



European Evaluation Network
for Rural Development

WORKSHOP OUTCOMES

“The *ex ante* evaluation of SWOT and needs assessment – prerequisite for a sound RDP intervention logic”

Good Practice Workshop
Prague, 27 and 28 May 2013

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1. Introduction to the workshop

Rural Development Programmes are designed and implemented in order to address the most relevant needs of rural areas in the EU Member States, and to contribute to the Union's rural development priorities and the EU strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

In order to identify the most relevant needs it is necessary

- to conduct a sound description of the RDP's territory and
- to do an analysis of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

The SWOT analysis and the needs assessment shall bring together the arguments to justify the construction of the programme intervention logic, including the composition of measures and activities clustered under rural development priorities and focus areas. Last but not least, a good description of the RDP territory and the SWOT analysis provides a comprehensive picture on the contextual situation at the start of the programme and thus enables later the assessment of RDPs impacts as well as their contribution to the Union priorities for rural development.

The *ex ante* evaluation accompanies the development of RDPs and starts already at the stage of the development of the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment. It has furthermore the role to appraise the logical links between these two and the programme's intervention logic.

Managing Authorities in the EU Member States have started the process of drafting their Rural Development Programmes as from autumn 2012. They are meanwhile in the process of analysing the feedback received from their *ex ante* evaluation on the SWOT analysis, needs assessment and the construction of the intervention logic. The feedback may refer to a lot of critical issues such as low quality or absence of data for context indicators, incompleteness or inconsistency of SWOT-analysis and the needs assessment, difficulties with structuring SWOT/ needs assessment around RD focus areas, and weak linkages between them and the programme's intervention logic, etc.

In order to discuss and exchange experiences on the SWOT analysis and needs assessment, to develop an understanding on common issues raised by the *ex ante* evaluation and identify lessons learnt to enhance the quality of the SWOT analysis, needs assessments and the intervention logic before finalizing the RDP, a workshop was organized by the Evaluation Helpdesk in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture of Czech Republic on 27 and 28 May 2013 in Prague. A series of good practices to address specific challenges in the development of the SWOT analysis, needs assessment and *ex ante* evaluation was proposed as the main outcomes of the workshop.

A **full documentation** of the workshop can be found [on the website](#) and includes:

- Workshop agenda
- Presentations
- Newsletter of the Good Practice Workshop
- Further reading.

The present document summarizes the main outcomes of the workshop discussions.

2. Workshop agenda

Day 1: Introductory presentations & case studies¹

- **Opening and welcome**
Mr. Josef Tabery – Managing Authority of Czech Republic
- **Objectives of the workshop**
Hannes Wimmer– Helpdesk of the Evaluation Expert Network [\[PDF en\]](#)
- **What are the requirements & expectations in strategic programming and *ex ante*??**
Ignacio Seoane and *Christophe Derzelle*
European Commission DG Agriculture and Rural Development [\[PDF en\]](#)
- **State of play of the *ex ante* evaluations**
Margot Van Soetendael - Helpdesk of the Evaluation Expert Network [\[PDF en\]](#)
- **Methodological Framework: SWOT and needs assessment as a basis to develop a sound RDP intervention logic?**
Robert Lukesch, Helpdesk of the Evaluation Expert Network [\[PDF en\]](#)
- ***Ex ante* evaluation of SWOT analysis and needs assessment for sound intervention logic? – Results from a survey**
Enrique Nieto - Helpdesk of the Evaluation Expert Network [\[PDF en\]](#)

Exchange Session – Four case studies described to participants (i) approaches for developing the SWOT analysis, need assessment and intervention logic (ii) main difficulties faced during the process (iii) main issues raised in the *ex ante* evaluation (iv) lessons learnt during the process.

- **Czech Republic**, *Jaroslav Prazan* – Institute of Agricultural Economics and Information, UZEI [\[PDF en\]](#)
- **Hungary**, *Judit Habuda*, Rural development expert [\[PDF en\]](#)
- **Germany**, *Dietmar Welz* – Bonneval [\[PDF en\]](#)
- **Finland**, *Sari Rannanpää*, Consultant, Avaintaito Osuuskunta [\[PDF en\]](#)

Day 2: Open session

Participants gathered in working groups to discuss the main challenges identified in the previous day. The topics of the group discussion were:

1. How to structure the SWOT analysis?
2. How to reflect characteristics of different territories in the analysis (SWOT)?
3. How to use context indicators / data in the SWOT?

¹ All presentations of the workshop can be found on the website: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/good-practices-workshops/ex-ante-evaluation-swot-analysis-needs-assessment/en/ex-ante-evaluation-swot-analysis-needs-assessment_en.cfm

4. How to prioritize needs based on the SWOT analysis and how to link them to the strategy?
5. How to ensure a good cooperation between *ex ante* evaluator, MA, SWOT experts and RDP stakeholders?

3. Questions & answers on SWOT, NA and *ex ante*

The following questions and answers have been recorded after the introductory presentations.

Question #1: In which part of the SWOT should Member States reflect the context indicators that were used?

Answer DG Agri: The RDP must contain an analytical table with the values of all context indicators used (common and programme specific indicators). A draft structure for this analytical table was provided to MS during the last EXCO (30th of April). It will be expanded to provide space for programme-specific indicators to be included.

The context indicators should be used in the general territorial description and in the analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to provide factual underpinning for the analysis.

Question #2: How should the SWOT analysis be presented and submitted to the EC?

Answer DG Agri: The EC expects one SWOT per RDP. The working document on “elements of strategic programming for the period 2014-2020 (6-7 December 2012)” illustrates a template for the presentation of the SWOT analysis in the RDP. This template includes a box where MAs have to insert the overall description (quantitative and qualitative) of the situation of the programming area concerned and additional boxes to describe the identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. It is recommended to contact the respective Desk Officer once the first draft of the SWOT is developed as more support can be provided to MAs in regards the final presentation.

Question #3: How should the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment be structured in the RDP?

Answer DG Agri: One SWOT is expected in the RDP. To arrive at this result, MAs can organize their process as they consider it most appropriate (intermediate analysis by 3 CAP objectives, 6 RD priorities....). On the other hand, the needs assessment should be structured following the 6 RD priorities and Focus areas, and the three cross-cutting themes. In each case, it is required to ensure consistency between the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment.

Question #4: How to consider the complementarities with other funds in the SWOT analysis and needs assessment?

Answer DG Agri: The SWOT analysis should be coherent with that in the Partnership Agreement. The needs assessment considers all needs arising from the SWOT. The strategy indicates which needs are to be addressed through the programme, and should be complementary to other ESIF programmes.

Question #5: How should an iterative approach between *ex ante* and programming be realized when the *ex ante* evaluation has started late?

Answer DG Agri: The finalized *ex ante* evaluation will be submitted together with the RDP. If the *ex ante* starts late, it is still expected to assess the complete RDP and reflect the process and recommendations in the respective chapters.

Question #6: What is the expected length for the *ex ante* evaluation report?

Answer DG Agri: The EC has not set any specific requirements in this matter. The “*Guidelines for the ex ante evaluation of 2014-2020 RDPs*” recommend to the MAs to specify this in their ToR according to the MA’s needs (e.g. limit to 150 pages).

Question #7: Is the EC expecting an *ex ante* evaluation report based on evaluation questions?

Answer DG Agri: The *ex ante* report should address all evaluation subjects defined in the Regulations, such as the contribution of the RDP to the EU2020 strategy, the coherence and consistency of the RDP with other CSF funds, the Partnership Agreement, Pillar 1 of the CAP and other EU and national policy instrument, etc. The “*Guidelines for the ex ante evaluation of 2014-2020 RDPs*” suggest evaluation questions for each of these subjects as an advisable approach to conduct the *ex ante* evaluation. However, the use of evaluation questions is not mandatory.

Question #8: How should the *ex ante* evaluation be presented in the RDPs? What parts or elements of the *ex ante* evaluation should be submitted with the RDP? Does the feedback provided by the *ex ante* evaluator on the SWOT, needs assessment and intervention logic have to be submitted together with the RDP?

Answer DG Agri: The full *ex ante* evaluation report should be presented as an Annex to the RDP. The RDP text itself should include a chapter on *ex ante* that provides a description of the overall process, an overview of the recommendations of the *ex ante* evaluator and a brief description of how they have been addressed (a table format is provided in page 24 of the “*Guidelines for the ex ante evaluation of 2014-2020 RDPs*”). A structured table for this purpose will be included in SFC.

Question #9: How to incorporate the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in the *ex ante* evaluation? How to incorporate the recommendations of the SEA into the RDP?

Answer DG Agri: In the “*Guidelines for the ex ante evaluation of 2012-2020 RDPs*”, MAs can find information regarding the SEA process and its incorporation into the *ex ante* evaluation report. As the SEA forms part of the *ex ante* process, SEA recommendations should be addressed and reported in the same way.

Question #10: If the SEA evaluator is not yet contracted but the *ex ante* evaluator is, should MAs have to wait for the SEA evaluator to start both evaluations together?

Answer DG Agri: The *ex ante* evaluator can start its work regardless whether the SEA evaluator is already contracted or not. However, both evaluations have to be completed, and the SEA incorporated within the *ex ante* evaluation for submission as part of the formal RDP submission process.

4. Case studies

Case study presenters from Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany and Finland were invited to give an overview about:

Approaches to conduct the SWOT and needs assessment

- Description of the approach taken in the SWOT design and needs assessment linking them to the RDP intervention logic (timeline, stakeholders involved, development process)
- Main challenges faced and solutions adopted

***Ex ante* evaluation's feedback on SWOT and needs assessment**

- Mechanism and forms for the provision of feedback (frequency, at which stage, etc.)
- Main issues raised from the *ex ante* evaluation of the SWOT and needs assessment and its consequences on the RDP intervention logic
- Main challenges faced and solutions adopted

Conclusions and lessons learnt

- The lessons when doing the SWOT/needs assessment and *ex-ante* evaluation
- The effectively influence of the SWOT/needs assessment in the strategy design

The following table summarizes the main elements presented in the Case Studies.

	CZECH REPUBLIC	HUNGARY	GERMANY	FINLAND
INTRODUCTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jaroslav Prazan; - Czech Institute of Agricultural Economics and Ministry of Agriculture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Habuda Judit; - Rural development expert. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dietmar Welz; - BonnEval (Bonn) and Entera (Hannover). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sari Rannanpää; - Consultant at Avaintaito Osuuskunta.
APPROACH TO CONDUCT THE SWOT AND NEEDS ASSESSMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The working groups (WGs) in charge of preparing the SWOT analysis were formed on the basis of the RD priorities and relevant topics (1 WG per RD priority, 1 WG on Less Favoured Areas and 1 on forestry); - The outcomes of the 8 WGs were translated into one SWOT summary table; - Simple intervention logic schemes were designed to support the WGs and to show the reasoning from the problem to measure design; - WGs had monthly meetings in order to share findings and have discussions; - The needs were identified changing the weak points of the SWOT into strengths, in order to meet opportunities and faced threats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An external expert was hired to carry out an evidence based SWOT analysis and capacity building for stakeholders; - WGs were structured along the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) priorities, and focused on territorial differences; - The findings of the WGs were translated into one SWOT summary table. - An assessment grid was provided to filter repetitions, incoherence, relevancy etc; - Stakeholders were widely involved in the process; - An excel based model and a need assessment template were used to support the formulation of the strategy; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In several German Länder a joint socio-economic and SWOT analysis and NA was carried out to coordinate the interventions across CSF funds; - Needs are prioritised at programme specific levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The necessary work to structure the SWOT was carried on by several internal WGs in the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA); - As the process started very early, it was largely based on studies previously commissioned by the MoA; - One SWOT analysis was developed by each WG, structured along the three types of rural areas; - One summary SWOT analysis was developed afterwards; - Stakeholders were deeply involved providing feedbacks in the process.
MAIN DIFFICULTIES FACED ON SWOT AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WGs did not have appropriate experience in SWOT analysis and intervention logic; - Context indicators and other data were missing; - No clear definition of rural areas; - To clearly link the SWOT analysis, needs assessment and selection of measures; - No sufficient time for capacity building of participants. Most of the time was dedicated to data collection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The outcomes of WGs were sometimes rather general; - Necessity to use additional context indicators to support the SWOT analysis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diverging interpretations of priorities and needs among CSF programmes; - Joint socioeconomic and SWOT analysis and needs assessment did not automatically lead to improve synergies between CSF funds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Horizontal issues crossed administrative boundaries; - Participants had to handle a large amount of detail during WG; - To reflect regional differences in SWOT and need assessment; - RD priorities were initially difficult to work with.
CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training to stakeholders during the meetings, using practical examples is necessary to enhance the capacities of stakeholders; - Key to prepare the WGs for the RDP design in advance; - Important to start data collection process in advance, in order to ensure a continuous data flow from data providers to practitioners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Further work is necessary to stabilize the set of context indicators and establish guidance on how they should be used by MS during the SWOT analysis and through the evaluation process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The joint socioeconomic and SWOT analysis and needs assessment serve as a general framework, however a more fund-specific analysis (SWOT and NA) has to be carried out; - The joint socioeconomic and SWOT analysis and needs assessment enable an earlier identification of thematic, sectorial or regional gaps in funding and to identify potential for creating synergies; - CSF based analysis and programming could be seen as an eye-opener to a more coherent policy framework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation of some stakeholders in several WGs enhance the coherence and consistence of the WG outcomes; - An early start of the process creates a continuity in the strategic focus from the 2007-13 period; - SWOT analysis, NA and strategic design have to walk hand in hand.

5. Outcome of working group discussions

Participants (Mas, PA and evaluators) gathered in Working groups (“open space”) during the second day of the Good Practice Workshop to identify good practices and quality criteria to address the challenges faced in the development of the SWOT, needs assessment and *ex ante* evaluation. Participants discussed about 5 identified challenges and presented the outcomes of their discussions in plenary. It is important to highlight that the outcomes of the open space merely reflect the opinion of participants, which in certain issues may differ with the view of European Commission. The following sections provide more detailed information on the outcomes of the working groups.

Working Group #1: How to structure the SWOT analysis?

Should MA develop one SWOT for each priority or one for all? or one SWOT for each CAP objective? The role of the situation analysis.

Summary of discussion

➤ Good practices:

It is important to make a clear distinction between the creation and the presentation of the SWOT analysis.

Creation of SWOT:

- ✓ Use Common Context Indicators (CCIs) to briefly describe the situation;
- ✓ Use programme-specific context indicators as the bases to conduct the analysis of the situation;
- ✓ Use “Evidence Summary Papers” as supporting working papers to explain things which will be in the SWOT as necessary. These documents will **NOT** be part of the RDP and their structure can be freely chosen (e.g. based on the consultations). It is clear for example that the SWOT does not contain indicators or numbers in general while the papers include them;
- ✓ The SWOT creation depends on the interaction and participation of RD stakeholders;
- ✓ Start with a general SWOT which can be further detailed, e.g. going from 1 to max. 18 SWOTs.

Presentation of SWOT:

- ✓ The structure of the final SWOT should be compliant with the requested by the EC (by 6 RD priorities + 3 horizontal issues, either integrated in one SWOT or several);
- ✓ Develop a summary paper of the SWOT.

➤ Quality criteria:

- ✓ Stakeholders have a comprehensive picture on the purpose and expected outcomes of the SWOT;
- ✓ A detailed evidence-based analysis is provided;
- ✓ An interactive and participatory process is implemented;

- ✓ The SWOT offers the rationale for the justification for the selection (or rejection) of each focus area;
- ✓ The SWOT complies with EC request.

x Less good practices

- To generate a very extensive situation analysis and SWOT of for instance 500 pages.

Working Group #2: How to reflect the characteristics of different territories in the analysis (SWOT)?

How to best reflect differences within a country/region? How to organize the SWOT analysis at regional level to allow for a PA consultation?

Summary of discussion:

➤ Good practices:

- ✓ Develop an analysis of the current situation in order to understand and identify the issues of the territory (Although there is no legal requirement for it);
- ✓ Reflect the differences within the territory in the situation analysis;
- ✓ Include regional differences in the situation analysis and RDP when they hold potential relevance for the development of the overall strategy of the RDP;
- ✓ Use the SWOT analysis as a structuring tool to break the complexity of the situation analysis down: start up with the situation analysis, which is structured in the SWOT analysis around the 6 RD priorities to identify the needs of the territory which will justify the RD strategy;
- ✓ Base the needs assessment on economic, environmental and political criteria;
- ✓ Use the SWOT to generate a good quality RDP, which will provide a good basis for negotiation during the PA consultation.

➤ Quality criteria:

- ✓ A good and detailed understanding of the territorial context is provided;
- ✓ The process is coherent, transparent, inclusive and plausible (Analysis of the situation – SWOT – NA – Intervention logic);
- ✓ The RDP is approved.

x Less good practices

- Deviations from the identified good practices;
- Develop an unreflected SWOT analysis which is merely a list of topics and regional differences and which is not based on the situation analysis;
- Develop a SWOT which does not reflect internal strengths and weaknesses
- Present only the matrix of the SWOT without any narrative synthesis which illustrates the various options that the SWOT matrix implies.

Working Group #3: How to use context indicators / data in the SWOT?

How to integrate context indicators in the best way? How to deal with data gaps in the SWOT and needs assessment? How to use Common Context Indicators in an already existing SWOT? Alternative approaches for data collection when gaps are found on context indicators?

Summary of discussion

➤ Good practices:

Use of context indicators:

- ✓ Use context indicators (common, programme specific and proxy indicators) in the situation analysis. These indicators can also be introduced in the SWOT if they complement the information provided in the SWOT;
- ✓ Cross-check using CCIs, the conclusion of an already existing SWOT-analysis that had not been based on Common Context Indicators;
- ✓ Complement the situation analysis and the SWOT with programme-specific context indicators as the information provided only by the CCIs is not sufficient;
- ✓ Look at regional trends when defining needs (EU targets are not always reference points to set needs);
- ✓ Develop a flow chart that describes and illustrates the links between the different stages (situation analysis – SWOT – needs assessment). In this chart, context indicators could show the links between the situation analysis and the SWOT and can be used to:
 1. Motivate programmers to follow the logic;
 2. Enhance communication with stakeholders.

Dealing with data gaps:

- ✓ Start with a comprehensive research on data availability to get clear overview;
- ✓ Use proxy indicators OR consultations with key experts to support the description of the situation in case there are data gaps on relevant context indicators;
- ✓ Enhance and ensure good cooperation with main data-providers in order to improve access to data.

➤ Quality criteria:

- ✓ Context indicators are used to provide clear evidence of the situation in the territory;
- ✓ Robust solutions to overcome data-gaps are identified and used;
- ✓ The links between situation analysis, SWOT and needs assessment are established using context indicators.

x Less good practices

- The context indicators employed do not comprehensively describe and analyse the situation of the territory;
- The links between the analysis of the situation and SWOT are not clearly addressed through context indicators.

Working Group #4: How to prioritize needs based on the SWOT and how to link them to the strategy?

Who should MAs decide about priorities and how should it be done? How to link the needs assessment, priorities and strategies and how should the ex ante evaluation verifies these links in view of impacts? What is the difference between SWOT and needs assessment? How should the ex ante verify that the measures of the RDP contribute to the accomplishment of the impact indicators?

Summary of discussion

➤ Good practices:

- ✓ Conduct an analysis of the current situation (ACS) covering all the significant sectoral, environmental and territorial features of the programming area, produce the SWOT in the required format and deduce the respective needs analysis;

Prioritization:

- The first step is to sort out the needs which can be addressed by the EAFRD;
- The second step is to prioritize the needs bearing in mind the limited resources and possible goal conflicts;
- In principle there are two main options to prioritize needs:
 - Option 1: Technical approaches for prioritization, e.g. Multi-Criteria-Analysis, cost-benefit-analysis; etc;
 - Option 2 (recommended!): Involve stakeholders in all phases of the process (e.g. stakeholder-negotiation), put them in dialogue, let them put forward their expectations and needs; technical expertise is still needed to inform this process.
- Ultimately the prioritisation will be carried out by aiming at maximum effects regarding the EU objectives and EAFRD priorities, and the respective needs of the area with the least cost incurred.

➤ Quality criteria for the stakeholder participation:

- ✓ **Diversity** in the representation of stakeholders (Lobbies should be included like any other group with specific needs);
- ✓ **Well choreographed, balanced and transparent process:** e.g. how are the different Focus Groups organized (per sub-region? per theme?), in which frequency do they meet, how are their achievements conveyed to the other groups and to the higher level of coordination?;
- ✓ **Reflexivity:** the outcomes of the participatory process, specifically the draft decisions on the selection of measures are shared and validated.

Remark: The final quality check of SWOT and needs assessment can only be done when the whole intervention logic is laid out and external coherence (e.g. with other interventions in the same area) can be assessed.

x **Less good practices**

- Prioritization based on purely technical criteria or just political deals;
- To use funds as fetishes not considering the actual state of affairs; we could call this a shopping list approach; (the aim should be to solve problems and address needs instead of catching funding opportunities).

Working Group #5: How to ensure a good cooperation between *ex ante* evaluator, MA and SWOT experts and RDP stakeholders?

How can the ex ante evaluator help the MA to develop sound intervention logic? How to translate different interests in the RDP? How should an ex ante evaluator deal with lobbyists? How to ensure an interactive approach? How to ensure a good response of stakeholders? How to react in the case that ex ante if stakeholders were evidently not involved?

Summary of discussion

➤ Good practice:

Managing Authority should:

- ✓ Lead and manage the process;
- ✓ Do a stakeholder analysis, e.g. make a list of the organisations interested in an issue and assess their interests in participating, identify new players that could be involved;
- ✓ Strategically define the composition of the group;
- ✓ Avoid dominant position of one group;
- ✓ Use participatory methods to activate the group, to bring the group to make their own compromises.

When to involve stakeholders (before, during or after SWOT?):

- ✓ Depends on how the whole process has been designed, there are good examples of each.

Building of intervention logic:

- ✓ MA may wish to outsource building of intervention logic to another entity;
- ✓ Involvement of evaluator depends on the TOR for the *ex ante* evaluation;
- ✓ The evaluator should not build the intervention logic but can assist the MA through capacity building and technical advice.

➤ Quality criteria:

- ✓ The role of MA is active;
- ✓ Expectations of participants are well managed, e.g. frame the discussions of the group, show where the stakeholders can influence and where they cannot;
- ✓ Capacity building of stakeholders is conducted by the evaluator/external consultant, e.g. advising and training on process and methods, coaching;
- ✓ Participatory methods are applied. No top-down approach.

x Less good practices

- Let the stakeholders understand that their input has an influence but the input is finally not taken into consideration, e.g. consultation too late when decisions are already made;
- Involve stakeholders in discussions regarding issues which are not relevant for them, i.e. involve wrong stakeholders.

6. Annex 1: Working document on “The *ex ante* evaluation of SWOT and needs assessment” Survey Results

The following working document reflects the outcomes of a survey that has been sent to Managing Authorities of RDPs and evaluators before the Good Practice Workshop.

METHODOLOGY

A quick survey was sent out in May 2013 to MAs of RDPs and *ex ante* evaluators to explore the challenges faced, solutions adopted and lessons learnt from the development of the SWOT analysis, needs assessment and its *ex ante* evaluation. In particular, the survey intends to identify approaches used in drafting the SWOT analysis and needs assessment, to screen findings of the *ex ante* evaluation, and to analyze the effective influence of the *ex ante* evaluation on the RDP intervention logic.

Responses were received from 23 different Rural Development Programmes (AT, CZ, CY; DE-Hessen; DE- Niedersachsen/Bremen; EE; EL; ES-Andalucia; ES-Cantabria; ES-La Rioja; HU; IT-Piemonte; IT-Puglia; IT-Marche; IT-Liguria; LT; LV; PT-Continental; PT_Azores, RO; SE, SK, UK). In those cases, where responses were given, the development of the SWOT analysis is rather advanced. The majority are currently in the process of developing the SWOT analysis while 5 respondents have stated to be in its final stage. In addition, half of the respondents are also developing the need assessment and the intervention logic of their RDP. Only one respondent mentioned to be finalizing the intervention logic. By contrast, the *ex ante* evaluation is still in its early stage in the RDPs that responded the survey. In only half of the cases the *ex ante* evaluator was already selected, but when this was the case, the evaluator is consulted since initial development stages of the SWOT analysis and NA.

MAIN FINDINGS

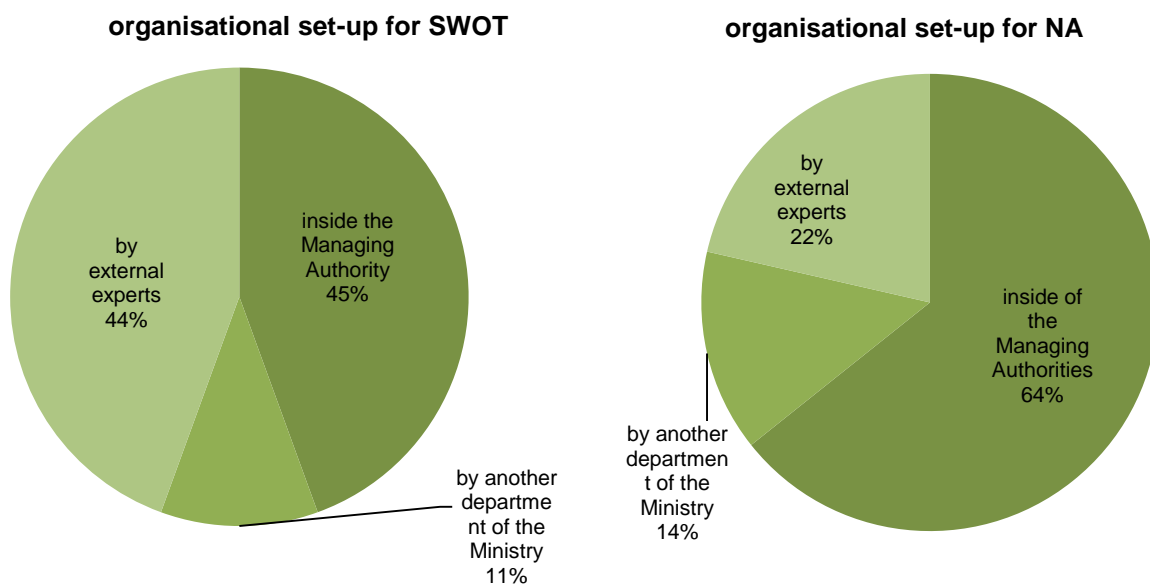
The responses of the survey were analyzed and compared. Although not representative, they do provide valuable examples on approaches used and solutions adopted in the *ex ante* evaluation of the SWOT analysis and needs assessment (see also the table in Annex 1). The main findings of the survey can be summarised as follows:

- ✓ **The SWOT analysis is based on quantitative methods whereas the needs assessment is driven by more qualitative approaches and consultations.** The quantification of indicators (Common context indicators, proxy indicators and programme-specific context indicators) is used as a key element for underpinning the findings of the SWOT. On the other hand, qualitative methods are applied also here when insufficient data is available for RD indicators.

Example UK_England:

- (1) Based on the SWOT and discussions with policy teams within the MA, a list of 39 'Opportunities', draft objectives and interventions for the next programme was produced.
 - (2) Prioritization of needs was conducted using a 'Multi-Criteria Analysis' spreadsheet to identify the strength of need for each objective based upon scoring each objective against a set list of criteria developed in working groups with RD stakeholders.
- ✓ **While half of the analyzed MAs have opted to outsource the SWOT analysis to external bodies** (e.g. research institutes as (IRES) Istituto Ricerche Economiche e Sociali (IT_Piemonte), external ongoing evaluation team (SK)) the overall majority of MAs does the needs assessment in-house. The externalization helps MAs to adequately conduct the SWOT within the given timeframe and to ensure the required technical capacity. As shown below, in the sample of 21 respondents the needs assessment is rather conducted by MAs.

Figure 1 : Main drafter of SWOT analysis and needs assessment.



Source: Survey on *ex ante* evaluation of SWOT analysis and needs assessment conducted by the Evaluation Helpdesk (May. 2013)

- ✓ **Different bodies are involved in the development of the SWOT analysis and needs assessment when relying more on qualitative and participative approaches (e.g. via workshops, working groups, reflection groups, etc.)** The main bodies involved are MAs, *ex ante* evaluators, external experts, other Ministry departments and the civil society. In some cases, consultations are not conducted on a continuous basis, but rather at different stages. Some of the analyzed RDPs opted for conducting consultations with RD stakeholder when particular tasks were finalized (e.g. context analysis, the need assessment, selection of measures, etc.).
- ✓ **Only an *ex ante* evaluation that is contracted at an early stage allows for an iterative approach between *ex ante* and programme design.** Where this was the case, respondents highlighted it as a positive feature that improved the overall process and helped to enhance the results. A lack of communication and collaboration among stakeholders was mentioned

as one of the challenges faced for the development of the SWOT analysis, NA and the *ex ante* evaluation.

- ✓ **Most of the SWOTs are structured around rural development priorities. However, other solutions are also implemented to structure the SWOT.** The majority of respondents indicated that the SWOT analysis is structured around rural development priorities. In other cases one SWOT is developed addressing the six RD priorities or rather one single SWOT for each of the priorities (6 SWOTs in total). Additional solutions are also mentioned such as building the SWOT around Focus Areas (IT_Piemonte), developing additional SWOTs for cross-cutting issues and thematic sub-programmes (HU), or develop one overall SWOT for all programmes under the ERDF, EARDF and ESF (DE_Hessen).
- ✓ **Common context indicators (CCIs) are used from the initial stages of the SWOT analysis and needs assessment.** Respondents have expressed that they have employed all or most of the available (draft) CCIs from the beginning of the process. It was also stated that CCIs were integrated into the SWOT and needs assessment when those were about to be finalized (DE-Hessen, UK_England, EE). Most of the respondents have mentioned data gaps in some of the CCIs, particularly on the environmental indicators. An issue that is also often raised in the *ex ante* evaluation.
- ✓ **Proxy indicators are used as a solution to overcome data gaps on CCIs,** particularly in the field of environmental indicators, sectorial indicators (agricultural and forestry productivity (LV)) and when rural disaggregated data is required. For the development and selection of an adequate proxy indicator, one respondent indicated that the National Rural Network is collaborating in this matter (IT_Piemonte).
- ✓ **Programme-specific context indicators are evidently broadly employed in the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment to cover the specificities of the territory and to allow the analysis at lower territorial levels.** This was mentioned for instance for indicators related with land consolidation, international trade, level of market-oriented farms or short supply chains.
- ✓ **The *ex ante* evaluation of the SWOT and NA has raised mainly issues on poor coherence, evidence-base, stakeholder participation and objectives.** A weak coherence and linkages between SWOT, NA and intervention logic, insufficient evidence-based strategic decision and statements (in some cases due to data gaps in environmental CCIs) were mentioned. Moreover a poor definition of objectives and RD vision was highlighted. The weak involvement of stakeholders, particularly in the identification of environmental needs was also mentioned. → *table 3 illustrates the specific issues raised by the ex ante evaluation, solutions adopted as well as the lessons learnt included in the surveys received.*
- ✓ **The feedback of the *ex ante* evaluation on the SWOT analysis and needs assessment is recognized as an essential contribution to improve it.** It is highlighted that the *ex ante* evaluation contributed to further improve the SWOT and NAs by addressing the comments provided by the *ex ante* evaluator.

Table 2: SWOT analysis and needs assessment – What are the experiences of the stakeholders?

	DIFFICULTIES	SOLUTIONS	LESSONS LEARNT
DATA & INDICATORS	<p>Regional disaggregated data (at least at NUTS III) are limited. The use of the national definition of rural areas has an impact on the methodology that is used for relevant indicators applicable at rural area level.</p> <p>Primary data collection from different official sources and their analysis (e.g. time gaps, association and consistency issues).</p> <p>The indicators (including CCIs) are not sufficient to achieve a coherent and valuable SWOT (lack of information, gaps, non-intuitive information, etc.). So, the qualitative information is critical for developing the SWOT.</p> <p>More common context indicators are not sufficient to completely describe the rural issues.</p> <p>Lack of an alternative solution in formulating and delivering proxy and additional indicators, given that <i>ex ante</i> evaluator is not contracted yet and the only source for delivering data is the National Institute of Statistic.</p> <p>Collect and process information about environmental issues.</p>	<p>→ Regional disaggregated data was used.</p> <p>→ Close cooperation with the SWOT drafter in the identification of technical solutions on methodologies and data.</p> <p>→ Quantitative analysis was complemented by assessment of experts.</p> <p>→ Develop programme-specific indicators.</p> <p>→ The programming Authority ensures that all necessary information is present</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The role of the context indicators must be reconsidered. They are certainly a value and objective support, but they cannot become the basis of the SWOT because they are not well adapted to the special situation of each region. 2. To have strong justification basement (information, analysis, investigations) is a good advantage for decision-making process. 3. More frequent meetings and improved communication of working groups. 4. Make the process interactive and integrated. Many of the objectives for the intervention logic were identified through the needs assessment process. However, discussion on developing the intervention logic has challenged the need for some objectives, or helped revise them, which feeds back into further revision of the SWOT and needs assessment. 5. It can be difficult to see how all the stages fit together and how all the relevant documentation produced throughout this process can be integrated and presented as part of a package for the new Programme Document. Sharing information with other MAs to get ideas for how they structure theirs is helpful. 6. Clear guidelines on an early stages are necessary
METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES	<p>Identification of an adequate methodology and structure (e.g. overall SWOT or several) to develop the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment.</p> <p>Combination of a linear and integrated logic at the same time.</p> <p>Difficult to define the object of analysis (RDP territory? Agri-forestry sector?), and its internal and external environment for SWOT (specific for each priority).</p> <p>Identification of the links of the SWOT analysis with objectives in the intervention logic.</p> <p>The fixed priorities and more or less fixed focus areas, measures and operations do not fully correlate with the needs of rural areas.</p> <p>Prioritisation of the needs.</p> <p>Inclusion of data in the SWOT, or just references supporting data in the needs assessment.</p>	<p>→ Handy guidelines on SWOT analysis and needs assessment.</p> <p>→ Use of a linear and an integrated logic.</p> <p>→ Focus on our strategic goals related to Union priorities and objectives.</p> <p>→ The SWOT tables summarise fairly high level issues but do not themselves include statistics. They cross-refer to other evidence in the needs assessment and supporting summary papers.</p> <p>→ Use Information provided by the Evaluation Helpdesk</p>	
ORGANIZING THE PROCESS	<p>Harmonization and integration of different views of stakeholders (views can be conflicting, sometimes a fact can be seen as a weakness and simultaneously as a strength – subjectivity of SWOT analysis, difficult to have just a SWOT for all the programme).</p> <p>Lack of communication between stakeholders.</p>	<p>→ Organization of meetings and reach a common agreement, involving external experts including <i>ex ante</i> evaluators; use different approaches to obtain a SWOT analysis supported by stakeholders; improving dialogue (workgroups, presentations, etc.).</p>	

Table 3: Ex ante evaluation’s feedback on SWOT and NA

	ISSUES RAISED	SOLUTIONS	LESSONS LEARNT
Ex ante feedback on SWOT analysis	<p>Issues identified in the SWOT analysis were not supported by evidence.</p> <p>Lack of coherence between the SWOT with context indicators and objectives for intervention.</p> <p>Common context indicators are not fully useful for the SWOT analysis.</p> <p>Need to create clearer links between every strength, weakness, opportunity, threat with the situation analysis.</p> <p>Issues are too generalized. There is no clear design of the SWOT (e.g. listed opportunities were not opportunities, etc.)</p> <p>Regrouping internal and external aspects of SWOT, based on possibilities to influence them by RDP.</p> <p>Poor the definition of objectives.</p> <p>Poor description of the RDP vision.</p> <p>Poor prioritisation of SWOT elements.</p> <p>Missing uniform standards.</p> <p>Missing the sources of references/sources of information</p> <p>Missing overview about the environmental situation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Revision of the SWOT to provide clearer references to supporting evidence, or amending the SWOT where points appear unsupported. → Clarify the references between the elements, or adding supplementary evidence wherever the context indicators do not specifically address the points in the SWOT. The linkages between the context analysis and SWOT were strengthened. → Enrich SWOT justification with missing common context indicators. → Move from changing several SWOTs towards a one common SWOT and justify priorities. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clear understanding and justification for real needs of rural development and environment issues avoiding influence from exact stakeholder groups favours. 2. SWOT analysis and needs assessment are very important part of programming. 3. Good SWOT and needs assessment are a must for any public programme. 4. Clear guidelines on an early stages are necessary
Ex ante feedback on needs assessment	<p>Parts of the NA were not clearly referenced to existing evidence and did not join up with the SWOT and/or all objectives listed for the intervention logic chains.</p> <p>Increase the emphasis on external experts' opinion and proposals for needs assessment on different field of rural development and especially on environment issues based on situation analysis.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Revision of the NA to make clearer references and linkages between each stage, and to provide an overall narrative on the need for intervention in each of the 6 objectives. → Developing of needs assessment, improving intervention logic through organizing work discussions. → Elaboration of a special table proving all the necessary linkages between SWOT, needs assessment and selected measures. 	

7. Annex 2: List of workshop participants

	Name	First Name	Country	Organisation
1.	ASPARUHOV	Anton	Ministry of Agriculture and Food	BG
2.	PETROVA	Tatyana	Ministry of Agriculture and Food	BG
3.	FOUSOVÁ	Barbora	Ministry of Agriculture	CZ
4.	HRDLICKOVA	Anna	Ministry of Agriculture	CZ
5.	KUBŮ	Alena	Ministry of Agriculture	CZ
6.	PAGE	Alex	MZE	CZ
7.	PODŠKUBKOVÁ	Tereza	Ministry of Agriculture	CZ
8.	VLASAKOVA	Veronika	Ministry of Agriculture	CZ
9.	PRAZAN	Jaroslav	UZEI	CZ
10.	PRAZAKOVA	Eva	Paying Agency -	CZ
11.	NOVOPACKÝ	Jan	Paying Agency -	CZ
12.	SUSOVÁ	Kateřina	Ministry of Agriculture	CZ
13.	LANDA	Ivan	Ministry of Agriculture	CZ
14.	WELZ	Dietmar	BonnEval	DE
15.	KVISTGAARD	Morten	Evaluators.EU	DK
16.	KVISTGAARD	Lea	Evaluators.EU	DK
17.	CHATZIPANTELI	Sofia	MA of RDP	EL
18.	FOUNTI	Eleni	SPEED S.A	EL
19.	SAN SEGUNDO	Patricia	TRAGSATEC	ES
20.	COTO	Maria	RED2RED	ES
21.	HABUDA	Judit	KEMET 2011 Zrt.	HU
22.	CZENE	Zsolt	NAERDI	HU
23.	KUKELY	Gyorgy	Terra Studio Ltd	HU
24.	BARWISE	Nick	Ministry of Agriculture	IE
25.	FITZPATRICK	Jim	Fitzpatrick Associates	IE
26.	CRISTIANO	Simona	INEA - National RD Network	IT
27.	MERY	Pampaluna	Regione Lombardia	IT
28.	VIRGILIO	Buscemi	Lattanzio VIC	IT
29.	LIUTIKAS	Darius	Ministry of Agriculture	LT
30.	RASIMIENĖ	Alma	Ministry of Agriculture	LT
31.	BENGA	Elita	Institute of Agrarian Economics	LV
32.	GRINBERGA	Maruta	Ministry of Agriculture	LV
33.	LAKOVSKIS	Peteris	Institute of Agrarian Economics	LV
34.	NURZYNSKA	Iwona	Institute of Rural and Agricultural Dev.	PL
35.	CHMIELEWSKA-	Wanda	Ministry of Agriculture	PL
36.	DUDEK	Monika	Ministry of Agriculture	PL
37.	NOWICKA	Magdalena	Ministry of Agriculture	PL
38.	BARRADAS	Susana	MAMAOT -	PT
39.	MOURA	Ana	MAMAOT -	PT
40.	PORTA	Magda	IESE	PT
41.	POPESCU	Camelia	Ministry of Agriculture	RO
42.	TUINEA	Andreea	Ministry of Agriculture	RO

	Name	First Name	Country	Organisation
43.	HETENYIOVA	Beata	Ministry of Agriculture	SK
44.	KOSIK	Miroslav	EuroConsulting	SK
45.	MACLEOD	Fraser	Ministry of Agriculture	UK
46.	SEOANE	Ignacio	European Commission	
47.	DERZELLE	Christophe	European Commission	
48.	FURLAN	Andrea	European Commission	
49.	KATSADA	Alkmini	European Commission	
50.	ANGUIANO	Emeric	European Commission	
51.	DUMONT	Valerie	Evaluation Helpdesk	
52.	KOLOSZ	Katalin	Evaluation Helpdesk	
53.	LUKESCH	Robert	ÖAR Regionalberatung GmbH	
54.	GASPARI	Enrico	Evaluation Helpdesk	
55.	NIETO ANTON	Enrique	Evaluation Helpdesk	
56.	RANNANPAA	Sari	Evaluation Helpdesk	
57.	SANOPOULOS	Angelos	Evaluation Helpdesk	
58.	TVRDONOVA	Jela	Evaluation Helpdesk	
59.	VAN SOETENDAEL	Margot	Evaluation Helpdesk	
60.	WIMMER	Hannes	Evaluation Helpdesk	