

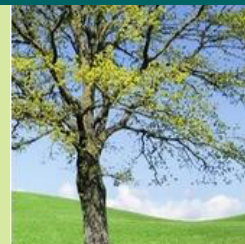
Rome (IT)  
10-11 Apr. 2014



The European Evaluation Network for Rural Development (Under the guidance of DG AGRI - Unit E4)

# Good Practice Workshop

## National Rural Networks: How to show their benefits



### Introduction

[Link to the event](#)

The Good Practice Workshop (GPW) on “National Rural Networks: How to show their benefits” took place on 10 and 11 April 2014 in Rome (IT), and was hosted by the Istituto Nazionale di Economia Agraria - INEA in collaboration with the Ministero delle politiche agricole alimentari e forestali of Italy.

55 participants (Managing Authorities, evaluators and researchers) from 17 countries participated with the objective of:

- **Sharing good practice** in evaluation of National Rural Networks and National Rural Network programmes;
- **Identifying main challenges and solutions** in the evaluation of networks' activities and their added value in the implementation of rural development policy and enhancement of networking in rural areas;
- **Transferring lessons learnt with respect to evaluation of NRNs** in 2007-2013 into the 2014-2020 period.



### Why evaluation of National Rural Networks?

Enrique Nieto

*National Rural Networks (NRNs) have proved to be a useful component of rural development policy in 2007–2013. The added value that NRNs bring to the implementation of EU rural policy through the development of social capital in rural areas, the creation and development of territorial and individual identity, the improvement of governance in rural areas, encouragement for exchanging information and knowledge, and support to the delivery of rural development policy is generally acknowledged. However, still many challenges remain to be overcome in order to support the general positive opinion of the network's benefits with reliable and robust evidence.*

Building on the positive experiences with networking among beneficiaries of Rural Development Programmes in 2007–2013, EU rural development policy for 2014–2020 foresees the continuation of National Rural Networks (NRNs) in each Member State. NRNs can either be operated as specific interventions within a single Rural Development Programme (RDP), financed from Technical Assistance (National Rural Networks – NRN) or be established through a separate programme with a separate budget (National Rural Network Programme – NRNP). Managing Authorities are at the moment approaching the *ex post* evaluation of the 2007-2013 NRNs. This exercise aims to demonstrate the networks' achievements and to assess their results and impacts, effectiveness, efficiency and relevance. The *ex post* evaluations will help us to understand whether National Rural Networks have achieved their objectives, whether they are cost-effective, as well as drawing relevant lessons and conclusions which can be transferred to future networking activities. In addition, MAs are currently involved in designing the NRNs for the 2014–2020 period. In this process, evaluation can support MAs in building up a relevant intervention logic through the identification of network objectives and the design of appropriate NRN activities which are consistent with the specific networking needs of rural areas and which are identified in the SWOT analysis and needs assessment.

In the design phase of the 2014-2020 networks, it becomes crucial to set up a robust monitoring and evaluation framework for the NRN in order to ensure that the NRN's activities and results can be properly assessed. The monitoring and evaluation framework can help to clarify what the MA is expecting from the NRN operations. The elements outlined in the common monitoring and evaluation system (CMES) namely, output indicators, common evaluation questions leave ample space for MAs to complement them with network-specific elements such as additional evaluation questions, result and impact indicators. The network specific elements should be designed at the beginning of the programming period to ensure that a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework is in place, which will support the MA in understanding the network's performance throughout the implementation period and to capture the benefits brought by the NRN to the territory. In times of budget constraints and resource limitations, the value for money spent on the NRN should be justifiable, both politically and financially. Sound evaluations of the results and impacts of the NRNs will legitimise their funding at European, national and regional level. Also, reporting on and communicating how money was spent, what has been achieved and at what cost will enhance transparency and accountability to stakeholders and taxpayers.

Good Practice Workshop on “National Rural Networks” webpage, [click here](#)



# Evaluation of NRNs: Requirements and expectations

Zélie Peppiette's presentation available here

# The shape of NRNs: Now and in the future

Antonella Zona's presentation available here



## 2007-2013

- NRNs were a new element of the RD framework → Need to be evaluated.
- Only some NRNs were evaluated in the MTE, whereas all NRNs conducted an MTE.
- *Ex post* evaluations have to be submitted before the 31.12.2016.

Requirements for the *ex post* evaluation

- (Intervention Logic)
  - How have the NRNs contributed to RD objectives?
- (Effects)
  - What have NRNs contributed?
- Identification of Good Practice.
- Draw recommendations for the future NRN.

## 2014-2020

- IL is designed from the start.
- NRNs have to be addressed in the *ex ante* evaluation and Evaluation Plan (EP).
- NRNs are included in the CMES:
  - Common output indicators;
  - Common Evaluation Question.
- Space for MAs to develop programme-specific elements:
  - Specific NRN objectives and groups of actions;
  - Specific indicators (Output, result and impact);
  - Specific evaluation questions.

**"Each member state shall establish a National Rural Network, which groups the organisations and administrations involved in rural development"**

## What is new compared to 2007-2013?

The NRN must include the Partnership under Article 5 of the Regulation 1303/2013, i.e. competent public authorities; economic and social partners; bodies representing civil society.

Four common NRN objectives laid down in Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Article 54(2).

Common group of actions laid down in Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Article 54(3):

- Collecting examples of projects covering all priorities of RDPs;
- Facilitating thematic and analytical exchanges, sharing and disseminating findings;
- Training and networking for LAGs (e.g. technical assistance for inter-territorial and transnational cooperation);
- Networking for advisors and innovation services (NEW!);
- Sharing and disseminating M&E findings (NEW!);
- A communication plan (NEW!);
- Contributing to European networking (NEW!).

*Ex post* guidance will provide support to answer these questions.

NRN guidance will provide support to set up the IL and M&E of NRNs for 2014-2020.

- Guidance fiche on NRNs for MAs.
- NRN toolkit (ENRD).



## What are the key issues for *ex post* evaluation of NRN?

### IMPORTANT ISSUES WHILE PREPARING THE *EX POST* EVALUATION OF NRN

1. Common understanding between MAs - evaluators (Also on the terminology used);
2. Cooperation with stakeholders (e.g. review and develop EQs);
3. Identification of the evaluation needs and scope;
4. Identification and preparation of the data for evaluation;
5. Learn the lessons from previous evaluations,
6. Reflect how *ex post* results and conclusions feed into the 2014-2020 RDPs.

### KEY ELEMENTS TO BE INCLUDED IN THE *EX POST* EVALUATION FRAMEWORK OF NRN

1. Network structure;
2. Relevance of NRN intervention logic (MAs with the support of evaluators and NSU);
3. Network contribution to RDP implementation and objectives;
4. Network results and impacts;
5. Network added value:
  - Social capital,
  - Governance,
  - Capacity building,
  - Positive externalities.

### HOW THE *EX POST* EVALUATION OF NRN SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED

1. The evaluation of NRNs needs to be coordinated and integrated with the RDP evaluation;
2. NRNs as stand-alone programmes need a separate evaluation;
3. Stakeholders have to be involved in the evaluation activities;
4. Applying robust evaluation methodologies to provide sound evidence of the NRNs effects:
  - Use of mixed methods (quantitative & qualitative),
  - Look for counterfactual.

## Avoid the LEADER evaluation syndrome

"Whilst the benefits of LEADER are widely acknowledged, it is not easy to quantify and demonstrate its effects. Some stakeholders maintain that it is impossible, and that the LEADER method should simply be accepted as intrinsically positive, with no further evaluation."

### HOW CAN NRNs CONTRIBUTE TO RDP EVALUATION?

Consider NRN self-assessment results in NRN evaluation.

NRN participate in the evaluation process of the RDP (e.g. steering committee, progress report, survey).

Access to a wide range of stakeholders. Especially useful in *ex ante* evaluation & RDP design / modifications.

Assess certain aspects of RDP implementation (e.g. LEADER).

Dissemination of RDP evaluation results.







# Sharing experiences with the evaluation of NRNs

Four case studies (Italy, Scotland (UK), Sweden and Wallonia (BE)) showed the approach used to carry out the evaluation of their National Rural Network and the main lessons learnt.

[Presentations available here](#)

|  | ITALY  | SCOTLAND  | SWEDEN   | WALLONIA   |
|--|--|---|--|--|
|  |  <p>FRANCESCA ANGORI<br/>Italian NRN evaluator<br/>LATTANZIO GROUP PUBLIC SECTOR</p>  |  <p>ALISTAIR PRIOR<br/>Rural Communities Team<br/>SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT</p>  |  <p>SOFIA PALMÉR<br/>Swedish NRN evaluator<br/>MARKÖR AB</p>   |  <p>XAVIER DELMON<br/>Support Unit<br/>WALLOON RURAL NETWORK</p>  |
| EVALUATION MANDATE / QUESTIONS           | <p>14 EQs to assess:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The contribution of the operations to achieve the NRNP objectives (one question per objective);</li> <li>Internal efficiency and effectiveness of NRN task forces, including the strengths and weaknesses.</li> </ul>  | <p>EQs to assess:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The effectiveness of the operations in achieving the NRN objectives and addressing key stakeholder needs;</li> <li>The future focus of the NRN and its role in the 2014-2020 RDP.</li> </ul>   | <p>3 EQs to assess:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The contribution of NRN operations to achieve the NRN objectives;</li> <li>The relevance and usefulness of the NRN operations implemented;</li> <li>The impacts of the NRN operations on the stakeholders' organisations.</li> </ul>  | <p>EQs to assess:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The weaknesses and strengths of NRN operations;</li> <li>Information channel and platforms for exchanging knowledge;</li> <li>Internal resources and skills of the network;</li> <li>Awareness of target audiences and general public satisfaction.</li> </ul>  |
| CRITERIA & INDICATORS                    | <p>A set of 7 cross-cutting output, result and impact indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>% of actors supported by NRN;</li> <li>Customer satisfaction degree (and communication actions);</li> <li>% outputs utilized;</li> <li>No of networks created;</li> <li>% stakeholders cooperating with the NRN;</li> <li>% disseminated good practices and innovations.</li> </ul> | <p>Key Performance Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Website: visits, % new visits, submissions, registrations, newsletter opt-ins, support incidents raised, projects added, new consultations, social media activity;</li> <li>Events: number of events, numbers attending, sectoral spread, demographics, user registrations, event delivery and evaluation.</li> </ul> | <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased knowledge amongst the stakeholders;</li> <li>Increased cooperation amongst the stakeholders;</li> <li>Increased abilities of the stakeholders.</li> </ul>  | <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Level of stakeholders' involvement in network activities;</li> <li>Collaboration among members and enhancement of network expertise;</li> <li>Collaboration with other European networks.</li> </ul>   |
| EVALUATION TOOLS & METHODS               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social Network analysis;</li> <li>Customer satisfaction;</li> <li>Web-based tools for stakeholders involvement in planning annual activities and 2014-2020 programming;</li> <li>Self-assessment, web-based questionnaires, RDPs case-studies.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Desk-based review of key information (as quarterly reports, web statistics, Key Performance Indicators);</li> <li>In-depth interviews;</li> <li>Online survey;</li> <li>Workshops (wide range of stakeholders to explore different delivery models).</li> </ul>  | <p>Goldsmith and Eggers framework for networks used in the analysis of the results from the data collected.</p> <p>Main evaluation methods &amp; tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Case studies through focus groups and interviews;</li> <li>Qualitative interviews with stakeholders regarding specific operations;</li> <li>Online surveys.</li> </ul>      | <p>Method/tools for the design of the IL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preparatory questionnaire for network members;</li> <li>Brainstorming on networking dimensions to design the IL;</li> <li>Counterfactual analysis of the IL;</li> <li>Working groups for prioritization of the networking needs and define expected results.</li> </ul>   |
| CONCLUSIONS AND LEARNING FROM EVALUATION | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluation governance: Clear identification of evaluation responsibilities;</li> <li>Link ongoing evaluation and <i>ex ante</i> evaluation;</li> <li>Apply a participative approach in evaluation;</li> <li>Clearly link IL/EQs/indicators;</li> <li>Tailor evaluation methods to NRN specificities.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluation supports a better planning and design of the intervention logic;</li> <li>Key to show the results and achievements of the NRN;</li> <li>Evaluation helps to make efficient use of money (targeting main needs);</li> <li>Consider the human dimension of the NRN achievements (it is not about hits in websites...).</li> </ul>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The NRN needs to develop EQs relevant for the RDP and the NRN;</li> <li>Strive for a stronger understanding of the purpose and use of the network;</li> <li>Need for a clear intervention logic to plan annual activities;</li> <li>Important to define the role and expectations of stakeholders when entering the Network.</li> </ul> | <p>Self-assessment helps to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a common understanding among stakeholders of the NRN's purpose;</li> <li>Clarify the role of NRN stakeholders;</li> <li>Produce a realistic NRN intervention logic and action plan according to the needs (applying counterfactual);</li> <li>Develop analytical tools for M&amp;E and create an evaluation culture.</li> </ul> |



## Questions & Answers to the EC

### Can MAs apply new methods in the ex post evaluation of NRNs?

MAs and evaluators will take the final decision on the most appropriate methodology to apply for the evaluation of NRNs. The EC is aware that a lot of methods are available however, it is important that the chosen method is able to capture and measure the achievements of the network. Part II of the *ex post* guidelines describes possible methods which MAs may find useful when selecting the methods.

### For the 2014-2020 programming period, NRNs are not required to conduct a specific territorial and SWOT analysis. How can the ex ante evaluation look at these missing elements?

The same principles for the *ex ante* evaluation of RDPs apply for NRNs. The *ex ante* is meant to assess whether the NRN actions are coherent with the overall territorial analysis and SWOT, and if not, the *ex ante* evaluator can ask for clarifications and make recommendations. The *ex ante* evaluation of NRN could be an annex to the *ex ante* report.

## Lessons from MTE for the ex post evaluation

While few NRNs were assessed in the MTEs of their respective RDPs, some experience is available from the NRNPs evaluations which helps to draw important lessons for the ex post evaluation:

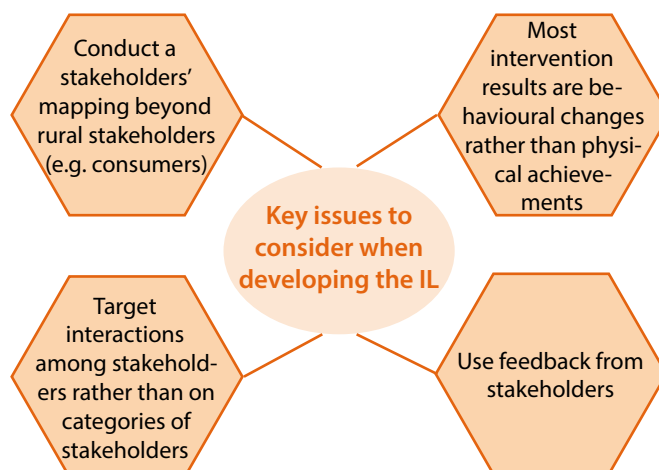
- Revisit/establish NRNP intervention logic, indicators and evaluation questions.
- Consider RD policy objectives and the improved governance in rural areas as key horizons for NRNPs and NRN action plans and develop impact indicators around them.
- Consider methods and availability of data and information to be collected.
- Revise programme-specific indicators and evaluation questions, examine their mutual consistency and with programme objectives.
- Combine properly quantitative and qualitative methods.
- Identify data sources and collection system.
- Give more attention to the impacts of the rural network.



## → Main outcomes of the working groups

### Steps for the development of the intervention logic (IL)

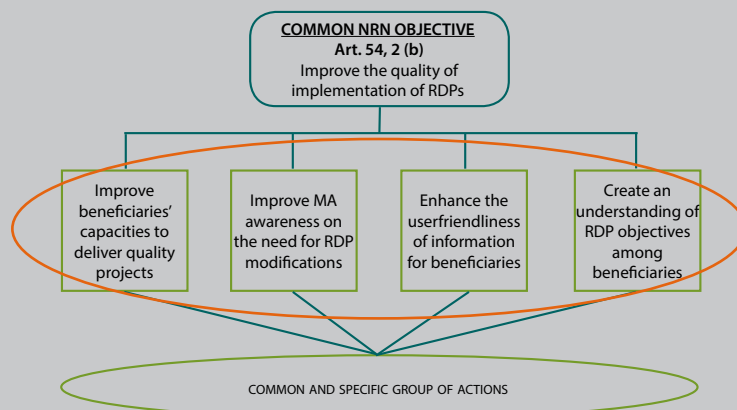
- 1 Construct the IL based on common elements (objectives and groups of actions) and justified in SWOT and needs assessment.
- 2 Complete the IL with specific objectives and groups of actions in line with the identified needs.
- 3 Identify the expected outputs, results and impacts.



### Additional level of network objectives

The common elements for the intervention logic (common objectives and group of actions) are not sufficient to construct a comprehensive intervention logic. Programme-specific objectives and group of actions will be needed to complement the common elements in the IL.

An intermediate level of objectives, defined as specific network objective, may be necessary to link the group of actions with the common NRN objectives.



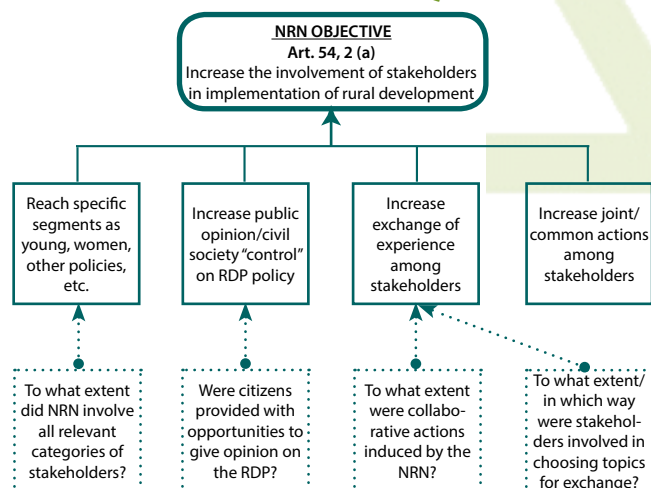
### Develop the M&E framework from the start of the implementation period

It is recommended to design the Monitoring and Evaluation framework of NRNs at the same time as developing the intervention logic. In the 2014-2020 period, there is space to develop programme-specific elements (indicators, evaluation questions, judgement criteria).

#### Evaluation questions:

- The (one) common evaluation question is linked to the four common NRN objectives.
- Programme-specific evaluation questions need to be developed to assess the specific network objectives.

#### EXAMPLES OF SPECIFIC EQS



#### Indicators:

- Develop result and impact indicators in advance to answer the EQs;
- Make sure the selected indicators are measurable and appropriate;
- Plan the evaluation to ensure data is available and collected by the time of evaluation.

#### EXAMPLES OF INDICATORS

- % of young stakeholders involved;
- Rate of awareness of beneficiaries;
- Rate of participation in innovative projects;
- % of innovative projects encouraged by the NRN.

The Evaluation Helpdesk operates under the guidance of DG AGRI - Unit E.4

The contents of this publication do not necessarily express the official views of the EC.

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