefits of innovation across the Union;<br>▸ Pooling forces to achieve breakthroughs: European Innovation Partnerships (EIP).</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">COMMON STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK</th><th colspan="2">COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Art.9 CSF Regulation: 1.strengthening research, technological development and innovation;<br>RIS3 strategies</td><td colspan="2">One of the CAP specific objectives is to foster innovation.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">2º Pillar Rural Development Programs</td><td rowspan="3">1º Pillar<br><br>EIP for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability<br><br>RDP<br>Art. 61-63<br><br>Union Research and Innovation Policy</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Innovation, Environment and Climate Change as cross-cutting objectives</td></tr>
<tr><td>Rural Development Priorities (Art.5 of RDR)</td><td>Focus Areas (Art.5 of RDR)</td><td>Measures</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">P.1. Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry, and rural areas with a focus on the following areas (horizontal priority)</td><td>1.a Fostering innovation and the knowledge base in rural areas;</td><td rowspan="2">Non exhaustive list of suitable measures:<br>Art 15, knowledge transfer and information actions<br>Art 16, advisory services<br>Art 18, investments in physical assets<br>Art 20, farm and business development<br>Art 27 investments in forestry sector<br>Art 36, co-operation measure (establishing "operational groups; pilot demonstration projects) (...)<br>Art.42. LEADER</td></tr>
<tr><td>1.b. Strengthening the links between agriculture and forestry and research and innovation</td></tr>
</table>

[69] RDR, Art. 36

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

The key issues should be addressed by the evaluation team 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 innovative actions developed under the EIP Operational Groups and funded with the RDP.
- Evaluate the contribution of the Rural Development Programme toward the Innovation Union flagship, RIS3 strategy and the CAP objectives related to innovation.

### *What are proposed approaches?*

Innovation is a complex phenomenon, a dynamic and constantly evolving system that is adapting to a range of internal and external factors. Innovation is difficult to quantify and with **often 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 analysis 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 partner's, academics, managers, authorities and policymakers. Evaluators should ensure that the opinions of the different stakeholder groups are captured.

Some **possible methods** to develop this analysis are:

- **Document and literature searches**: the use of documents and literature directly or indirectly related to the RDP. This may include, for example, administrative manuals, application forms, assessment forms, existing evaluation reports and broader policy reports.
- RDP Authority's, managers, beneficiary and stakeholder **interviews**.
- **Case Studies** of some pilot projects. Methods of inquiry that focus on detailed data collection and analysis and which focus on a restricted number of participants/ beneficiaries.
- **Peer review panels**: evaluation or assessment of programme activities or programme outcomes/outputs involving qualified individuals within the field.
- **Focus groups, workshops and meeting** with Operational Groups partners.
- **Network analysis,** that aims to map the social interaction between the subjects of the evaluation including the beneficiaries.

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### *Environment*

#### *What is the legal basis?*

The EAFRD shall contribute to the Europe 2020 Strategy by promoting **sustainable rural development** throughout the 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 Union agricultural sector[70] 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.[71] *Ex ante* evaluation should verify the adequacy of planned measures to promote sustainable development[72].

The provisions for sustainable rural development as the EAFRD general principle and the environment protection and climate change mitigation and adaptation as rural development cross-cutting objectives can be approached following the structure below:

- Sustainable development is the broader concept embracing economic, environmental, social and cultural elements.
- Environment is a subset of sustainable development dealing in particular with the condition of environmental goods and elements.

In the context of these Guidelines the focus would be on thee and climate change mitigation and adaptation only.

#### *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 SEA process during programming. SEA in most cases focuses on a number of "environmental issues"[73], i.e. biodiversity, population and human health, fauna and flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, and cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage and landscape.

The advantage of concentrating on these issues and their development based on a number of relevant indicators is that the baselines and the indicators are already familiar to the RDP through programming and SEA procedures.

#### *What are proposed approaches?*

The SEA approach offers a robust framework[74]. The Managing Authorities are already familiar with the tools and processes, which has been used as an *ex ante* appraisal of the cross-cutting environmental impact of the programme. The same tools can be used for the ongoing evaluation of the impacts, offering periodical snapshots of the programme's impact.

The steps that could be followed are:

- Definition of a limited number of "**environmental issues**" (See "What are the key issues?").
- Collection of relevant binding and guiding documents such as laws, regulations, strategies, guidelines, etc. in order to collect and summarize the "objectives" that the RDP actions are complying with. For example Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC) provisions for soil do set the frame for many RDP measures.

[70] RDR, Article 3
[71] RDR, Article 5
[72] CPR, Article 48
[73] Directive 2001/42/EC, Annex I, lit.f
[74] see also Greening Regional Development Programmes Network (2006), Handbook on SEA for Cohesion Policy 2007-2013

- Formulation of a number of guiding questions per ”environmental issue” (3-4 questions should be sufficient), e.g. in the case of the environmental issue “soil”, one of the guiding questions could be “Is the RDP contributing to soil 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.
- Selection of a number of relevant context indicators which are best suited to depict the impact and change on the “environmental issue”.
- Qualitative description of the impact of the measure on the issue and the effect and attribution to the relevant indicators.

A specific issue when dealing with the environment as a cross-cutting issue, instead of a sectorial one, is the difficulty of embedding the cross-cutting effects into the programme’s intervention logic. In an environmental measure (e.g. on agro-environmental-climate) there is a clear logic between objective, activity and indicator. In the case of a cross-cutting evaluation, the causal link between e.g. investments in infrastructure and machinery and nutrients load in the water might be not so obvious, yet it is there.

Regarding relevant indicators, monitoring and evaluation provisions, the effort should be to use as many as possible readily available information and data. The Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (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. Overall the possible sources for indicators are:

- CMEF Common Context Indicators especially from the Group II Agriculture/Sectoral Analysis and Group III Environment Climate;
- The SEA indicators for the description of the environmental situation and the monitoring as described in the SEA Environmental Report of each RDP,
- If not included in the SEA Environmental Report, relevant indicators from the reporting duties on several EU Directives (e.g. Birds Directive, Habitats Directive, Water Framework Directive etc.).

The table below proposes an indicative overview of which of the aforementioned environmental issues could be the specific focus of the evaluation in the given rural development Union Priorities and 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.

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**Table 4 Indicative relations between environmental issues and RD Focus Areas**

| UP | Focus Area | Environment |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Fostering innovation and the knowledge base in rural areas | All issues |
| | Strengthening the links between agriculture, food production and forestry and research and innovation | |
| | Fostering lifelong learning and vocational training in the agricultural and forestry sectors. | |
| 2 | Facilitating restructuring of farms facing major structural problems, notably farms with a low degree of market participation, market-oriented farms in particular sectors and farms in need of agricultural diversification. | - Biodiversity/fauna and flora<br>- Soil<br>- Climate/Air<br>- Landscape<br>- Material assets |
| | Facilitating entry into the farming sector, and in particular generational renewal in the agricultural sector. | |
| 3 | Better integrating primary producers into the food chain through quality schemes, promotion in local markets and short supply circuits, producer groups and inter-branch organisations and promoting animal welfare. | - Soil<br>- Climate/Air<br>- Landscape<br>- Population and human health |
| | Supporting farm risk management. | |
| 4 | Restoring, and preserving and enhancing biodiversity, including in Natura 2000 areas and high nature value farming, and the state of European landscapes. | - Biodiversity/fauna and flora<br>- Soil<br>- Water<br>- Climate/Air<br>- Landscape<br>- Population and human health<br>- Material assets |
| | Improving water and land management and contributing to meeting the Water Framework Directives (WFD) objectives. | |
| | Improving soil, erosion, fertiliser and pesticide management. | |
| 5 | Increasing efficiency in water use by agriculture. | - Biodiversity/fauna and flora<br>- Soil<br>- Water<br>- Climate/Air<br>- Landscape<br>- Population and human health |
| | 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 nitrous oxide and methane green house gas and ammonia emissions from agriculture and improving air quality. | |
| | Fostering carbon sequestration in agriculture and forestry. | |
| 6 | Facilitating diversification, creation and development of new small enterprises and job creation.<br>Fostering local development in rural areas. | - Population and human health<br>- Material assets<br>- Cultural heritage |
| | Enhancing accessibility to use and quality of information and communication technologies (ICT) in rural areas. | |

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### *Climate Change*

#### *What is the legal basis?*

Climate Change mitigation and adaptation is a subset of the environment dealing with the impact of anthropogenic emissions ($CO^2$, Methane, Nitrous Oxides, etc.) released in the environmental elements "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?*

An analogous approach as for the cross-cutting objective environment, can be followed for climate change with a number of RDP related "Climate change issues[75]":

- On Mitigation, e.g. regarding the RPDs contribution in
    - Reducing GHG emissions from agriculture and other sources (keyword Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry, LULUCF);
    - Increasing the production of electrical power from renewable energy sources ;
    - Increasing the ability of soil to capture carbon;
    - Reducing erosion;
    - Improving manure storage and reducing methane emissions;
    - Reducing fertiliser use and nitrogen emissions,
    - Improving maintenance of Wetlands/peat lands 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 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 CO2teq avoided) should be relatively straightforward (and is partly directly or indirectly available through the RDP output and target indicators). There 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?" and or
- "How has the programme reduced overall GHG emissions by improving/extending the potential for carbon sequestration (e.g. via afforestation, peat land management, soil organic matter improvement, etc.)?"

This is not the case with the adaptation contribution. Here a more qualitative approach, based on guiding questions in the SEA logic, is recommended. For example if in a given RDP region the main

[75] DG CLIMATE, presentation on 30.04.2013, Questions and Answers Session at DG AGRI

threat is coming from 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 which of the aforementioned climate change issues could be the specific focus of the evaluation in the given rural development Union Priorities and 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 5 Indicative relations between Climate Change Issues and RD Focus Areas**

| UP | Focus Area | Climate Change Mitigation | Climate Change Adaptation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Fostering innovation and the knowledge base in rural areas. | All issues | All issues |
| | Strengthening the links between agriculture, food production and forestry and research and innovation. | | |
| | Fostering lifelong learning and vocational training in the agricultural and forestry sectors. | | |
| 2 | Facilitating restructuring of farms facing major structural problems, notably farms with a low degree of market participation, market-oriented farms in particular sectors and farms in need of agricultural diversification. | - GHG emissions<br>- Renewable energy sources<br>- Ability of soil to capture carbon<br>- Manure storage | - Habitat fragmentation;<br>- Loss of biodiversity<br>- Temperature increase and stress;<br>-Pests and diseases, etc. |
| | Facilitating entry into the farming sector, and in particular generational renewal in the agricultural sector. | | |
| 3 | Better integrating primary producers into the food chain through quality schemes, promotion in local markets and short supply circuits, producer groups and inter-branch organisations and promoting animal welfare. | - Ability of soil to capture carbon<br>- Fertiliser use | - Temperature increase and stress,<br>- Pests and diseases, etc. |
| | Supporting farm risk management. | | |
| 4 | Restoring, and preserving and enhancing biodiversity, including in Natura 2000 areas and high nature value farming, and the state of European landscapes. | - GHG emissions<br>- Ability of soil to capture carbon<br>- Erosion<br>- Fertiliser use<br>- Maintenance of Wetlands | All issues |
| | Improving water and land management and contributing to meeting the WFD objectives. | | |
| | Improving soil, erosion, fertiliser and pesticide management. | | |
| 5 | Increasing efficiency in water use by agriculture. | - GHG emissions<br>- Renewable energy sources<br>- Ability of soil to capture carbon<br>- Erosion<br>- Fertiliser use | - Droughts,<br>- 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 nitrous oxide and methane green house gas and ammonia emissions from agriculture and improving air quality. | | |
| | Fostering carbon sequestration in agriculture and forestry. | | |
| 6 | Facilitating diversification, creation and development of new small enterprises and job creation.<br><br>Fostering local development in rural areas | - GHG emissions<br>- Renewable energy sources | - Temperature increase and stress;<br>- Pests and diseases, etc. |
| | 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 as many as possible readily available information and data. 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:

Analogue to the environmental cross-cutting evaluation, most baselines and indicators should be available in the programming document as Common Context Indicators.

- On Climate Change:
  - Reports from national obligations towards international organizations e.g. UNFCCC reports (mainly agriculture and LULUCF)[76],
  - The SEA indicators as described above.
  - Relevant Common Context Indicators e.g.
    - 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)
    - 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)[77] 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

[76]Here countries with regional programmes will have to find either a source or a methodology for "translating" the national numbers to regional ones.

[77] 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)

Implementation Reports. Thus, LEADERs contribution is fed in through the hierarchy of objectives for the CAP and EU2020.

### *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 must be addressed and planned for if this LEADER added value is to be evaluated effectively[78] 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[Error! Bookmark not defined.] and CLLD common uidance[77].

### *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 LDS[79]. This LDS must contain descriptions of its own arrangements for monitoring and evaluation and of the associated LAG capacity[80], in effect an LDS evaluation plan[81]. 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, its evaluators or agents[82] 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 Network[83]. The CPR makes explicit provision for this stating that "*Member States shall ensure that appropriate evaluation capacity is available*"[84] and this is clearly reinforced in the proposed minimum requirements for the Evaluation Plan[Error! Bookmark not defined.] and the LLD common guidance[77]. The Evaluation Plan should therefore clearly set out the proposed support to be made available for LAGs in these activities[85].

### *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

[78] This particular issue has been stressed by the European Court of Auditors (Report 10/2010).
[79] Common Provisions Regulation Articles 30.3 (g)
[80] Common Provisions Regulation Articles 29.1(f)
[81] The Common guidance referred indicates that the approach for evaluating to above
[82] Article 78(1) RDR
[83] RDR Article 55(3)(b)(iii)
[84] Article 49(2)
[85] The ENRD LEADER Toolkit will contain a section on LDS evaluation for LAGs circa November 2013

defined principles. The regulatory framework foresees programing under focus area 6(b)[86] but with the clear expectation of a wider relevance and contribution across, and possibly outwith the RDR.

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 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; there is a considerable lack of consistency of approach and significant skills gaps[87]. 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 outcomes[88].

The monitoring and data collection arrangements necessary in order to capture 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 Rural Evaluation Helpdesk publication, 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 circa November 2013 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;

[86] For a comprehensive outline on the potential contribution of LEADER to focus areas and cross-cutting objectives see the "Measure Fiche LEADER local development".
[87] See European Court of Auditors (Report 10/2010) and ENRD LEADER Focus Group 4 report.
[88] Ideally via the *ex ante* evaluation of the RDP.

- the support actions necessary for preparing the LAGs for evaluation activities[89] 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 performance data with specific relevance to indicators and targets. This should include suitable links to other relevant databases e.g. the RDP electronic information system[90];
- proposals for disseminating[91] 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 (ascendant evaluation approach)

Due to the specificities of LEADER, its inherently participative methodology and its strong socio-economic effects 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 issues[92].

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 is an essential component of the development of a mature LAG.

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[89] 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.
[90] RDR Article 73(1).
[91] Including to the local community empowering them through making policies more visible and effective at local level as is specifically outlined for CLLD.
[92] 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)[93] **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[94].

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 (NRN) or budget of the programme (NRNP) is given **for setting up structures to run the network and for the action plan/activities of the programme. The Action Plan** should contain at least support for rural monitoring, provision of training for implementing bodies and Local Action Groups, collection of examples, facilitation of exchanges of practice among advisors, networking activities for innovation, Local Action Groups, etc.[95].

#### *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 are not only **strengthening accomplishment of RDP objectives**, but also **create an added value** in the form of generation of 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.;

[93] RDR, Art.55.1 : "MS with regional programmes may submit for approval a specific programme for the establishment and the operation of their national rural network".
[94] RDR, Art. 55
[95] RDR, Art. 55.3

- Improvement of governance in rural areas;
- Development of partnership and multi-level governance as one of the main principles of CSF funds;
- Exchange and transfer of knowledge, information experiences, expertise, and good practice and related capacity building of 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 prominent role in promoting rural networking:

- Rural development priority 1, Focus area b: strengthening links between agriculture, food production and forestry, research and innovation, including for the purpose of improved environmental management and performance;
- Rural development priority 3, Focus area a: 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
- Rural development priority 6, Focus area b: fostering local development in rural areas.

Among rural development measures the following are significantly encouraging rural networking and cooperation:

- Art. 15 Knowledge transfer in information actions;
- Art. 16 Advisory services, farm management ands 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.

In addition the measures under the following articles[96] are supporting grouping of farmers, foresters and municipalities and therefore can have 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).

[96] RDR

- 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?*

As for the RDP interventions also in the case of the NRN/NRNP the **network structure and its intervention logic** is the starting point for the evaluation. Different scenarios can be applied in setting up the network and its coordination unit, in 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 territory, the 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 common and programme-specific indicators should be equipped with data collection methods, data sources (both quantitative and qualitative) and data management. The following data 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);
- Etc.

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 CSF funds. The evaluation of NRN is part of the RDP evaluation. However, the network can also decide to conduct the self-assessment, which can take the form of the ongoing self-evaluation or periodical self-evaluation (e.g. in time of enhanced AIRs of 2017 and 2019). The **self-evaluation techniques**[97] could also help to collect evidence for the independent network evaluation, but also to enhance capacities of network members to improve the governance of the network and consequently the networking as such.

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

It is important to acknowledge that establishing and running rural networks represent so called "soft" interventions which cause mainly qualitative changes, which should not only be reflected in data collection but also in the selection of **evaluation methods**. The following methods can be used in the evaluation of NRN/NRNP:

- Desk analysis of the monitoring data;
- Case studies[98];
- Interviews and focus groups[99];
- Stakeholder analysis[100];
- Network function analysis[101];
- Network and organization diagnosis[102];
- Social network analysis[103];

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 combination of methods allowing triangulation of evaluation outcomes should be applied.

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[98] Capturing impacts of Leader and of measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas, European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, 2010
[99] Capturing impacts of Leader and of measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas, European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, 2010
[100] FAO Socio-economic and gender analysis (SEAGA) - http://www.fao.org/knowledge/goodpractices/bp-gender-equity-in-rural/bp-seaga/en/
[101] Enrique Mendizabal: Understanding Networks: The Functions of Research Policy Networks, Overseas Development Institute, London, 2006
[102] Bauer-Wolf, S. et al., (2008), Erfolgreich durch Netzwerkkompetenz (succesful trhough Network competence), Springer-Verlag, Vienna
[103] 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

Evaluation during the programming period accompanies the entire programme implementation and concerns various evaluation activities. Legal acts[104] describe the responsibilities of various stakeholders (Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, evaluators, Monitoring Committees) involved in evaluation. Evaluation stakeholders should carry out evaluation activities individually or in collaboration (see also the Chapter 1 of **Part II**: "Governance and management of evaluation").

RDP authorities are responsible for the provision of the necessary resources to enable evaluations to take place and for developing data collection procedures (including procedures for the collection of monitoring data). Data should include values for common and programme-specific indicators to help answer common and programme-specific evaluation questions. A Monitoring Committee reviews the RDP's progress towards objectives and quantified targets and the use of common and programme-specific indicators.

Functionally independent evaluators carry out the evaluation itself. The Managing Authority plays the leading role in steering evaluation activities and shoulders responsibility for quality control of evaluation results and for their effective use and dissemination, including to the European Commission.

***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. However, also 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 impacts[105].
- Agreement with data providers as to data availability.
- Fill the gaps and address identified weaknesses in data collection, e.g. develop a method for data collection for HNV, collect additional data for those indicators for which temporary proxies have been employed.
- Prepare Terms of Reference (ToR) and conduct a tendering procedure (if external evaluators conduct the evaluation).

[104] CPR, Art. 41, 42, 43, 44, 45 and 47
[105] CPR, Art. 44.4, 47, RDR, Art. 75

### *Review evaluation question, define judgment criteria and links to indicators*

Common evaluation questions 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.

### *Review potential data collection methods*

The prosed methods for the collection of data for common and programme-specific result and impact indicators, as described in the indicator fiches[106], 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. It should be conducted carefully 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 used in project pipelines (application forms, request for payment).
- 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.

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

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 phase[107]. (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.

***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 and impacts, RD cross-cutting and specific issues, CSF general principles, answering evaluation questions, developing conclusions and recommendations, 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.
- Collecting, processing and synthesising relevant information 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.
- Collecting, processing and analysing relevant information 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.

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

[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.

- 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.

### *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 two enhanced AIRs submitted in 2017 and 2019. The *ex post* evaluation report, to be submitted to the EC services by 31 December 2023 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 growth[110], 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 by the beginning of 2020.

### *Enhanced Annual Implementation Reports 2017 and 2019*

In 2016, 2018, 2020 and 2021, standard Annual Implementation Reports will be required from the Managing Authorities. However, 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 requirements for reporting in the AIRs will be specified in the implementing acts, and further guidance on how to fulfil the requirements will be provided at a later date. As shown in the table below, in addition to the elements of standard AIRs, supplementary analytical requirements on the progress of the programmes will form part of enhanced AIRs. A functioning M&E system that produces the required data and reports must be in place and in addition, certain evaluations should have been 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.

**Table 6 Required elements of the Annual Implementation Reports**

[Table to be inserted after finalisation of related implementing acts]

In addition to the compulsory reporting of evaluation activities and results and the publication of evaluation reports, programme authorities may prepare shorter versions or extracts of evaluation reports in order to provide a "user friendly" source of information, helpful for a broader spectrum of rural development stakeholders and policy decision makers. These reports could be disseminated using 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

# 7 PART III: TOOLBOX

**Proposed contents** (under development):

- Indicative template for Evaluation Plan as part of the RDP (mandatory)
- Indicative template for Terms of Reference for Evaluation during the programming period
- Indicative template for Annual Work Plan (not mandatory)
- Indicative structure of evaluation chapter in AIR (to be developed when implementing acts are published)
- A generic time bound plan for conducting an external evaluation
- Exemplary budgets for evaluation tasks

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