European Evaluation Network
for Rural Development

European Commission

GUIDELINES FOR THE
EX POST EVALUATION OF
2007-2013 RDPs

DRAFT MARCH 2014

This draft document has been drawn up based on Council Regulation (EC) 1968/2005, Commission Regulation No 1974/2006 and its amendments and common monitoring and evaluation framework for rural development. Feedback on the content of the draft guidelines is welcome! Please send remarks, questions and suggestions to **info@ruralevaluation.eu.**

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CONTENT

FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIR	Annual Implementation Report
AWP	Annual Work Plan
CAP	Common agricultural policy
CCI	Common Context Indicators
CEQ	Common Evaluation Question
CF	Cohesion Fund
CLLD	Community-Led Local Development
CMEF	Common monitoring and evaluation framework
CSF	Common Strategic Framework
DG AGRI	Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development
DG BUDG	Directorate-General for Budget
DG EMPL	Directorate-General for Employment Social Affairs and Inclusion
DG ENV	Directorate-General for the Environment
DG MARE	Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional Policy
EAE	*Ex ante* evaluation
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EC	European Commission
EIP	European Innovation Partnership
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
ENRD	European Network for Rural Development
EP	Evaluation plan
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESI Funds	European Structural and Investment Funds
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
FADN	Farm Accountancy Data Network
FSS	Farm Structure Survey
GAEC	Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition
HNV	High Nature Value
IACS	Integrated Administration and Control System
ICT	Information and Communication Technology

LAG	Local action group
LDS	Local development strategy
LULUCF	Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MS	Member State
NRN	National Rural Network
PA	Paying agency
RDP	Rural Development Programme
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SME	Small and medium enterprise
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TA	Technical assistance
ToR	Terms of Reference
TWG	Technical working group
WFD	Water Framework Directive

INTRODUCTION

What is ex post *evaluation?*

Ex post evaluation of rural development programmes aims to assess the rural policy interventions after they have been fully accomplished. It provides the opportunity to see if the policy was designed and implemented to address the most relevant needs in an expected way, whether the rural development programme has achieved the programme´s objectives and contributed to the changes in the programme territory and whether public and private funds have been spent in a meaning full manner. *Ex post* evaluation also offers lessons for designing the future policies and programmes and plays an important role in the policy cycle. Thus *ex post* evaluation serves as the governance tool to justify and steer the rural policy to the best interest of public and private stakeholders and enhance its transparency and accountability towards European taxpayers.

The ***ex post* evaluation** of rural development programmes in the programming period of 2007-2013 is the final and most important part of **ongoing evaluation.** Evaluation stakeholders use ongoing evaluation to improve the quality of rural development programmes and its implementation, to justify the proposals for substantive changes during the programme life cycle and as the basis to prepare mid-term and *ex post* evaluation. In 2016, ongoing evaluation takes the form of a separate *ex post* evaluation[1]**,** building upon ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities conducted throughout the programme implementation period.

The *ex post* evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs will involve the participation of different RD stakeholders such as Managing Authorities, evaluators, data providers, paying agencies, etc., who will work together in a coordinated manner to accomplish the legal requirements and to deliver quality *ex post* programme evaluation that demonstrates the contribution of the RDPs in addressing the rural challenges.

Why do we need guidelines for the ex post *evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs?*

The assessment of the mid-term evaluation (MTE) reports conducted by DG AGRI and the Evaluation Helpdesk[2] in 2011 revealed that relatively few MTEs had used advanced evaluation methods, that impacts of individual measures were mainly analysed without assessing the overall programme impacts, that counterfactuals were not sufficiently established and that the set of Common Evaluation Questions was very extensive and difficult to cope with. The assessment highlighted the need to enhance the quality of evaluation in order to demonstrate the value of implementing the RDPs through reflecting the achievements, results and impacts. It suggested to revise the current set of evaluation questions outlined in the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework in order to better define the focus of the *ex post* evaluation. In addition, the assessment showed that Member States are actively seeking the European Commission's support in carrying the process of the *ex post* evaluation as well in evaluation methods.

Having in mind the outcomes of the MTE assessment as well as the current state of play in conducting the rural development evaluation, the European Commission in close collaboration with Member States has drafted the guidelines to ensure the common understanding of the requirements for the *ex post* evaluation and to assist Managing Authorities, evaluators and other evaluation stakeholders in preparing, steering and conducting the *ex post* evaluation.

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[1] Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, Art. 86.5

[2] Evaluation Helpdesk (March 2012), Methodological Assessment of Mid-Term Evaluation Reports of 2007-2013 Rural Development Programmes at http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=DEAC4A4D-09E2-CCB0-3E66-A5F53E2BE9BF

The guidelines aim to provide a good understanding and a comprehensive translation of the legal texts into practical terms. This will allow to save time and effort of those responsible for managing and conducting the *ex post* evaluations while ensuring that all aspects and required elements are adequately addressed. It will also enable the common understanding of the *ex post* evaluation, ensure consistency and comparability of evaluations among Member States and regions and facilitate the *ex post* evaluation summary[3]conducted by Commission services in 2017.

Despite the European Commission's involvement in the development of the guidelines, the document remains **NON BINDING**.

Who are the target group(s) for these guidelines?

The *ex post* guidelines for evaluation of Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013 have been drafted for different groups of rural development stakeholders:

1) Representatives of Managing Authorities will find the information on the purpose and scope of the *ex post* evaluation, including an exhaustive list of legal references, which have to be fulfilled by Member States / regions. Furthermore, they will find the guidance and practical tools that will help them managing, coordinating and steering the *ex post* evaluation, as well as disseminating the evaluation results.

2) For evaluators the guidelines provide further explanations of the legal texts and rationale behind the requirements, with the aim to create a common understanding of the task. The document also offers a revised set of Common Evaluation Questions, clarifies the role of the evaluation questions and indicators, and proposes evaluation methods and approaches for collecting evidence for conducting the assessment of Rural Development Programmes' impacts.

3) Other evaluation stakeholders, such as monitoring committee members, paying agencies programme beneficiaries, etc. can use the *ex post* evaluation guidelines as a source of information, when contributing to evaluation through data / information collection, or when debating / commenting the *ex post* evaluation report.

3) Officials within DG Agriculture and Rural Development concerned with Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013 who may find helpful to have a reference point summarising the common understanding of the purpose and the tasks of the *ex post* evaluation.

How to use the ex post *evaluation guidelines?*

The *ex post* evaluation guidelines have been structured in three parts, which can be used as a stand-alone documents, still interlinked through cross-links provided in the text. Although each stand-alone part elaborates various aspects of the *ex post* evaluation in depth, there is still necessarily a certain amount of repetitions, particularly in relation to the legal requirements.

PART I: **Mainly for Managing Authorities**

This covers the purpose, scope and the process of the *ex post* evaluation.

Chapter 1 deals with "WHY" *ex post* evaluation should be conducted, setting out the rationale, purpose and legal framework of *ex post* evaluation.

Chapter 2 explains all relevant legal provisions, highlighting what must be covered by the *ex post* evaluation. The chapter also explains common and programme-specific evaluation elements such as evaluation questions and indicators, elaborating on the critical points related to their use in evaluation. In addition, the chapter informs on the new elements as compared to the practice applied in ongoing and mid-term evaluation.

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[3]Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, Art. 87 on summary of *ex post* evaluation

Chapter 3 explores "HOW" the *ex post* evaluation should be conducted, providing practical guidance on the key steps of the process (planning, implementing and disseminating), the role and responsibility of each evaluation stakeholder and the timing related issues for *ex post* evaluation. This chapter also includes a description of the necessary consultation procedures.

Chapter 4 focuses on the *ex post* evaluation of National Rural Network Programmes, highlighting the differences and similarities with the evaluation of NRNs planned under the RDPs, and with the overall *ex post* evaluation process of the RDPs.

PART II: Mainly for evaluators

This part covers the evaluation of Rural Development Programmes in more detail. It contains different evaluation elements that are addressed throughout **PART II** of the guidelines in detail: focus of evaluation, intervention logic, evaluation questions, indicators, evaluation methods and data.

Chapter 1 elaborates the focus of the *ex post* evaluation in depth namely the relevance, effectiveness and achievements, efficiency, impacts of the RDP in the rural territory. It also informs "about the focus of evaluation at the *ex post* stage in relation to specific evaluation topics such as technical assistance and national rural networks.

Chapter 2 deals with the intervention logic as the starting point in the evaluation at the programme, axis and measure level, considering various scenarios in its composition, expected and unexpected effects, as well as timing issues. The chapter also provides a summary of key steps for the assessment of the intervention logic in relation to relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and impacts, and illustrates it with examples of good practice. A separate sub-chapter deals with specific issues in relation to technical assistance and national rural networks.

Chapter 3 explains the purpose and role of evaluation questions and judgment criteria in evaluation, and their links to indicators; it proposes a revised set of Common Evaluation Questions, provides advises for developing, using and answering evaluation questions in *ex post* evaluation, with a specific section focusing on technical assistance and national rural networks.

Chapter 4 explains the purpose and role of indicators in evaluation and describes how to develop programme-specific indicators. The chapter also advises on how to use indicators in the *ex post* evaluation including linking indicators to policy objectives and evaluation questions, balancing importance and measurability, screening indicators from the point of data requirements, etc. Again, a section addressing the specificities of technical assistance and national rural networks with regards to indicators is included in this chapter.

Chapter 5 debates methods as the key element to address the methodological challenge – assessment of programme effects in the *ex post* evaluation. The chapter describes various quantitative and qualitative methods and explains how to choose the most appropriate result / impact evaluation methods to conduct robust evaluations. The chapter also provides a set of criteria to judge the quality of the impact evaluation design. This chapter also elaborates on specific issues with regards to technical assistance and national rural networks.

Chapter 6 deals with proper use of qualitative and quantitative data, necessary for the assessment of programme results and impacts. It also debates challenges in data management and collection and describes the role of various institutions in it. A separate sub-chapter deals with specific issues in relation to technical assistance and national rural networks.

PART III Toolbox

It contains practical tools such as draft Terms of Reference for *ex post* evaluation, a revised set of evaluation questions, an outline of an *ex post* evaluation report, and various working templates, which will facilitate for both - evaluators and Managing Authorities, the conduction and implementation of the *ex post* evaluation.

How and by whom have the guidelines been developed?

The *ex post* evaluation guidelines have been drafted by a team of evaluation experts of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development in close collaboration with the relevant services of the European Commission and the Evaluation Expert Committee for Rural Development. Experts of the Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development have contributed their wealth of evaluation experience to the text. Members of the Evaluation Expert Committee acted as a sounding board to check whether successive drafts of the text were adapted to the needs of the target audience. Representatives of DG Agriculture and Rural Development have ensured the coherence of the guidelines within the EU policy framework. The Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development coordinated and facilitated the drafting process.

PART I: MAINLY FOR MANAGING AUTHORITIES

1. WHY *EX POST* EVALUATION?

Ex post *evaluation as part of policy cycle*

Evaluation, as integral part of the programme cycle, starts at the programme design stage in the form of *ex ante* evaluation, accompanies the programme across its life cycle (ongoing evaluation) looking at the progress of the programme in relation to its achievements and results. In the mid-term stage and after the full programme implementation, ongoing evaluation takes the form of a mid-term and *ex post* evaluation, when the programme effectiveness, efficiency and impacts are assessed. Each one of the evaluations has a different purpose and point of view, depending on the timing and the availability of the information. The *ex post* evaluation looks at the impact, effectiveness and efficiency of the programme as a whole**.**

Why is **ex post** *evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs necessary?*

Ex post evaluation comes at a point where it is possible to **calculate impacts** and **assess the added value of the programme funding**, both at EU and programme level. The impact and added value of the interventions are important tools for **showing the programme achievements** and thus **justify the programme spending**, both politically and financially. Demonstration of the policy achievements, thus legitimising funding for rural development measures, is important at European, national and regional levels, especially when budgets are tight. Furthermore, major reasons for carrying out an *ex post* evaluation are to report on and communicate how money was spent, what has been achieved and at what cost, that is, to enhance **transparency** and **accountability** to stakeholders and taxpayers.

The *ex post* evaluation is also a **policy learning tool**, which enables to use the evaluation results to improve the design, quality and implementation of the policy. Utilising evaluation in policy design, via drawing relevant conclusions and lessons, is an important aspect of evidence-based policy-making. Even though the *ex post* evaluation is conducted at the end of the previous programming period, when the new policy is already designed and partly implemented, it can still contain relevant information and recommendations to improve the implementation of the new programme. The *ex post* evaluation results are especially relevant to those measures whose implementation continues across programming periods. Hence, the *ex post* evaluation of 2007-2013 can support the evaluation during the programming period of 2014-2020.

The requirement to conduct RDP evaluations, including an *ex post* evaluation, is stipulated in Article 84(1) of Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005. The *ex post* evaluation is seen as a vital component and end point of the ongoing evaluation for a programme[4], As such, the *ex post* evaluation should be embedded into the continuous process of evaluation-related activities established and carried out already from the beginning of the programming period. This means that the *ex post* evaluation should not be considered as a one-off exercise but as one element of a dynamic process. As the ongoing evaluation activities are interlinked and they build on each other, the *ex post* evaluation has to draw on previous evaluation activities. In a sense, all the evaluation activities that have occurred during the programming period, are a basis for the *ex post* evaluation.

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[4] Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005, Art. 86.5

2. WHAT IS THE SCOPE OF *EX POST* EVALUATION?

The *ex post* evaluation must be the assessment of the entire programme over the course of the whole programming period. The legal texts spell out some requirements for the focus of the analysis, as well as the approach to evaluation. There are also certain requirements regarding common elements at EU-level, as well as programme-specific elements.

2.1 Legal requirements regarding the scope and content of *ex post* evaluation

Evaluating Rural Development Programmes is a legal requirement, which consists of setting up an ongoing evaluation system[5] and conducting specific evaluation studies[6]. Ongoing evaluation both incorporates and prepares for the *ex post* evaluation.[7]

The aim of evaluation is three-fold, namely, to **improve the quality**, **efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of Rural Development Programmes**.[8] Even though the *ex post* evaluation cannot influence these issues for the programming period that it is focusing on, the results can be fed back into the policy cycle and thus can be used to improve the future programmes.

The legal texts spell out the scope of the evaluations clearly. In general, evaluations should **assess the impact of the programmes with regard to the strategic guidelines of the Community**[9] **and the rural development problems specific to the Member States and regions concerned**. Here **sustainable development** requirements and **environmental impacts** should be taken into account.[10]

More specifically, the *ex post* evaluation, similar to the MTE, must examine[11]

- the **degree of utilisation of resources**;

- the **effectiveness** and **efficiency of the programming of the EAFRD**;

- the **socioeconomic impact** of the programme, and

- the programme's **impact on the Community priorities,** which are:[12]

  o Priority 1: Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors

  o Priority 2: Improving the environment and countryside

  o Priority 3: Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of the rural economy

  o Priority 4: Building local capacity for employment and diversification

  o Priority 5: Ensuring consistency in programming

  o Priority 6: Complementarity between European instruments

  o Meeting new challenges[13]

    ‣ combating climate change;

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[5] Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, Art.86.1.
[6] Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, Art. 84.1
[7] Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, Art. 86.5
[8] Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, Art. 84.2
[9] Council decision 2006/144/EC of 20 February 2006 on Community strategic guidelines for rural development
[10] Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, Art. 84.2
[11] Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, Art. 86.6
[12] Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, Art. 9 and Council decision 2006/144/EC of 20 February 2006 on Community strategic guidelines for rural development
[13] Council Regulation (EC) No 74/2009, The Health Check of the CAP reform

▸ promoting renewable energies;

▸ water management;

▸ protecting biodiversity;

▸ restructuring the dairy industry.

The *ex post* evaluation, similar to the MTE, should further[14]

• cover the **goals of the programme**[15]; and

• **aim to draw lessons concerning rural development policy**; and

• **identify the factors which contributed to the success or failure of the programmes'
implementation**, including as regards **sustainability**; and

• **identify best practice**.

Rural development policy objectives
Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, Art. 4.1

• Improving the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry by supporting restructuring,
development and innovation;

• Improving the environment and the countryside by supporting land management; and

• Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of economic activity.

Consequently, the *ex post* evaluation must contain answers to common and programme-specific
evaluation questions, which are derived from an assessment of the effectiveness, efficiency, and
relevance of measures and the Rural Development Programme and provide solid conclusions and
recommendations in order to improve the quality and the implementation of future programmes. The
ex post evaluation has to also include a judgment on the degree to which measures and the
programme as a whole meet their targets and contribute to achieving the objectives set out in the
national strategy as well as the Community strategy.

Focus of the **ex post** *evaluation* (see **Part II**, Chapter 1: Focus of *ex post* evaluation)

In line with the legal acts, the subject of the *ex post* evaluation should be an assessment, at the
programme and axis level, of the programme's:

Relevance is the extent to which the objectives and design of the programme are consistent with (a)
current challenges and concerns in a particular RD sector and programming area and (b) the needs
and priorities of target groups. Evaluating relevance means to analyse if the programme impacts are
generating change in addressing programme area needs.

The assessment of relevance should include analysis whether the objectives and the design of the
programme are still appropriate at the time of the evaluation, given that circumstances may have
changed since the programme was started or its objectives last revised. In the assessment the
evaluation should take into consideration the composition of the programme's intervention logic:
objectives, measures, activities and allocated funds, and how they are addressing the programme
area's needs identified in the SWOT analysis and needs assessment. (see Chapter 3: Intervention
logic)

Effectiveness and achievements is the extent to which a programme attains its objectives and
targets.

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[14] Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, Art. 86.6
[15] Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, Art. 4.1

In the assessment of the effectiveness the evaluation analyses whether the programme's intervention is heading towards the expected changes within the programme area and whether the programme objectives have been achieved. Effectiveness also relates to the programme contribution to Community priorities and new challenges as outlined in the Community strategic guidelines for rural development[16].

Efficiency is the relationship between resources employed and results achieved in pursuing a given objective through an intervention.

When assessing the programme efficiency, the evaluation looks at the relationship between allocated resources and achieved programme results or in other words, whether the money spent has generated the expected value. This might also include the analysis of the programmes outcomes achieved within individual measures, their groups or the entire axes, in relation to the implementation costs. An analysis of efficiency reveals whether more results could have been obtained with the same budget, or whether the same results could have been obtained at a lower cost.

Results are direct and immediate effects of the intervention. They represent changes happening within the group of programme beneficiaries due to the programme, for example, the behaviour, capacity or performance of direct beneficiaries and are measured in physical or monetary terms e.g. gross number of jobs created.

In the assessment of results the evaluation assesses the programme results primarily through information gathered with the means of result indicators. The assessment of results precedes the assessment of programme impacts.

Impacts are effects of the programme which last medium or long term.

The evaluation assesses the programme impacts by scrutinising the extent to which the change observed in the *programme area* can be attributed to the programme and to which extent the programme has addressed identified needs and Community priorities for rural development, compared to other intervening factors.

Success / failure factors are factors which have contributed to the success or failure of the programme.

The evaluation identifies success / failure factors by analysing issues which might foster or weaken the effects of the intervention. Examples of such issues are the programme delivery mechanism, administration and management and the effectiveness and efficiency of its operation. Furthermore, it is useful to consider the level of assistance to potential beneficiaries, communication and dissemination of information, capacity-building actions, etc. Other aspects requiring consideration included the overall macro-economic situation, the ability of beneficiaries to co-finance projects, regional socio-economic differences, etc.

2.2   Common and programme-specific elements of the *ex post* evaluation

The Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) establishes an evaluation system which should be used in conducting the *ex post* evaluations. The evaluation system consists of common and programme-specific elements. The common elements are the core of the evaluation system, and their goal is to create comparable key information common to all the European Rural Development Programmes. The programme-specific elements, on the other hand, complement the common elements by addressing the specificities of the RDP in question. The programme-specific elements are designed by the programming authorities in order to highlight those aspects of the RDPs which are not covered by the common elements.

The common and programme-specific elements comprise:

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[16] Council decision 2006/144/EC of 20 February 2006 on Community strategic guidelines for rural development

- **EU common intervention logic for rural development** consisting of the hierarchy of objectives for rural development[17], and Community priorities for rural development, the rural development measures and sub-measures;

- **Common Evaluation Questions (CEQs),** which are included in the CMEF are related to individual measures of the four axes and to the horizontal objectives and Community Priorities.[18]The aim of the CEQs is to focus the evaluation *of the effects of programme interventions towards the EU rural development policy, and to encourage the assessment of impacts;*

   As per request of the Member States, the Commission has decided to reduce the number of Common Evaluation Questions for the *ex post* evaluation of Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013, linking them to horizontal and axis level policy objectives and therefore strengthen the comparability of the evaluation reports. Member States / regions will be encouraged to use programme-specific evaluation questions to a greater degree instead.

- **Programme-specific evaluation questions (PSEQs),** are formulated typically by the MA to focus the evaluation on programme specific objectives and interventions. For instance, if a programme has pronounced environmental focus, the MA may wish to include additional PSEQs in the *ex post* evaluation to assess environmental effects. The PSEQs can also be used to assess elements of particular interest to the MA, such as programme implementation, delivery mechanisms, national rural network, or communication strategy.

- **Common indicators**[19] on the financial execution (inputs), baseline, output, results, impacts, are used to measure the programme efficiency, effectiveness, results and impacts.

- **Programme-specific indicators**[20] are specific to the Rural Development Programme in question. The programme-specific indicators are designed to answer PSEQs. In addition, they can be developed to answer CEQs, in case the common indicators are not sufficient or suitable.

Common and programme-specific evaluation elements are described and explained in the **CMEF** in order to ensure the common approach towards the evaluation of RDPs. The guidance documents complement legal proposals and implementing acts, and have a **non-binding character**.[21] The guidance documents consist of the CMEF Handbook, which contains four Annexes:

Annex 1 – General guidance covers: Choice and use of indicators, Evaluation guidelines and *ex ante* evaluation guidelines.

Annex 2 – Programing and measure guidance covers: Hierarchy of objectives and measure fiches.

Annex 3 – Indicator guidance covers: Common list of indicators, and fiches for common baseline, output, result and impact indicators plus examples of additional indicators.

Annex 4 - Other guidance covers: FAQ, Evaluation network, Glossary of terms, Useful reading.

The guidance documents also contain a draft structure and table of content for the evaluation reports. (see **Part III**, Toolbox)

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[17] Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, Art. 4.1
[18]Further information on the CEQs can be found in Explanatory Notes to the Common Evaluation Questions & Recommendations on Mid-term Evaluation Reporting, European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, July 2010 at http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=8A970C77-E23A-C171-2D14-6D6DFE1490FB
[19] Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, 80 and 80.1, Commission Regulation (EC) No 1974/2006, Annex VIII
[20] Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, 81.5
[21] Guidelines for the evaluation of Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013 at http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/eval/index_en.htm

Additional guidance documents have been published during the programming period of 2007 – 2013 by the Evaluation Helpdesk on specific issues, such as Leader impacts, evaluating NRN programmes, Gross Value Added Indicators, HNV Indicator, and Mid-Term Evaluation.

DOs	DON'Ts
Consider the *ex post* evaluation as a part of and a distinct end point of ongoing evaluation. Use the ongoing evaluation lessons when planning for the *ex post* evaluation.	Disregard problems and issues encountered during ongoing evaluation, especially the MTE, in the *ex post* evaluation preparations.
Review the legal requirements and utilise the common and programme-specific evaluation elements.	Cover the scope and focus of the *ex post* evaluation only partially.
Focus the evaluation of impacts at programme and axis level	Look only at measure level impacts.
Tailor the evaluation for your needs: consider what is important to know about RDP implementation.	Think of the *ex post* evaluation framework as externally given.
Develop programme-specific evaluation questions	Rely on the reduced set of CEQs to give a comprehensive picture of the RDP.
Develop programme-specific indicators	Consider the CMEF indicators to be a finite list of indicators to be used in an evaluation of the RDP.
Link evaluation questions and indicators, develop judgment criteria.	Consider evaluation questions and indicators separately.

3. WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF *EX POST* EVALUATION?

3.1 Who is involved and who does what?

Managing Authority

The Managing Authority (MA) carries responsibility for the functioning and governance of the monitoring and evaluation system and the quality, timeliness and communication of results.

Paying Agency

The Paying Agency (PA) has an important role in monitoring and evaluation activities as it holds information regarding the programme implementation, namely applications, supported projects, payments and controls.

Implementing bodies

These delegated bodies (e.g. local authorities, regional development bodies or NGOs) that the MA has designated to carry out the management and implementation of RDPs are typically involved in monitoring and evaluation through data collection and the monitoring of programme progress at regional level. The intermediate bodies should cooperate closely with the MA and the evaluators in terms of providing data and being available for interviews to gain qualitative information about the programme and its implementation.

Monitoring Committee

In general, the monitoring committee (MC) is responsible for reviewing the implementation of the programme and progress towards its objectives and the achievements of the targets set for each axis.

LAGs

LAGs are both the RDP beneficiary and an implementing body of the rural development policy in their respective territories. LAGs are required to provide information pertinent to a programme's monitoring and evaluation[22], and also carry out self-evaluations and monitor the development of Local Development Strategies (LDSs). Representatives of LAGs sometimes participate in regional or national evaluation steering groups. LAGs can bring invaluable local knowledge and contacts, as well as a practical perspective to the *ex post* evaluation. The LAGs could also be themselves an object of analysis for part of the *ex post* evaluation, both in terms of analysis of Axis 4 of the programme and as a separate delivery mechanism of the policy.

National Rural Networks

It is useful to include the NRN in the *ex post* evaluation process as the NRNs have an important role in data collection, as well as sharing and disseminating the *ex post* evaluation findings. Similar to the LAGs, the NRNs are also the object of analysis for part of the *ex post* evaluation.

Steering group

Evaluation steering groups are recommended as best practice for facilitating and coordinating stakeholder consultation and managing the evaluation process. Evaluation steering group members

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[22]Article 75(1)(c)(ii) of Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005

can contribute specialist skills and expertise and help ensure the availability of data, information and relevant contacts to evaluators. An engaged evaluation steering group also enables interaction with and between partners and other stakeholders.

An evaluation steering group is typically convened and chaired by the MA. The composition[23] of the group depends on the specifics of the programme (priorities, scale and delivery) and the specific tasks assigned to the group. As a minimum the group should include representatives from the MA (representing relevant departments/units) and others involved in programme delivery, representatives from the PA, those responsible for programme design and policymaking and, if applicable, members of the Evaluation Unit. It is also good to include representatives of the beneficiaries and other interest groups in the steering group. It may also be useful to include representatives of Structural Funds and experts from research institutions. There is no fixed size for the steering group. It should be large enough to be representative of RDP stakeholders and contain a range of relevant skills and knowledge, but not be so large as to hamper its effectiveness.

Some RDPs use a different steering group for each evaluation, whereas others have one single group which follows the entire ongoing evaluation process of the RDP, including the *ex post* evaluation.

Evaluators

RDP evaluations must be carried out by independent evaluators[24], that is, internal or external experts that are functionally independent of the authorities responsible for programme implementation. RDP evaluators are usually external experts (e.g. single company or research institution, or a consortium made up of several companies and / or research institutions) and chosen through a tendering procedure. It is important to note that the evaluators could also be international.

Some RDPs have the same evaluator contracted for the entire programming period, whereas in others there are tenders for individual evaluations. (see Part I, Chapter 3.2.1: Planning)

Beneficiaries

Beneficiaries of RDP interventions can be directly involved in the *ex post* evaluation in two ways. Individual beneficiaries are often obliged to provide information pertinent to the programme's monitoring and evaluation[25]. Secondly, the organisations representing beneficiaries, such as farmers' unions and small and medium enterprises (SME) associations are important RDP stakeholders. In many countries, organisations representing beneficiaries are therefore involved in the MC and the *ex post* evaluation steering group.

Other data providers

It is useful to consider data providers (national statistical office, relevant ministries, research institutes, etc.) as stakeholders in the *ex post* evaluation and to involve them early on in the planning process. They may hold data of relevance to RDPs, conduct research on relevant topics, be a source of expert knowledge or even collect specific monitoring data for the MA on a contractual basis. In many MSs, representatives of data providers also participate in the MC and evaluation steering groups.

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[23]Potential members of the evaluation steering group can be identified via analysis of the RDP evaluation stakeholders. This covers the review of RDP stakeholders and the clarification of their roles, responsibilities and relevance in the programme and its evaluation.

[24]Article 84(4) of Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005
[25]Article 75(1)(c)(ii) of Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005

3.2 Key steps

The *ex post* evaluation is both a part and end point of the ongoing evaluation, but also a separate project by itself. As a project, it can be divided into separate steps with tasks that follow each other in sequence. The main steps of the *ex post* evaluation are planning, implementation, and dissemination. Each phase contains several tasks, which will be discussed in below together with the tasks of the main actors involved.

Figure 1   Steps and tasks related to the *ex post* evaluation
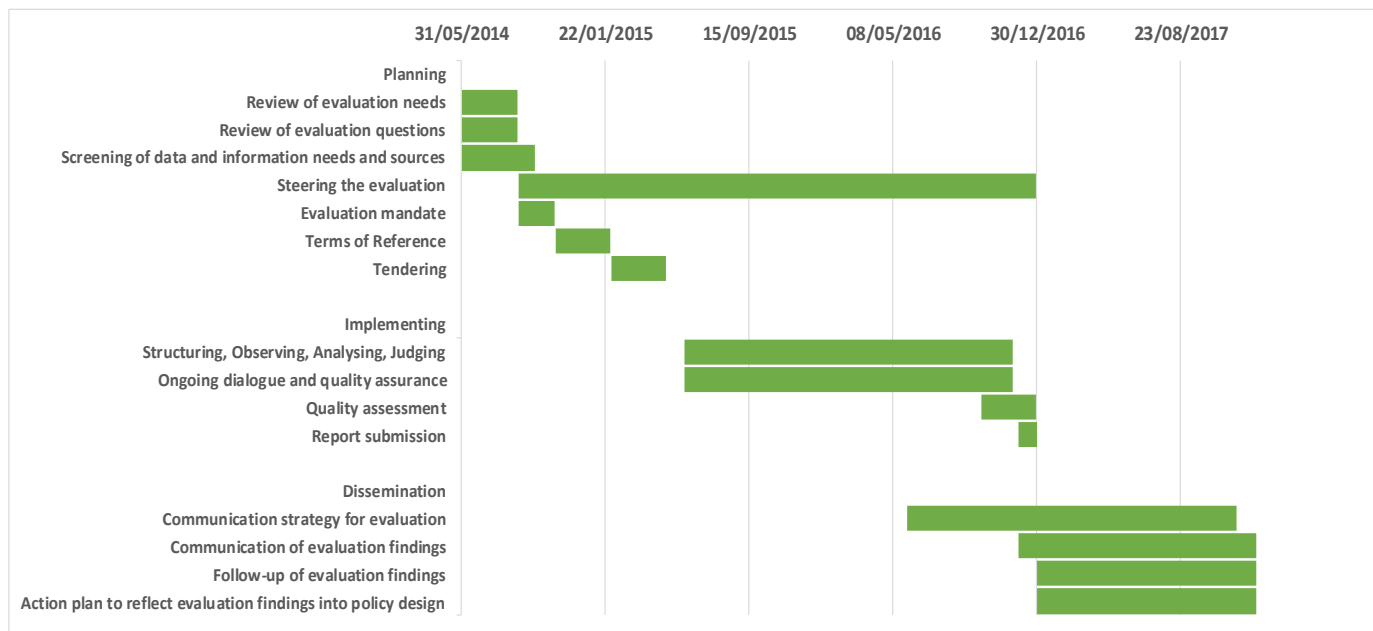
Timing

The Member States must submit the *ex post* evaluation to the Commission by 31 December 2016 at the latest.[26] The Commission has the duty to complete the summary of *ex post* evaluations by 31 December 2017.[27]

The complexity, in terms of number of tasks and actors involved, necessitates timely planning in order to help anticipate workloads and manage deadlines. Advanced planning is essential as the whole process from evaluation planning to results dissemination can take up to three years. A lack of available data may lengthen the evaluation process considerably and it cannot be stressed enough how important it is to start planning an evaluation well in advance.

The entire *ex post* evaluation process scheduling can be managed, for instance, by using a scheduling method called retro planning, which is also known as backward scheduling. Retro planning means creating a schedule by starting from the last step of the process, the deadline (see example in **Part III**, Toolbox). This is a useful tool in estimating the timeline for the *ex post* evaluation. Experience from previous programming periods will be useful in determining the length of time required for each action.

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[26] Article 61 of Commission Regulation (EC) 1974/2006
[27] Article 87(2) of Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005

How to prepare well the *ex post* evaluation?

A thorough and successful ongoing evaluation paves the way for a good *ex post* evaluation. However, even with hiccups in the ongoing evaluation, it is still possible to have a good *ex post* evaluation. There are several things that the MA can do to have a high quality *ex post* evaluation.

Preparation phase

- Use the mid-term evaluation experiences to plan *the ex post* evaluation;
- Start the *ex post* evaluation process early;
- Reserve enough human and financial resources for the *ex post* evaluation;
- Plan the entire *ex post* evaluation process and its steering carefully;
- Identify the evaluation needs,
- review common evaluation questions and indicators ,
- develop programme-specific evaluation questions and indicators
- screen data needs thoroughly and ;

Identify data sources and gaps and consider strategies / tools for filling them;

- Draft suitable and detailed Terms of Reference for the evaluation;
- Draft quality assessment criteria for the *ex post* evaluation report;
- Plan the tendering process and details of the tender carefully, especially the selection criteria for the evaluators; and
- Ensure capacity-building of the evaluation stakeholders.

Implementation phase

- Ensure that the evaluators get all the necessary information in a timely manner;
- Make sure that the evaluators have a good understanding of the programme at the structuring phase;
- Ascertain that the evaluators have chosen the best possible methods for the evaluation;
- Give timely and meaningful feedback to the draft reports and other deliverables;
- Maintain open and ongoing dialogue between the evaluators, MA, and the steering group; and
- Conduct a thorough quality assessment on the final report.

3.2.1 Planning

The MA is the main motor behind the planning of the *ex post* evaluation. The better the planning, the clearer the implementation of the evaluation will be.

Identification of evaluation needs

Each evaluation provides information aimed at the programme stakeholders. The first step in starting an evaluation process is to look at what kind of information needs shall be produced by the evaluation. For the *ex post* evaluation of the Rural Development Programmes, certain evaluation needs such as efficiency and effectiveness, are also required by legal framework. *(see* **Part I**, Chapter

2.1 Legal requirements of *ex post* evaluation*)*. The evaluation needs are also linked with common or national / regional specific policy objectives or specific policy interests (e.g. generation of employment), but also with the programme delivery and administration.

It is important to review the evaluations, studies, and other assessments produced earlier on in the programming period. This way it is possible to identify gaps, as well as to build on the conclusions of the previous work.

- **The Managing Authority**, in collaboration with other actors involved in the implementation of the RDPs, reviews the results of the ongoing evaluation and identifies the legal and programme-specific evaluation needs.

Review of evaluation questions and indicators

Once it has been decided the kind of information the *ex post* evaluation should cover, it is necessary to think **how this information can be obtained**. The way to do this is through asking appropriate evaluation questions.

The evaluation questions define the focus of the evaluations and thus direct the work of the evaluator. The EQs also serve as a basis for defining what kind of information needs to be collected. Hence it is vital that all evaluation questions (CEQs and PSEQs) are taken into account in the planning phase of an evaluation. As the number of CEQs is reduced for the *ex post* evaluation, it is vital to develop PSEQs which cover the identified evaluation needs. It is necessary to review the CEQs and PSEQs against the specificities and objectives of the RPD in question so as to ensure that they are able to capture and reflect the intended effects of the RDP interventions.[28] *(see **Part II**, Chapter 4: Evaluation questions)*

As best practice, judgment criteria should be defined for all evaluation questions to facilitate answering EQs in a structured manner, enhance transparency by making the judgement explicit, and improve the objectivity of evaluations[29]. The judgment criteria specify the aspects against which the merits of the intervention are judged. The answers to evaluation questions are based on evidence collected through indicators and other relevant information, which have a clear link to the evaluation questions and their judgment criteria. *(see **Part II**, Chapter 4: Evaluation questions)*

When reviewing the EQs and developing judgment criteria, indicators used to answer the EQs should be examined. Then it is possible to get a good overview of the type and scope of the information that needs to be collected to answer the EQs. In case there are aspects that are not covered by the common indicators (e.g. new challenges introduced by the Health Check of the CAP), programme-specific indicators shall be developed to answer common or programme-specific evaluation questions. *(see **Part II**, Chapter 5: Indicators)*

Table 1   Example: Judgment criteria linking the EQ and indicator

Evaluation Question	Judgment Criteria	Indicator
To what extent has the intervention contributed to preventing soil erosion and improving soil management?	Soil erosion and management has improved.	% of agricultural land under management contracts improving soil management % of forestry land under management contracts to improve soil management

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[28] Further information on screening evaluation questions can be found at Guidelines on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013, European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, July 2009 at http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=83C6EDCD-9413-1C64-4EAA-1E4E8EC9ED3E p. 4
[29] EuropeAid Guide to Evaluations http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/evaluation/methodology/methods/mth_cri_en.htm

- **The Managing Authority**, in collaboration with other actors involved in the implementation of the RDPs (e.g. PA and intermediate bodies), reviews and develops the evaluation questions and indicators, as well as develops judgment criteria. This step may have to be revisited, especially for the part of the indicators, after screening of data and identifying the data gaps.

Screening of data and information needs and potential sources

After deciding on evaluation questions, judgment criteria and related indicators, it is necessary to agree on and develop an evaluation design (e.g. quasi-experimental or non-experimental: see **Part II**, Chapter 6: Methodology), after which it is possible to **identify what kind of data and information** from which **sources** is needed to complete the evaluation, i.e. to answer the common and programme-specific evaluation questions. In general, identifying the data needed to use the common and programme-specific indicators is one of the most important activities in preparing for the evaluations. Often data needs have to be completed with qualitative information. For the *ex post* evaluation, the identification of data and information needs should build on the ongoing and MTE evaluation experiences. Special attention should be paid to identified data gaps and problems with data quality that arose during the MTE.

The following data and information sources are typically used in RDP evaluations:

- Monitoring data, including data related to programme inputs, outputs, and results. This data is typically collected from the beneficiaries (application forms, payment requests) and the payment system of the PA;

- Disaggregated data from sector representative samples via regular surveys (e.g. Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN), Farm Structure Survey (FSS), national surveys) or from non-beneficiaries (counterfactual analysis);

- Specific relevant data collected regularly by national institutions;

- Statistical data aggregated in suitable manner;

- Face-to-face and focus group interviews; and

- Surveys and questionnaires.

Following the screening of data, it is vital to **identify potential data providers**. A lot of the data required for the *ex post* evaluation is collected though institutions related to the implementation of the RDP. However, some data may be accessible only through external institutions. In these cases, sometimes accessing the required data may prove to be challenging without inter-institutional communication, legal procedures, or funds reserved for data purchase. The **agreements to purchase data** should be concluded at an early point so as to ensure the evaluator timely access to the data. These agreements should contain provisions on clarity of responsibility for ensuring access to data to the evaluator, as well as making sure that the evaluators can access the software or reporting tools or receive relevant extracted data from databases.

Especially when handling data related to beneficiaries or individual interviewees, it is necessary to consider the legal aspects related to **data protection**. In addition to Directive 95/46/EC[30] and Regulation 45/2001[31], some national rules may apply.

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[30]Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 1995 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data.

[31]Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2000 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data.

In connection with identification of data needs and data providers, it is often necessary to examine that the **data collection methods** of the data providers are suitable for providing the data required for the indicators. For the common indicators, the EU level indicator fiches should be followed.[32] All programme-specific indicators should have accompanying indicator fiches, which present the indicator and define the data to be collected. *(*see **Part II**, Chapter 7: Data*)*

- The **Managing Authority**, in collaboration with other actors involved in the implementation of the RDPs (e.g. **PA and intermediate bodies**), identifies data and information needs, as well as potential data providers. As there are legal and financial aspects involved in this step, different departments of the MA / PA may have to be involved. It is also beneficial to involve **data providers** (e.g. institutions and research institutes) early on, especially if agreements to purchase data need to be concluded.

  The Managing Authority should ensure that there is clear guidance or description of the various data sources and indicators.

This step will have to be done iteratively a couple of times over the course of the evaluation planning and implementing as the **chosen evaluation methods will have an effect on the data requirements**.

Steering the evaluation

Evaluation steering group helps to facilitate and coordinate stakeholder consultation, as well as planning the evaluation process. Evaluation steering group members can contribute specialist skills and expertise and help ensure the availability of data, information and relevant contacts to evaluators (see **Part I**, Chapter 3.1: Who is involved and who does what?).

The MA may wish to convene a new steering group (SG) for each evaluation, including the *ex post* evaluation. It is also possible to have a permanent steering group that operates throughout the programming period. These two options are discussed in turn.

If the MA decides to convene a separate steering group for the *ex post* evaluation, the group shall be involved in planning the evaluation starting with screening the evaluation needs. Depending on the Member State / region in question, it may take some time to set up the steering group. Typically, the MA would identify the main stakeholder organisations of the RDP in question, consider the expertise needed for the SG, and send an official request to selected organisations to name a person to the *ex post* evaluation SG. After receiving the nominations, the SG would typically be set up officially, either through a Ministerial Decision or some other official document.

In the case that the permanent evaluation steering group exists, the advantage is that the steering of evaluation and building capacities have a continuous character. This allows better involvement of evaluation stakeholders in planning the *ex post* evaluation and preparing it for a long time along with the ongoing evaluation activities including those linked to improvements in data management and collection (e.g. ensuring data quality in required time series, establishing proper counterfactual, etc.).

- The **Managing Authority** convenes the steering group for the *ex post* evaluation, and outlines the procedures for its operations. The task of the **Steering Group** at this stage is to assist the MA in planning evaluation, and at the same time not reducing the responsibility of the MA over the process and substance of evaluation.

Evaluation mandate

The evaluation mandate is an intermediate step between the commitment to carry out an evaluation and the detailed Terms of Reference (ToR). The evaluation mandate is an optional, yet advisable, document that is essentially a brief and overall description of the evaluation that will be carried out.

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[32] CMEF Annex 3 Indicator Guidance at http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/eval/index_en.htm

This document should specify the *scope* (what is going to be evaluated), *context* and *motives* (what the background and motives are for doing an evaluation), *responsibilities* and *timing* (how the work will be organized and in what kind of schedule), and the *objectives* (what the expected use of evaluation is). The evaluation mandate guides the preparation of the ToR, as well as the work programme of the steering group.

- The **Managing Authority** typically initiates the preparation of the evaluation mandate and approves it.

- The **Steering Group** assists in the drafting of the evaluation mandate, and sometimes also approves it.

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference (ToR) is the key document in the evaluation process, especially when the evaluation is conducted by an external evaluator. The previous tasks of the evaluation planning step described above for the basis on which the ToR can be drafted.

The ToR should contain a description of the origin, scope and objectives of the evaluation project, as well as a clear distribution of roles and responsibilities. The ToR should list and clearly describe the evaluation tasks and activities that must be conducted by the external evaluator during the course of the evaluation. In addition, the already available information, as well as the questions that the evaluation should answer (evaluation questions) should be specified in the ToR. A good ToR also contains the criteria for choosing the evaluator, as well as the quality assessment criteria for the final report.

There are no legal requirements for the content of the ToR. **Part III**, Toolbox contains a model template for ToR. It includes the recommended main elements which reflect common good practice standards.[33]

- The **Managing Authority** gives expert input into drafting the ToR and the quality assessment criteria and guidelines for scoring (see examples in **Part III**, Toolbox), and ensures that the ToR reflects the realities of the RDP in question;

- The **Managing Authority** is charged with ensuring that sufficient human and financial resources are available for conducting the evaluation;

- The **Steering Group** supports the MA in the defining and drafting the ToR.

Tendering

There are some major issues that need to be considered prior to launching the tender for *ex post* evaluation. The main consideration for undertaking a good quality evaluation is to reserve **sufficient resources** for it, which is the task of Member States.[34] In practice it means that the ToR should reflect the size and scope of the programme (proportionality). Similarly, the tender appraisal process should take into account the resource requirements. It is also vital to allocate **sufficient time for the evaluation process** and each evaluation stage and task. Furthermore, it is particularly important to make sure that there is enough time allocated for preparation, primary research, delays in data access and other problems, as well as interaction with the Steering Group.

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[33] Further information from the Guidelines on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013, European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, July 2009 at
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=83C6EDCD-9413-1C64-4EAA-1E4E8EC9ED3E page 11-13
[34] Articles 84(5) and 86(1) of Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005

Before launching the tender, it is also important to set out clear rules and procedures for evaluators and responsible management bodies to interact. This could be through the Steering Group, the Evaluation Unit, or a dedicated project manager.

Finally, the MA must choose the tendering procedure. This depends on the specific approach taken to engaging evaluators (a single open call, establishment of a framework panel, contracting directly). In each case it is fundamental to respect the relevant tendering procedures and allocate sufficient time so that the final *ex post* evaluation is submitted to the European Commission within the deadline. Prior the call for tender, it is important to ensure that all legal aspects related to tendering are respected.

- The **Managing Authority** is responsible for reserving the funds for evaluation, choosing the tendering procedure, and the management of the tendering procedure.

Checklist: Can the tendering process be launched yet?
The importance of planning the *ex post* evaluation is fundamental for the success of the evaluation. Here are a few questions which can be of help for the MA to determine whether the *ex post* evaluation planning has reached the point when the tendering process can be started.

- Have sufficient resources (human and financial) been reserved for the evaluation?

- Have the evaluation needs been considered thoroughly?

- Have the evaluation questions been reviewed and PSEQs developed to cover the information needs?

- Have the indicators been screened and programme-specific indicators developed to answer all the EQs?

- Have data and information needs been screened?

- Have data gaps been identified and strategies to cover them designed?

- Has the steering and management of the ex post evaluation process been designed?

- Has a comprehensive ToR, which reflects the programme evaluation needs, been drafted?

- Has quality assessment criteria for the final report been drafted?

- Has the assessment criteria for the tenders been drafted?

3.2.2 Implementing

Management, steering and resourcing the evaluation

After the MA has contracted the evaluators, the MA is managing the evaluation process with the assistance of the evaluation steering group. It is advisable to appoint the evaluation manager within the MA, who takes care of the day-to-day issues related to the *ex post* evaluation and who acts as the contact point between the evaluators and the MA. However, the MA should ensure that sufficient additional capacities and human resources are available for the *ex post* evaluation if needed.

- The **Managing Authority** bears the responsibility for reserving sufficient human and financial resources for the evaluation, for drawing up the contract for evaluation, as well as for the management of the evaluation from the client side.

- The **Steering Group** assists the MA in steering the evaluation.

Structuring, Observing, Analysing, Judging[35]

Although the evaluation tasks are conducted by evaluators, the Managing Authority is managing the *ex post* evaluation throughout the entire process and supports evaluators. The role of the Managing Authority is structured into four distinct phases of evaluation (structuring, observing, analysing, and judging) which are as follows:

The **structuring phase:** the Managing Authority makes sure that the evaluator has clear understanding of the RDP in questions (intervention logic, including the composition of measures) the purpose of evaluation, evaluation questions and indicators. The Managing Authority also has to ensure that evaluators are aware of all of evaluation tasks they have to accomplish, that they have access to all available information and, data with respect to planned analytical tools and evaluation designed.

For their part, the evaluators have to:

- Work in close collaboration with the Managing Authority to gain an understanding of the task at hand.

- Establish / examine detailed intervention logics for the different measures to be evaluated.

- Define the key terms of the evaluation questions; elaborate judgement criteria that allow answering of each evaluation question, and where appropriate, identify target levels.

- Establish the methodology for answering the evaluation questions (CEQs and PSEQs).

- Review indicators (common and programme-specific), as well as related information and data allowing to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance of the measure and / or the programme.

The **observing phase** covers the collection of all available and relevant data and information. During the observing phase the Managing Authority steers the evaluation process and assists evaluators in obtaining all available valid data (including those from institutions outside of the Ministry of Agriculture). For their part, the evaluators ensure that gaps of data and information needed for evaluation, which cannot be filled with available sources (both qualitative and quantitative) are bridged, using various tools and techniques (questionnaires, surveys, interviews, focus groups, case studies, etc.).

In the observing phase, the evaluators have to:

- Create the tools needed for the quantitative and qualitative analysis: interview guidelines, questionnaires, queries for extractions from databases, requests for maps, guidelines for case studies, and any other data collection instrument deemed appropriate;

- Collect data and qualitative information needed for answering each evaluation question: databases, studies, identify and contact people to be interviewed, appropriate case study areas etc.; and

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[35] Further information on the four evaluation phases can be found at CMEF Guidance Note B Evaluation Guidelines at
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/eval/guidance/note_b_en.pdf

- Describe the process of programme implementation, composition of programmes, priorities and target levels, budget.

The **analysing phase** ensures that evaluators process and synthetize all available information in a systematic way. They use different kinds of tools and techniques to triangulate factors behind the effects and impacts of measures and programmes against programme objectives and targets. In order to assess progress made, the link to the baselines has to be established. The role of the Managing Authority in this stage is to communicate with evaluators their findings and assess their quality.

In the analysis phase, the evaluators must:

- Establish appropriate typologies of measures and / or beneficiaries in view of reducing the complexity of dealing with the empirical analysis; and

- Process and synthesise available data and information, and where necessary, handle data gaps by modelling or other extrapolations; apply a measurement against the counterfactual as well as target levels.

In the final stage of the evaluation, the **judging phase**, the evaluator develops answers to all evaluation questions based on evidence collected with the means of indicators and draws conclusions and recommendations from the analysis respecting the judgment criteria. The conclusions and recommendations relate to the effects of the programme, its axes or even single measures, where appropriate (e.g. in case o0f measures which are implemented with significant share of the programme budget, or measure of high policy importance). The answers to evaluation questions must be accompanied by a critical discussion of the evidence, and the limitations of the validity of the findings and the resulting judgement should be critically reflected.

In the judging phase, the evaluators have to:

- Answer all evaluation questions (CEQs and PSEQs);

- Assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme;

- Assess measures with respect to their balance within the programme;

- Judge on the degree to which the measures and the programme as a whole meet their targets;

- Identify the factors which contributed to the success or failure of the programme; and

- Draft conclusions and recommendations based on the findings.

In short:

- The **evaluators** are the main actors responsible for the structuring, observing, analysing and judging.

- The **Managing Authority** and the **Steering Group** steer and back stop the evaluation, playing an important role mainly in the structuring phase. In the analytical and judging phase the Managing Authority has to look at the quality of evaluation.

- The **PA, intermediate bodies, LAGs, beneficiaries and the data providers** are vital for allowing the evaluators access to data in the observing phase.

Ongoing dialogue and quality assurance

During the *ex post* evaluation ongoing dialogue between the evaluator, the Managing Authority and steering group shall be ensured. The evaluation approaches and methods chosen affect data collection. There should be enough time for elaborating and discussing them with the MA and SG. Different reports (inception report, intermediate report(s), draft final report, and final report) should be submitted by the evaluator at key stages of the evaluation process. These reports should be analysed by the SG and the MA, and feedback should be given to the evaluator. This way the quality of the evaluation can be followed and improved. Furthermore, the progress of the evaluation can be checked frequently against agreed milestones.

- The **evaluator** is responsible for submitting agreed reports and taking feedback into account.

- The **Managing Authority** and the **Steering Group** should give meaningful and timely feedback to the evaluator.

- The **Steering Group** monitors the progress of the *ex post* evaluation.

- The **Managing Authority** should facilitate the dialogue between the **evaluator and the Steering Group, PA, intermediate bodies, LAGs, NRN, beneficiaries and data providers**.

Quality assessment

The final report should undergo a thorough quality assessment by the Managing Authority. For this purpose, it is recommended to develop quality standards for evaluation reports and a quality assessment grid and documented assessment criteria. There are no compulsory quality assessment criteria for *ex post* evaluation reports.

Good quality criteria consider the evaluation process (relevance, timeliness and inclusiveness), normative issues (focus on independence and impartiality of the evaluator), as well as technical criteria (relevance of the evaluation, appropriate design, reliable data, sound analysis, credible findings, evidence-based answers to evaluation questions, valid conclusions, helpful recommendations, and report clarity[36]). Good practice is to employ the quality criteria with the scale of rating parameters (yes / no, numerical, rating scale) and standardise the requirements for each item of the scale to ensure the transparency of the quality assessment.

A draft quality assessment grid is included as an example in **Part III**, Toolbox of this document.

- The **Managing Authority and the Steering Group** should assess the quality of the final *ex post* evaluation report, using an agreed quality assessment grid.

Report submission

The evaluator should submit the final report by the time agreed in the ToR. This deadline should foresee the discussion of the final report by the SG and possible examination by the MC[37], as well as discussion with other national / regional bodies, before the report is submitted to the EC by the end of December 2016.[38]

- The **Managing Authority** is responsible for submitting the *ex post* evaluation report to the Commission in time.

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[36] Annex 6 'Quality Assessment Form', DG Markt Guide to Evaluating Legislation at
http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/internal_market/docs/evaluation/evaluation_guide_annexes.pdf , pages 87-97
[37] Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, Art. 78(c)
[38] Commission Regulation (EC) No 1974/2006, Art. 61

3.2.3 Dissemination

Communication of evaluation findings

Evaluation results are useful if they are communicated to the correct target audiences in a timely manner. Developing an appropriate communication strategy for evaluation results is therefore an essential part of evaluation activity planning. Even though the dissemination step logically comes after the finalisation of the *ex post* evaluation report, it is necessary to start devising the communication plan for the *ex post* evaluation findings well before the submission of the report.

The first step in establishing a communication strategy for evaluation is to identify the key potential users (the target audience: who for) and their information needs (what). The main target audiences for the *ex post* evaluation findings are typically key policy-makers and interested institutions, RDP stakeholders, other interest groups, and the general public. After identifying what kinds of issues would be of interest to different target audiences, the channels of communication suitable for each audience should also be outlined (how). Depending on the target audience, different means of diffusing evaluation findings (e.g. meetings, synthesis notes, memoranda, presentations, brochures, newspaper articles, press conferences, newsletters, web sites, tweets, etc.) can be used. Finally, the timing of the different means of communication (when) and the persons responsible should be decided (who).The main elements for developing a communication strategy can be presented in a table format.

Table 2   Elements of communication strategy

WHO	WHO FOR	WHAT	WHEN	HOW

- The **Managing Authority** is responsible for developing and implementing the communication strategy for *ex post* evaluation. Usually, the MA has a communications department, which handles the evaluation communication as well as the general RDP communication;

- The **National Rural Network, LAGs** and the **Steering Group** can assist the MA in communicating the evaluation findings.

Follow-up of evaluation findings

Even though the *ex post* evaluation is an assessment of the programming period that has already ended, it is recommended to consider an internal procedure through which the relevant evaluation findings feed into the policy cycle after the start of the new programming period. This is the case especially with regard to the delivery mechanisms and the management aspects of the programmes, which often remain similar from one programming period to the other.

One way of following up evaluation findings is first to go through the *ex post* evaluation report and consider the relevant recommendations for the new programming period. A reason should be given for considering a recommendation not relevant. Afterwards, these recommendations should be put on the annual work list of the MA (or other relevant bodies) with a timetable for achievement. The progress of fulfilling the recommendations should be included in the annual reporting of the institutions or bodies in question.

- The **Managing Authority** should develop a strategy and process for following up the evaluation recommendations.

Feedback into policy

One way of following up evaluation findings is to make an action plan that reflects the evaluation findings. This involves first going through the *ex post* evaluation report and considering the recommendations and findings relevant for the new programming period. Afterwards, these items should be put on the annual work list of the MA (or other relevant bodies) with a clear timetable for achievement and responsibility should be assigned to relevant units / departments. The progress of fulfilling the recommendations should be included in the annual reporting of the institutions or bodies in question.

4. *EX POST* EVALUATION OF 2007-2013 NATIONAL RURAL NETWORK PROGRAMMES

The National Rural Network Programmes must be evaluated as any other intervention in the context of rural development policy from the point of its relevance (to identified needs), effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability in using the public finances.

Additionally National Rural Network Programmes have a distinct intervention logic addressing rural networking, capacity development, facilitating and fostering the implementation of rural development policy. Hence they contain an explorative dimension and non-linear cause-effect chains. *Ex post* evaluation of NRNP is thus paramount for **policy learning**.

Differences and similarities to standard RDP (table comparing RDP / NRN and NRNP)

There are several similarities but also some fundamental differences between a "standard" RDP, an NRN and an NRNP (to be developed).

Table 3   Differences and similarities between standard RDP, NRN and NRNP

	"Standard" RDP	**NRNP**	**NRN**
Legal Requirements	Articles 84 and 86 of Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005	Theoretically same as the "standard" RDP but with some reasonable consideration of issues like "socioeconomic impact"[39] or the Programme's impact on the Community priorities[40].	Subject to evaluation as part of the TA but subject to the same consideration as the NRNP
***Ex post* evaluation focus**	As described in **PART II**	Emphasis on effectiveness, results and success / failure factors, since impacts are mostly intangible and based on perceptions.	Mainly emphasis on effectiveness, achievements and success / failure factors in absence of an intervention logic beyond the Action Plan.
Coverage by the EU Common Intervention logic for rural development	Given	Indirectly given through the focus of the NRNP on the facilitation of implementation of rural development policy but NRNP	Given within the NRN embedment in the TA. NRN may however develop a customised intervention logic.

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[39] Article 86(6) of Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005
[40] Article 9 of Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005 and Council decision 2006/144/EC of 20 February 2006 on Community strategic guidelines for rural development

	"Standard" RDP	NRNP	NRN
		basically have to develop a customised intervention logic.	
Common Evaluation Questions	Developed intentionally for RDP, but RDP may develop Programme-specific Evaluation Questions.	Limited coverage by the Common Horizontal Evaluation Questions. NRNP need to develop Programme-pecific Evaluation Questions.	Limited coverage by the Common Horizontal Evaluation Questions. NRN may develop Programme-specific Evaluation Questions.
Common Indicators	Developed intentionally for RDP, but RDP may develop programme-specific Indicators.	Not applicable apart from some output indicators. NRNP need to develop programme-specific output, result and impact indicators.	Output and in some cases result indicators derived from the Action Plan.
Guidance Documents	CMEF, Helpdesk Working Papers	Helpdesk Working Papers	Helpdesk Working Papers

Differences in process and results

Roles:

The process of the NRNP *ex post* evaluation is similar to the "standard" RDP. However when considering the relevant stakeholders and actors the following points have to be taken in account:

- NRNP (and NRN) contain formal (i.e. top-down structures defined by the MA) and informal elements (e.g. bottom-up initiatives, local alliances, *ad hoc* groupings, etc.). Both elements must be taken in account.

- Actors intermingle; stakeholders, beneficiaries and data providers might be the one and same person.

- Networks members influence themselves and the evaluator and thus the result of evaluation; the observation cannot be "objective" in the sense that e.g. an evaluator observes the change in an environmental value.

Key Steps:

The key steps in the evaluation of the NRNP (and NRN) follow in principle the same logic as the standard RDP. However they are facing also some specific challenges:

- During the planning phase NRNP need to develop their own evaluation components, i.e. review or specification of the intervention logic, programme-specific evaluation questions and indicators, operationalisation of data needs for the capture of the intangible effects of those programmes, selection of data sources and collection methods (since the information is connected usually to humans and is also time-sensitive), etc. NRNP cannot rely on the same

peer consultations as RDP evaluators might be able to do. Different domains, e.g. on technology innovation, possess extensive methodologies on network evaluation, but their applicability on rural networking is limited.

- Due to the limitations described above the formulation of ToR can neither be exhaustive nor final; the MA will need to further develop the evaluation framework with the evaluator during the structuring phase.

- During the implementation phase the delineation among the structuring, observing, analysing and judging phases might not be that straightforward. The evaluation of NRNP will rely less on the analysis of monitoring data and "objective" observation and more on qualitative and collective inquiries (e.g. focus groups). Participants will tend to influence the evaluation approach, especially when moving from the evaluation of the network activities and outputs (e.g. measuring satisfaction on provided training) to the effects on the role of stakeholders and the impact on rural governance. An extreme form of this intermingle are self-assessment tools, which are popular among NRN due to their simplicity and low cost.

- The conclusions out of an NRNP evaluation are based mainly on qualitative aspects and perceptions. Hence they represent, in the best case, an "intra-subjective" point of view that has to be communicated to the stakeholders in a way, that they regard it as their "own". For that reason communication and dissemination of the NRNP *ex post* evaluation must encompass a strong "validation" element in the sense that the evaluation report is produced as a basis for discussion and exchange and not as an "*ex cathedra*" verdict. This implies that the MA must provide a framework for reflection and for tracking the follow-ups induced.

PART II: MAINLY FOR EVALUATORS

(To be developed)

PART III: TOOLBOX

1 SET OF REVISED COMMON EVALUATION QUESTIONS

(To be developed)

2 OUTLINE OF THE *EX POST* EVALUATION REPORT[41]

1.   Executive summary

- Main findings of the evaluation.

- Conclusions and recommendations.

2.   Introduction

- Purpose of the report.

- Structure of the report.

3.   The Evaluation Context

- Brief contextual information about the programme: related national policies, social and economic needs motivating assistance, identification of beneficiaries or other target groups.

- Description of the evaluation process: recapitulation of the Terms of Reference, purpose and scope of the evaluation.

- Brief outline of previous evaluations related to the programme.

4.   Methodological Approach

- Explanation of the evaluation design and the methods used.

- Description of key terms of programme-specific and the common evaluation questions, judgement criteria, target levels.

- Sources of data, techniques for data collection (questionnaires, interviews; size and selection criteria for samples, etc.); information about how the indicators are calculated in order to assess the quality and reliability of the data and identify possible biases.

- Techniques for replying to the evaluation questions and arriving at conclusions.

- Problems or limitations of the methodological approach.

5.   Description of Programme, Measures, and Budget

- Programme implementation: actors involved, institutional context.

- Composition of the programme; description of priorities and measures.

- Intervention logic of single measure.

- Budget foreseen for the entire programming period.

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[41] Chapter 7 of the CMEF Guidance note B – Evaluation Guidelines at
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/eval/guidance/note_b_en.pdf

- Uptake and budget actually spent.

6.   Answers to Evaluation Questions

- Analysis and discussion of indicator(s) with respect to judgement criteria and target levels referred to by evaluation questions.

- Analysis and discussion of quantitative and qualitative information from public statistics, specific surveys / enquiries, or other sources.

- Answers to the evaluation question.

7.   Conclusions and Recommendations

- Coherence between the measures applied and the objectives pursued; balance between the different measures within a programme.

- Degree of achieving programme-specific objectives as well as objectives set out in the national strategy and the Community Strategy.

- Recommendations based on evaluation findings, including possible proposals for the adaptation of programmes.

3 GLOSSARY OF TERMS

(To be developed)

4 EXAMPLE OF QUALITY ASSESSMENT GRID FOR THE EVALUATION REPORT

Title of the evaluation:
Department / unit responsible:
Evaluator / contractor:
Assessment carried out by: (*name organisations/units involved in the assessment*)
Date of quality assessment:

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1) RELEVANCE

Does the evaluation respond to information needs of the commissioning body and fit the Terms of Reference?

SCORING

Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent

Arguments for scoring:

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2) SCOPE

Is the rationale of the programme and its set of outputs, results and impacts examined fully, including both intended and unexpected policy interactions and consequences?

SCORING

Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent

Arguments for scoring:

3) APPROPRIATE DESIGN

Is the design for the evaluation adequate for obtaining results needed to answer the evaluation questions?

SCORING

Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent

Arguments for scoring:

4) RELIABLE DATA
Are primary and secondary data collected adequate for their intended use and have their reliability been ascertained? Have data weaknesses and limitations been explained?

SCORING

Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent

Arguments for scoring:

5) SOUND ANALYSIS

Are qualitative and quantitative data appropriately and systematically analysed to answer evaluation questions and cover other information needs in a valid manner? Are cause and effect links between the intervention and its results explained? Are external factors correctly taken into consideration?

SCORING

Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent

Arguments for scoring:

6) CREDIBLE FINDINGS

Do findings follow logically from and are justified by the data / information, analysis and interpretations based on pre-established criteria? Are findings based on carefully explained assumptions and rationale?

SCORING

Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent

Arguments for scoring:

7) VALID CONCLUSIONS

Are conclusions non-biased and fully based on findings? Are conclusions clear, clustered and prioritised?

SCORING

Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent

Arguments for scoring:

8) HELPFUL RECOMMENDATIONS

Are areas needing improvements identified in coherence with the conclusions? Are the suggested options realistic, impartial and sufficiently detailed to be operationally applicable?

SCORING

Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent

Arguments for scoring:

9) CLARITY

Is the report well structured, balanced and written in an understandable manner?

Is the report easy to read and has a short but comprehensive summary? Does the report contain graphs and tables?

SCORING

Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent

Arguments for scoring:

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE FINAL REPORT

Overall, the quality of the report is assessed to be:

Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent

- Does the evaluation fulfil contractual conditions?
- Are the findings and conclusions of the report reliable, and are there any specific limitations to their validity and completeness?
- Is the information in the report potentially useful for communicating the impacts and achievements of the programme?

5 EXAMPLE OF QUALITY CRITERIA FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF TENDERS

(To be developed)

6 TEMPLATE FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF DATA GAPS

7 EXAMPLE OUTLINE OF THE TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION OF THE TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE *EX POST* EVALUATION[42]

Context	Background
	Purpose
	Actors involved
	Reference to relevant legislation and supporting documents
Scope of the *ex post* evaluation	Programme
	Description of the RD measures
	Geographical area concerned
	Focus of programme
	Programming period
	Specific focus intended (areas, approaches, sectors)
Objectives of the evaluation	Common objectives for the *ex post* evaluation
	Programme-specific objectives for the *ex post* evaluation
Evaluation Questions	List of common evaluation questions
	List of programme-specific evaluation questions
Tasks to be performed	Structuring
	Observing
	Analysing
	Judging
Timing and content of deliverables	Deliverables
	Requirements regarding content, style, format, and structure
	Milestones
	Timeline for all deliverables
Organisation of work	Budget
	Responsibilities for contract management
	Interaction with the Steering Group
	Invoicing arrangements and schedules
Sources and documentation	List of appropriate sources and materials
	Programme documentation (Regulations 1698/2005 and 1974/2006 and national decrees, National Strategy Plan, Rural Development Programme, *Ex ante* Evaluation, Mid-term Evaluation, other evaluations and assessments, CMEF, etc.)
	Provisions for data protection and data security
Tendering procedures and contractual clauses	Description of the tendering procedure
	List of selection criteria for choosing the external evaluator and possible weightings
	Communication of successful/unsuccessful tenders
	Relevant contractual clauses

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[42] Adapted from Annex 1 of the Guidelines on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013, European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, July 2009 at
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=83C6EDCD-9413-1C64-4EAA-1E4E8EC9ED3E

8 RETRO PLAN, AS FOR THE EVALUATION PLAN GUIDELINES (STRESSING THE FACT THAT MA SHOULD START THE PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES NOW!)

TASK	DURATION	DEADLINE
Report submission to the Commission		**31.12.2016**
National / regional approval procedures		
Quality assessment of the final report		
Final report submission to MA / SG		
Draft final report submission to MA / SG		
Interim report submission to MA / SG		
Inception report submission to MA / SG		
Signing of *ex post* evaluation contract		
Assessment of tenders		
End of call for tender		
Launch of call for tender		
Preparation of call for tender		
Terms of Reference		
Evaluation mandate		
(if no permanent evaluation steering group: Setting up of evaluation steering group)		
Screening of data and information sources		
Screening of evaluation questions and indicators		
Assessing evaluation needs		

European Evaluation Network
for Rural Development