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National Monitoring and Evaluation Network for Rural Development Policies

Organisation of Ongoing Evaluation



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1. Aims of the Working Paper

Ever increasingly more, the institutions, stakeholders and representatives of civil society involved directly or indirectly in the planning processes express the need to know the effects deriving from the implementation of rural development policy both in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the intervention instruments currently used and to demonstrate the socio-economic and environmental results and impacts thereof.

Precisely in this direction evaluation can make an important contribution, favouring the development of a “good policy,” as is also underlined by EU regulations and the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework guidelines (CMEF). Evaluation is in fact the place where critical points concerning the course of the programme are evidenced (in terms of both process and effects), and is the point of departure for the actors involved for improving the quality of the implementation of the programme, possibly making changes in it and improving subsequent planning.

As regards the evaluation activities, the regulations on rural development for the 2007-2013 planning period provide for the introduction of the ongoing evaluation of the programmes. As in the previous planning period, the evaluation is conducted by an independent evaluator under the responsibility of the RDP Managing Authority, which identifies criteria and awarding modalities.

In particular, the regulations, while not explicitly setting a time limit for the selection of the independent evaluator, also provide that, beginning from 2008, each Managing Authority shall report on the progress of the ongoing evaluations in the Annual Progress Report (ex art. 82 EC Regulation 1698/2005), in this way suggesting a “virtuous” course, which provides for the selection of the evaluator during the first year of implementation of the programme. Such process should ensure the realisation of a midterm evaluation report at the end of 2010 and an ex post evaluation report at the end of 2015.¹

The novelty is evidently not absolute and does not merely represent a new modality to satisfy the cognitive needs of the Commission, but has implications of

¹ It must be remembered that, among the evaluation activities that the Managing Authority must take into consideration, the ex post evaluation of the RDPs co-funded by the EAGGF-Guarantee Section in the 2000-2006 planning period is also included. For further information see European Commission (2008).

an organisational nature deriving from the fact that it affirms and consolidates certain concepts able to favour the satisfaction of the prerequisite of quality:

- evaluation is an activity that accompanies the programme in the course of its implementation and therefore is not merely a product (represented by the evaluation report), but a process that is realised over time;
- even though accompanying the implementation of the programme, evaluation must not be limited to analysing the “processes,” but must also point out, describe and – whenever possible – measure the “effects” deriving from the actuation of the intervention measures;
- the evaluation of a programme is a complex activity, for which reason it is necessary to provide for a timeframe that is suitable for completing the different phases thereof;
- in order to carry out evaluation activities, is necessary to dispose of different typologies of information. The availability of data deriving from monitoring² is an indispensable – though in itself insufficient – condition for evaluating the effects of the intervention measures funded under the RDPs. In fact, most of the time this activity requires the direct observation of the phenomena.

Therefore, the aims of this working paper are as follows:

- to provide indications to the RDP Managing Authorities on how to best organise evaluation activities;
- to contribute to the formation of a shared vision of evaluation as a useful and necessary activity for the formulation and reorientation of the RDP planning and management processes;
- to support the RDP Managing Authorities in the identification of a concrete evaluation need;
- to create the conditions so that the results of the evaluations can be utilised and therefore satisfy the prerequisite of quality, where quality must not be understood just in terms of the quality of the data and methodologies used, but also in terms of the capacity of the results to generate a value added in terms of knowledge for the actors interested in the effects of rural development policy.

While pursuing these objectives, the nature of the document is to provide direction, and therefore is not binding on the RDP Managing Authorities,

² For further information see Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies (2008).

particularly as regards indications of an organisational type, which can be modulated in terms of regional specificities and needs.

Box 1 – Deadlines provided for the different evaluation activities

Delivery of ex post Evaluation Report RDP 2000-06 (EAGGF – Guarantee Section): <i>Responsible party: Independent Evaluator</i>	31/12/2008
Assignment of Ongoing Evaluation RDP 2007-13: <i>Responsible party: Managing Authority</i>	31/12/2008
Account of Evaluation Activity Performed by Evaluator (included in the Annual Progress Report): <i>Responsible party: Managing Authority</i>	30/06/2008-2013
Delivery of Midterm Evaluation Report RDP 2007-13: <i>Responsible party: Independent Evaluator</i>	31/12/2010
Delivery of ex post Evaluation Report RDP 2007-13: <i>Responsible party: Independent Evaluator</i>	31/12/2015

2. “Governance” of Ongoing Evaluation

The EU guidelines on ongoing evaluation evidence how the latter includes “*all the evaluation activities to be carried out during the whole programming period, comprising ex-ante, mid-term, and ex-post evaluation as well as any other evaluation-related activity the programme authority may find useful for improving their programme management. This includes the interaction between evaluation activities, the compilation and refinement of indicators, and data collection.*”³

In order to obtain usable results from the evaluation activities it is fundamental for the Managing Authority of the programme to “govern” the evaluation.

To govern the evaluation means, in the first place, to express a clear evaluation need of its own, which evidently indicates the need, on the part of whomever manages the programme, to have specific cognitive answers pertaining to the peculiar characteristics of the territory, actors, and institutional, economic and social structures and relations.

The political decision-makers, as well as those who award or manage the activity of evaluation, must be aware of having to require quality answers of whomever

³ European Commission (2006b), p. 10.

performs the evaluation activity, where quality must be understood in terms of methodological soundness, comprehensibility and usability.

Equally important is the capacity on the part of the administration to ensure confrontation, direct or indirect, with the evaluator concerning the object of the evaluation, data and methods used, results and any recommendations.

At the same time, it is also necessary to provide the evaluator with conditions allowing the same to carry out his (or her) activities in the best possible way, ensuring the necessary resources (time and budget), availability of data, possibility to relate with representatives of the Managing Authority, possibility to contact the beneficiaries, etc.

Finally, it is important to create conditions guaranteeing an adequate dissemination of the results of the evaluations in Monitoring Committees and on other public occasions.

In this sense, it is imperative to have the involvement of the social and economic forces present in the territory and to identify modalities of participation in order to guarantee an adequate degree of involvement and continuity of this process in all phases of the evaluation cycle.

In order to favour the satisfaction of the above-mentioned conditions, it may be opportune to provide for the setting up of:

- a "RDP Monitoring and Evaluation Unit" composed of Managing Authority functionaries;
- a "RDP Evaluation Steering Group," whose composition may vary in accordance with its predominant function and whose creation is also provided for in the guidance documents of the Commission.

These two subjects fill different but complementary roles: their collaboration and the combination of their respective responsibilities in accordance with the organisational needs of the different Managing Authorities constitutes a prerequisite in the process leading to quality evaluation. The following two sections contain some reflections on the composition, role and desirable division of responsibilities between the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit and the Steering Group. These reflections will have to be adapted to the specific regional decisions on matters of organisation.

Monitoring and evaluation unit

The Monitoring and Evaluation Unit should be an integral part of the Managing Authority. In order to guarantee full operational capacity in the roles indicated

below, it would be advisable to ensure a minimum number of members between 3 and 4 labour units.

The monitoring and evaluation unit should ensure:

- the setting up of the monitoring system at a regional level;
- verification of the quality of the monitoring data;
- transmission of monitoring data at the national level according to the specifications contained in the document "Informazioni minime da raccogliere e trasmettere a livello di singola operazione" (MAFFP 2008);
- transmission of monitoring data at the EU level according to the specifications contained in the Explanatory Guidelines included in the document "Common Indicators for Monitoring and Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013" (European Commission, 2007);
- management of the technical/administrative relations with the independent evaluator of the RDP, including the supply of data and information necessary for the performance of the evaluation activities;
- co-ordination of the work of the "RDP Evaluation Steering Group." It is well to highlight that the attribution of responsibility for co-ordination of the Steering Group can have both positive and negative aspects. If, on the one hand, it in fact can contribute to orienting the evaluation activities toward the cognitive needs of the Managing Authority and to avoiding wasting resources on less relevant themes, on the other hand, it may represent a loss of autonomy and independence on the part of the Steering Group;
- gathering of the cognitive needs of the Managing Authority and synthesis thereof in the proposition of evaluation questions; this activity must be performed in co-ordination with the Steering Group; the level of interaction will depend on the composition and role assigned to the same Group;
- drawing up of the terms of reference of the evaluation, on the basis of the evaluation plan elaborated by the Steering Group;
- interfacing with those responsible for the evaluation of the unitary cohesion policy and participation in the definition of the regional Unitary Plan of Evaluations;⁴
- interfacing with the National Evaluation Network for rural development;

⁴ For further information cf. Section 3.

- testing of the activities realised by the evaluator.

In regional contexts where the Regional Evaluation Unit possesses adequate responsibilities and professional make-up for supporting rural development evaluation processes, the monitoring and evaluation unit may provide for the collaboration and/or participation of the Unit itself.

The Steering Group

The European Commission underlines the central role of quality evaluation (in terms of both process and products) in support of the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of rural development programmes. The Community Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development (CSG) and Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) also underline how the involvement and co-operation of the parties in the performance of the evaluation and in the sharing and dissemination of the results can contribute to increasing both the quality of the evaluation and (including partially as a consequence) the effectiveness of rural development policies.⁵

The aim is pursued in the National Evaluation Network for Rural Development Policies by a Steering Group (SG) that, in accordance with the scheme of the CMEF, acts as an interlocutor, on the one hand able to encourage the involvement of all the parties concerned with the planning and implementation of the programme, and of all those who will be subject to the effects thereof and, on the other hand, to assist with competence the evaluators on the methodological plane and in the procurement of resources, as well as to control the performance of the evaluation process (above and beyond the technical/administrative aspects managed by the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit).⁶

The SG is set up at the beginning of the planning period and remains in office during the entire period. The SG intervenes prior to the beginning of evaluation (contributing to the definition of the quality requirements and control criteria), during the evaluation itself (through continuous dialogue with the parties and

⁵ "The exchange of good practices and the sharing of evaluation results can contribute significantly to the effectiveness of rural development." (Community Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development, Council of the European Union 2006).

⁶ "In order to ensure a high quality of the evaluation, a regular consultation of stakeholders should be ensured. The setting up of a steering group which accompanies the evaluation process and which involves representatives of different departments is advisable. The steering group should contribute to the preparation of the terms of reference. The members of the steering group can provide access to additional information; they shall support and monitor the work of the evaluator." (European Commission, 2006b, p. 8).

evaluators) and once the results are available (through quality control, communication of the outcomes to the Managing Authority and collaboration in the activities of communication and dissemination of the results).

The SG intervenes above all in the definition of the Evaluation Plan, which it drafts in collaboration with the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit. In this process, in the first place, it plays a fundamental role in reconciling the interests of all the parties involved: through an action of synthesis of the questions that the actors ask the evaluators to reply to, the SG supports the definition of an autonomous evaluation need, which includes both that expressed by the European Commission and that specifically required by the territory.

The categories interested in participation in the SG are as follows:

- those in charge of planning: regions, individuals in charge of sub-regional planning (provinces, LAGs and others). It is also opportune to involve the representatives of unitary regional policy in the SG; the modalities of involvement will have to be established at the regional level in terms of the organisation of the broader steering group in connection with the Unitary Plan of Evaluations;⁷
- those in charge of the implementation of the programme: the Managing Authority, Paying Agency, heads and experts in the implementation of the different measures provided for in the RDP;
- the experts: monitoring and evaluation experts, area or sector experts (in the case of thematic evaluations tied to a specific area or sector), National Evaluation Network for Rural Development experts;
- the social forces: trade associations, trade unions, associations and institutions related to the environment, tourism, consumer protection and other aspects connected with rural development.

The following table illustrates the roles that the SG can fill and related activities before, during and after the performance of the evaluation. For each role, indications are provided concerning the most appropriate composition. In practise, it is desirable for the SG to fill both roles, even if to a different extent depending on what is most appropriate. The relative weight of the functions will determine both the final composition of the SG and the number of its members.

Given the nature of the Steering Group as a support/active opposite party vis-à-vis the group of evaluators, the choice of the representatives of the social forces to

⁷ For further information cf. Section 3.

be included should converge on subjects that have experience in the sector and professional maturity such as to be able to make a valid and active contribution to the Group. Knowledge of evaluation questions, even if of a general nature, would be desirable. In order to avoid overlapping and confusion of functions with the Monitoring Committee, it would be preferable to provide for a limited representation and, as much as possible, to avoid duplications.

In the event that a Region opts for broad representation in the Steering Group, it might be opportune to consider holding the meetings of the Group to coincide with those of the Monitoring Committee.

Considering that representativeness (whether broad or narrow) is constitutive feature of the SG, it is reasonable to expect relatively large groups, with a minimum of 5-6 members. However, representativeness must not hinder the operational capacity of the SG, especially in cases where broad representation is opted for. It can be useful to set up subgroups of an operational nature as needed for the purpose of overseeing specific phases or functions and to favour a more agile and effective functioning of the Steering Group (e.g. a methodological subgroup made up of evaluation experts, a subgroup charged with supervising information and dissemination activities, a subgroup tasked with keeping track of evaluation activities concerning an Axis, etc.).

Role of the Steering Group	Activities	Predominant composition of the Steering Group
To provide the group of evaluators with methodological assistance and support.	<p>Prior to evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - collaborates in the definition of the quality requirements and control criteria (drafting of terms of reference); <p>During evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - facilitates the availability of adequate sources of information (data and contacts); - checks to be sure that the evaluation reflects the complexity of the context and plurality of the parties involved. <p>After evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - participates in the control of the results. 	The SG is oriented toward guaranteeing adequate technical/methodological skills (with a suitable number of experts among its members). The social forces, persons in charge of planning and those responsible for the implementation of the programme participate to a more limited extent.
To promote the involvement of all parties concerned with the planning and implementation of the programme or affected in some way by its impacts.	<p>Prior to evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ensures that all parties are involved in the definition of the quality requirements and control criteria (drafting of the Evaluation Plan). <p>During evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fosters continuous dialogue with the parties and provides feedback on reactions to the evaluators; - encourages the visibility of the evaluation process in order to enhance the support of the parties. <p>After evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - supervises activities in connection with the communication of the results to all parties; - supports heads of planning as regards the utilisation of the results in decision-making processes. 	The SG is oriented toward guaranteeing a broad and articulated representativeness of the parties. The presence of experts able to manage mediation between parties to support the evaluation process is also very important.

3. From the “Unitary Plan of Evaluations” to the “Ongoing RDP Evaluation Plan” up to the Terms of Reference

In order to accompany the effective complementarity and integration of rural development policy and unitary cohesion policy, in the course of the implementation of the different programmes the NSP says that “a link must be guaranteed with the activities of the National Evaluation Network for Regional/Cohesion Policies, ensuring co-ordination with the national structures of reference for the evaluation of intervention measures pertaining to unitary cohesion policy.”⁸

At the same time, the National Strategic Framework 2007-2013 (NSF) provides that any Administration affected by unitary regional policy shall implement an evaluation plan (Unitary Plan of Evaluations) that should concern all evaluations of interventions in the framework of the same policy, regardless of the funding source (ERDF, ESF and LDAF). This process is broadened to include rural development policy, even if in the observance of their respective management responsibilities and the different rules applied in conducting evaluation activities in the framework of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs).

In fact, the National Evaluation Network of unitary regional policy⁹ is intended to and consolidate the integration of all evaluations of regional policy interventions that can give rise to common cognitive and evaluation needs. The reason for this process is to devise evaluation instruments inspired by the same principles and mutually compatible, so as to provide policy-makers with comparable results in support of a comprehensive vision of the effects of the different policies on the territory (regardless of the actual existence of a common planning strategy). This also contributes to improve coherence within the programmatic framework and to the integration of the policies, encourages the participation of the actors in all policies important for the territory and the evaluation thereof, and contributes to creating complementarity and synergies between/among policies that have multiplier effects on wellbeing, income and the quality of life.

The Unitary Plan of Evaluations should contain the regional evaluation strategy and therefore describe the “list” of evaluations that the Region intends to actuate and

⁸ Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies (2007), p. 65.

⁹ The National Evaluation Network of unitary regional policy for the programming period 2007-2013 is provided for in the NSF with the aim of supporting the quality of evaluation processes in order to build evaluation capacity and spread evaluation culture. It offers advice and support to administration concerning organisation, evaluation and self evaluation processes, evaluation plans, dissemination of results, etc.

the human and financial resources made available, as well as the modalities of realisation¹⁰. The evaluations planned for rural development policies (the ex post evaluation 2000-06 and the on going evaluation 2007-13), should also be included in this list. The Managing Authority can extend this list, undertaking additional evaluations during the planning period concerning specific themes not initially provided for. In general, it is advised to identify as objects of evaluation areas of common action identified in the NSP and NSF (e.g. research, agroindustrial system logistics, territorial infrastructures, training, protection and valorisation of Natura 2000 areas, action strategy aimed at fire prevention, economic development of rural areas, quality of life in rural areas, tourism and cultural resources in rural areas and integrated planning). The choice of the most significant areas of evaluation obviously may depend on the regional strategic choices and relevant cognitive needs. Such areas can form the object of thematic evaluations financed simultaneously by the different Funds, as well as in-depth studies within the framework of the ongoing RDP evaluation.

With reference to rural development policy, once the Unitary Plan of Evaluations has been defined, the next phase involves the definition of a specific "Ongoing RDP Evaluation Plan". This "Plan" is characterised by the more operational nature of the elements contained therein and represents a guiding document on the basis of which the Managing Authority will proceed to the definition of the terms of reference and the awarding of the evaluation to an independent evaluator.

The "Ongoing RDP Evaluation Plan" is therefore a written document that must be prepared in a phase preceding the awarding of the evaluation. Each Managing Authority identifies the most appropriate organisational modalities for the drafting of the Plan, ensuring in any case the involvement of the Steering Group and likewise avoiding the involvement of subjects potentially interested in the assignment of the evaluation service.

The content of the Ongoing RDP Evaluation Plan

In the Ongoing Evaluation Plan it is necessary to plan the whole of activities that will have to be undertaken by the evaluator to meet the cognitive needs of the Managing Authority, European Commission and stakeholders.

The most important aspect in this respect is the definition of the evaluation need. The evaluation need consists of the whole of the evaluation priorities that will have to be assumed and, therefore, of the aspects that will have to form the object of

¹⁰ For more thorough treatment of organisational modalities and contents of the Plan see the document National Evaluation Network for Regional Policy (2008).

the analysis of the evaluator, with respect to which the same will have to provide answers.

The guideline documents of the European Commission obviously propose their own evaluation questions directed toward comprehending the capacity of the programmes to achieve the objectives described in the EU Regulations and Community Strategic Guidelines. In particular, the “evaluation need” necessitates:

- reconstructing the logic of the intervention and, therefore, verifying the coherence of needs and objectives, as well as in terms of the indicators proposed for the evaluation;
- quantifying the set of result and impact indicators proposed in the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. This aspect is particularly important since the European Commission requires an annual statement, in the Annual Progress Report, of the values of the result and impact indicators.¹¹ It must be remembered that during discussion of the CMEF, Italy’s position, accepted by the Commission, was to consider such indicators in the framework of the evaluation activities and not as concerns monitoring;
- responding, including in qualitative terms, to an evaluation questionnaire, which in any case makes reference to a set of common indicators.¹²

The same EU documents require defining specific evaluation questions tied to the single RDP. Among other things, the making explicit of an autonomous evaluation need is the first level of guarantee of the independence of the evaluating process. This need can be guided by the need to:

- quantify an additional set of indicators so as to be able to grasp the more detailed aspects of the actions funded by the programme or to verify regional objectives not provided for at the EU level. What this involves, therefore, is answering questions that regard the direct and indirect effects generated by the programme;
- answer specific questions that can help in comprehending the cause/effect relations (e.g. problems of access to credit, creation of local markets and/or capacity to penetrate the same, relations between agriculture/territory and tourist flows, etc.). Therefore, the questions involved do not regard the effects of the programme, but questions that can in any case help in better planning and managing the intervention measures;

¹¹ European Commission (2007).

¹² European Commission (2006b), pp. 17-34.

- thoroughly investigate at the programme level some specific aspect/theme singled out owing to its particular strategic importance, success and/or failure of the RDP action, interest with respect to local priorities/needs, interest on the part of the partnership, the results emerged in the evaluations regarding the past, etc. (e.g. integrated planning, measures for improving quality, etc.);
- examine in depth the themes that it is appropriate to deal with from a “common” standpoint (e.g. energy, logistic system, hinterlands, etc.), therefore looking at how those policies as a whole act on whatever given phenomenon (rural development, CAP, cohesion, regional). This need should emerge even regardless of whether the policies have undergone a common planning process;
- analyse the impact of specific financial instruments of a regional nature within the framework of rural development and agricultural policy, actuated on the basis of regional regulations and using regional funds, and the integration/supplement thereof with EAFRD funds.

Also other elements that the Commission itself asks to specify form an integral part of the need for evaluation, with reference to the four major phases of evaluation (structuring, observing, analysing, judging).¹³ For that matter, included in the ongoing evaluation is *“any other evaluation activity the programme authority may find useful for improving their programme management”*¹⁴ Therefore, to reflect at the time of the definition and structuring of the Evaluation Plan on how to deal and/or to have dealt with different phases of the activity of evaluation is a useful and even indispensable activity for pursuing quality relating to the subsequent activities and products.

Therefore, the following aspects should also be defined in the RDP Evaluation Plan:

- the object of the evaluation. A generic definition of the evaluation questions might turn out to be insufficient or misleading (e.g. what are the impacts on the competitiveness of the agricultural sector?). It instead appears advisable to provide clear indications concerning the scope of the evaluation,¹⁵

¹³ European Commission (2006b).

¹⁴ European Commission (2006a), p. 10.

¹⁵ The decision to evaluate represents an opportunity for defining the bounds of the programme in terms of its institutional, chronological, sector and geographical dimension. This is what is meant by scope of the evaluation or, better yet, the object of the evaluation. To define the scope of an evaluation is the equivalent of asking oneself “What is about to be evaluated?” With respect to this, to ensure the usefulness of the evaluation the party ordering it must provide a precise description of the strategic decisions intended to be adopted that require evaluation.

including by identifying needs and priorities pertaining to sectors, instruments, specific areas, groups and themes on which to focus the attention of the evaluator (including in relation to available resources);

- the judgement criteria used in performing the evaluation. These criteria may differ: traditionally, reference is made to the effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and usefulness of the intervention measures, to which may be added the multiplier effect, equity, coherence, synergy and/or reproducibility. It may prove useful to take into consideration results and possible degenerative effects vis-à-vis the programme's strategy in terms of crowding out and deadweight;
- the areas of in-depth examination of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). Although an updating of the SEA is not provided for in the course of the ongoing RDP evaluation, it may be advisable in the phase of the definition of the evaluation demand to take into consideration the salient elements that emerged during the SEA process, such as additional objectives and indicators; aspects to which the evaluator has called "attention" and suggested measures for mitigation or strengthening; effects significant in terms of reversibility, duration and frequency or medium- and long-term indirect, cumulative and/or synergetic effects, etc.;
- the identification of stakeholders, modalities and degree of their involvement in the definition of the contents and management of the evaluation process;
- the data, information used and methodologies of analysis. Evaluation is a research activity, which as such requires the observation of phenomena and the employment of suitable methodologies of analysis. The typology of data to be used and the methodologies are elements to be taken into consideration in the phase of the elaboration of the Plan, inasmuch as they are among the most important elements for the determination of the cost of the evaluation. With regard to the data, it must be specified that the phenomena can be observed using various modalities:
 - a) through data already available (*secondary data*), which may derive from monitoring, information of an administrative nature, information stored in other databanks, information deriving from other research, official statistics, etc. All this information can contribute to an understanding of the effects of the programme. It is clear that monitoring represents the principal secondary source, inasmuch as it helps to place in context the RDP intervention measures and the areas of in-depth examination of the direct surveys/investigations;

- b) through original data gathered *ad hoc* to answer the evaluation questions (*primary data*). This activity can be carried on directly by the evaluator or Managing Authority.

With reference to both secondary and primary data, it is advisable to clearly define what information is provided directly by the Managing Authority. In any case, it is well to remember that among the duties of the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit is that of favouring access to data.

With regard to methodologies, the Evaluation Plan provides indications as to the desirable requirements of the method (quantitative, qualitative, type of results expected), expressing whatever particular needs concerning the data processing methods and calculation of the impacts (e.g. use of certain econometric models, input/output methods, geo-referencing, etc.). The terms of reference will conform to these indications, while taking care to allow the evaluator sufficient flexibility to propose specific instruments in relation to the availability of both primary and secondary data.

- Definition of products. In addition to the traditional Evaluation Reports provided for in the Regulations or required on an *ad hoc* basis for particular themes, it is important in the Plan to provide for and devote suitable space to dissemination, allowing the communication, comprehension and – above all – use of the results attained.
- Use of midterm information and evaluation reports during and after the evaluation process. This aspect, which entails a continuous process of communication and feedback during the evaluation, has great weight in guaranteeing the quality of the planning processes. This is the reason why the Evaluation Plan must identify modalities for ensuring the use of the evaluations during the performance of the evaluation processes (e.g. publicity, meetings and workshops), as well as defining the modalities and criteria for the dissemination of the results.
- Timeframe. It is advisable to provide for a schedule suited to the various phases of the evaluation process (e.g. it is necessary to consider a certain lapse of time between the drawing up of the contract and beginning of the work), especially with respect to the more complex tasks of evaluation. It is therefore necessary to specify the time allotted for completing the different evaluation activities, deadlines for the delivery of pieces of work, and times provided for the dissemination of the results.
- Human/organisational and financial resources: it is necessary for the resources to be planned in such a way that they are balanced vis-à-vis the different phases of the evaluation process and suited to the nature and scope of the

evaluation activities to be performed, especially in cases where the evaluation includes activities also linked to other factors, such as training and participation, and that therefore entail higher costs.

The Evaluation Plan will also have to take into account the need to articulate the evaluation activities in already mentioned four major phases, i.e. structuring, observing, analysing, judging. Each of these phases requires the realisation of activities, observance of the work schedule, the making available of information, the organisation of meetings between the Managing Authority and evaluator, the return of the results of the activities performed, etc.

Finally, in preparing the evaluation plan it is fundamental to identify mechanisms for watching over quality and rules for modifying the evaluation plan with reference to:

- the features of the process: the way in which the purchasing administration decides to undertake an evaluation, defines the scope thereof and available resources or the way in which the relations among the various parties involved are managed, the actual dialogue with the stakeholders, etc.;
- the product of the evaluation: the adequacy of the methods of analysis in terms of the type of data used, observance of certain criteria of professionalism on the part of the evaluator, validity and quantity of the data, credible results, clarity of the evaluation reports, synthesis, etc.

4. From the Evaluation Plan to the Terms of Reference

The *terms of reference* – i.e. the document that describes in detail the characteristics of the contractual relation between the body commissioning the evaluation and the evaluators, the requirements and expectations of such body in relation to the different phases of the evaluation, and the modalities of interaction with the commissioning body and the steering group – will be prepared on the basis of the Evaluation Plan.

Minimum contents of the terms of reference:

Statutory framework and background

- Reference to the European, national and possibly regional normative foundation of the evaluation activity.
- Description of the reasons for the evaluation and the role of the Managing Authority and Steering Group.

Scope/object of the evaluation

- Definition of the scope of the evaluation in terms of sector, geography, programme and time.
- Identification and justification of possible *focus* on themes, geographical areas or sectors.

Products of the evaluation and final users

The users of the evaluation include the commissioning Managing Authority, other policy-makers interested in planning at the local, regional and national level, and the social forces present in the territory involved in the implementation of the policies and/or affected by their impacts.

Therefore, the evaluation activity must provide a variety of products able to both demonstrate the scientific soundness of the work and to make known the contents thereof in an appropriate manner to the user target (intervening in the matter of length, style, whether technical or popular, etc.). The terms of reference specify the number and characteristics of the required products.

The following is a non-exhaustive illustrative list of products that may be required:

- midterm and final evaluation reports, including statistical appendices, databases and anything else necessary for guaranteeing the usability of the products;
- any thematic reports regarding rural development policy (by geographical area, sector, instrument, etc.);
- any contributions to thematic reports regarding transversal themes, on the basis of what is provided for under the Regional Evaluation Plan;
- synthesis of the evaluation report intended for dissemination to the administration;
- syntheses intended for wide circulation among the social forces of the territory;
- organisation of and/or participation in conferences, seminars of a scientific nature (for comparison of methods and results) and popular nature (to support a wide understanding of the results and to encourage participation and a sense of belonging).

Evaluation questions

The terms of reference must specify that the evaluation must answer the common evaluation questions of the European Commission and specific questions expressed by the Region in the Evaluation Plan. It may be opportune to explicitly require the willingness of the evaluator to work on evaluation questions that may emerge in the course of the implementation and evaluation of the Programme.

State of the art (including sources, data, etc.)

- References to information available at the time concerning the programme and its expected effects, for example:
 - a) official planning and evaluation documents (planning documents 2007-2013, ex-ante evaluations 2007-2013, including the Strategic Environmental Assessment, midterm evaluations 2000-2006, ex-post evaluations 2000-2006 when they become available);
 - b) other important research;
 - c) data deriving from monitoring;
 - d) Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN) databank data and/or other important databanks/statistics.
- Description of the role of the Steering Group in facilitating access to information (databanks, contacts, etc.)

Methodological approach

- Explicit reference to the methodological indications contained in the Evaluation Plan, possibly providing more specific indications, for example regarding *ad hoc* surveys/investigations for gathering data to complete existing data, evaluation methods, instruments or techniques meeting particular cognitive needs (if any and if the Managing Authority is aware of their existence). In any case, it is necessary to allow the proponent sufficient flexibility in the choice of methodologies so as to be able to evaluate the best proposal in qualitative terms.
- Description of the Steering Group as a support and for methodological comparison during the evaluation.

Calendar

- Deadlines for the delivery of the midterm and final report (including date of delivery of drafts for discussion with the Managing Authority and Steering Group).

- Deadlines for the annual delivery of the quantification of the result and impact indicators (in time for their inclusion in the Annual Progress Report).
- Date of delivery of the Start-up Report (a detailed plan prepared by the evaluator that describes timeframes, resources, activities, methods, etc.).
- Indicative dates of meetings with the Steering Group (with an indication that other meetings may be requested on the initiative of the Steering Group or Managing Authority).

Financial resources

The financial resources must be adequate to allow the performance of the evaluation activities in accordance with the required modalities. The costs pertaining to the gathering of primary data or the supply of specific products (e.g. conferences, seminars, etc.) must be adequately covered.

Composition and competencies of the group of evaluators

In this section, the Managing Authority must indicate the requirements that the group of evaluators must fulfil and the guarantees that it must give for the purpose of ensuring the quality of the evaluation and the group's independent judgement. It is necessary to specify that the same evaluator may take care of the evaluation in all phases of the planning cycle. In certain cases, this can increase the continuity of the work and reduce the cost of evaluation.

Below is a list of items that the terms of reference should contain at a minimum:

- indication of the areas of competence that must be possessed by the group of evaluators (e.g. competencies in matters of agro-environment/biodiversity, soil, water management, local/rural development, expertise in the agroindustrial sector, integrated planning, etc.);
- requirement of proven evaluation experience in the framework of rural development or thematic areas where evaluation will have to be developed;
- requirement that the proponent must illustrate the organisation of the workgroup and show how the integration of the different competencies will guarantee the quality of the results;
- guarantees concerning the integrity of the competencies and previous experience of the group: an adequate substitution/replacement will have to be made should one or more competencies and/or senior professional skills be lacking;
- guarantees concerning the participation in the group of senior experts;

- guarantees concerning the independence of the group: the evaluators must be independent and belong to bodies not directly involved in the implementation, management and funding of the programmes, with the exception of public institutions (e.g. universities) to the extent that they observe the criterion of independence and competence.

Interactions

The Managing Authority must explicitly discipline the interactions of the evaluator with the Steering Group. It is desirable for the terms of reference to mention the need for a collaborative attitude and willingness to discuss and dialogue, and to facilitate the use of the midterm and final results of the evaluation on the part of evaluators who will thoroughly investigate specific themes in connection with the evaluation of unitary cohesion policy.

Structure of the proposal

The terms of reference must indicate the structure of the evaluation proposal (e.g. sections, contents and maximum number of pages).

Modalities of submission and criteria of award

- Indication of deadline and manner of sending.
- Indication of criteria of award, specifying the relative weight of each of the criteria (e.g. quality and suitability of the proposal and evaluation group, price, etc.).
- Indication of any admission restrictions and reasons for exclusion (e.g. conflicts of interest).

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- Council of the European Union (2006), Council Decision of 20 February 2006 on Community strategic guidelines for rural development (programming period 2007 to 2013). 2006/144/EC.
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- European Commission (2006a), *Manual of the Common Framework for Monitoring and Evaluation. Guideline Document 2007-2013* (http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/eval/index_en.htm).
- European Commission (2006b), *Common Framework for Monitoring and Evaluation. Guidance note B - Guidelines for ongoing evaluation. Rural development programmes 2007 – 2013.*
- European Commission (2006c), Commission Regulation (EC) No 1974/2006 of 15 December 2006 laying down detailed rules for the application of Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).
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