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# **Ongoing evaluation in rural development**

State of play, current  
challenges and future  
prospects

Workshop on "Evaluation activities 2007-2013 – Evaluation perspectives 2014-2020", Athens, 6 June 2012

# Outline

- *Purpose of ongoing evaluation*
- *The "system" of ongoing evaluation*
- *How has it worked in practice?*
- *How to make it work better?*
- *Some ideas for discussion*

## *Weaknesses in the 2000-2006 period ...*

- *Evaluation treated as a disconnected, stand-alone exercise (formal requirement)*
- *Focused on individual measures, limited link to broader objectives*
- *Substantial variability in effort, data, tools, reporting; limited comparability / aggregation*
- *Insufficient preparation of the mid-term and ex-post evaluations*

## *Ongoing evaluation should ...*

- *Ensure capacity building early on*
- *Encourage timely data collection*
- *Help establish good evaluation practice*
- *Encourage information sharing*
- *Ensure continuity of the evaluation activities*
- *Provide regular feedback through annual reporting*
- *Prepare for the mid-term and ex-post evaluations*

⇒ ***Evaluation should become an integral part of the programme cycle***

## The "system" of ongoing evaluation

- Ongoing evaluation organised by the MA in cooperation with COM. COM to organise training and exchanges of best practice and information (CR 1698/2005)
- European evaluation expert network to facilitate exchange of expertise and support implementation & evaluation of the rural development policy
- Evaluation expert committee for RD
  - advise COM on the work programme of the network
  - contribute to the choice and coordination of thematic work
  - monitor the implementation of ongoing evaluation
- Technical assistance ⇒ "Helpdesk"

## *Bringing together ...*

*Evaluators: assess the impacts of RD measures / programmes*

*Member State authorities: ensure availability of data on general trends, outputs and results; steer the evaluation process; report to COM*

*Academics / researchers with an expertise in the evaluation of rural development; other interested stakeholders (MC, SG)*

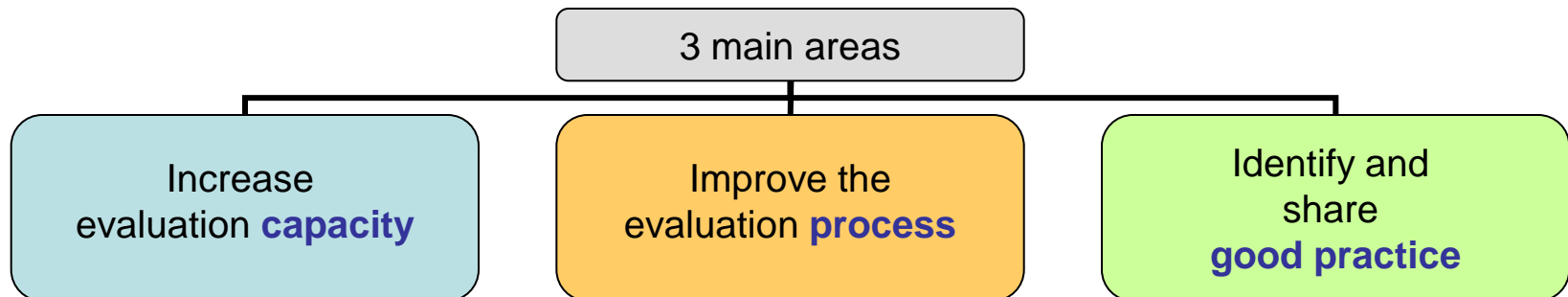
*Commission: establishes the common framework, provides methodological support, facilitates capacity building + exchange of good practice, synthesis of mid-term & ex-post evaluation*

⇒ **Ambitious system**      ⇒ **Learning process**

## How is it working in practice (EU network) ?

### *Work programme of the network*

- *SWOT analysis / needs assessment in the MS*
- *Focus groups / Helpdesk geographical experts*
- *RD country desk officers*



## *A) Evaluation practice / methodological support*

- *Guidance documents*
  - High Nature Value land and farming (impact indicator)
  - Assessing environmental & socio-economic impacts
  - Capturing the impacts of LEADER and of measures to improve the quality of life in rural areas
  - Evaluation of national rural network programmes
  - Ex-ante evaluation 2014 – 2020 (in preparation)
- *Working papers*
  - Gross value added indicator



## ***B) Other support***

- *Preparation of the mid-term evaluations*
  - Guidelines for the MTE
  - Explanatory notes on the common evaluation questions and on MTE reporting
  - MTE assessment tool (for COM desk officers)
  - Methodological assessment of MTE reports
- *Collection / dissemination of good practice*
  - Good practice workshops (HNV, rural networks, drafting ToRs for the ex-ante evaluation, ongoing evaluation, data for evaluation)
- *Evaluation training for AGRI desk officers*
- *Frequently asked questions – Helpdesk function*

## ***C) Fostering information exchange***

- *Evaluation newsletter (8 issues so far) + newsletters on good practice workshops*
- *Participation in events*
  - meetings of evaluators in MS
  - national evaluation networks
  - conferences / workshops on evaluation
  - focus groups
- *Website + internet-based discussion forum*
- *Annual updates on needs assessments*
- *Synthesis of APRs (ongoing evaluation)*

## ***What has been achieved so far?***

*The system of ongoing evaluation is largely operational, many of the initial hurdles have been overcome*

*A fruitful co-operation between the MS and COM has been established; an active dialogue among the MS is emerging*

*A considerable amount of capacity building and “preparatory” activity has been going on in the MS*

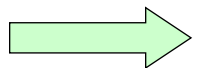
*MS were better prepared for the mid-term evaluations, but final judgement on results still outstanding (synthesis ongoing)*

*Activities for information sharing and exchange of good practice among MS have proven to be particularly useful*

*Efforts are still concentrated on implementation, benefits in terms of more flexible and timely evaluation feedback have not (yet) materialised (too much emphasis on mid-term and ex-post?)*

## How is it working in practice (Member States) ?

- *Annual Progress Reports 2010*
- *MTE recommendations on M&E*
- *Focus group discussions*
- *Interviews on ongoing evaluation*
- *Vienna WS on ongoing evaluation, May 2012*



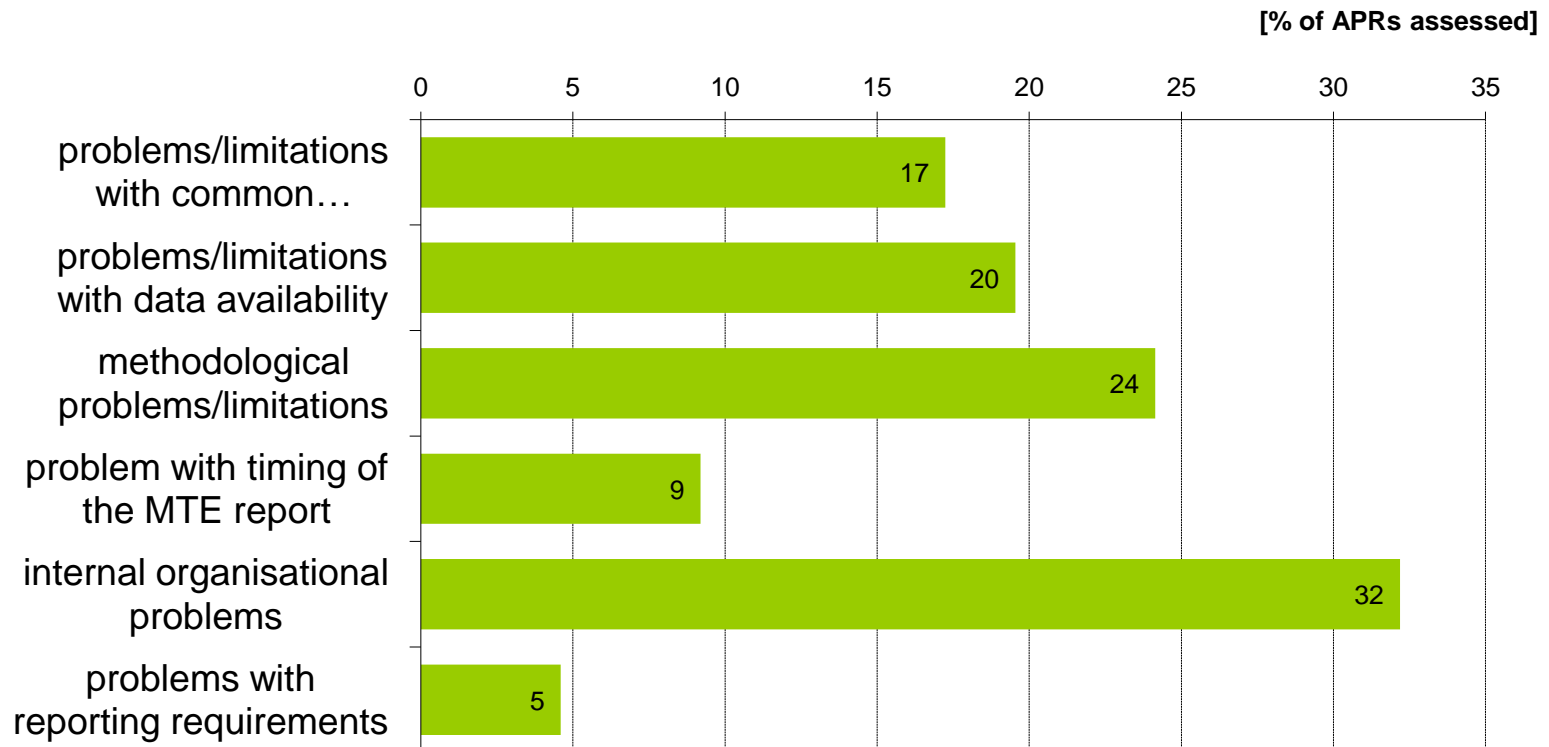
Report on ongoing evaluation in 2012 (Helpdesk)

## 1) Findings from the APRs 2010

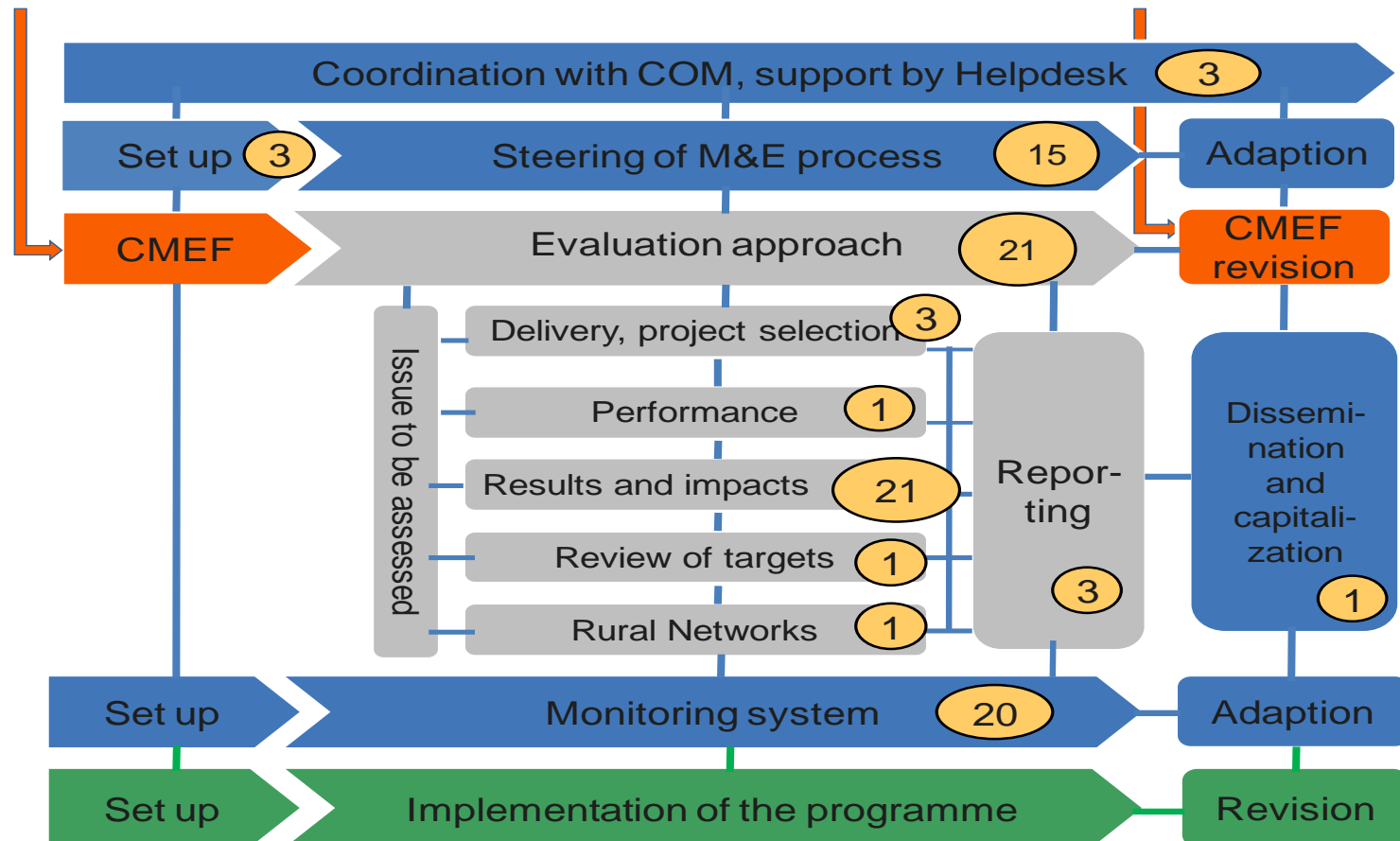
*Overall positive ...*

- ✓ The APRs show that the MTEs have been **embedded** in a **continuous process** of evaluation-related activities.
- ✓ The MTE has not been considered as a one-off exercise, but as **an element of a dynamic process** of ongoing evaluation activities.
- ✓ It can be expected that the **outcomes/recommendations** of the MTE will **feed into** ongoing evaluation and that the follow-up will be well reflected in the APRs for 2011.

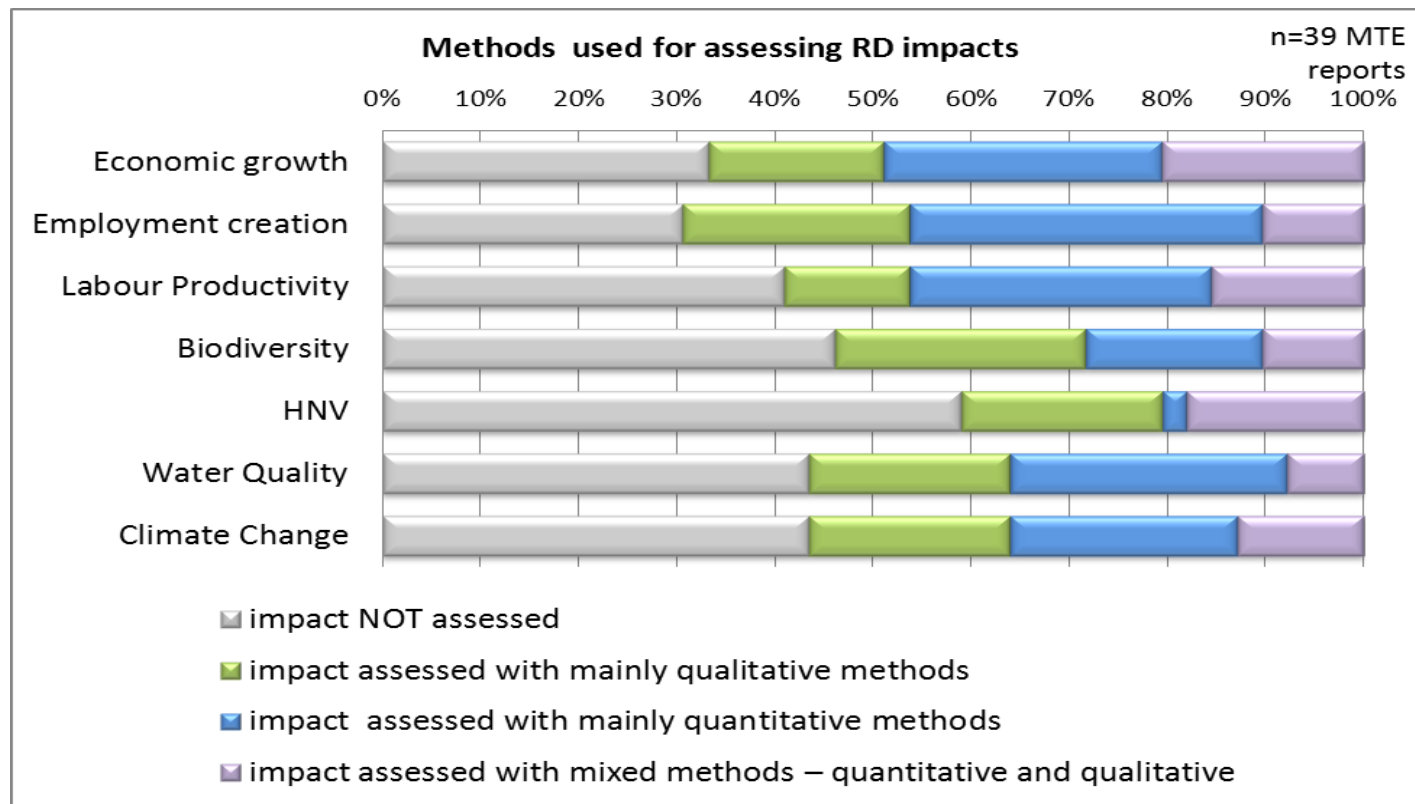
*... but difficulties encountered*



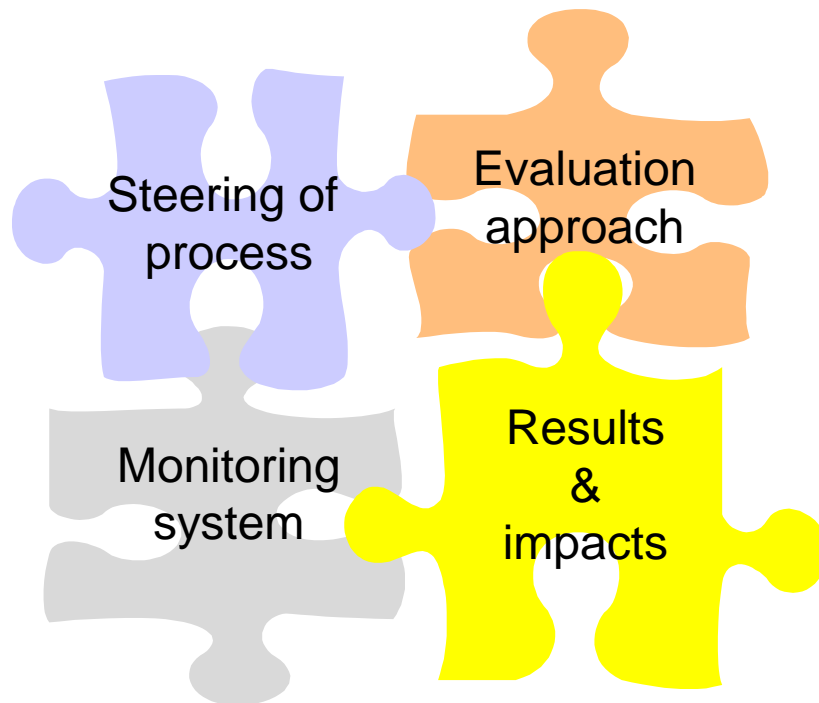
## 2) MTE / Focus group recommendations



## Assessing impacts in the MTE







Recommendation of the focus groups:

*All actors involved in M&E need to develop a **balanced approach** to tackle **all four** M&E activity fields in need of improvement*

### 3) Interviews: success factors

- ✓ Early establishment of the ongoing evaluation system
- ✓ Early involvement of the evaluator(s)
- ✓ Regular communication among evaluation actors
- ✓ Allocation of sufficient resources for data collection
- ✓ Continuous building up of specific knowledge and skills
- ✓ Developing methods for specific evaluation tasks
- ✓ Sharing of good practice
- ✓ Creating understanding and building awareness within MAs

## 4) WS on ongoing evaluation

Confirmation of results of the other exercises, with a strong reminder of the importance of **good governance**

In particular, good **co-operation** between the **Managing Authority**, the **Paying Agency** and the **evaluators** is key for successful evaluation

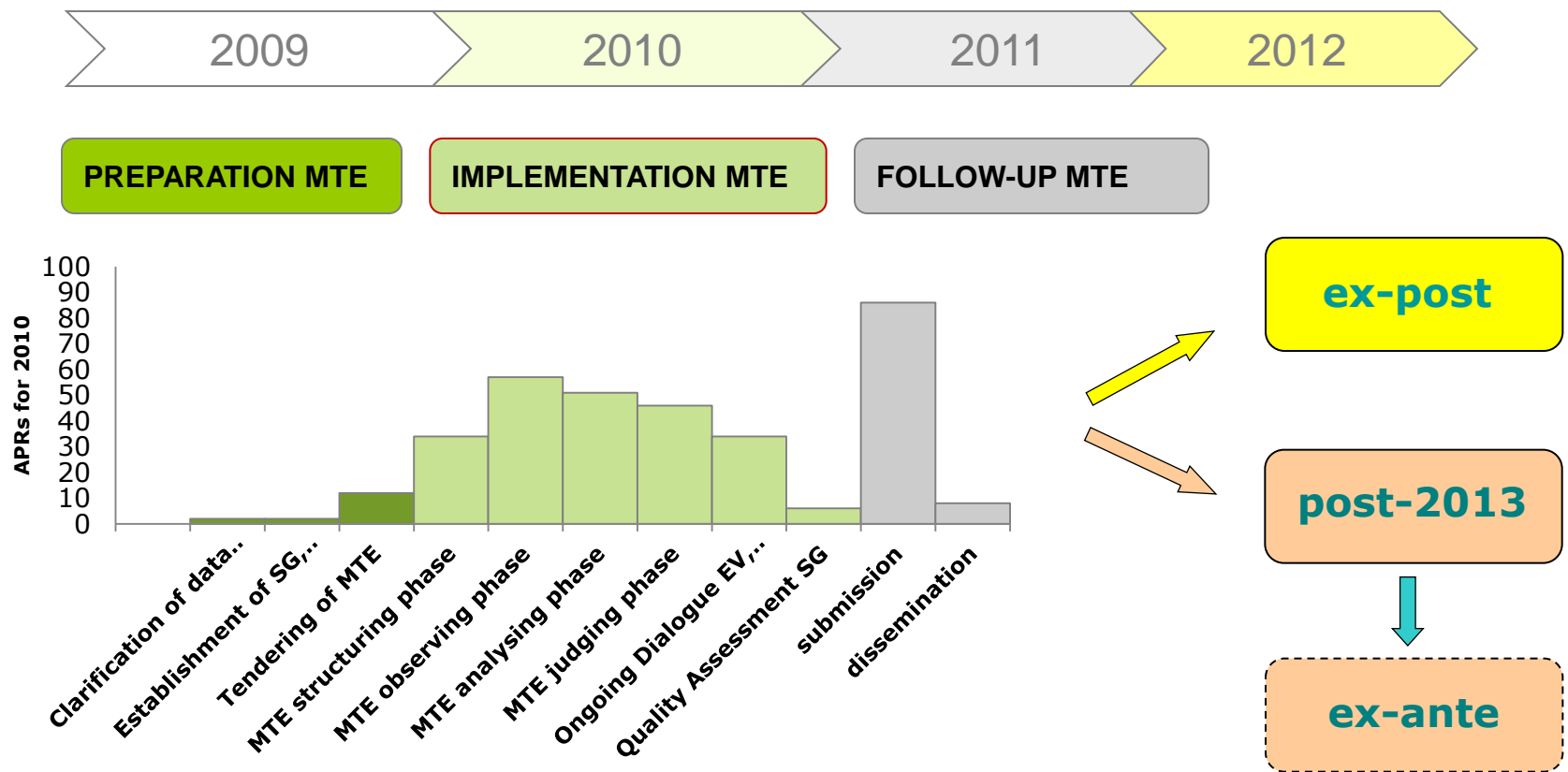
## Getting it right for the ex-post (and for post-2013)

- *Bring the actors together (MA, PA, evaluators)*
  - *try to define the relationship as a partnership*
  - *specify the role and obligations of each actor*
  - *establish clear communication channels and organise the information flow*
  - *establish an evaluation manual (agreed in a collaborative process)*
- *Improve the planning of the evaluation process*
  - *establish an evaluation plan*
  - *establish a quality control mechanism*
- *Develop a data coordination and provision plan*
  - *ensure timely transmission of monitoring data to evaluators*
  - *develop a concept for integrating existing databases (document)*
  - *establish a data co-ordinator endowed with sufficient competences*

## Getting it right for the ex-post (and for post-2013)

- Continue to refine evaluation *approaches / tools*
  - Engage academics / *experts* in the process
  - encourage a targeted *exchange of good practice* (also across borders)
- Analyse conditions concerning the *enabling* environment
  - *staff* resources, competence levels, staffing continuity
  - identify bottlenecks and *risk* factors; draw up *contingency plans*
  - *continue* capacity building / training activities
- Find a balance between the preparations for the *ex-post* and the preparations for *post-2013*
  - *ex-ante* evaluation of the RDPs 2014-2020
  - preparation of the *evaluation plan*
  - see it as an *opportunity* to develop *synergies* between the two exercises

## Timeline of activities



# Thank you !

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