



European Evaluation Network  
for Rural Development



# GUIDELINES ESTABLISHING AND IMPLEMENTING THE EVALUATION PLAN OF 2014- 2020 RDPs

DRAFT MARCH 2014

This draft document has been drawn up based on Regulations published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 20 December 2013. It does not prejudge the final nature of any related delegated or implementing act, which will be published later in 2014.



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Additional information about the activities of the Evaluation Expert Network and its Evaluation Helpdesk is available on the Internet through the Europa server (<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/>)

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2020 RDPs

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# FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

**The evaluation plan (EP) is a new element within the rural development monitoring and evaluation system for the programming period 2014-2020**, and is a formal requirement for Rural Development Programmes (RDP). In previous years programme authorities have used various planning tools to structure, manage and steer the evaluation of their Rural Development Programmes, to strategically build-up evaluation capacity, and to ensure that necessary prerequisites are in place for the assessment of the results and impacts of rural development interventions. The evaluation plan of 2014-2020 provides an opportunity to build up on existing experiences in planning of evaluation and sets the corner-stones for the Rural Development Programme's evaluation system.

**The purpose of these non-binding guidelines** is to illustrate what an evaluation plan consists of, to outline why it is important, and to show how it can help to ensure that evaluation activities are conducted effectively. The guidelines aim to interpret the binding minimum requirements of the evaluation plan and also provide recommendations on how to set up and run evaluations during the programming period. A broader spectrum of stakeholders (steering groups, Monitoring Committees, paying agencies, evaluation units, evaluators and EC Desk Officers) involved in programme development and evaluation may also find these guidelines helpful. They contain practical tools and recommendations and encompass the range of situations within, and choices taken by Member States in organising their evaluation systems.

**This document has been drafted by a Thematic Working Group** of the *Evaluation Expert Network* in close collaboration with the relevant services of the European Commission and the Evaluation Expert Committee for Rural Development. Selected experts - Rolf Bergs, Lenka Brown, Simona Cristiano, Maria Coto Sauras, Judit Habuda, John Grieve, Miroslav Kosik, Morten Kvistgaard, Isabel Naylor, Sari Rannanpaa, Andreas Resch, Angelos Sanopolous, Jela Tvrdonova and Hannes Wimmer - have contributed their wealth of evaluation experience to the text. Draft documents of these guidelines were shared with members of the Evaluation Expert Committee in May, June, September and November 2013 to enable them to act as a sounding board and to check whether successive drafts of the text had been adapted to the needs of the main target audience. Representatives of DG Agriculture and Rural Development have ensured the coherence of the guidelines within the EU policy framework. Experts of the Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development supported and facilitated the drafting process.

**The evaluation plan guidelines are non-binding in nature and complement related legal acts.** The present document has been drawn up based on the Regulations published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 20 December of 2013 namely Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013<sup>1</sup> and Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013<sup>2</sup>. The final version of the evaluation plan guidelines will be published after adoption of the delegated and implementing acts.

Brussels, March 2014

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006

<sup>2</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005

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## 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	<i>Ex ante</i> 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

A good practice workshop entitled "From Ongoing Evaluation towards the evaluation plan" was organised in Vienna in May 2012 by the Evaluation Helpdesk<sup>3</sup>. It was attended by 47 participants, amongst them representatives from 18 Member States (MSs), the European Commission, the Evaluation Helpdesk, and evaluators. One of the key findings of the workshop was that an evaluation plan (EP) can serve as an effective tool for Managing Authorities (MAs) to plan their evaluation activities during the programming period, as long as it remains flexible to newly emerging evaluation needs.

### *What is the evaluation plan all about?*

**The evaluation plan is a new element within the rural development monitoring and evaluation system for the 2014 – 2020 programming period.** It is a mandatory component of the Rural Development Programme (RDP), in which the Managing Authority specifies in seven sections how monitoring and evaluation activities will be conducted in the 2014-2020 period. Whilst the evaluation plan is an element in all Common Strategic Framework (CSF) Programmes, in rural development (similarly to programmes financed with European Maritime and Fisheries Funds (EMFF)), it is an integral part of the RDP. The evaluation plan is therefore subject to *ex ante* evaluation and is submitted as part of the RDP. During programme implementation, the evaluation plan serves as a reference document for the management, conduct and follow-up of evaluation activities, as well as the basis for reporting in Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs)<sup>4</sup>. It is therefore a key tool for evaluation during the programming period (formerly "ongoing evaluation").

### *Who are the main evaluation plan stakeholders?*

The drafting of the evaluation plan is the responsibility of the **MA**, with the assistance of **programming bodies** or an **evaluation unit** (if different from the MA). The evaluation plan will be a foundation for the planning, steering and coordination of evaluation tasks. **Evaluators** may use the evaluation plan as a reference document for designing their evaluation approach and for communicating with the MA and other relevant bodies (e.g. data providers). **EC Desk Officers** will assess the evaluation plan to ensure that it meets minimum requirements, and will subsequently refer to it when assessing the evaluation activities undertaken and reported in Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs). **Other evaluation stakeholders** such as paying agencies (PAs), Monitoring Committee (MC) members, evaluation steering groups, bodies managing local development strategies (LDSs), and RDP beneficiaries, may also use the evaluation plan as an information source to clarify their role in evaluation and to get a clearer insight into the evaluation process.

### *How can the non-binding evaluation plan guidelines be utilised?*

These guidelines are designed to help **MAs** to:

- Build and draft the evaluation plan as a part of the RDP (see **PART I** "Evaluation plan in the RDP").
- Implement the evaluation plan during the programming period (see **PART II** "From Plan to Practice" and **PART III** "Toolbox").

The structure aims to satisfy both Member States who prefer concise guidance limited to the fulfilment of minimum requirements (**Part I**) and those who prefer more extensive recommendations (**Part II and III**). In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the process, we recommend reading **Part II** "From Plan to Practice" before drafting the evaluation plan.

<sup>3</sup> The newsletter and presentations from this workshop can be found at [http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/good-practices-workshops/from-ongoing-evaluation-towards-the-evaluation-plan\\_en/en/from-ongoing-evaluation-towards-the-evaluation-plan\\_en.cfm](http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/good-practices-workshops/from-ongoing-evaluation-towards-the-evaluation-plan_en/en/from-ongoing-evaluation-towards-the-evaluation-plan_en.cfm)

<sup>4</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 50 and Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 75

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## **PART I: EVALUATION PLAN IN THE RDP**

*Recommendations on how to fulfil the minimum requirements for drafting the evaluation plan*

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# 1 WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF HAVING AN EVALUATION PLAN?

The **overall purpose** of the evaluation plan, as outlined in the draft Implementing Act on Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Annex I, point 9 (state March 2014), is to ensure that sufficient and appropriate evaluation activities are undertaken, and to ensure that data needed for RDP evaluation is available. Assessing this in advance brings a number of benefits to the Rural Development Programme (RDP), which are discussed below.

## **Planned and structured RDP evaluations**

- **Fitting evaluation into RDP implementation right from the programme start** enables evaluation to be understood as an integral part of programme implementation, providing relevant and timely feedback to evaluation stakeholders and policymakers.
- **Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders** and providing opportunities for early dialogue between relevant stakeholders.
- **Fostering a multi-annual approach to evaluation tasks and activities** and linking them to the information needs of Managing Authorities (MAs), the European Commission (EC) and other evaluation stakeholders.
- **Ensuring appropriate resources** for administrators and evaluators to carry out monitoring and evaluation tasks.
- **Reducing the administrative burden** through the design of a data-management and monitoring system that is tailor-made to address evaluation needs.

## **Targeted monitoring and evaluation activities**

- **Organizing monitoring and evaluations activities targeted at the needs of RDP stakeholders** which are also compliant with respective EU Regulations.
- **Specifying thematic priorities for evaluation during the programming period** and outlining what is needed to enable the application of advanced evaluation methods.
- **Providing a clear reference point for flexible annual planning of evaluation activities.** For example, a voluntary annual work plan could be used by the MA as a tool to help administrators implement individual evaluation tasks.
- **Establishing links between monitoring, evaluation and reporting activities**, such as evaluation during the programming period, AIRs, *ex ante* evaluation and *ex post* evaluation.

## **Making better use of evaluation results**

- **Strengthening the communication of evaluation findings based on robust evidence** to decision-makers and other stakeholders.
- **Fostering evaluation transparency and a common understanding of the effects of rural development policy** amongst all those involved in programming, managing, implementing and evaluating the RDP, including RDP beneficiaries and the broader public.
- **Providing a comprehensive overview of the evaluation of rural policy intervention** in the RDP area, prepared at the very beginning of RDP implementation so that all actors are aware of intended results.

## 2 THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

In September 2013 the European Parliament, the EU Council and the European Commission reached an agreement on reforming the common agriculture policy (CAP) for the 2014-2020 programming period. The EU regulations, published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 20 December 2013 establish a **reinforced monitoring and evaluation system** compared to previous periods.

The **building blocks of the monitoring and evaluation system for Rural Development Programmes (RDPs)** are set out at different levels by the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013<sup>5</sup>, Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013<sup>6</sup> and Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013<sup>7</sup> and the respective delegated and implementing acts.

- At the overarching level, Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 defines the fundamental requirements with respect to the purpose and objectives of evaluation (Art. 50, 54(1), 55, 56, 57), the use of indicators (Art. 27(4)), the provision of resources and capacities (Art. 54(2), 56(2)), and the responsibilities and independence of evaluations (Art. 54(3)).

It is clearly stated that evaluations shall be carried out to improve the quality of the design and implementation of programmes and that the impact of programmes has to be evaluated (Art. 54(1)). Managing Authorities (MAs) shall ensure that evaluations are carried out during the programming period to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of each programme on the basis of the evaluation plan and that at least once during the programming period an evaluation shall assess how support has contributed to the objectives of each priority.(Art. 56(3)). Moreover, Member States (MS) shall provide the necessary resources for carrying out evaluations, including ensuring procedures for data collection (Art. 54(2)).

- At the fund-specific level, Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 specifies the objectives of monitoring and evaluation (Art. 68), the required use of indicators, including the establishment of common indicators (Art. 8, 67, 69), data provision and data management (Art. 69, 70, 71, 76, 78). The Regulation also lays down requirements in relation to monitoring and evaluation reporting in the AIR and to the Monitoring Committee (MC) (Art. 74, 75, 76) including provision of information on the implementation of the evaluation plan (Art. 8, 76).

Against this background the evaluation plan sets out the necessary foundations to ensure the implementation of all building blocks in the reinforced monitoring and evaluation system, as set out by the relevant legal provisions.

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<sup>5</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006.

<sup>6</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agriculture policy and repealing Council Regulation (EEC) No 352/78, (EC) No. 165/94, (EC) No 2799/98, (EC) No 814/2000, (EC) No 1290/2005, and (EC) No 485/2008.

<sup>7</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005.



### 3 ELEMENTS OF THE EVALUATION PLAN TO BE COVERED IN THE RDP

This section is based on the minimum requirements for the evaluation plan as established in the draft Implementing Act on Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Annex I, point 9 (state March 2014)<sup>8</sup>.

The evaluation plan forms part of the future monitoring and evaluation system for rural development and outlines how evaluation during the programming period will be conducted and reported. The minimum requirements as included in the implementing act for the Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 will be legally binding. Compliance with them will be required in order for the RDP to be approved. As with all other elements of the RDP, the evaluation plan may only be modified through a formal modification procedure.

The implementing act will also specify minimum reporting requirements on the implementation of the evaluation plan, which will be included in the Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs). The evaluation plan as described here (and in particular sections 1, 4 and 7) is considered to fulfil the requirements of Article 8(m)(ii) as regards the description of the monitoring and evaluation procedures. Therefore, an additional and separate description of the monitoring and evaluation system will not be required in the RDP.

**Figure 1** The minimum requirements for the evaluation plan



The seven sections of the evaluation plan are described further in the following chapters. For each section, a paragraph of the minimum requirements is shown in a green box. Key terms are discussed for each section with a view to achieve a common understanding of the main issues and concepts. A number of guiding questions outline what should be considered when drafting the respective section of the evaluation plan. Practical tips show the most important dos and don'ts. Finally, selected cross-references indicate to the interested reader where further information can be found in **Part II** and **III**.

<sup>8</sup> See Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 54 and 56, and Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 8(1)(g); 76(1).

### 3.1 Objectives and purpose of the evaluation plan

#### *What is the minimum requirement?*

*This section should contain a statement of the objective and purpose of the evaluation plan, based on ensuring that sufficient and appropriate evaluation activities are undertaken, in particular to provide information needed for programme steering, for the Annual Implementation Reports in 2017 and 2019 and the ex-post evaluation, and to ensure that data needed for RDP evaluation is available.*

#### *What are the related key terms?*

The key terms **objectives** and **purpose** of the evaluation refer to the aim that is to be met by drawing up and implementing the evaluation plan as well as the function it is intended to fulfil. The objectives of the evaluation plan contain two aspects: first, they refer to the EU common evaluation plan objectives. Second, the Managing Authority might expand and complete these by formulating additional programme-specific objectives of the evaluation plan, reflecting the programme-specific situation in planning evaluation of the RDP 2014-2020.

#### *What should be considered when drafting this section of the evaluation plan?*

- Objectives of the evaluation plan as listed in the minimum requirements (see above).
- Additional specific programme-related objectives: What other objectives do you intend to pursue with the evaluation plan?

#### *Practical tips when drafting the evaluation plan chapter in the RDP*

- Ensure that the objectives listed in the minimum requirements are mentioned.
- Add any additional objectives that you intend to achieve with your evaluation plan (e.g. those identified in a brief working session with relevant evaluation stakeholders).

#### *Where can further information be found?*

- Chapter 1 (**Part I**) of this guidance document explores what can be achieved with the evaluation plan, and may be helpful when drafting the programme-specific “objectives and purpose” section.

### 3.2 Governance and coordination

#### *What is the minimum requirement?*

*This section should contain a brief description of the monitoring and evaluation arrangements for the RDP, identifying the main bodies involved and their responsibilities. It should explain how evaluation activities are linked with RDP implementation in terms of content and timing.*

#### *What are the related key terms?*

**Monitoring and evaluation arrangements** are understood as the system of actors, activities and mechanisms that is set up to monitor and assess RDP implementation. The **bodies involved** are those defined by the legal acts<sup>9</sup> (Managing Authority (MA), Monitoring Committee (MC), paying agency (PA), beneficiaries), as well as others that may already exist within the Member State (MS) / region (e.g. evaluation unit, advisory institutes) and those that may be additionally set up (e.g. evaluation steering group, technical working groups (TWGs)). **Coordination** of evaluation activities is understood as the mechanisms and arrangements that bring together the information and needs of rural development implementation and evaluation.

#### *What should be considered when drafting this section of the evaluation plan?*

- **Organisation of the RDP’s monitoring and evaluation arrangements:** How are the tasks and responsibilities in relation to monitoring and evaluation divided between different parts of your Managing Authority and other actors? How do they relate to each other? What division of

<sup>9</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 Art. 47, 49, 51, 54; and Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 66, 73

labour is envisaged? Which processes are foreseen? Which lessons from the last programming period have been learnt and how have you incorporated them into the new system?

- **Main bodies involved and their responsibilities:** What roles do the following actors play in your monitoring and evaluation system: Managing Authority, Monitoring Committee, paying agency, beneficiaries, local action groups (LAGs), National Rural Network (NRN), evaluation steering group, technical working groups, beneficiaries, data providers, evaluators? How and in which way(s) do they contribute to monitoring and evaluation? Is the body responsible for each key task clearly identified?
- **Link of evaluation activities with RDP implementation:** How do you intend to assess the data needs for evaluations? How will you adjust your monitoring system so that the required data will be obtained on time? How will you seek agreement on who will be responsible to develop these processes?

#### **Practical tips when drafting the evaluation plan chapter in the RDP**

- Use organograms to illustrate the monitoring and evaluation arrangements and also describe them in the text.
- Clearly identify relevant actors, but avoid naming any companies (e.g. of evaluators) that might change.
- Note that the composition of the Monitoring Committee should not be described in the evaluation plan but rather in the appropriate chapter of the RDP.
- Make sure to describe actors' responsibilities specifically in relation to monitoring and evaluation.

#### **Where can further information be found?**

For a detailed description of different actors' role relation to monitoring and evaluation see **Part II** (chapter 5.1) of this guidance document.

### **3.3 Evaluation topics and activities**

#### **What is the minimum requirement?**

*This section should contain an indicative description of the evaluation topics and activities anticipated, including, but not limited to, fulfilment of EU requirements. It should cover activities needed to evaluate the contribution of each of the RDP priority to objectives, assessment of result and impact indicator values, analysis of net effects, thematic issues (including sub-programmes), cross-cutting issues, the National Rural Network and the contribution of community-led local development strategies. It should also include planned support for evaluation at LAG level. It should mention any programme-specific elements such as work needed to develop methodologies or to address specific policy areas.*

#### **What are the related key terms?**

**Evaluation topics** are the specific subject(s) that the evaluation is focused on. **Evaluation activities** are activities that Managing Authorities and other stakeholders need to carry out **during the programming period** in order to assess the **contribution of the RDP to rural development priorities** and programme **results and impacts**. The programme **result indicators** are tools to measure the effects of the programme on beneficiaries and are used in the assessment of programme results. Programme **impact indicators** are tools used to measure programme impact on changes observed in the programme context or area. **Analysis of net effects** is the process of identifying changes which are due to the programme, rather than other external factors. **Cross-cutting issues** (sustainable development, climate change, innovation) and **specific evaluation topics** (National Rural Network, Leader) will require **additional evaluation activities**.

#### **What should be considered when drafting this section of the evaluation plan?**

- **Major evaluation topics during the programming period:** What are the most important evaluation needs and when do they occur in relation to the programme? (e.g. programme strategy, achievements of rural development priorities / focus areas / group of measures, assessment of cross-cutting issues, programme delivery, cost-effectiveness of programme implementation?) What will be the focus of evaluation in relation to these needs? Which evaluation topics will be chosen for evaluation during the programming period? What will be the timing for the evaluation of individual topics?
- **Major evaluation activities to be conducted during the programming period:** Which evaluation activities need to be conducted in relation to the assessment of programme results? Which activities need to be assessed in relation to programme impacts and the identification of the programme's net effects? Which specific additional activities are required to address particular thematic issues (including those addressed by sub-programmes)? Which specific additional evaluation activities need to be conducted in relation to the cross-cutting issues of sustainable development, climate change and innovation? What will be required to adequately evaluate the National Rural Network, the contribution of local development strategies, the added value of the Leader approach and the partnership principle?

#### **Practical tips when drafting the evaluation plan chapter in the RDP**

- Use brief descriptions of proposed evaluations emphasising only their cornerstones in relation to evaluation topics, major evaluation tasks and usage of common and programme-specific elements.
- Only list major evaluation topics.
- List and very briefly describe overall evaluation activities (related to all topics) and major topic-specific activities involved in the preparation and implementation of evaluation and reporting of evaluation results.
- Include a general mention of *ad hoc* evaluations and studies to enable flexibility to respond to newly emerging evaluation needs.
- Do not list very specific, small-scale, complementary and *ad hoc* evaluation topics.
- Avoid a too detailed description of evaluation activities.
- Do not propose specific evaluation methods to be used to answer evaluation questions and assess impacts and achievements of programme objectives.

#### **Where can further information be found?**

For examples of evaluation topics see **Part II** (chapter 6.2 and 6.3) of this guidance document.

For examples of evaluation activities see **Part II** (chapter 6.4) of this guidance document.

### 3.4 Data and information

#### *What is the minimum requirement?*

*This section should provide a brief description of the system to record, maintain, manage and report statistical information on RDP implementation and the provision of monitoring data for evaluation. It should identify the data sources to be used, data gaps, potential institutional issues related to data provision, and proposed solutions. This section should demonstrate that appropriate data management systems will be operational in due time.*

#### *What are the related key terms?*

As part of the *ex ante* conditionalities, Member States must ensure the existence of a **statistical information system** with indicators that are necessary for undertaking evaluations<sup>10</sup>. The MSs are also required to organise the production and gathering of data and to make information provided by the monitoring system available to evaluators<sup>11</sup>.

The **monitoring data** submitted to the European Commission (EC) will be derived from the application forms (operations database) and the payment system. Some of this information is specifically included to facilitate evaluations, but the MA should anticipate any additional data needs for the evaluation topics and activities included in the previous section.

#### *What should be considered when drafting this section of the evaluation plan?*

- **System of statistical information on RDP implementation and monitoring for evaluation purposes:** What are the provisions to ensure data is available in the right format and on time (e.g. for AIRs, for the assessment of impacts)? What are the links between the application forms and monitoring database? What mechanisms are foreseen to ensure data quality?
- **Data sources to be used** (monitoring data, surveys, external data, Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN)): What data will be obtained from monitoring (beneficiary data) and what from other databases? What will be done to match different data with monitoring data? What kind of data will be collected by evaluators and what by other bodies (MA, paying agencies (PA), etc.)? How will you ensure that beneficiaries report on time and that time series are obtained? What strategies are envisaged to establish control groups?
- **Data gaps identified / bottlenecks / issues:** What have been the major bottlenecks for data provision in the 2007-2013 period? How is data availability being assessed in the programme design phase? How will you consider the risk of mistakes in data received from other sources? How will access to non-anonymous or semi-anonymous micro-data be granted? What are the conditions and potential legal consequences of access to restricted data? How will clear and common definitions amongst different actors be ensured during data collection?

#### *Practical tips when drafting the evaluation plan chapter in the RDP*

- Build on experiences from previous evaluations when describing data bottlenecks and potential issues experienced when assessing impacts.
- Be specific with regard to different data types.
- Consult with the *ex ante* evaluator or ongoing evaluator before specifying possible strategies to achieve control groups.

#### *Where can further information be found?*

For more information in relation to data and information systems see **Part II** (chapter 5.4) of this guidance document.

<sup>10</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 96.6 (b), 110.1(h), Annex XI on *ex ante* conditionalities

<sup>11</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 8.1(d), 9, 74(c) and Annex V on *ex ante* conditionalities

## 3.5 Timeline

### *What is the minimum requirement?*

*This section should contain the **major milestones of the programming period** and an **indicative outline of the timing** needed to ensure that results are available at the appropriate time.*

### *What are the related key terms?*

**Major evaluation milestones** are the enhanced AIRs in 2017 and 2019, and the *ex post* evaluation. The **indicative outline of timing** shows the anticipated duration, the starting and ending points of each process. The outline requires backward scheduling (starting from the last step in the process needed) in order to ensure that results are available on time.

### *What should be considered when drafting this section of the evaluation plan?*

- **Major milestones during the programming period:** What are the mandatory elements and deadlines at EU and national level that have to be respected when developing your timeline? What kind of information needs to be available by the end of 2016, 2018 and 2024? What other evaluation activities (studies, intermediary evaluations, and updates, etc.) do you envisage will be needed to ensure that these requirements are fulfilled, and when will they need to take place? Are there additional issues or milestones specific to your programme?
- **Indicative outline of timing:** What are the major risks related to timing? What are the lessons from the previous period regarding the timing of evaluations? What kind of preparatory steps (e.g. data preparation, methodology development, review of Evaluation Questions, launch of tenders) are needed to enable the first evaluation of programme impacts for the AIR in 2019? What experience from previous programming periods do you have concerning the average length of time required for each action? When will you start preparing and launching major tenders and other preparatory work? How will the indicative outline of timing be fine-tuned (e.g. multi-annual work plan, action plan) and followed up during the programming period?

### *Practical tips when drafting the evaluation plan chapter in the RDP*

- Base the indicative lengths of processes on experiences from the previous programme period.
- Be specific with regard to the required preparatory working steps, but include sufficient buffers in timing.

### *Where can further information be found?*

For examples of good practice in relation to drafting a timeline and more details on establishing the non-binding internal evaluation plan, see **Part III** (Toolbox) of this guidance document.

## 3.6 Communication

### *What is the minimum requirement?*

*This section should contain a description of how evaluation findings will be disseminated to target recipients, including a description of the mechanisms established to follow-up on the use of evaluation results.*

### *What are the related key terms?*

**Communication** ensures that evaluation findings (WHAT) are transmitted to the right recipients (WHO), in the right format (HOW) and at the right time (WHEN). The **target recipients** are evaluation stakeholders at EU, national and RDP level, such as policymakers, evaluators, researchers, beneficiaries, and the wider public. **Information channels** are the means (e.g. e-mail, internet, intranet, newsletter, events) through which evaluation findings are disseminated. The **follow-up of evaluation results** can be done through different mechanisms (e.g. action plans, seminars, workshops, committees) in order to feed lesson learning and recommendations from evaluations back into programme implementation and to the policy cycle.

### *What should be considered when drafting this section of the evaluation plan?*

- **How to make the results of evaluation activities available?** What are the lessons on effective communication of evaluation results from the previous programming period? Who is responsible for the drafting and implementation of the evaluation's communication strategy? Is this actor supported by any working group or other bodies during the communication strategy's implementation? How will the implementation of the evaluation's communication strategy be monitored?
- **Target recipients and their information needs:** Which actors within the RDP's overall monitoring and evaluation system (e.g. Managing Authority, paying agency, Monitoring Committee, possible technical working groups and / or evaluation steering group) are targeted by the evaluation's communication strategy? Which other stakeholders (policymakers, general public, researchers, etc.) are addressed? What are the specific information needs of the target recipients and how are they addressed? When do they need specific types of information? Who needs information which could lead to further improvement of the programme management and / or implementation? Who needs information about the effects and impacts of the supported interventions? What consequences will the information needs of the target recipients have on the scope and focus of the planned evaluation activities?
- **Information channels:** Which information channels do you have at your disposal? What use will be made of classic information channels (e.g. events, web pages)? What use will be made of interactive information channels (e.g. workshops, focus groups, interactive web pages)? How will different information channels be used to satisfy the information needs of different target groups?
- **Follow-up of evaluation results:** What procedures and mechanisms are in place to follow up the findings and recommendations from evaluation? How will you ensure that evaluation results influence programme implementation? What role do Managing Authority, measure managers, paying agencies, EC Desk Officers, etc. play in this?

### **Practical tips when drafting the evaluation plan chapter in the RDP**

- Summarize the communication strategy in a table showing: who, who for, what, when and how.
- Do not name contractors / companies who may change.
- Do not include fixed dates.

### **Where can further information be found?**

For an example of how the essential elements of a communication strategy can be presented in the form of a table, see **Part II** (chapter 5.5) of this guidance document.

## **3.7 Resources**

### **What is the minimum requirement?**

*This section should describe the resources needed and foreseen to implement the plan, including an indication of administrative capacity, data, financial resources, IT needs. It should also describe the capacity building activities foreseen to ensure that the evaluation plan can be fully implemented.*

### **What are the related key terms?**

**Resources** are, in this context, understood as the financial and human resources required for the implementation of the evaluation plan.

### **What should be considered when drafting this section of the evaluation plan?**

- **Resources:** What is the total cost for the implementation of the evaluation plan activities outlined, i.e. the daily management of the monitoring and evaluation system, costs for capacity building for monitoring and evaluation; evaluation contracts, evaluation studies, other measure-related analysis, case studies, costs for establishment and running of IT systems, data collection and management, data purchase, costs for methodological developments and guidance, costs for the implementation of the evaluation communication strategy, etc.? What other national / regional funds go into the monitoring and evaluation budget? What funds are set aside to cover emerging evaluation and data needs?
- **Staff resources:** This should consider the level of resources needed to implement the evaluation plan, and what type of profile and which competencies are needed. Is there sufficient existing staff or will additional personnel be recruited? Are there any periods where higher resource input will be needed?
- **Capacity building activities in relation to monitoring and evaluation:** What are the lessons learnt from the previous programme period? How will you identify specific needs with regard to monitoring and evaluation capacity building? What training activities are you planning? For whom? What manuals and other support materials for capacity building are you developing?

### **Practical tips when drafting the evaluation plan chapter in the RDP**

- Provide an indicative outline of the staff responsible for implementation of the evaluation plan.
- Provide an indicative break-down of the financial resources required for monitoring and evaluation.
- Calculate estimated costs based on previous experiences, but adapt to new requirements.
- Make sure to reserve resources for *ad hoc* evaluations and unforeseeable costs.

### **Where can further information be found?**

For a further discussion on human and financial resources see **Part II** (chapter 5.4). For more information on the role of different actors in capacity building see **Part II** (chapter 5.1).

For implications of evaluation topics and activities on resources see **Part II** (chapters 6.2, 6.3. and 6.4) of this guidance document.



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## 4 SETTING UP AND USING THE EVALUATION PLAN

### 4.1 Preparing the evaluation plan

**The Managing Authority (MA)** or its delegated representative (e.g. evaluation unit) will lead the development of the evaluation plan (EP) during programme design, to be submitted as part of the Rural Development Programme (RDP). This process may involve a range of stakeholders concerned with programme design as well as with steering, managing, coordinating and conducting evaluation tasks (paying agencies (PAs), evaluators, local stakeholders, National Rural Networks (NRNs), decision-makers and beneficiaries). In each case, this process should build on stakeholders' experiences with rural development evaluation in previous periods and critically assess what has worked well and what needs to be improved.

**The *ex ante* evaluator assesses whether** the evaluation plan complies with the legal requirements and if it contains an adequate framework for evaluation during the programming period. For this purpose, the *ex ante* evaluator will assess the content of the evaluation plan for its completeness, usability and integration with other information processing activities. The evaluator will check whether the activities included in the evaluation plan match with the information needs of the MA and the European Union (EU) for evaluation, and whether the resources allocated appear sufficient to cover the proposed activities in order to generate the outputs foreseen. If necessary, the *ex ante* evaluator will provide suggestions to improve the quality of the evaluation plan (see [Guidelines for the \*ex ante\* evaluation of 2014-2020 RDPs](#), chapter 4.2).

**European Commission (EC) services** will assess the evaluation plan in line with the legal framework, and will consider whether it meets the minimum requirements and fulfils the objectives stated. The EC approves the evaluation plan as part of the RDP.

### 4.2 Implementing the evaluation plan

The **body** specified in the evaluation plan with the primary responsibility for implementing the evaluation plan (e.g. Managing Authority, evaluation unit) will be expected to play the leading role in establishing the suggested structures and in steering the evaluation activities during the programming period. In order to ensure timely provision of evaluation results, a close coordination with other relevant bodies and evaluation stakeholders will be needed (see Chapter 5 Governance).

### 4.3 Modifying the evaluation plan

The evaluation plan may be **subject to modification**, particularly if there are substantial changes in the RDP strategy or content (e.g. inclusion or elimination of focus areas). However, as with all other elements of the RDP, the evaluation plan can only be modified through a formal modification procedure.

### 4.4 Monitoring and reporting on the evaluation plan

An internal monitoring system on the implementation of the evaluation plan must be put in place to ensure that the plan remains on track or that potential deviations are allowed for. The responsibility for such monitoring should be clearly attributed, together with responsibility for deciding on any modifications to plan or process to ensure that requirements are still met. Similarly, the responsibility for reporting on the implementation of the evaluation plan should be made explicit.

## **PART II: FROM PLAN TO PRACTICE**

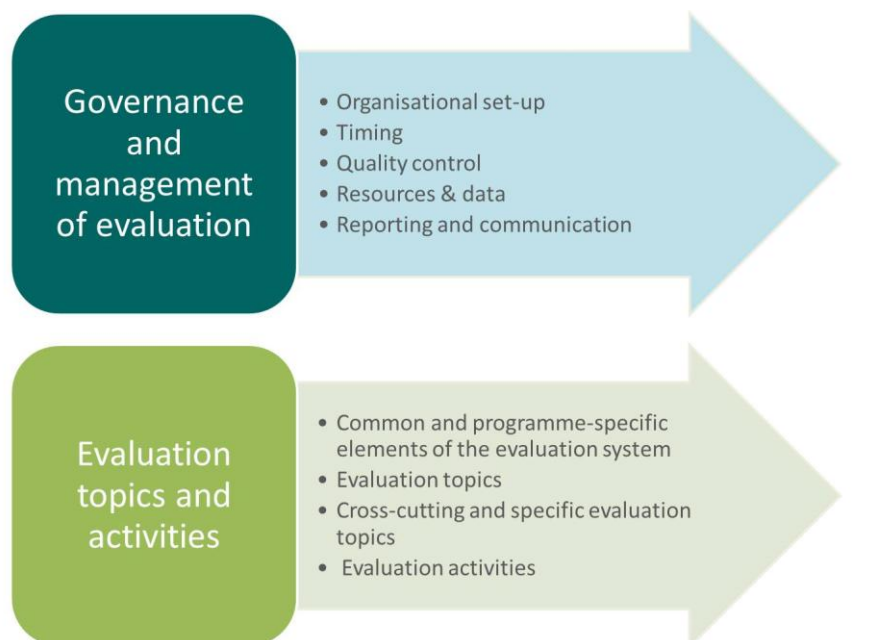
*Recommendations on how to implement the evaluation plan*

In the second part of the guidelines, we describe good practice in implementing the evaluation plan, paying particular attention to;

(1) Governance and management of evaluation.

(2) Evaluation topics and activities.

**Figure 2** Structure of Part II of the guidelines:



## 5 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF EVALUATION

The individual parts of a **monitoring and evaluation system** for a Rural Development Programme (RDP) should come together to form a logical, well-functioning entity. Monitoring and evaluation systems consist of deliverables (“WHAT”), actors (“WHO”), and processes (“HOW”) that are time-bound (“WHEN”). In order to function, the system also needs resources (“WITH WHAT”) as inputs. This chapter looks at the governance issues to consider when setting up a monitoring and evaluation system in sequence; the organizational set-up of the monitoring and evaluation system; timing; quality control; resources; and finally, communication of evaluation results.

**Governance** is mainly concerned with actors and processes; in other words who does what and how things are done. Important aspects of governance are transparency and accountability. A well-designed governance system ensures that decisions are made in a consistent and fair manner. It also enables stakeholders to be involved in decision-making, while openness about governance fosters public trust in the spending of public funds. Furthermore, a robust governance system is a vital element in ensuring that the monitoring and evaluation system is able to deliver results. A well-designed governance system also increases efficiency.

### 5.1 Governance issues to consider when setting up a monitoring and evaluation system

When setting up a monitoring and evaluation system, the first thing to do is to identify what needs to be done to generate intended outputs. Actors should then be identified and their responsibilities outlined, i.e. who does what. If tasks and responsibilities are divided between several units within one body (such as the Managing Authority (MA)), a coherent overall picture of the division of labour should also be provided. Finally, process descriptions should illustrate how the monitoring and evaluation system actually works by showing how things are done. Later on, during the programming period the processes can be improved by concentrating on how things could be done better.

#### *Organizational set-up of monitoring and evaluation system*

The main bodies involved in monitoring and evaluation of RDPs are typically the MAs, paying agencies (PAs), Monitoring Committee (MC) and, on occasion, an evaluation steering group, technical working groups (TWGs), evaluators, beneficiaries, local action groups (LAGs), National Rural Networks (NRNs) and data providers. In regionalised countries, there are sometimes additional stakeholders, for instance a national evaluation network, an evaluation coordinator, or national and regional ministries.

As the specific organisational set-up for monitoring and evaluation varies greatly amongst Member States, it is not possible to recommend any single model of governance. The monitoring and evaluation governance should be planned to suit the specificities of the RDP and the Member State or region. However, it is obviously advisable to consider the lessons learnt from previous programming periods when planning governance processes.

The general roles and responsibilities of the main bodies involved in monitoring and evaluation are summarised below.

#### ▶ **Managing Authority**

The Managing Authority shoulders responsibility for the functioning and governance of the monitoring and evaluation system and the quality, timeliness and communication of results. There are several legal requirements concerning the monitoring and evaluation activity of the Managing Authority.

In terms of monitoring, the Managing Authority must ensure a secure electronic information system<sup>12</sup>, provide the European Commission (EC) with relevant indicator data on selected and completed operations and draw up the Annual Implementation Report (AIR)<sup>13</sup>. The Managing Authority also monitors the quality of programme implementation by means of indicators<sup>14</sup> and provides the Monitoring Committee with information and documents necessary to monitor programme progress<sup>15</sup>.

The Managing Authority is responsible for drawing up an evaluation plan (EP)<sup>16</sup> and for ensuring that it is consistent with the monitoring and evaluation system.<sup>17</sup> The Managing Authority organises evaluations and related activities on the basis of the evaluation plan<sup>18</sup>. In the 2014-2020 programming period, the RDP's contribution to each priority's objectives should be evaluated at least once<sup>19</sup>. This requirement reflects the need for enhanced AIRs in 2017<sup>20</sup> and 2019<sup>21</sup>, as well as the requirements of *ex post* evaluation<sup>22</sup>. The Managing Authority must make sure that the *ex ante* and *ex post* evaluations conform to the monitoring and evaluation system and that the *ex post* evaluation is conducted on time.<sup>23</sup> The Managing Authority is also responsible for communicating each evaluation to the European Commission<sup>24</sup> and for making evaluation reports public.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to such legal requirements, the Managing Authority often takes on other tasks relating to monitoring and evaluation, such as chairing the evaluation steering group, managing evaluation tenders, coordinating evaluations through an evaluation unit or an evaluation coordinator, facilitating cooperation amongst the monitoring and evaluation stakeholders and ensuring capacity building of stakeholders. Typically the MA is also in charge of communicating the evaluation results to internal and external stakeholders, as well as to the wider public. The MA is also directly involved in collecting and processing monitoring data in some MSs.

Given the range of monitoring and evaluation related tasks within the Managing Authority, it is important that tasks are clearly assigned and procedures are well thought through, agreed on and documented.

#### ► **Monitoring Committee**

The Monitoring Committee reviews the implementation of the programme and progress towards its objectives<sup>26</sup>, principally through the use of indicators<sup>27</sup>, and considers and approves the AIRs before they are sent to the EC. The MC shall examine activities and outputs related to the progress in the implementation of the evaluation plan<sup>28</sup> and may issue recommendations to the MA regarding programme implementation and evaluation and then monitor actions taken as a result of its recommendations<sup>29</sup>.

The size and composition of the MC varies greatly between the RDPs. As a minimum, the MC should be composed of MA representatives, intermediate bodies and partner organisations<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 66.1(a1)

<sup>13</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 66.3. (g)

<sup>14</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 69

<sup>15</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 66.1(e)

<sup>16</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 66.1(e); and Regulation (EU) No 1303/2005, Art. 56.1

<sup>17</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 66.1(a1)

<sup>18</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art.56.3

<sup>19</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art.56.3

<sup>20</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 50.4; and Regulation(EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 75.3

<sup>21</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 50.5; and Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 75.4

<sup>22</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 78

<sup>23</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 77 and 78

<sup>24</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 75.1and 76

<sup>25</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 76.3

<sup>26</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 49.1

<sup>27</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 72

<sup>28</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 74

<sup>29</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 49.4

<sup>30</sup> Regulation (EU) No, 1303/2013 Art. 48.1

### ▶ **Paying agency**

The accreditation of paying agencies depends on, *inter alia*, monitoring<sup>31</sup>. Based on this, the paying agency has an important role in monitoring and evaluation activities as they hold information regarding applications, supported projects, payments and controls. Much of the data required for the submission of AIRs is provided by the PA who therefore needs to work in close partnership with the MA, for instance through a joint technical working group and participation in the evaluation steering group work. In some cases, it may be necessary to formalise the PA's responsibilities through memorandums, for example.

As the PA typically records and holds much of the information required for monitoring and evaluation, provisions and procedures for the MA's and evaluators' access to data should be put in place so that timely data flow is secured. Ideally, there will be a common PA and MA data system or interface to facilitate the transfer and handling of data. In some MSs, the PA itself may be decentralised or supported by delegated bodies, in which case information flow and responsibilities should be clarified to avoid any confusion.

### ▶ **Evaluation steering group**

Establishing a steering group to support evaluation processes is highly advisable as it helps facilitate and coordinate stakeholder consultation. It can also contribute positively to the governance of monitoring and evaluation processes and help ensure the relevance of monitoring and evaluation activities to programme needs. Evaluation steering group members 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 typically oversees the evaluation process during the programming period, including the drafting of the evaluation plan (if the evaluation steering group is constituted before submission of the RDP) and each evaluation that takes place. A single steering group fosters continuity and capacity building. It is also possible to convene separate groups for each evaluation, if appropriate, but this may be burdensome. A compromise may be for a core group to be augmented temporarily with expertise specific to the requirements of individual evaluations.

An evaluation steering group is typically convened by the MA. The composition<sup>32</sup> 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 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 may also be useful to include representatives of other European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds) and experts from research institutions. The group 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.

### ▶ **Technical working groups**

Technical working groups (TWGs) are sometimes established by the MA or the MC to assist in technical tasks and to consult with stakeholders on specific issues, e.g. environmental issues, such as water protection and nature conservation, or Leader delivery. The MA may also wish to set up

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<sup>31</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013 Art. 1(a)

<sup>32</sup> 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.

evaluation working groups to ensure coordination between the MA and the PA. Obviously the composition and tasks assigned to each TWG will vary depending on the issue at hand.

▶ **Beneficiaries**

Beneficiaries of RDP interventions are directly involved in the monitoring and evaluation process in two ways. Individual beneficiaries are often obliged to provide information pertinent to the programme's monitoring and evaluation<sup>33</sup>. 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 evaluation steering group.

▶ **Local action groups**

LAGs are involved in monitoring and evaluation activities in several ways. They are duty bound to provide information pertinent to a programme's monitoring and evaluation<sup>34</sup>, and also carry out self-evaluations and monitor the development of Local Development Strategies (LDSs). Representatives of LAGs also often participate in regional or national level evaluation steering groups or TWGs. LAGs can bring invaluable local knowledge and contacts, as well as a practical perspective on the monitoring and evaluation process.

▶ **National Rural Networks**

NRNs aim to improve the quality of implementation of RDPs, increase stakeholders' involvement in RDP implementation, inform the broader public about the RDP and potential beneficiaries about funding opportunities, and foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas<sup>35</sup>. NRNs also have an important role in sharing and disseminating monitoring and evaluation findings<sup>36</sup>. Their role can be particularly important in regionalised countries, where the NRN can be an important source of expertise and capacity building, and can contribute to the development of harmonised approaches to evaluation, such as the establishment of regional proxies when only national data is available for impact indicators.

▶ **Regional governments and agencies**

When regional governments and / or agencies are involved in RDP implementation, they are typically involved in monitoring and evaluation through data collection and the monitoring of programme progress at regional level.

▶ **Data providers and other relevant institutions and organisations**

It is useful to consider data providers (national statistical office, relevant ministries, research institutes, etc.) as stakeholders in monitoring and 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, evaluation steering groups or TWGs.

▶ **Evaluators**

RDP evaluations must be carried out by internal or external experts that are functionally independent of the authorities responsible for programme implementation<sup>37</sup>. Evaluators can gain important insights into the programme and its governance that can help the MA improve RDP implementation. RDP evaluators are usually external experts (e.g. single company or research institution, or a consortium

<sup>33</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 71

<sup>34</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 71

<sup>35</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 54.2

<sup>36</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 54.3

<sup>37</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 54.3



made up of several companies and / or research institutions) and chosen through a tendering procedure. Evaluators may be selected for the entire programming period or for individual evaluations.

### **Coordination of evaluation activities with RDP implementation**

Evaluation should be considered at the planning phase of the RDP and form an integral part of RDP operations; this is one of the reasons for including the evaluation plan as part of the RDP. It is important to assess each evaluation's data needs and adjust the monitoring system so that the data required is obtained on time. It may take time to adjust the collection and recording of data from sources external to the MA and PA (such as statistical offices) so it is important to agree on responsibilities and processes early on.

### **Coordination of evaluation activities with Pillar I and other ESI Funds programmes**

Given that there is now one set of common impact indicators for the entire Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)<sup>38</sup>, it may be useful at times (e.g. for thematic evaluations of environmental impacts) to coordinate some Pillar I and Pillar II monitoring and evaluation activities. It is therefore important to foster cooperation within and between the MA and PA. An early review and development of common data sources and evaluation methodologies can contribute to an evaluation of the impact of the CAP as a whole within the RDP territory.

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) is one of the funds that contributes to the Union's strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and its associated priorities through the Partnership Agreement. It may be useful to coordinate some evaluation activities with other ESI Funds programmes; however this will depend on arrangements in the individual MS and the degree of integration and coordination between the programmes.

Such coordination of evaluation activity can be fostered in different ways. Evaluations, monitoring and related activities across programmes can be monitored within a single MC for programmes co-financed by ESI Funds<sup>39</sup>, or representatives of other ESI Funds' programmes can be included in the RDP evaluation steering group. Alternatively the MA of the RDP might take part in the other ESI Funds' programmes' MCs and evaluation steering groups. In order to foster cooperation and to find synergies, the MS may wish to organise common evaluation-related training for ministries and other bodies responsible for all the ESI Funds' programmes. It may also be useful to draft evaluation guidelines for all ESI Funds. Whilst there are many fund-specific considerations, a set of guidelines covering common issues would both foster cooperation and transparency as well as ensure similar evaluation standards for all funds.

## **5.2 Timing**

The complexity of the monitoring and evaluation system necessitates timely planning and appropriate sequencing of actions in order to help managers to anticipate tasks and workloads and manage deadlines. In terms of monitoring, certain timing-related issues arise from the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, such as the date of submission of AIRs<sup>40</sup> and the submission of monitoring data<sup>41</sup>. Each MS must have processes in place to plan and take action to meet such 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.

In practice, it may be useful for a MS or region to address all monitoring and evaluation-related issues in a non-binding **detailed internal evaluation plan** or **multi-annual work plan**, including a timeline

<sup>38</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013, Art. 110

<sup>39</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 47

<sup>40</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 75(1)

<sup>41</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 66.1; and Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 112

for actions, divided into annual segments (see **table 1: Examples of internal planning tools for monitoring and evaluation**). These can, in turn, be split into smaller projects for which different scheduling methods can be used. A widely used method is retro planning, also known as backward scheduling.

### **Retro planning**

Retro planning involves building up a schedule starting from the last step of the process. It is a highly useful tool in calculating an evaluation's timeline. Experience from previous programming periods will be useful in determining the length of time required for each action.

An example of a retro planning template, which can be used in planning monitoring and evaluation tasks and activities, can be found in the Toolbox (Time plan for evaluation during the programming period). The table is filled in by using either approximate temporal information (e.g. year 2017 or second quarter of year 2017), more specific details (e.g. June 2017), or specific dates (e.g. 31<sup>st</sup> June 2017). The more detailed the retro planning table, the easier it is to utilise as an internal management tool. Retro planning of all major evaluation reports should be completed by the start of the programming period so that evaluation tasks can be scheduled well in advance.

## **5.3 Quality control**

It is advisable to apply quality control to all aspects of the monitoring and evaluation system. Internal quality control procedures and quality criteria should be applied to data, activities, and processes. The description of monitoring and evaluation quality control procedures should clearly identify responsible bodies and their sub-units.

Good quality criteria pertaining to evaluation activities considers 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<sup>42</sup>).

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<sup>42</sup> 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](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/internal_market/docs/evaluation/evaluation_guide_annexes.pdf) , pages 87-97

**Table 1 Examples of monitoring and evaluation internal planning tools**

<p>Whereas the evaluation plan that is submitted as part of the RDP will contain only a general description of actions, MSs may wish to produce more detailed internal documentation to assist monitoring and evaluation tasks. Typically, the development of internal tools is the responsibility of the MA. However, in most cases coordination with, and cooperation from, other monitoring and evaluation stakeholders is both necessary and desired. Some examples of possible internal documents are listed below.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Detailed internal evaluation planning document (internal evaluation plan)</b></li> </ul>	
<p><b>A more detailed internal version of the evaluation plan</b></p>	
<p><i>Pros</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Gives a clear picture of EP items.</li> <li>▶ Helps M&amp;E work planning.</li> <li>▶ Proof of M&amp;E work for external actors.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Cons</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Workload in writing the detailed plan.</li> <li>▶ Difficulty in defining certain processes.</li> <li>▶ Requires revision when EP updated.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Annual or Multi-Annual Work Programme</b></li> </ul>	
<p><b>A time-based action plan based on the evaluation plan</b></p>	
<p><i>Pros</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Gives a clear time line for M&amp;E work.</li> <li>▶ Assists in advance planning.</li> <li>▶ Clarifies resource allocation.</li> <li>▶ Helps to highlight and schedule issues requiring further development (e.g. processes, skills).</li> <li>▶ Makes reporting on EP in the AIR easier.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Cons</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Preparation requires time and resources.</li> <li>▶ Danger of excluding additional items or actions.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Internal monitoring and evaluation manual</b></li> </ul>	
<p><b>A comprehensive handbook that covers all aspects of M&amp;E in the MS for the programming period</b></p>	
<p><i>Pros</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ All documents and procedures related to M&amp;E in one document, so easy and quick to reference.</li> <li>▶ Helps in development, stabilisation, analysis and review of processes.</li> <li>▶ Ensures consistency of processes.</li> <li>▶ Improves efficiency and effectiveness.</li> <li>▶ M&amp;E system has to be considered as a whole; aids the identification of gaps and weaknesses.</li> <li>▶ Assists in knowledge management and knowledge transfer; trains employees in their job functions and serves as orientation tool for new employees.</li> <li>▶ Proof of and information on M&amp;E work for external actors.</li> <li>▶ Fosters transparency and accountability.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Cons</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Heavy workload when drafting and approving.</li> <li>▶ Requires stringent quality control to avoid unequal level of detail in document.</li> <li>▶ Requires coordination amongst M&amp;E actors in drafting and revising.</li> <li>▶ Requires frequent updates and revisions.</li> <li>▶ MA may prefer not to disclose all internal procedures.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ad hoc documentation</b></li> </ul>	
<p><b>Separate documents relating to monitoring and evaluation in the MS</b></p>	
<p><i>Pros</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Quick to draft and approve.</li> <li>▶ Tailored to the needs of end users.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Cons</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Danger of gaps and overlaps.</li> <li>▶ Difficult to keep track of versions.</li> <li>▶ Unequal level of detail.</li> <li>▶ Unclear / late / lacking instructions cause inefficiency.</li> <li>▶ Lack of holistic view may lead to inconsistencies</li> </ul>

## 5.4 Resources

Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 spell out several obligatory monitoring and evaluation related tasks for the MS to carry out. In addition to the specific tasks listed in the governance section above, the MS must ensure that appropriate evaluation capacity is available<sup>43</sup>, analyse monitoring and evaluation needs related to the evaluation plan and provide

<sup>43</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 56(2)

sufficient resource and capacity to address them<sup>44</sup>. The principle of proportionality also applies to the financial and administrative resources allocated to monitoring and evaluation<sup>45</sup>.

In general, the quality of monitoring and evaluation obviously depends on the resources allocated to it so it is critical to budget adequate financial and human resources. The MS or region must also consider other resources fundamental to monitoring and evaluation, such as IT and data systems. As these resources are typically included in the budgets of different institutions (mainly MA and PA) it is important to gather relevant information from separate budgets into one, in order to get a picture of all the resources allocated to the RDP's monitoring and evaluation activities.

### **Financial resources**

Most of the monitoring and evaluation tasks and activities can be co-financed through technical assistance (TA) which can be used to support:

- Institutional strengthening and administrative capacity building;
- Evaluations, expert reports, statistics, studies;
- Analysis, management, monitoring, information exchange and programme implementation;
- Measures relating to the implementation of control systems and technical and administrative assistance;
- Installation, operation and interconnection of computerised systems for management, monitoring, audit, control and evaluation;
- Actions to improve evaluation methods and the exchange of information on evaluation practices<sup>46</sup>.

However, monitoring and evaluation is only one of the RDP management-related activities funded from the TA budget. In order to calculate the financial resources needed for the entire monitoring and evaluation system, the MS or region must consider each monitoring and evaluation action and estimate their costs in terms of person days and, ultimately, money. Experience from the previous programming periods can be used in budgeting but it is important to note the additional needs arising from the new monitoring and evaluation framework.

The monitoring and evaluation budget should take into account the duration and scope of evaluation activities and the availability and accessibility of data. In most cases, evaluations and larger studies are tendered, but the MS or region should be able to estimate the cost range in advance.

In addition to the production of specific reports, methodological and process development should also be accounted for in the monitoring and evaluation budget, as should the costs of governance and costs involved in liaising with stakeholders. Furthermore, communication costs should be estimated based on the evaluation plan's communication plan.

Other major cost items, such as staffing, capacity building, and IT systems are discussed below. It is also sensible to set funds aside to cover needs that emerge during programme implementation. The need for a certain study or a new data source might only become apparent once the programme has begun. It is also sensible to have some flexibility within the monitoring and evaluation budget to cover *ad hoc* evaluation needs.

### **Human resources and administrative capacity**

Appropriate human resources are critical for effective monitoring and evaluation. In addition to sufficient staff time, the staff entrusted with monitoring and evaluation should possess adequate technical expertise.

<sup>44</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 8.1

<sup>45</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 4.5

<sup>46</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 58

In most MSs and regions, the monitoring and evaluation system is managed predominantly through MA's and PA's internal resources. In some cases, the tasks are delegated to other bodies or external institutions, or consultants are contracted for monitoring and evaluation management tasks.

An *ex ante* conditionality is that the MS must ensure institutional capacity and efficient public administration.<sup>47</sup> Development of skills at all levels and the development of procedures and tools for monitoring and evaluation are essential parts of this conditionality. As well as adequate institutional capacity, it is also important to develop staff capacity and ensure capacity building of other actors involved in monitoring and evaluation. Needs should first be identified and training / manuals, etc. should be planned and implemented. The cost of solutions to address needs therefore constitute the capacity building budget line.

### **IT systems**

The MA is responsible for ensuring a secure electronic system which records, manages and reports statistical information on the programme and its implementation, in particular information required to monitor progress towards defined objectives and priorities<sup>48</sup>.

The MS or region can either develop its current monitoring system for the next programming period or create a new one, either in-house or by using contractors such as specialised monitoring and evaluation data providers. Modifying the current IT system is typically cheaper and easier in the short-term. However, if the system requires significant modifications it can become complex, slow, tedious and more costly than a new IT system. Developing a new system to reflect new data needs and specifications usually requires a substantial upfront investment. If a contractor delivers the project, the internal IT department(s) will still be required to make specifications for the new system and migrate data from the old system. End users will require training in the use of a new system and depending on their specifications, continuity between the old and the new systems may be a challenge. However, a new system, designed to meet new data needs, may end up being more beneficial in terms of both usability and total cost. Whether creating a new IT system or modifying an existing one, it is obviously important to ensure compatibility and interconnection of systems between institutions, especially between the PA and MA.

In terms of budgeting, the development and maintenance of an IT system requires software, hardware and internal and external human resources.

### **Data**

As part of the *ex ante* conditionalities, the MS must ensure the existence of a statistical system capable of undertaking analysis to assess programme effectiveness and impact<sup>49</sup>. The MS is also required to organise the production and gathering of requisite data and to supply evaluators with information provided by the monitoring system.

A lot of monitoring data will be submitted to the EC on a bi-annual basis, mainly derived from application forms, the payment system, the rural development operations database and other IT applications such as the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS). In addition, the MS or region must obviously consider the data needs of different evaluations and reports. In order to deliver the data required on time, an initial assessment of data availability should be prioritised. Often data has to be transformed into a different format to fit the specifications of a research task. In some cases, data has to be purchased from external data sources, such as a statistical office or research institute. On occasions data may be inaccessible or accessible only under very strict conditions (e.g. micro-data).

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<sup>47</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Annex XI *ex ante* conditionalities, thematic *ex ante* conditionalities

<sup>48</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 66.1, 70

<sup>49</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Annex XI *ex ante* conditionalities, general *ex ante* conditionalities

In terms of budgeting, data costs should include experts' work required for definition, gathering, assuring quality, transforming, and transmitting.

## 5.5 Reporting and communication

Evaluation results can only be utilised and implemented if they are communicated to the target audience in a timely manner. Developing an appropriate communication strategy for evaluation results is therefore an essential part of evaluation activity planning.

In this section communication is specifically discussed from the point of view of evaluation (and as such differs from related RDP implementation communication activities).

### *Establishing a communication strategy in relation to evaluation*

When establishing a communication strategy, it is important to first identify the target audience (who for) and their information needs (what). The methods and means of communication suitable for each audience should also be outlined (how). Finally, the timing of communication (when) and the persons responsible should be decided (who).

The essential elements of the communication strategy can be presented in the form of a table.

WHO	WHO FOR	WHAT	WHEN	HOW

It is advisable to consider links between the evaluation's communication strategy and the RDP's overall communication strategy, because the most relevant target audiences for an evaluation's communication strategy may well also be interested in other types of information concerning RDP implementation.

#### ▶ *Persons responsible (WHO)*

The main actor responsible for the drafting and implementation of evaluation results' communication strategy is the MA, who may choose to task a technical working group or the evaluation steering group to assist them.

As the MA usually has a communication department, the communication strategy for evaluation results may be communicated or even developed by in-house experts. When this is the case, it is important that the department responsible for evaluation is an active co-owner of the process.

#### ▶ *Target audience (WHO FOR)*

The target audiences of the evaluation results' communication strategy are not only the actors involved in the overall monitoring and evaluation system of the RDP (e.g. MA, PA, MC, TWG, and evaluation steering group) but also other stakeholders e.g. RDP beneficiaries and policymakers. In order to ensure wider accountability, it is also necessary to include the general public amongst the target audiences of the communication strategy.

#### ▶ *Information needs (WHAT)*

It is important to clearly identify target audiences' specific information needs. Whilst the MA and PA usually focus on evaluation findings which could lead to further improvements in the RDP's management and / or implementation processes, policymakers usually focus more on the real effects and impacts of the interventions supported, in order to devise adjustments in longer term policy strategies.

It is also important that an early identification of target audiences' information needs is taken into consideration when scoping and focusing evaluation activities, to ensure that evaluation results are available when the target audience needs them.

#### ▶ *Right timing (WHEN)*

When identifying the information needs of all the main target audiences, it is important to link planned evaluation activities with the policy making and reporting cycle. This helps to ensure that evaluation results are delivered and communicated on time to all the main target audiences during RDP implementation, or during the preparation of the next programming period's RDP.

▶ **Communication channels (HOW)**

After the main target audiences and their information needs have been identified, it is necessary to identify the main information channels which will be used to communicate with the different target audiences. As a minimum prerequisite<sup>50</sup>, all evaluation reports should be made available to all relevant actors and the general public (e.g. via the MA's website). If the target audience is MA and PA staff, communication of evaluation results may be through internal meetings and workshops, internal newsletters or other internal communication channels. If the target audience is MC members, evaluators may be invited on a regular basis to individual MC meetings to report on their progress and results. In the case of policymakers being the target audience, executive summary reports may be prepared and specific presentations organised. The information channels identified should suit the needs of both the respective target audiences and the MA staff responsible for evaluation plan communication strategy implementation.

▶ **Monitoring of communication strategy implementation**

The evaluation strategy communication strategy should also be regularly monitored and evaluated in order to check its effectiveness and efficiency in reaching the target audience and receiving feedback on evaluation result. It is also advisable to describe the responsibilities and procedures for following up evaluation results in the evaluation plan.

If the evaluation plan's communication strategy is interlinked with the overall communication strategy of the RDP, the general mechanisms for the monitoring and evaluation of the overall communication strategy should cover both, whilst ensuring that the specificities of communication of evaluation results are adequately covered.

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<sup>50</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 76.1

## 6 EVALUATION TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES

Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013<sup>51</sup> describes the overall purpose and objectives of EU rural development policy and the common evaluation approach to be employed. Evaluation assesses the achievements and contribution of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) towards common agricultural policy (CAP) objectives and the European Union's strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth<sup>52</sup>. It must also consider the socio-economic and environmental situation in Member State's (MS's) rural areas. In line with the legal proposals, evaluation is carried out to improve programme design and implementation by answering the following questions:

- **Relevance:** Are the programme's interventions addressing the most important needs?
- **Effectiveness and achievements:** To what extent are objectives and targets being met?
- **Efficiency:** Does the programme get the most out of employed resources?
- **Impact:** To what extent do interventions contribute to desired change in the programme area?

While the purpose, objectives and common approach of evaluation are framed by the relevant EU legal requirements, an evaluation's specific focus and content is for the MS to decide upon. During programme design, Managing Authorities (MAs) identify programme-specific monitoring and evaluation (M&E) **needs**<sup>53</sup> and outline the evaluation set-up and approach in the pertinent chapter of their evaluation plan (EP). The chosen evaluation approach should relate to the **evaluation system**, which consists of the EU common and programme-specific elements (intervention logic, evaluation questions and indicators), and related evaluation topics and activities.

### 6.1 Common and programme-specific elements of the evaluation system

The EU rural development policy of Pillar II of the CAP is implemented via RDPs, which are developed in MSs and regions and tailored to their specific needs and context. Common and programme-specific elements support the evaluation of RDPs and are specified in the Regulations and implementing acts. The **common elements** comprise:

- EU common intervention logic for rural development, which consists of the hierarchy of objectives; CAP horizontal and specific objectives, Union priorities for rural development, and the specific objectives of focus areas. The rural development measures and sub-measures can be programmed flexibly under different rural development priority focus areas;
- Common evaluation questions, which are formulated by the European Commission (EC) and linked to CAP objectives, cross-cutting issues of rural development and rural development priority focus areas;
- Common indicators on context, impacts, results and outputs, and quantified targets linked to focus areas, in order to measure the effects of the policy (EU data sources for common context and impact indicators);
- Guidance documents explain the common approach towards the evaluation of RDPs. The guidance complements legal proposals and implementing acts, but has a non-binding character.
- Programme-specific elements, such as programme-specific intervention logic, evaluation questions and indicators, complement the common elements.

<sup>51</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006

<sup>52</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art 54; and Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 68

<sup>53</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 8.1.g



## 6.2 Evaluation topics

MAAs carry out evaluations to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of a programme. At least once during the programming period, evaluation must assess how the support from European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds) has contributed to the objectives of each rural development priority<sup>54</sup>. Evaluations conducted during the programming period should assess the programme's intervention logic and its implementation, including complementarities and synergies with other instruments such as Pillar I of the CAP.

The evaluation topics should be specified, to the extent possible at the stage of programme design, as they have consequences on evaluation governance and management, the allocation of resources and the planning of evaluation tasks and activities.

### *What are evaluation topics in relation to the RDP?*

Legal acts outline the principles of the EU's support for ESI Funds<sup>55</sup>, rural development priorities and focus areas, cross-cutting objectives<sup>56</sup> and specific interventions (Leader and National Rural Networks (NRNs)<sup>57</sup>) which represent evaluation topics.

In addition there may also be RDP-related evaluation topics which reflect specific country or regional conditions. Such topics are either defined in relation to the composition and focus of the RDP intervention logic and the volume of allocated funds, and / or are based on the specific interests of policymakers or rural development stakeholders.

**Evaluation topics** linked to the composition and the focus of a programme's intervention logic relate to the programme territory's needs. For example, if programme objectives focus significantly on improving the quality of life in rural areas, evaluation should also be directed towards assessing programme effects on issues linked to the quality of life in rural areas. One of the topics to evaluate might be rural infrastructure and services (if the SWOT analysis and needs assessment identified a critical need in this area) in which case the programme objective could be *"To increase the rural population's access to infrastructure and services"*. The related evaluation question will be *"To what extent has the programme contributed to an increase in the access of the rural population to infrastructure and services?"* and the evaluation topic will be *"The assessment of the programme effects on improved access through the development of rural infrastructure and services"* (Figure 3).

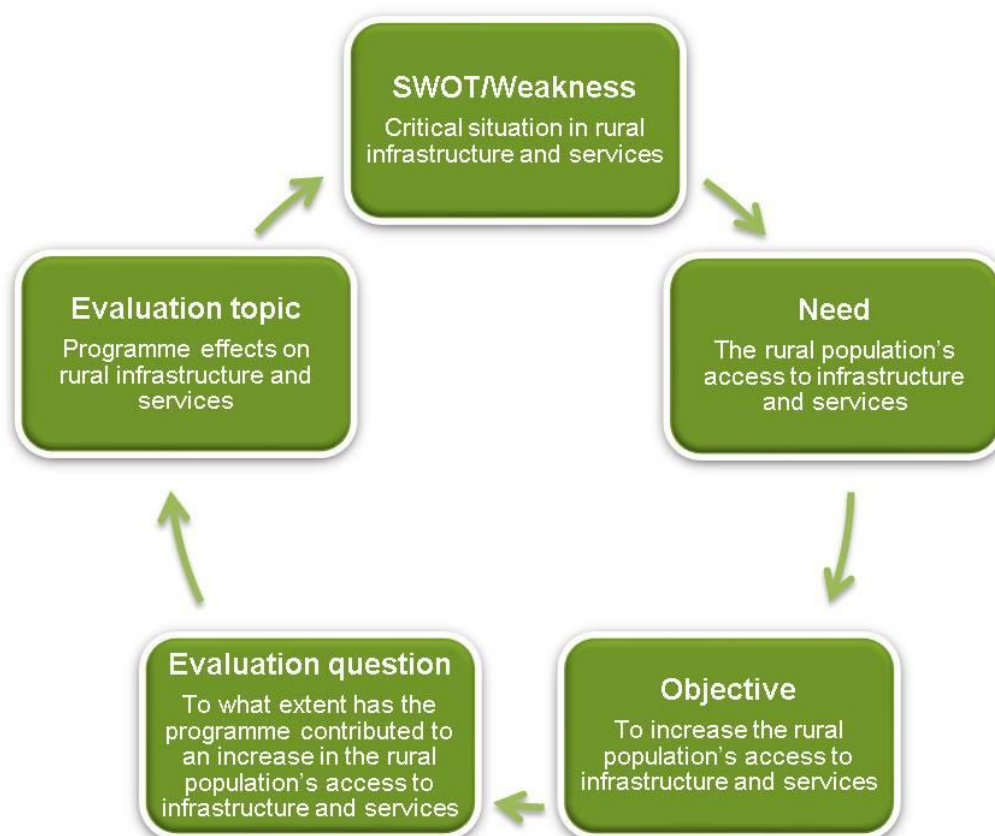
<sup>54</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 56

<sup>55</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 4 - 8

<sup>56</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 5

<sup>57</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 42 – 44 and 54

**Figure 3** Example of the link between SWOT / needs assessment, programme objectives, evaluation questions and evaluation topics



The selection of evaluation topics may also take account of specific needs which may not necessarily correspond to the most prominent programme interventions in terms of allocation of funds, but have significant importance to society (e.g. increased awareness towards the environment, or increased capacity for local development).

Examples of evaluation topics in relation to the *programme intervention logic*:

- Results / impacts of the RDP / focus areas on the **competitiveness** of agriculture;
- Results / impacts of the RDP / focus areas on **job creation and maintenance**;
- Results / impacts of RDP / focus areas on **environmental public goods** (biodiversity, water quality, climate change, HNV, etc.);
- Results / impacts of the RDP / group of measures on **local development** (village renewal, local economic development and diversification, integrated local development, Leader / Community-Led Local Development (CLLD), etc.);
- Effects of the RDP on rural development cross-cutting objectives such as **environment, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and innovation**;
- Contribution of **networking** to the achievements of the RDP.

The majority of evaluation topics can be identified in the programme design stage and included in the evaluation plan chapter of the RDP. Other topics may need to be added during the programme implementation phase, either due to possible changes in the intervention logic and related funds allocation, or because specific evaluation needs arise in relation to existing evaluation topics (e.g. originally proposed topic on water quality is broadened to include water efficiency).

### **What evaluation tasks have to be performed in relation to the programme?**

- Observation of development trends and context analysis<sup>58</sup>; ongoing observation of changes in the context in which the programme's interventions take place against set baselines (using common and programme-specific context indicators).
- Assessment of programme effectiveness, efficiency and impacts<sup>59</sup> and contribution to CAP objectives. This includes the analysis of the net effects of the programme towards observed changes in the contextual situation (based on impact indicators).
- Assessment of programme results<sup>60</sup> and contribution to focus areas under rural development priorities; assessment of multiple effects and synergies and analysis of complementary result indicators.
- Monitoring<sup>61</sup> of the RDP's progress in relation to target indicators and output indicators.
- Assessment of progress and achievement on specific evaluation topics, such as NRNs.
- Assessment of progress made in ensuring an integrated approach in the use of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) to support territorial development of rural areas through Leader local development strategies (LDSs)<sup>62</sup>, and if relevant, a multi-fund approach to CLLD.
- Assessment of RDP contributions to rural development cross-cutting objectives<sup>63</sup> such as innovation, environment and climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Assessment of RDP contributions to delivering the EU's strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth<sup>64</sup>, including the contribution of RDPs to the headline targets;
- Assessment of the use of technical assistance (TA) funds.

<sup>58</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 54; and Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 68

<sup>59</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 54; and Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 68

<sup>60</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 50.4

<sup>61</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 50.2; and Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 72.2

<sup>62</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 75.4

<sup>63</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 54.1; and Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 68

<sup>64</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art.54.1

**Table 2 Evaluation topics and tasks**

Evaluation topics (examples)	Major evaluation tasks in relation to evaluation topics	Evaluation questions		Indicators		Reporting <sup>65</sup>
		EU	RDP	EU	RDP	
Focus Areas (1-18)	Observation of development trends and context analysis			Context indicators	Proxies, Specific context indicators	<i>Ex ante</i> Enhanced AIR <i>Ex post</i>
Viable food production	Assessment of RDP effectiveness, efficiency and impacts and contribution to CAP general objectives	Common horizontal	Specific horizontal	Common impacts	Specific impacts	Enhanced AIR <i>Ex post</i>
Environment	Assessment of results of RDP interventions and contribution to focus areas under rural development priorities	Common FA related	Specific FA related	Common compl. results	Specific results	Enhanced AIR <i>Ex post</i>
Biodiversity	Monitoring of the RDP progress in relation to target indicators and output indicators			Target outputs	Specific target outputs	Quarterly, yearly
Innovation	Assessment of progress and achievements with respect to the specific evaluation topics	Common horizontal	Specific horizontal	Common results	Specific results	Enhanced AIR <i>Ex post</i>
Balanced territorial development	Assessment of progress made in ensuring an integrated approach to the use of EAFRD and other EU financial instruments to support territorial development, including the LDS	Common	Specific	Common results in relation to Leader/CL LD	Specific results in relation to Leader/CL LD	Enhanced AIR <i>Ex post</i>
Local development	Assessment of RDP contributions to rural development cross-cutting objectives	Common Horizontal	Specific horizontal	Common results	Specific results	Enhanced AIR Enhanced AIR <i>Ex post</i>
Jobs creation	Assessment of RDP contributions to the EU's strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, including Common Strategic Framework (CSF) thematic objectives, including contribution to EU 2020 headline targets	Common horizontal	Specific horizontal		Specific	Enhanced AIR <i>Ex post</i>
Quality of life						
Etc.						
Technical assistance	Assessment of the use of TA funds		Specific		Specific	Enhanced AIR <i>Ex post</i>

<sup>65</sup> Requirements may be further specified in the related implementing acts.

### 6.3 Cross-cutting and specific evaluation topics

This chapter outlines the cross-cutting evaluation topics, namely: (1) Innovation; (2) Environment; (3) Climate Change; and specific evaluation topics (4) Leader / CLLD; (5) NRNs.

#### *Innovation*

Innovation could be defined as “**a new idea successfully put into practice**”. The new idea could be a new product, practice or service or a new production process or method. It could also involve opening up new markets or a new way of managing or organising operations. The substance of **innovation can differ** by the structure of the sector, by region, by development stage and by the type of constraint faced. Innovation is **only identifiable ex post**, when the new approaches have been successfully transformed into practice. It is impossible to be sure in advance whether an idea will become an innovation.

We can distinguish **between linear and system innovation**:

- Linear innovation is the dissemination of research results; it is based on information actions, linear advising methods and training;
- System innovation occurs as a result of the interplay and mediation between actors for combining new and / or existing knowledge (not only purely scientific). This model relies mainly on co-operation, the sharing of knowledge and intermediating advisory methods.

#### ► *What is the legal basis?*

**Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth** gives innovation and research a crucial role in preparing the EU for future challenges. Indeed, the “**Innovation Union**” is one of the seven **flagship initiatives** of the EU 2020. Among the 30 action points that this flagship comprises we highlight:

- (1) **Spreading the benefits of innovation across the Union**; MSs should initiate the preparation of post-2013 ESI Funds programmes with an increased focus on innovation and smart specialisation;
- (2) **Pooling forces to achieve breakthroughs**; European Innovation Partnerships (EIP).

**The Common Strategic Framework (CSF)** has been established to increase coherence between policy commitments made in the context of Europe 2020 and investment on the ground. CSF encourages integration by setting out how ESI Funds<sup>66</sup> can work together to achieve common thematic objectives, of which one is **strengthening research, technological development and innovation**<sup>67</sup>.

**The common agricultural policy (CAP)** also states fostering innovation as one of its specific objectives and highlights its role in sustainable agriculture and rural development. The “Budget for Europe 2020” (under the CAP heading) anticipates a 4.5 billion Euro allocation for research and innovation in the field of food security, bio-economy and sustainable agriculture. Innovation is also represented in the horizontal **rural development priority**<sup>68</sup> under Pillar II of the CAP. The measures that will play a prominent role in supporting innovative approaches in RDPs will be:

- Measures addressing knowledge transfer and advisory services<sup>69</sup>;
- Investments in physical assets<sup>70</sup>;
- Co-operation<sup>71</sup> establishing operational groups and pilot demonstration projects;

<sup>66</sup> European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF), Cohesion Fund (CF) and European Maritime and Fisheries Funds (EMFF)

<sup>67</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art.9.1

<sup>68</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 5. 1

<sup>69</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art.14 and 15

<sup>70</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art.17, 19 and 26

- LEADER.

In fostering innovation, **the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability** aims to provide a working interface between agriculture, bio-economy, science and other stakeholders at EU, national and regional level. **Two headline targets** have been identified for the EIP:

- Promoting productivity and efficiency of the agricultural sector (reversing the recent trend of diminishing productivity gains by 2020);
- Promoting sustainability of agriculture (securing soil functionality at a satisfactory level by 2020).

The EIP **will cover multiple stages**, from the core research process and the dissemination of research results to the development of products and techniques and their integration in the production process. An important role will be assumed by certification processes that confirm the increased added value of research products. An **EIP network facility** has been established to transpose innovation into agricultural practice via the funding of concrete innovative actions through RDPs.

► **What are the key issues to be addressed?**

The key issues to be addressed in RDP evaluation are:

- Analyse how the RDP is improving the conditions for innovation, research and development in rural areas;
- Assess the contribution of Priority 1, as a cross-cutting priority, to reinforce the rest of RDP priorities (draw out the contribution of the "innovation" measures from the evaluation of the results of other priorities);
- Evaluate the contribution of innovative actions, developed under the EIP Operational Groups and funded with the RDP, to the rural development cross-cutting objective on innovation, and consequently to EU 2020 Strategy.

**What are the proposed approaches?**

Innovation is a complex phenomenon, taking place within a dynamic and constantly evolving system that is adapting to a range of internal and external factors. Innovation is difficult to quantify and often involves long time-lags before an impact can be measured. Indeed, impacts can only be **identifiable ex post**, when new approaches have been successfully transformed into practice.

In response to these challenges, the **following types of approaches are suggested:**

- Use a mix of methods to fit the needs and the context of the innovation evaluation, as no single method can address all the main evaluation questions or be applied across the range of analyses. A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods should be employed;
- Be participative and draw on the expertise of EIP partners, academics, managers, authorities and policymakers. Evaluators should ensure that the opinions of different stakeholder groups are captured.

**Possible methods** to develop this approach include:

- Desk research based on documents and literature directly or indirectly related to the RDP, e.g. administrative manuals, application forms, assessment forms, existing evaluation reports and broader policy reports;
- Interviews with RDP Managing Authorities, measure managers, beneficiaries and other stakeholders;

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<sup>71</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 35

- Case Studies based on pilot projects, applying detailed data collection and analysis with a restricted number of participants / beneficiaries;
- Peer review panels involving qualified experts in the assessment of programme activities, outputs and outcomes;
- Focus groups, workshops and meetings with EIP Operational Group partners;
- Network analysis to map the social interaction between the actors involved in evaluation, including beneficiaries.

## Environment

### ► **What is the legal basis?**

The rural development policy shall contribute to the Europe 2020 Strategy by promoting **sustainable rural development** through the rural development priorities, in a complementary manner with other instruments of the common agricultural policy, Cohesion Policy and to the Common Fisheries Policy. It should contribute to a **more territorially and environmentally balanced, climate friendly** and climate resilient, competitive and innovative agricultural sector across rural areas in the EU<sup>72</sup>, enabling all of the rural development priorities to contribute to the cross-cutting objectives of innovation, environment and climate change mitigation and adaptation.<sup>73</sup> *Ex ante* evaluation should verify the adequacy of planned measures to promote sustainable development<sup>74</sup>.

**Environment as a rural development cross-cutting objective** can be approached as a sub-set of sustainable development, dealing in particular with the condition of environmental goods and elements.

### ► **What are the key issues to be addressed?**

Previous RDPs have involved the **evaluation of the environment as a cross-cutting issue** via the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process. SEA, in most cases, has focussed on a number of “environmental issues”<sup>75</sup>, i.e. biodiversity, population and human health, fauna and flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage (architectural and archaeological) and landscape.

Therefore, the indicator set used for RDP programming and monitoring and evaluation already includes a number of relevant environmental indicators.

### ► **What are the proposed approaches?**

The SEA approach offers a robust analytical framework<sup>76</sup> and is already used as an *ex ante* appraisal of a programme’s cross-cutting environmental impact. The same tools can also be used for the evaluation of impacts during the programming period, offering snapshots of the programme’s impact at different stages.

The steps that could be followed are:

- Define the “environmental issues” relevant for the programme area (See “What are the key issues?”);
- Collect documents such as relevant legal documents, regulations, strategies and guidelines, to review objectives that RDP actions need to comply with. For example, the “Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC)” element of the cross-compliance mechanism could set the frame for evaluating relevant RDP measures;

<sup>72</sup>Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 3

<sup>73</sup>Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 5

<sup>74</sup>Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 55

<sup>75</sup> Directive 2001/42/EC, Annex I, lit.f

<sup>76</sup> see also Greening Regional Development Programmes Network (2006), Handbook on SEA for Cohesion Policy 2007-2013

- Formulate guiding questions for each environmental issue identified (three or four questions should be sufficient). For example, in the case of soil, one of the guiding questions could be “Is the RDP accelerating soil erosion even when GAEC provisions are respected?” This question might seem superficial in a measure under Union Priority 4, for example, but it could be of importance under Union Priority 2 due to unintended effects caused by farms’ restructuring;
- Identify the relevant context indicators for each environmental issue identified;
- Identify the relevant RDP measures / group of measures / focus areas for each “environmental issue” and link them to relevant result and impact indicators;
- Complement the quantitative figures with a qualitative description of the impact of the measure / group of measures / focus areas on the environmental issue, and the effect of the RDP based on the relevant indicators;
- Summarise RDP effects for each environmental issue and formulate synthetic judgments.

Regarding relevant indicators and related monitoring and evaluation provisions, the effort should be to use readily available information and data, whenever possible. The Common Context Indicators (CCIs) collected during programming offer a useful starting point. Overall, the possible sources for indicators are:

- CCIs relevant for environmental issues;
- The SEA indicators for the description of the environmental situation and monitoring as described in each RDP’s SEA report;
- If not included in the SEA report, relevant indicators from other EU Directives (e.g. Birds Directive, Habitats Directive, and Water Framework Directive).

The table below proposes an overview of the relationships between Union Priorities, rural development focus areas, and relevant environmental issues. Depending on the RDP strategy and the importance given to each of the focus areas, the Managing Authority will choose issues of highest relevance.



**Table 3** Indicative relationships between environmental issues and rural development focus areas

UP	Focus Area	Environment
1	Fostering innovation, cooperation and the development of the knowledge base in rural areas.	All issues
	Strengthening the links between agriculture, food production, forestry and research and innovation, including for the purpose of improved environmental management and performance.	
	Fostering lifelong learning and vocational training in the agricultural and forestry sectors.	
2	Improving the economic performance of all farms and facilitating farm restructuring and modernisation, notably with a view to increase market participation and orientation as well as agricultural diversification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Biodiversity / Fauna and Flora</li> <li>- Soil</li> <li>- Climate / Air</li> <li>- Water</li> <li>- Landscape</li> <li>- Material assets</li> </ul>
	Facilitating entry of adequately skilled farmers into the agriculture sector and in particular generational renewal.	
3	Improving competitiveness of primary producers by better integrating them into the agri-food chain through quality schemes, adding value to agriculture products, promotion in local markets and short supply circuits, producer groups and organisations and inter-branch organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Soil</li> <li>- Climate / Air</li> <li>- Landscape</li> <li>- Population and human health</li> </ul>
	Supporting farm risk prevention and management.	
4	Restoring, and preserving and enhancing biodiversity, including in Natura 2000 areas, areas facing natural or other specific constraints and High Nature Value (HNV) farming, and the state of European landscapes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Biodiversity / Fauna and flora</li> <li>- Soil</li> <li>- Water</li> <li>- Climate / Air</li> <li>- Landscape</li> <li>- Population and human health</li> <li>- Material assets</li> </ul>
	Improving water management, including fertiliser and pesticide management.	
	Preventing soil erosion and improving soil management.	
5	Increasing efficiency in water use by agriculture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Biodiversity / Fauna and flora</li> <li>- Soil</li> <li>- Water</li> <li>- Climate / Air</li> <li>- Landscape</li> <li>- Population and human health</li> </ul>
	Increasing efficiency in energy use in agriculture and food processing.	
	Facilitating the supply and use of renewable sources of energy, by-products, wastes, residues and other non-food raw material for purposes of the bio-economy.	
	Reducing green house gas and ammonia emissions from agriculture.	
	Fostering carbon conservation and sequestration in agriculture and forestry.	
6	Facilitating diversification, creation and development of small enterprises and job creation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Population and human health</li> <li>- Material assets</li> <li>- Cultural heritage</li> </ul>
	Fostering local development in rural areas.	
	Enhancing accessibility to use, and quality of, information and communication technologies (ICT) in rural areas.	

### Climate Change

#### ▶ What is the legal basis?

Climate Change mitigation and adaptation is a subset of the environment cross-cutting issue dealing with the impact of anthropogenic emissions (CO<sup>2</sup>, Methane, Nitrous Oxides, etc.), released into the atmosphere with resulting changes in environmental elements and processes (e.g. the hydrological cycle, biodiversity, etc.) affecting human activities. “Mitigation” reduces these emissions, while “adaptation” reduces their impact.

#### ▶ What are the key issues?

For each RDP, a number of “**climate change issues**” need to be defined, e.g.<sup>77</sup>:

- On mitigation, for example the RDP’s contribution to:

<sup>77</sup> DG CLIMATE, presentation on 30.04.2013, Questions and Answers Session at DG AGRI

- Reducing Green House Gas (GHG) emissions from agriculture and other sources (keyword Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF));
  - Increasing the production of electric power or biogas from renewable energy sources ;
  - Increasing the ability of soil to capture carbon;
  - Reducing soil erosion;
  - Improving manure storage and reducing methane emissions;
  - Reducing fertiliser use and nitrogen emissions;
  - Improving maintenance of wetlands / peatlands and their ability to capture carbon.
- On adaptation, for example the RDP's contribution to responsiveness, resilience and adaptive capacity against climate change related hazards and processes, such as:
    - Droughts;
    - Forest fires;
    - Floods;
    - Rain / hail;
    - Habitat fragmentation;
    - Loss of biodiversity;
    - Temperature increase and stress;
    - Pests and diseases.

► **What are the proposed approaches?**

A similar approach as the one described under the environmental cross-cutting objective is proposed. However, when considering climate change there is a need to make a distinction between mitigation and adaptation.

The quantification of the mitigation contribution (in terms of CO<sup>2</sup> tonne equivalent avoided) should be relatively straightforward (and is, at least in part, directly or indirectly available through the RDP output and target indicators). The main questions of relevance are:

- What are the main Green House Gas (GHG) emission sources (usually fossil energy use, methane / biogas release and fertilizer use)?
- How has the programme affected the relevant context indicators?
- How has the programme reduced overall GHG emissions by improving / extending the potential for carbon sequestration (e.g. via afforestation, peatland management, soil organic matter improvement)?

However, this is not the case when considering the contribution to climate change adaptation. Here a more qualitative approach is recommended, based on guiding questions in the SEA logic. For example, for the climate change issue "temperature increase", the guiding question could refer to the RDP's contribution to reduce heat stress (e.g. by adapted designs in investments, heat-resilient crop varieties, afforestation, evaporation-reducing irrigation systems).

The table below proposes an indicative overview of climate change issues linked to EU priorities and rural development focus areas. The MA will select issues of relevance depending on the RDP's strategy and the importance given to each of the focus areas.

**Table 4** Indicative relationships between climate change issues and rural development focus areas

UP	Focus Area	Climate Change Mitigation	Climate Change Adaptation
1	Fostering innovation, cooperation and the development of the knowledge base in rural areas.	All issues	All issues
	Strengthening the links between agriculture, food production and forestry and research and innovation, including for the purpose of improved environmental management and performance.		
	Fostering lifelong learning and vocational training in the agricultural and forestry sectors.		
2	Improving the economic performance of all farms and facilitating farm restructuring and modernisation, notably with a view to increase market participation and orientation as well as agricultural diversification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- GHG emissions</li> <li>- Renewable energy sources</li> <li>- Ability of soil to capture carbon</li> <li>- Manure storage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Habitat fragmentation</li> <li>- Loss of biodiversity</li> <li>- Temperature increase and stress</li> <li>- Pests and diseases, etc.</li> </ul>
	Facilitating entry of adequately skilled farmers into the agriculture sector and in particular generational renewal.		
3	Improving competitiveness of primary producers by integrating them better into the agri-food chain through quality schemes, adding value to agriculture products, promotion in local markets and short supply circuits, producer groups and organisations and inter-branch organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- GHG emissions</li> <li>- Ability of soil to capture carbon</li> <li>- Fertiliser use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Temperature increase and stress</li> <li>- Pests and diseases, etc.</li> </ul>
	Supporting farm risk prevention and management.		
4	Restoring, and preserving and enhancing biodiversity, including in Natura 2000 areas, areas facing natural or other specific constraints and HNV farming, and the state of European landscapes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- GHG emissions</li> <li>- Ability of soil to capture carbon</li> <li>- Erosion</li> <li>- Fertiliser use</li> <li>- Maintenance of wetlands</li> </ul>	All issues
	Improving water management, including fertiliser and pesticide management.		
	Preventing soil erosion and improving soil management.		
5	Increasing efficiency in water use by agriculture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- GHG emissions</li> <li>- Renewable energy sources</li> <li>- Ability of soil to capture carbon</li> <li>- Erosion</li> <li>- Fertiliser use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Droughts</li> <li>- Temperature increase and stress</li> </ul>
	Increasing efficiency in energy use in agriculture and food processing.		
	Facilitating the supply and use of renewable sources of energy, of by-products, wastes, residues and other non-food raw material for purposes of the bio-economy.		
	Reducing green house gas and ammonia emissions from agriculture.		
	Fostering carbon conservation and sequestration in agriculture and forestry.		
6	Facilitating diversification, creation and development of small enterprises and job creation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- GHG emissions</li> <li>- Renewable energy sources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Temperature increase and stress</li> <li>- Pests and diseases, etc.</li> </ul>
	Fostering local development in rural areas.		
	Enhancing accessibility to use, and quality of, information and communication technologies (ICT) in rural areas.		

With regard to relevant indicators for monitoring and evaluation, effort should be made to use readily available information and data as much as possible. The Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) and the common context indicators collected during programming offer a useful starting point. There are also many other possible sources that each RDP could make use of:

- CCIs, which relate to;
  - Sector Analysis
    - 18 Agricultural Area
    - 19 Agricultural Area under Organic Farming

- 20 Irrigated land
- 21 Livestock Units
- 29 Forests and other wooded land
- Environmental
  - 31 Land Cover
  - 33 Extensive Agriculture
  - 34 Natura 2000
  - 35 Farmland Birds
  - 36 Biodiversity habitats related to Grassland
  - 38 Protected Forest
  - 40 Water Quality (also an Impact Indicator)
  - 41 Soil Organic Matter (also an Impact Indicator)
  - 42 Soil Erosion
  - 43 Production of renewable energy
  - 44 Energy use in agriculture, forestry and food industry
  - 45 GHG Emissions (also an Impact Indicator)
- Indicators used in reporting adherence to national obligations to international organisations e.g. UNFCCC reports (mainly agriculture and Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF))<sup>78</sup>;
- The SEA indicators, as described above.

### **LEADER / Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)**

The minimum requirements for the evaluation plan as contained in the draft Implementing Act on Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Annex I, point 9 (version March 2014) specify a section on evaluation topics which should include the analysis of the contribution of Local Development Strategies and planned support for evaluation at LAG level”.

#### **▶ A common framework**

Whether standalone or as part of a wider approach, CLLD<sup>79</sup> / LEADER is implemented within the RDP’s operational framework. It contributes to the RDP intervention logic and the achievement of its objectives, through LAGs delivery against LDS objectives. LDSs tailor rural development interventions to local needs via their own specific intervention logic. Consequently, the RDP evaluation plan should set out a framework to enable the LDS objectives to be incorporated into RDP objectives, including the assessment of progress in the 2017 and 2019 Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs). This way LEADER’s contribution is fed into the hierarchy of objectives for the CAP and EU2020.

#### **▶ The added value of the LEADER approach**

LEADER is a development approach, not just an RDP delivery scheme. As such it has specific features which add value to the mobilisation of local resources for integrated rural development. The specific features of the LEADER approach must be addressed and planned for if its added value is to be evaluated effectively<sup>80</sup>, both in its own right and as part of CLLD. The effectiveness and efficiency of delivery arrangements should also be evaluated. The evaluation plan should therefore address these specificities<sup>79</sup>.

<sup>78</sup>Countries with regional programmes will have to find a source or develop a methodology for “translating” the national numbers to regional ones.

<sup>79</sup> Guidance on the approach to CLLD evaluation is set out in the Common guidance of the European Commission’s Directorates-General AGRI, EMPL, MARE and REGIO on Community-led Local Development in European Structural and Investment Funds (29 Apr 2013)

<sup>80</sup> This particular issue has been stressed by the European Court of Auditors (Report 10/2010).

### ▶ **The Local Development Strategy**

LEADER is implemented through the principle of subsidiarity through local action groups (LAGs), who are responsible for the development, delivery, and monitoring and evaluation of their local development strategy<sup>81</sup>. The LDS should contain descriptions of monitoring and evaluation arrangements and of associated LAG capacity building<sup>82</sup>, in effect an LDS evaluation plan (EP). It should be noted, however, that no methodological description is required in the RDP's evaluation plan. As LAGs are obliged to provide information required for RDP level monitoring and evaluation to the Managing Authority and its evaluators or agents,<sup>83</sup> LDS plans should consider the framework of the RDP's evaluation plan as well as the LDS specificities. This should be a prerequisite of the contractual agreement between the Managing Authority and the LAG.

### ▶ **Evaluation support**

LAGs will therefore:

- Contribute to the evaluation of the RDP as a whole;
- Contribute to the assessment of the added value of the approach;
- Undertake the monitoring and evaluation of their own LDS.

In order to enable LAGs to contribute effectively they will require support and capacity building from the Managing Authority or National Rural Network<sup>84</sup>. Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 makes explicit provision for this stating that “Member States shall ensure that appropriate evaluation capacity is available”<sup>85</sup> and this is clearly reinforced in the minimum requirements for the evaluation plan and the CLLD common guidance<sup>79</sup>. The evaluation plan should therefore clearly set out the LAG support proposed<sup>86</sup>.

### ▶ **Key issues in planning the evaluation activities of LEADER**

In planning the evaluation activities of LEADER, several key issues should be taken into account. The LEADER approach is part of the CLLD framework and therefore belongs to EU2020 intervention logic. The CLLD priorities and objectives is included into the Partnership Agreement; LEADER is however also integrated in the CAP as a whole and the RDPs. Although LEADER fits within this, it remains a bottom-up local development approach with clearly defined principles. The regulatory framework foresees programming under Focus Area 6(b)<sup>87</sup>, but with the clear expectation of a wider relevance and contribution across, and possibly outside, Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013.

As LEADER delivers to the RDP objectives through the LDSs, evaluation activities at the local and RDP level should be coordinated. This will benefit the utility, efficiency and effectiveness of evaluation activities, their resourcing, their respective contributions, expected outcomes and follow-up activities.

Given the minimum of two levels of involvement (local / regional and national) in evaluation, the respective roles of Managing Authorities and LAGs should be clearly defined and coordinated. The implementation of RDP and LDS level evaluation plans should be carefully monitored and managed, to ensure the coordination and progress of evaluation activities and iteration between the different levels.

The evaluation of the added value attributable to the LEADER approach is complex and involves the assessment of three main strands:

<sup>81</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. Articles 34.3 (g)

<sup>82</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Articles 33.1(f)

<sup>83</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art 71.1

<sup>84</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 54.3(b)(iii)

<sup>85</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 56(2)

<sup>86</sup> The ENRD LEADER Toolkit will contain a section on LDS evaluation for LAGs

<sup>87</sup> For a comprehensive outline on the potential contribution of LEADER to focus areas and cross-cutting objectives see the “Measure Fiche LEADER local development”.

- The extent to which the MA enabled the effective implementation of the LEADER approach through RDP design and delivery;
- The extent and effectiveness of LAGs' implementation of the LEADER specificities;
- The extent of added value attributable to the implementation of the specific LEADER methodology, by comparison with other development methods (including at the level of the whole CAP, CLLD and EU2020).

LAGs have not previously been formally required to conduct evaluation activities and have varying degrees of experience, knowledge and expertise. Therefore there is likely to be a considerable lack of consistency of approach and in some cases a significant skills gap<sup>88</sup>. Assessing LAGs' monitoring and evaluation skills and capabilities, and acting to address any identified shortfalls, is essential in order to strengthen the consistency and quality of evaluation and the robustness and the timing of outcomes<sup>89</sup>.

The monitoring and data collection arrangements necessary in order to capture the added value of LEADER and its contribution to the RDP, and wider impacts, are complex and need careful planning. Evaluation plans at both RDP and LDS level should clarify the different responsibilities and tasks related to the provision of data needed for MA and LAG monitoring and evaluation activities.

► **What are the proposed approaches?**

Further and more detailed guidance on approaches to LEADER evaluation are available in the Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development publication, entitled '*Working Paper on Capturing impacts of LEADER and of measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas*'. The ENRD LEADER toolkit will contain a section on LDS evaluation for LAGs which will include details of specific methods and approaches. The following paragraphs provide some general principles.

At the level of the RDP, the Managing Authority should provide:

- A framework for the overall assessment of LEADER;
- The means to incorporate LDS achievements and outcomes from evaluations into RDP level evaluations;
- Support to help LAGs prepare for evaluation activities<sup>90</sup> e.g. data needs assessment, definition / interpretation of indicators, evaluation techniques, quality control.

At the level of the LDS, LAGs should provide:

- A framework for assessing their own performance in implementing the LEADER specificities including the specification of data to capture relevant procedural, physical, financial and relational elements;
- The systems and mechanisms to manage financial and output data, with a specific focus on indicators and targets. This should include suitable links to other relevant databases e.g. the RDP electronic information system<sup>91</sup>;
- Proposals for disseminating<sup>92</sup> and utilising evaluation results e.g. through amending the LDS and its delivery;
- The structure through which they will complement RDP level evaluation of LEADER.

<sup>88</sup> See European Court of Auditors (Report 10/2010) and ENRD LEADER Focus Group 4 report.

<sup>89</sup> Ideally via the *ex ante* evaluation of the RDP.

<sup>90</sup> These activities should be scheduled prior to LDS implementation to support the LAGs in designing their own evaluation plans. During implementation on-the-job support such as mentoring, dissemination of good practices, tutoring and peer reviewing can be provided to maintain or improve quality.

<sup>91</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 66.1 and 70.

<sup>92</sup> Including to the local community empowering them through making policies more visible and effective at local level as is specifically outlined for CLLD.

Due to the specificities of LEADER, its inherently participative methods and its strong socio-economic dimension, a participative evaluation approach is recommended. Active participation in the evaluation process strengthens its relevance and the understanding and ownership of the outcomes. This in turn can strengthen the trust within the partnership and between the LAGs and the MA. Participative approaches are also particularly relevant to the process elements of LEADER and its methodology, for example in assessing aspects of its added value by comparison with other approaches. It must be noted, however, that great care is required to avoid an overly strong focus on qualitative or methodological aspects, a tendency which has been prominent in the past. The use of mixed-methods may better address the need to capture different aspects of the effects of LEADER with reference to quantitative, qualitative, procedural and relational issues<sup>93</sup>.

The Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 envisages strong LAG involvement in evaluation activities. In addition to strengthening ownership, this can be beneficial in supporting institutional learning, developing evidence-based policies and social accountability, and enhancing understanding of the territory, the LDS and its effects across the population. This reflexivity is an essential component of the development of a mature LAG.

### **National Rural Networks**

#### **▶ What is the legal basis?**

MSs establish the National Rural Network (NRN) or National Rural Network Programme (NRNP)<sup>94</sup> **to group administrations and organisations in rural development**, including partnerships created for the purpose of the RDP and Partnership Agreement development. NRNs and NRNPs should **support networking in rural areas, which aims to:**

- Improve the quality of rural development programmes;
- Ensure the involvement of rural development stakeholders in programme implementation and evaluation;
- Inform the broader public and potential beneficiaries about rural development policy;
- Foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas<sup>95</sup>.

NRNs and NRNPs are instruments for inter-institutional and cross-scale learning, fostering exchange of experiences and know-how and facilitating the dissemination of good practice between rural stakeholders across rural areas. NRNs and NRNPs ensure that EAFRD support, either in form of technical assistance (in the case of NRNs) or programme budget (in the case of NRNPs), is given **for setting up structures to run the network and to implement the programme's action plan. The action plan** should contain activities for sharing and disseminating monitoring and evaluation findings, training and networking activities for local action groups, collection of examples, networking activities for advisors, etc.<sup>96</sup>.

#### **▶ What are the key issues to be addressed?**

The aims and activities of NRNs and NRNPs, as outlined in the legal proposals, represent the starting point for their assessments. However, rural networks should not only **strengthen the accomplishment of RDP objectives**, but also **create added value** by generating broader rural networking, enhanced social capital and improved governance in rural areas. The key issues to be addressed in the evaluation of rural networks are therefore:

<sup>93</sup>European Evaluation Helpdesk (2010): Working Paper on 'Capturing Impacts of LEADER and of Measures to Improve Quality of Life in Rural Areas'. Brussels.

<sup>94</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art.54.1 : "MS with regional programme may submit for approval a specific programme for the establishment and the operation of their national rural network".

<sup>95</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 54

<sup>96</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 54.3

A. The **enhancement of the implementation of rural policy**, where the assessment is focused on the contribution of rural networks to;

- Achievements of EU2020, CAP and rural policy objectives (e.g. innovation, environment / climate change, competitiveness, social inclusion, combating poverty);
- RDP specific objectives (improvement in RDP quality, involvement of stakeholders in evaluation, etc.);
- Quality of RDP implementation and delivery (involvement of RDP stakeholders in programme implementation, informing the broader public and potential beneficiaries, participation of rural networks in monitoring and data collection, etc.).

B. The **generation of added value**, where the assessment is focused on the contribution of rural networks to;

- Enhancement of broader rural networking among individuals, organisations, associations active in rural development, etc. at the local, regional and national level;
- Cooperation amongst and between various RDP stakeholders (e.g. farmers, entrepreneurs foresters, researchers, municipalities, local action groups);
- Improvement of governance in rural areas;
- Development of partnerships and multi-level governance as one of the main principles of ESI Funds;
- Exchange and transfer of knowledge, information, experiences, expertise, good practice and related capacity building within a broad spectrum of rural stakeholders;
- Exchange and transfer of knowledge, information, experiences, expertise, and good practice on evaluation, development of evaluation methods, support for evaluation processes, etc.

Although rural networking should be encouraged across the whole spectrum of rural development interventions, the following **focus areas** of rural development priorities play a prominent role in promoting rural networking:

- Focus area 1b: strengthening links between agriculture, food production and forestry, research and innovation, including for the purpose of improved environmental management and performance;
- Focus area 3a: improving competitiveness of primary producers by better integrating them into the agri-food chain through quality schemes, adding value to agriculture products promotion in local markets and short supply circuits, producers groups and organisations and inter-branch organisations;
- Focus area 6b: fostering local development in rural areas.

The following rural development measures significantly encourage rural networking and cooperation:

- Art. 14 Knowledge transfer in information actions;
- Art. 15 Advisory services, farm management and farm relief services;
- Art. 20.1c Basic services and village renewal in rural areas (broadband infrastructure);
- Art. 27 Setting up producers groups;
- Art. 35 Cooperation;
- Art. 42 – 44 Leader.



Additionally, the following articles of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 support the grouping of farmers, foresters and municipalities and therefore also have a co-operation and networking characteristic:

- Art. 18 Restoring agriculture production potential damaged by natural disasters and catastrophic events and the introduction of appropriate prevention actions (support is granted to farmers or group of farmers);
- Art. 22 Afforestation and creation of woodland (support is granted to private landowners and tenants, municipalities and their associations);
- Art. 23 Establishment of agro-forestry systems (support is granted to private landowners and tenants, municipalities and their associations);
- Art. 24 Prevention and restoration of damage to forests from forest fires and natural disasters and catastrophic events (support is granted to private, semi-public and public forest, municipalities, state forest and their associations);
- Art. 25 Investments improving the resilience and environmental value of forest ecosystems (support is granted to natural persons, private forest owners, private law and semi-public bodies, municipalities and their associations);
- Art. 26 Investment in forestry technologies and in processing and marketing of forest products (support is granted to private forest owners, municipalities and their associations);
- Art. 39 Organic farming (support is granted to farmers or group of farmers).

► **What are the proposed approaches?**

The starting point for the evaluation of a NRN / NRNP is the **network structure and its intervention logic**.

Different scenarios may arise when setting up a network and its coordination unit, in terms of the composition of local and regional structures and the division of responsibilities and competencies. The specific situation will influence the choice of assessment methods, including the option for self-assessment approaches.

In relation to a network's intervention logic, the first step is to review the network's objectives (overall and specific), measures and activities, EU common evaluation questions and indicators need to be linked to objectives and activities. Since a network functions in a RDP-specific context, programme-specific evaluation questions and indicators will need to be applied in order to measure a network's specific outputs, results and impacts. In formulating programme-specific evaluation questions and in developing network result and impact indicators, the contribution of the NRN / NRNP, both to the implementation of rural policy and to the generation of added value, should be considered.

The evaluation of a NRN / NRNP should be based on **sufficient evidence**. In preparing and planning the evaluation of networks, all NRN / NRNP related common and programme-specific indicators should be equipped with data collection methods, data sources (both quantitative and qualitative, as appropriate) and data management. The following data, for example, could be considered for the evaluation of networks:

- Quantitative data for input, output and result indicators (monitoring);
- Quantitative and qualitative data for result indicators collected from NRN / NRNP beneficiaries (surveys using questionnaires / interviews / focus groups / case studies, etc.);
- Quantitative and qualitative data for impact indicators collected from both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the NRN / NRNP in order to conduct counterfactual analysis (surveys using questionnaires / interviews / focus groups, case studies, etc.);
- Official statistics (if available).

Collated evidence should be analysed using various evaluation approaches and methods in order to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, results and impacts of rural networks.

As with any RDP or any other programme financed from ESI Funds, NRNPs are subject to **evaluation**, while NRN evaluation forms part of the RDP's evaluation. The network can also decide to conduct a self-assessment, and utilise **self-evaluation techniques**<sup>97</sup>. Results of self-assessment may contribute to independent network evaluation and also enable network members to improve the governance of the network, and consequently improve networking activity.

It is important to acknowledge that rural networks are examples of “soft” interventions, the impacts of which are often difficult for evaluations to capture. The following methods may be used in the evaluation of NRNs / NRNPs:

- Desk analysis of monitoring data;
- Case studies<sup>98</sup>;
- Interviews and focus groups<sup>99</sup>;
- Stakeholder analysis<sup>100</sup>;
- Network function analysis<sup>101</sup>;
- Network and organisation diagnosis<sup>102</sup>;
- Social network analysis<sup>103</sup>.

When selecting methods to assess the results and impacts of rural networks, it is important to note that, as one would expect, there is not a single method which will satisfy all evaluation requirements. A combination of methods should be considered in order to enable the triangulation of evaluation outcomes e.g. desk analysis of monitoring data can be combined with interviews and case studies.

## 6.4 Evaluation activities

### *What activities should be conducted to prepare the evaluation?*

Well-structured preparation activities at the start of the programme period are a precondition for a cost-effective and high quality evaluation during the programming period, and ensure a solid base for the *ex post* evaluation.

Evaluation planning takes place both before and at the start of programme implementation, hence the value of establishing the evaluation plan as part of the RDP. When drafting the evaluation plan, a close collaboration with the *ex ante* evaluator is advisable. The *ex ante* evaluator assesses the programme's intervention logic, common and programme-specific indicators, budget, governance and delivery mechanisms, and may give important advice for the structuring of evaluation activities. In addition, during the programming period the MA, as owner of the evaluation plan, may seek an exchange with the ongoing evaluator when updating the evaluation plan.

Activities linked to evaluation preparation comprise:

<sup>97</sup> [http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/en/index\\_en.cfm](http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networks-and-networking/nrn-self-assessment-tool-kit/en/index_en.cfm)

<sup>98</sup> Capturing impacts of Leader and of measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas, European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, 2010

<sup>99</sup> Capturing impacts of Leader and of measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas, European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, 2010

<sup>100</sup> FAO Socio-economic and gender analysis (SEAGA) - <http://www.fao.org/knowledge/goodpractices/bp-gender-equity-in-rural/bp-seaga/en/>

<sup>101</sup> Enrique Mendizabal: Understanding Networks: The Functions of Research Policy Networks, Overseas Development Institute, London, 2006

<sup>102</sup> Bauer-Wolf, S. et al., (2008), Erfolgreich durch Netzwerkkompetenz (successful through Network competence), Springer-Verlag, Vienna

<sup>103</sup> Capturing impacts of Leader and of measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas, European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, 2010

- Review of the common evaluation questions (including links to indicators);
- Development of programme-specific evaluation questions linked to programme intervention logic, definition of judgment criteria and links to indicators;
- Preparation of fiches for programme-specific indicators;
- Identification of additional types of data to be collected and screening of information sources;
- Review of potential approaches to the assessment of results and impacts<sup>104</sup>;
- Agreement with data providers as to data availability;
- Filling the gaps and addressing identified weaknesses in data collection, e.g. developing a method for HNV data collection, collecting additional data for indicators for which temporary proxies have been employed;
- Preparing Terms of Reference (ToR) and conducting a tendering procedure (if external evaluators are conducting the evaluation).

#### **Review evaluation question, define judgment criteria and links to indicators**

Common Evaluation Questions (CEQs), both horizontal and focus area related, are linked to CAP objectives, EU 2020 headline targets, and the objectives of focus areas. They cover the major aspects of EU rural development interventions to be examined by evaluation. If the RDP contains programme-specific objectives reflecting specific needs within the programme territory, programme-specific evaluation questions should also be employed. All evaluation questions, common and programme-specific, must be equipped with judgment criteria and linked to common and programme-specific indicators, which will be used in the answering of evaluation questions. Additional indicators (e.g. programme-specific indicators) may be necessary when answering common evaluation questions CEQs, by complementing the analysis with aspects which are not covered by the common set of indicators.

#### **Prepare fiches for programme-specific indicators**

If the Managing Authority employs programme-specific result and impact indicators, these need to be defined and elaborated on in the indicator fiche, in a similar fashion to common indicators. The fiche should contain, *inter alia*, the name of the indicator, the related objective, its definition, unit of measurement, methodology, data source and location, collection level and frequency. Programme-specific output indicators should be clearly defined and linked to reliable data sources.

#### **Review potential data collection methods**

The proposed methods for the collection of data for common and programme-specific result and impact indicators, as described in the indicator fiches<sup>105</sup>, should be reviewed by the MA in collaboration with evaluators. (Additional guidance on data collection methodology for complementary result indicators is expected in a near future.) Potential evaluation methods to be used in the assessment of results and impacts should be considered, including the use of counterfactual analysis, methods to net out intervening factors, and approaches to observe contextual trends, as they influence data collection and management. Potential approaches to answer evaluation questions should be reviewed in order to enable effective screening of data sources and the utilisation of methods in a cost effective manner.

#### **Identify data needs and potential sources**

Identifying the data types needed to address common and programme-specific indicators is one of the key activities in evaluation preparation, in order to make sure that data of sufficient quality is available

<sup>104</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 50.4, 54, and Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 68

<sup>105</sup> European Commission Working Document: Draft Target indicator fiches for Pillar II + complementary result indicators and Working Document: Impact indicators:

during the whole programming period at reasonable cost. The identification of data types, including those to be collected through programme monitoring, should follow indicator fiche guidance (EU fiches in the case of common indicators and fiches prepared by the Member State in the case of programme-specific indicators). In general, the following information and data sources are important for evaluation:

- Monitoring data, including data in relation to programme results, collected by and from beneficiaries via monitoring tables or documents (e.g. application forms, payment requests).
- Disaggregated data collected from non-beneficiaries (counterfactual analysis) or from sector representative samples (sector analysis) via regular surveys (e.g. Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN), Farm Structure Survey (FSS), country-specific research).
- Specific data regularly collected via institutions which relate to rural development priorities and focus areas (e.g. Ministry of Environment and its agencies, Ministry of Economy and its agencies, Ministry of Interior).
- Statistical data (used for the sector or contextual analysis), aggregated in line with RDP requirements.

When screening data it is important to identify potential data providers. If they are located outside of the programme-responsible ministry or sector, accessing the data required may be challenging, unless the necessary inter-institutional communication, legal procedures and financial measures to purchase data have been established.

#### ***Prepare the ToR and conduct the tendering procedure (in the case of external evaluation)***

If the Managing Authority has decided to contract an external evaluator to conduct evaluation during the programming period, it is important to prepare Terms of Reference (ToR) which list and clearly describe evaluation objectives, tasks and activities to be conducted by the external evaluator during the structuring, observing, analysing and judging phases<sup>106</sup>. (Detailed information on the content of the ToR can be found in Part III of these guidelines.) It is essential that the Managing Authority has sufficient capacity to tender, steer and control the evaluation of RDPs.

#### ***Which evaluation activities should be conducted and reported upon during the programming period?***

Evaluation activities conducted by programme authorities (Managing Authority, paying agency) during the programming period relate to:

- Evaluation of progress towards the RDP's objectives and contribution to the CAP and EU2020 objectives; assessment of programme results, impacts, rural development cross-cutting and specific issues; answering evaluation questions; developing conclusions and recommendations, and; using evaluation results to improve programme design and implementation (steered by Managing Authorities, conducted by evaluators);
- Reporting and communication of evaluation results (MA).

#### ***Which activities relate to the evaluation of progress towards the RDP's objectives, contribution to the CAP and EU2020 strategic objectives, and the assessment of programme results and impacts?***<sup>107</sup>

The following activities should be **conducted by evaluators**:

- Adopt suitable and robust evaluation methodologies;
- Collect, process and synthesise relevant information;

<sup>106</sup> [http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app\\_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=6A65BD6F-CB22-6660-7E91-321F04E742E2](http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=6A65BD6F-CB22-6660-7E91-321F04E742E2)

<sup>107</sup> Programme results relate to effects observed on programme beneficiaries across the programme's implementation. Programme impacts are effects observed in the programme territory attributed to the RDP interventions in relation to the evaluation topics.

- In conjunction with relevant information supplied by the Managing Authority **on the multiple effects** of interventions and synergies between activities;
- In conjunction with relevant information supplied by the Managing Authority and in line with the selected evaluation methods, conduct an assessment of **complementary result indicators** and programme-specific results;
- In line with the selected evaluation methods conduct an assessment of programme **impacts**, attributing them to programme interventions (netting out impacts);
- Analyse the RDP's contributions to the CAP's general objectives, the EU 2020 objectives and to cross-cutting issues (innovation, environment, climate change mitigation and adaptation), and the contribution of specific interventions such as National Rural Networks.
- Assess progress made in relation to the integration of EAFRD and other EU financial instruments to support the territorial development of rural areas, including through local development strategies.
- Analyse programme achievements along with RDP objectives;
- Process and analyse any sub-programmes;
- Answer evaluation questions;
- Provide conclusions and recommendations in relation to programme design and implementation, etc.

The quality of the assessment of impacts depends on the methods utilised by evaluators, and on data management and quality. Whenever possible, an advanced assessment of impacts should be conducted, using counterfactual analysis with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries to net out programme effects.

#### **What are the expected reporting activities on evaluation results?**

The evaluation activities described above should be reported in a specific section of the AIRs<sup>108</sup>. More detailed reporting on the evaluation's activities will be required in the two enhanced AIRs submitted in 2017 and 2019. The *ex post* evaluation report, to be submitted to EC services by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024, will complete all evaluation tasks and activities in relation to all evaluation topics. It should assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme and its contribution to the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth<sup>109</sup>, provide answers to evaluation questions and make conclusions and recommendations for rural development policy. It is advisable to start the preparations for the *ex post* evaluation at the end of 2020.

#### **Enhanced Annual Implementation Reports 2017 and 2019**

In 2017 and 2019 enhanced AIRs must be submitted and will combine monitoring and evaluation issues. As such, they will require thorough advanced planning. The presentation structure for the AIRs will be specified in the implementing acts, and complementary guidance will follow at a later stage. In comparison to the standard elements of AIRs, enhanced AIRs will require supplementary analytical activities on the progress of the programme. As a consequence, preparatory assessment activities will have to be finalised prior to the drafting of each AIR, so that their results can be incorporated into the report. By 2016, evaluation activities should ensure the delivery of the 2017 AIR.

Programme authorities may also want to prepare shorter versions or extracts of evaluation reports in order to provide "user friendly" information for a broader spectrum of rural development stakeholders and / or decision makers. These reports may be disseminated through various means, such as web

<sup>108</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art 50 56 and Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 75

<sup>109</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art 57

pages, TV and radio broadcasting, National Rural Network publications, leaflets, activities and events (see Chapter 1 of **Part II** on “Governance and management of evaluation”).

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## **PART III: TOOLBOX**

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# 1 INDICATIVE OUTLINE OF A NON-BINDING INTERNAL EVALUATION PLAN

The evaluation plan (EP), submitted as part of the Rural Development Programme (RDP), contains a general description of monitoring and evaluation procedures. Managing Authorities (MAs) may wish to develop, in coordination with other monitoring and evaluation stakeholders, a more detailed internal planning document (internal evaluation plan) that is non-binding and not shared with the European Commission (EC). Such an internal evaluation plan aims to assist evaluation managers to implement monitoring and evaluation tasks and activities, to anticipate workload, to manage deadlines, and to ensure the provision of data for evaluation purposes.

An internal evaluation plan is usually divided into annual segments. A widely used method is “retro planning”, also known as backward scheduling, which is done by building up a schedule starting from the last step of the process. In this way experience from previous programming periods, with regard to the likely lengths of each step, can be used for scheduling each action.

A time plan summarizes all evaluation steps, tasks and activities to be conducted during the programming period and between 2021 to 2024, including governance, preparation and implementation of evaluation, reporting and the dissemination of evaluation results.

The following indicative outline explains the time plan for evaluation together with an indicative resource plan. It aims to complement the minimum requirements with explanations and recommendations as to how different steps and tasks could be planned.

## Year 2014

### *Governance of evaluation*

From the start of the RDP the Managing Authority sets up the RDP monitoring and evaluation system and coordinates all evaluation activities in collaboration with other evaluation stakeholders. This comprises the following activities:

- Screening of evaluation stakeholders (MA, MC, PA, data providers, evaluators, local action groups, national rural networks, various technical working groups, etc.) and definition of their roles, responsibilities and expected contributions to evaluation;
- Establishing the MA or Ministry of Agriculture evaluation capacity (e.g. if organised in a separate coordination unit);
- Setting up an evaluation steering group to steer monitoring and evaluation activities. Such a steering group can, for example, include the MA, MC, paying agency (PA), data providers, local action groups, national rural networks, etc.;
- Deciding on optimal division of tasks and responsibilities; introduction of a communication system for all parties involved in monitoring and evaluation;
- Checking the clarity, consistency and functionality of monitoring and evaluation processes;
- Making necessary arrangements with data providers to ensure access to data in the required format and quality. This also includes data providers outside of the agriculture and forestry sector (e.g. environment, municipalities, NGOs);
- Preparation of a capacity building plan for evaluation stakeholders (MA, MC, PA, LAGs, NRN) in line with their evaluation roles, responsibilities and tasks;

- Starting ToR preparation, tendering and contracting procedures if the Managing Authority outsources specific evaluation tasks during the programming period to external evaluators / experts.

### **Preparation of evaluation**

During the first year of programme implementation the Managing Authority will ensure that all necessary preparatory activities take place in relation to evaluation. These comprise:

- Agreeing with decision makers and key stakeholders the focus of evaluation and selection of evaluation topics for evaluation during the programming period;
- Reviewing Common Evaluation Questions (CEQs) and indicators, identifying data needs and screening available data sources;
- Identifying programme-specific evaluation needs, defining programme-specific evaluation questions and indicators, identifying evaluation data requirements and screening data sources;
- Reviewing potential approaches and related activities linked to the assessment of results and impacts;
- Identifying potential data gaps and solutions to address them (e.g. primary data collection by the evaluator, conducting evaluation studies);
- Deciding on the data to be collected for evaluation through the monitoring system from application forms, payment requests and other monitoring tools. Specifying what data needs to be collected by evaluators;
- Setting up a monitoring and IT system for data collection from beneficiaries, including the design of application forms and payment requests. Making provisions to ensure that beneficiaries report on time and at the required scope.

### **Implementation of evaluation**

Starting in 2014 and throughout the whole programming period, the Managing Authority and / or paying agency observes programme implementation and collects relevant monitoring data to enable programme steering and evaluation. This includes:

- Monitoring the RDP's progress in relation to target and output indicators to facilitate programme steering;
- Collecting information on non-beneficiaries for the purpose of designing control groups which allow counterfactual analysis to be conducted during the assessment of programme impacts.

## **Year 2015**

### **Governance of evaluation**

In the second year of programme implementation the Managing Authority continues to coordinate evaluation. The evaluation steering group involves evaluation stakeholders (apart from evaluators), and steers evaluation processes and tasks. Targeted capacity building takes place amongst relevant stakeholders to increase knowledge and understanding about respective responsibilities within the monitoring and evaluation system and the role of evaluation in steering and managing programmes, e.g. a training for paying agency staff on the purpose of data collection for evaluation.

If the MA aims to outsource specific tasks for the 2017 enhanced AIR, it is advisable to start the preparation of the ToR and the tendering and contracting procedures for external evaluators / experts.

If there are major changes in implementation of the evaluation plan, the respective chapter in the RDP is revised and the Managing Authority submits the RDP modification to the EC.

### **Preparation of evaluation**

Preparation for evaluation also continues during the second year of RDP implementation. The Managing Authority in collaboration with other evaluation stakeholders, reviews data collection methods and discusses potential approaches to enable a robust assessment of results and impacts. The MA continues to address data gaps, securing access to databases which allow control groups to be formed (e.g. FADN or similar databases), and make the necessary arrangements to obtain data in the correct format and at the correct level of aggregation.

### **Implementation of evaluation**

The Managing Authority and / or paying agency observe the RDP's progress and collect beneficiary data via monitoring systems for output, target and complementary result indicators, in order to prepare the AIR for 2014 and 2015. Collected data and information is processed and synthesized in order to assess the RDP's progress and achievements in line with the selected evaluation methods and reporting requirements. Existing databases (such as FADN and forestry databases) are used to collect data and information to enable the design of control groups for future RDP evaluations. The external evaluator and / or experts are contracted to collect additional information / data to fill data and information gaps and to conduct *ad hoc* evaluations.

## **Year 2016**

### **Governance of evaluation**

The Managing Authority manages evaluation tasks and collaborates with the evaluation steering group. If the MA has contracted an external evaluator for specific evaluation tasks and activities, the evaluator prepares inputs for the first standard AIR 2016 (covering the years 2014 and 2015).

If there are major changes in evaluation plan implementation, the respective chapter in the RDP is revised and the Managing Authority submits the RDP modification to the EC.

The Managing Authority in coordination with the evaluation steering group, develops and implements a capacity building plan for evaluation stakeholders (MA, MC, PA, LAGs, NRN) in line with their roles, responsibilities and tasks.

### **Implementation of evaluation**

The Managing Authority and / or paying agency continue to observe the progress of RDP implementation and collect data on beneficiaries via the monitoring system for output, target and complementary result indicators. The collection of data from existing data sources (such as FADN) continues in order to construct control groups for future evaluations. Collected data and information is processed and synthesized in line with the selected evaluation methods and reporting requirements. *Ad hoc* evaluations are conducted if existing information sources are not sufficient to carry on the evaluation during the programming period.

### **Reporting**

The first standard Annual Implementation Report (AIR) , assessing the progress and achievements of the programme in the two previous years (2014 and 2015), will be presented and discussed with the Monitoring Committee and submitted to the European Commission by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

## Year 2017

### *Governance of evaluation*

The Managing Authority continues to manage evaluation tasks and coordinates them with programme implementation. Evaluation steering and coordination amongst stakeholders is ensured by the evaluation steering group, who collaborate with evaluators to conduct evaluation tasks and prepare inputs for the evaluation chapter of the enhanced AIR, submitted in 2017. The Managing Authority conducts a quality control of evaluation findings and of any other input the evaluator provides for the AIR. Evaluation results are discussed with the evaluation steering group and with the Monitoring Committee.

The Managing Authority prepares an RDP modification if the evaluation plan chapter needs to be revised, and implements an evaluation capacity building plan. The Managing Authority prepares the ToR and carries out a tendering procedure if an external evaluator will be involved in the preparation of the enhanced AIR, to be submitted in 2019. The Managing Authority also monitors the implementation of the evaluation communication strategy.

### *Implementation of evaluation*

In addition to observing RDP progress and implementation, and collecting data on beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, in 2017 the evaluator processes and synthesizes data and information in line with the selected evaluation methods and reporting requirements, assesses RDP results and contributions to focus areas under the rural development priorities, and answers relevant common and programme-specific evaluation questions related to focus areas and synergies among priorities, (providing reasonable programme uptake within RDP focus areas has taken place). The assessment also includes technical assistance (TA) and National Rural Networks (if financed from TA) and answering related common evaluation questions. It is considered good practice to assess the administration and management of the programme (delivery mechanisms) and the efficiency of programme outputs, results and impacts (e.g. through cost – benefit analysis).

*Ad hoc* evaluations are conducted if existing information sources are not sufficient to carry out the evaluation during the programming period.

### *Reporting*

The first enhanced **AIR 2017** is finalised, presented and discussed with the Monitoring Committee and submitted by the Managing Authority to the EC by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

### *Dissemination of evaluation results*

The 2017 AIR is uploaded to the MA's website and evaluation findings are disseminated to RDP stakeholders, policy makers and the general public in the most appropriate format e.g. a simpler version of the evaluation chapter of the AIR in the form of a presentation which can be used for RDP information events and rural development conferences and seminars.

## Year 2018

### *Governance of evaluation*

The MA is responsible for the management of evaluation tasks and activities, and their coordination with RDP implementation. The evaluation steering group continue to steer and coordinate the various stakeholders involved in evaluation, and collaborate with evaluators to conduct evaluation tasks to enable the preparation of the standard AIR in 2018 (covering the year 2017).

The Managing Authority prepares an RDP modification if the evaluation plan chapter needs to be revised, and implement the evaluation capacity building plan. The Managing Authority also monitors the implementation of the communication strategy.

### ***Preparation of evaluation***

With a view to preparing the enhanced AIR in 2019, in 2018 the Managing Authority and evaluator will again review the common and programme-specific Evaluation Questions and indicators, identify evaluation data needs and screen data sources.

The evaluation findings and conclusions from the enhanced 2017 AIR may have triggered new programme-specific evaluation needs and topics. If this has happened, the Managing Authority and evaluator will need to define or modify programme-specific evaluation questions and indicators, identify evaluation data requirements and screen data sources.

### ***Implementation of the evaluation***

The Managing Authority and / or paying agency continue to observe and analyse the progress of RDP implementation, and collect data on beneficiaries through the monitoring system for output, target and complementary result indicators. Data from existing databases, data collected by evaluators, and any other relevant information available is processed, analysed and synthesized to prepare inputs for the 2018 AIR. *Ad hoc* evaluations studies are conducted if needed.

### ***Reporting***

The standard 2018 AIR (covering the year 2017) assesses the programme's progress and achievements and must be prepared and submitted to the European Commission by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2018. This report contains information on the implementation of the programme and delivery against its priorities.

### ***Dissemination of evaluation results***

The 2018 AIR is uploaded to the Managing Authority's website and evaluation findings are disseminated to RDP stakeholders, policy makers and the general public in the most appropriate format, e.g. a simpler version of the evaluation chapter of the AIR in the form of a presentation which can be used for various RDP information events and rural development conferences and seminars, as defined in the evaluation plan's communication strategy.

## **Year 2019**

### ***Governance of evaluation***

The evaluation steering group steers the evaluation and coordinates evaluation stakeholders. The Managing Authority organises evaluations along with programme implementation and collaborates with evaluators to deliver evaluation tasks. The Managing Authority conducts quality control of evaluation reports and the evaluator's inputs to the enhanced 2019 AIR (covering the year 2018). The enhanced 2019 AIR is presented and discussed with the Monitoring Committee.

The Managing Authority prepares RDP modifications if the evaluation plan chapter needs to be revised, and implement the evaluation capacity building plan. In addition the Managing Authority also monitors the implementation of the evaluation communication strategy.

### ***Implementation of evaluation***

The evaluator processes and synthesizes the collected monitoring data / information on beneficiaries and the data / information on non-beneficiaries, and conducts counterfactual and other analysis. The evaluator also assesses the programme's results and impacts, including the analysis of net effects and the observation of general development trends and context analysis. In line with the selected

evaluation methods, the evaluator develops answers to common and programme-specific evaluation questions (focus area-related, related to other aspects of RDP, such as NRN and technical assistance, and EU level objectives) and provides conclusions and recommendations to improve the RDP's design and implementation.

Furthermore, the evaluator conducts an assessment of the RDP's contributions to achieving rural development cross-cutting and CAP objectives, the EU2020 Strategy and headline targets, the Common Strategic Framework (CSF) thematic objectives, and progress made in ensuring an integrated approach to support territorial development.

The assessment also includes technical assistance and National Rural Networks (if financed from TA). It is considered good practice to assess the administration and management of the programme (delivery mechanisms), and the efficiency of programme outputs, results and impacts (e.g. through cost – benefit analysis).

### **Reporting**

The second enhanced 2019 AIR is finalised, presented and discussed with the Monitoring Committee and submitted to the EC by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

### **Dissemination of evaluation results**

The 2019 AIR is uploaded to the Managing Authority's website and evaluation findings are disseminated to policy makers and the general public in the most appropriate format, e.g. simpler version of the evaluation chapter of the AIR or a presentation. Media releases can also be used to disseminate evaluation results to the general public.

## **Year 2020**

### **Governance of evaluation**

The Managing Authority continues to manage programme implementation and evaluation. The evaluation steering group steers the evaluation and coordinates evaluation stakeholders in implementing and monitoring evaluation tasks in a similar fashion to previous years. The Managing Authority continues to support the implementation of the capacity building plan and monitoring the implementation of the communication strategy.

The standard 2020 AIR (covering the year 2019) is presented and discussed with the Monitoring Committee.

The last year of the programming period also represents the last opportunity to modify the evaluation plan. At the same time the Managing Authority ensures that the necessary resources are available to undertake evaluation tasks until 2024.

### **Implementation of the evaluation**

The Managing Authority and paying agency conduct the same tasks in relation to monitoring RDP progress, collection of information and data on beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries and adapting the monitoring and evaluation system in line with any relevant Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 modification and new evaluation topics. The evaluator processes and synthesizes the collected data and information in line with the selected evaluation methods and reporting requirements. In addition, *ad hoc* evaluations studies are conducted if needed.

### **Reporting**

The Managing Authority presents and discusses the standard 2020 AIR with the Monitoring Committee and submits it to the European Commission by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

### **Dissemination of evaluation results**

The 2020 AIR is uploaded to the MA's web page and evaluation findings are disseminated to RDP stakeholders, policy makers and the general public in the most appropriate format, e.g. a simpler version of the AIR's evaluation chapter in the form of a presentation which can be used for various RDP information events, rural development conferences and seminars, as defined in the evaluation plan's communication strategy. Media releases can also be used to disseminate evaluation results to the general public.

## **Year 2021 and 2022**

### **Governance of evaluation**

After 2020 the implementation of the RDPs will continue and the Managing Authority will ensure the continuation of all evaluation tasks. It manages the evaluation during the programming period until the last standard AIR and *ex post* evaluation of the programme. The evaluation steering group continues to steer the evaluation and coordinate evaluation stakeholders until 2024. They may overlap with the new programme's steering group. As in previous years, the evaluation results published in the AIR are presented and discussed at the Monitoring Committee.

In 2021 the Managing Authority starts to prepare the *ex post* evaluation of the RDP that shall be submitted to the EC in December 2024. If the MA decides to contract an external evaluator for the *ex post* evaluation, in 2021 they shall prepare a Terms of Reference and conduct the tendering procedure, to ensure that adequate time is given to the external evaluator to conduct a quality *ex post* evaluation.

### **Preparation of evaluation**

For the preparation of the AIR, and in anticipation of the *ex post* evaluation to be submitted by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024, the Managing Authority and evaluator review the common and programme-specific evaluation questions and indicators, identify evaluation data needs and screen data sources.

The last RDP projects are committed by the end of 2020 and therefore in 2021 new evaluation needs and topic can be identified. The Managing Authority and evaluators may define programme-specific evaluation questions and indicators, identify evaluation data requirements and screen data sources.

### **Implementation of evaluation**

In 2021 and 2022 the evaluation tasks and activities continue as in previous years; observing the RDP's progress, processing, analysing and synthesizing data collected on RDP beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, conducting *ad hoc* evaluations, etc.

### **Reporting**

The standard 2021 AIR (covering 2020) and the 2022 AIR (covering 2021) are presented to and discussed with the Monitoring Committee and submitted by the Managing Authority to the European Commission by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021 and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022, respectively.

### **Dissemination of evaluation results**

The 2021 and 2022 AIRs are uploaded to the MA's website and evaluation findings are disseminated to RDP stakeholders, policy makers and the general public in the most appropriate format, e.g. a simpler version of the evaluation chapter of the AIR in the form of a presentation which can be used for various RDP information events and rural development conferences and seminars, as defined in the evaluation plan's communication strategy. Media releases can also be used to disseminate evaluation results to the general public.

## Year 2023

### **Governance of evaluation**

The Managing Authority continues to manage evaluation including activities to prepare for the *ex post* evaluation. The evaluation steering group steers the evaluation and coordinates evaluation stakeholders for the task. The progress of RDP implementation is presented in the 2023 AIR (covering the year 2022) and is discussed with the Monitoring Committee.

### **Implementation of evaluation**

In 2023 all projects contracted under the RDP 2014–2020 programming period will be finalised, including the collection of monitoring data on beneficiaries for output, target and complementary result indicators. In addition, data on non-beneficiaries is collected, processed and synthesized in line with the selected evaluation methods and reporting requirements, in order to enable the assessment of programme impacts and achievement towards the EU and rural development objectives in the RDP *ex post* evaluation of 2024.

### **Reporting**

The standard 2023 AIR (covering the year 2022) is presented to and discussed with the MC and submitted by the Managing Authority to the European Commission by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023.

### **Dissemination of evaluation results**

The 2023 AIR is uploaded to the MA's website and evaluation findings are disseminated to RDP stakeholders, policy makers and the general public in the most appropriate format, e.g. a simpler version of the evaluation chapter of the AIR in the form of presentation which can be used for various RDP information events, rural development conferences and seminars, as defined in the evaluation plan's communication strategy. Media releases can also be used in order to disseminate evaluation results to the general public.

## Year 2024

### **Governance of evaluation**

The *ex post* evaluation has to be submitted by the end of 2024. The *ex post* evaluation is coordinated by the MA, who is responsible for its quality even though the actual evaluation is carried out by an evaluator. The *ex post* evaluation report is discussed with the Monitoring Committee. However, as outcomes from the monitoring of RDP progress are also expected, a standard AIR in 2024 (covering the year 2023) will be prepared, discussed with the Monitoring Committee, and submitted.

### **Implementation of evaluation**

The evaluator processes and synthesizes beneficiary monitoring data and non-beneficiary data utilising the selected evaluation methods (including counterfactual analysis). He or she conducts the assessment of the programme's results and impacts, including an analysis of net effects and an observation of general development trends and context analysis. Furthermore, the evaluator carries out an assessment of the RDP's contribution to rural development cross-cutting objectives, CAP objectives, the EU2020 Strategy and headline targets, the CSF thematic objectives and progress made in ensuring an integrated approach to support territorial development.

The evaluator drafts answers to all common and programme-specific evaluation questions and develops conclusions and recommendations.

The administration and management of the programme are also assessed in the *ex post* evaluation, including technical assistance and costs of the programme outputs, results and impacts (e.g. by applying a cost-benefit analysis).



### **Reporting**

By 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024 the MA prepares and submits the standard 2024 AIR (covering the year 2023) and by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024 the *ex post* evaluation report.

The standard 2024 AIR focuses on the progress of the RDP in 2023, whereas the *ex post* evaluation report provides results of the *ex post* evaluation, demonstrates the impact, progress, effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of rural development policies implemented from 2014, as well as the achievements of the RDP towards EU common policy objectives and programme-specific objectives.

After discussing each report with the Monitoring Committee, the Managing Authority submits them to the European Commission by the relevant delivery deadline (30<sup>th</sup> June for the AIR and 31<sup>st</sup> December for the *ex post* evaluation report).

### **Dissemination of evaluation results**

Evaluation results, conclusions and recommendations from the *ex post* evaluation report are disseminated to the main rural development stakeholders and target audience (e.g. MA, PA, MC, TWG, evaluation steering group, policymakers, RDP beneficiaries and the general public), in the format and via communication channels as defined in the communication strategy of the RDP's evaluation plan.

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## 2 TIMELINE FOR EVALUATION DURING THE PROGRAMMING PERIOD

The following indicative evaluation timeline is an example of a retro planning table, which starts with the last activity to be carried out and is scheduled backwards to the first activity to be carried out. (The table should therefore be read from the bottom left corner to the upper right corner).

The table contains tasks and activities broken down by year in the 2014 – 2024 programme period, linked to:

- Governance of evaluation;
- Preparation of evaluation (structuring);
- Implementation of evaluation (observing);
- Implementation of evaluation (analysing and judging);
- Reporting on evaluation;
- Dissemination of evaluation results.

The table is interlinked (and harmonised) with:

- The indicative outline of a non-binding Evaluation plan (see elsewhere in **PART III** Toolbox);
- The indicative resource plan for evaluation (see elsewhere in **PART III** Toolbox).

The “*Indicative outline of a non-binding evaluation plan*” describes in detail all task and activities recorded on the timeline on an annual basis. The indicative resource plan is harmonised with the timeline and outlines when the resources for each evaluation task and activity shall be planned and financed.

The timeline table is also mentioned in part 5.2 of the evaluation plan guidelines (see Timing, p. 23).

Stage		Evaluation during programming period																		
		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024								
		30.6.2016		30.6.2017		30.6.2018		30.6.2019		30.6.2020		30.6.2021		30.6.2022		30.6.2023		30.6.2024 31.12.2024		
DISSEMINATION		Review and dissemination of evaluation findings																		
REPORTING				Standard AIR	Enhanced AIR	Standard AIR	Enhanced AIR	Standard AIR	Standard AIR	Standard AIR	Standard AIR	Standard AIR	Standard AIR	Standard AIR	Standard AIR	Standard AIR	Standard AIR	Standard AIR and ex post evaluation report (EPE)		
IMPLEMENTATION	Analyzing & Judging				Assessment of the use of TA funds (MA, Ev)		Answering EQs and providing conclusion and recommendations in relation to programme design and implementation (MA, Ev)											Answering EQs and providing conclusion and recommendations in relation to programme design and implementation (MA, Ev)		
					Answering EQs and providing conclusion and recommendations in relation to programme design and implementation (MA, Ev)		Assessment of the use of TA funds (MA, Ev)											Assessment of the use of TA funds (MA, Ev)		
					Assessment of results of RDP interventions and contribution to FAs under RD Priorities (including to programme specific FAs) (MA, Ev)		Assessment of progress made in ensuring an integrated approach to the use of EAFRD and other EU funds to support territorial development, including LDS (MA, Ev)												Assessment of progress made in ensuring an integrated approach to the use of EAFRD and other EU funds to support territorial development, including LDS (MA, Ev)	
							Assessment of RDP contribution to achieving the EU 2020 headline targets and the Union strategy including CSF thematic objectives (MA, Ev)													Assessment of RDP contribution to achieving the EU 2020 headline targets and the Union strategy including CSF thematic objectives (MA, Ev)
							Assessment of RDP effectiveness, efficiency and impacts (netting out impacts) and contribution to the three CAP general objectives (MA, Ev)													Assessment of RDP effectiveness, efficiency and impacts (netting out impacts) and contribution to the three CAP general objectives (MA, Ev)
							Assessment of RDP contributions to Rural Development cross-cutting objectives (MA, Ev)													Assessment of RDP contributions to Rural Development cross-cutting objectives (MA, Ev)
							Assessment of results of RDP interventions and contribution to FAs under RD Priorities (target, complementary result and programme specific indicators) (MA, Ev)													Assessment of results of RDP interventions and contribution to FAs under RD Priorities (target, complementary result and programme specific indicators) (MA, Ev)
							Conducting ad hoc evaluation studies (MA, Ev)													
							Processing and synthesizing relevant information in line with the selected evaluation methods (Ev)													
							Assessment of progress, achievements of RDP contributing to conducting the above evaluation tasks (MA, Ev)													
	Observing				Monitoring of the RDP progress in relation to target and output indicators (PA)															
							Observation of development trends and context analysis (Ev)											Observation of development trends and context analysis (Ev)		
						Collection and provision of information and data on non beneficiaries for designing control groups (Ev)														
PREPARATION	Structuring	Set up an efficient IT system for data collection from beneficiaries (MA)	Arrange access to beneficiaries and non beneficiaries data to the evaluator (MA)			Review potential data collection sources; Identification of data needs and potential sources based on AIR 2017 evaluation results (MA, Ev)							Review potential data collection sources; Identification of data needs and potential sources based on AIR 2019 evaluation results (MA, Ev)							
		Review potential data collection sources; Identification of data needs and potential sources (MA, Ev)	Fill the gaps and address identified weaknesses in data collection (e.g. HNV, etc.) (MA, Ev)			Development of programme specific evaluation questions (prepare fiches for programme specific indicators) based on AIR 2017 evaluation results (MA)								Development of programme specific evaluation questions (prepare fiches for programme specific indicators) based on AIR 2017 evaluation results (MA)						
		Development of programme specific evaluation questions (prepare fiches for programme specific indicators) (MA)	Review of potential data collection methods (MA, Ev)			Identification of programme specific evaluation needs and decide evaluation topics based on AIR 2017 evaluation results (Ev)								Identification of programme specific evaluation needs and decide evaluation topics based on AIR 2017 evaluation results (Ev)						
		Identification of programme specific evaluation needs and decide evaluation topics (Ev)	Review of potential approaches for a robust assessment of results and impacts (Ev)			Reviewing CEQs, define judgement criteria and links to indicators based on AIR 2017 evaluation results (MA, Ev)									Reviewing CEQs, define judgement criteria and links to indicators based on AIR 2017 evaluation results (MA, Ev)					
		Reviewing CEQs, define judgement criteria and links to indicators (MA, Ev)																		
GOVERNANCE		Prepare the ToR and tendering procedures and conduct a tendering procedure (if external evaluator is contracted) for the programming period (MA)	Prepare the ToR and tendering procedures and conduct a tendering procedure (if external evaluator is contracted) for the enhanced AIR 2017 (MA)		Prepare the ToR and tendering procedures and conduct a tendering procedure (if external evaluator is contracted) for the enhanced AIR 2019 (MA)		Monitoring the communication strategy (MA)						Prepare the ToR and tendering procedures and conduct a tendering procedure (if external evaluator is contracted) for the ex post evaluation (MA)					Monitoring the communication strategy (MA)		
		Preparation of the communication strategy (MA)			Quality control of evaluation reports (MA)			Quality control of evaluation reports (MA)										Quality control of evaluation reports (MA)		
		Organizational set up of the M&E system (MA, MC, PA, evaluation Steering Groups, technical working groups, beneficiaries, LAGs, NRN, data providers, evaluators) (MA)			Presentation and discussion of AIRs at the Monitoring Committee (MA, Ev)															
		Agreement with data providers as to data availability (MA)			Ongoing coordination of evaluation activities with RDP implementation via establishing and running an evaluation Steering Group (MA)															
		Planning resources for evaluation and capacity building (MA)			Revision of Evaluation Plan (MA)						Support common learning process (MA)									

\* (Main responsible of the evaluation activity, task), e.g. Managing Authority (MA), Evaluator (Ev).

### 3 INDICATIVE RESOURCE PLAN FOR EVALUATION

The following tables aim to support Managing Authorities (MAs) when allocating technical assistance (TA) resources to the evaluation tasks and activities mentioned in the evaluation plan (EP). The tables complement the “*Indicative outline of the non-binding internal evaluation plan*” and the “*Timeline for evaluation during the programming period*” contained within this Toolbox, and break down evaluation related tasks and activities for which Managing Authorities may need to reserve man-days and resources from their technical assistance budget. As the allocated resources will depend on the specificities of the respective RDP, figures are not suggested. Moreover, it should be noted that MAs may want to reserve resources for unforeseeable evaluation tasks and activities.

#### 1. Governance and coordination

The governance and coordination of evaluation activities during the programming period involves several tasks, not only at the beginning of the programming period but also throughout its implementation. The grey shadowed fields in the table below indicate in which years (approximately) resources will need to be allocated.

**Table 5** Template for planning resources for the governance and coordination of evaluation activities and tasks

EVALUATION TASKS AND ACTIVITIES - GOVERNANCE AND COORDINATION OF EVALUATION	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Plan resources for evaluation and capacity building											
Agree with data providers as to data availability											
Agree organizational set up of the M&E system (MA, MC, PA, evaluation steering groups, TWGs, beneficiaries, LAGs, NRN, data providers, evaluators)											
Prepare and monitor the communication strategy											
Prepare the ToR and conduct a tendering procedure (if external evaluator is to be contracted) for the programming period, enhanced AIR 2017, 2019, and <i>ex post</i> evaluation											
Support common learning process											
Revise evaluation plan											
Ongoing coordination of evaluation activities with RDP implementation via the establishment and management of an evaluation steering group											
Present and discuss AIRs at the MC											
Quality control evaluation reports											
<b>Total</b>											

Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

## 2. Evaluation

### Evaluation preparation

Well-structured preparation activities at the start of the programme are a precondition for an evaluation during the programming period that is cost-effective and capable of delivering high quality results. The grey shadowed fields in the table below indicate in which years (approximately) resources will need to be allocated.

**Table 6** Template for planning resources for evaluation tasks and activities related to evaluation preparation

EVALUATION TASKS AND ACTIVITIES - PREPARATION OF EVALUATION		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Structuring	Review CEQs, define judgement criteria and links to indicators											
	Identify programme-specific evaluation needs and evaluation topics											
	Develop programme-specific evaluation questions (prepare fiches for programme-specific indicators)											
	Review potential data collection sources, identify data needs and potential sources of data											
	Set up IT system for data collection from beneficiaries											
	Review of potential approaches and related activities to assess results and impacts											
	Review of potential data collection methods											
	Fill in any gaps and address identified weaknesses in data collection (e.g. HNV)											
	Arrange evaluator's access to beneficiary and non-beneficiary data											
	<b>Total</b>											

Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

### Implementation of the evaluation

When implementing evaluation, MAs and paying agencies (PAs) observe the progress of RDP implementation, and collect data (on beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries) for further analysis. The grey shadowed fields in the table below indicate in which years (approximately) resources will need to be allocated.

**Table 7 Indicative resource plan for evaluation tasks and activities related to evaluation implementation**

EVALUATION TASKS AND ACTIVITIES - IMPLEMENTATION OF EVALUATION		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Observing	Collection and provision of information and data on non-beneficiaries for designing control groups											
	Observation of development trends and context analysis											
	Monitoring of the RDP progress in relation to target and output indicators											
	Assessment of progress and achievements of RDP contributing to conducting evaluation tasks											
	Processing and synthesizing relevant information in line with the selected evaluation methods											
	Conducting ad-hoc evaluation studies											
Analysing and Judging	Assessment of results of RDP interventions and contribution to FAs under RD Priorities (target, complementary result and programme-specific indicators)											
	Assessment of RDP contributions to Rural Development cross-cutting objectives											
	Assessment of RDP effectiveness, efficiency, impacts (netting out impacts) and contribution to the three CAP general objectives											
	Assessment of RDP contribution to achieving the EU 2020 headline targets and the Union strategy including CSF thematic objectives											
	Assessment of progress made in ensuring an integrated approach to the use of EAFRD and other EU funds to support territorial development, including LDS											
	Assessment of the use of TA funds											
	Answering EQs and providing conclusion and recommendations with regard to programme design and implementation											
	<b>Total</b>											

Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

### 3. Reporting and disseminating evaluation results

Evaluations results are reported to the European Commission (EC) in the standard and enhanced AIRs and in the *ex post* evaluation report. The compilation and development of different reports will require resources, as will the dissemination of evaluation results to the target audience (as detailed in the communication strategy). The grey shadowed fields in the table below indicate in which years (approximately) resources will need to be allocated.

**Table 8** Template for resource planning of evaluation tasks and activities related to the reporting and dissemination of evaluation results

EVALUATION TASKS AND ACTIVITIES - REPORTING AND DISSEMINATION OF EVALUATION RESULTS	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Standard AIR											
Enhanced AIR											
<i>Ex post</i> evaluation report											
Review and dissemination of evaluation findings											
<b>Total</b>											

Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

### 4. Overview of monitoring and evaluation resource allocation in 2014-2020

The table below can be used to summarise the resources needed to implement evaluation during the programming period. This table may support MAs to anticipate the TA resources to be allocated in the evaluation plan chapter of the RDP.

**Table 9** Template for RDP's monitoring and evaluation resource planning, 2014-2020

<i>Financial overview</i>	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
GOVERNANCE <sup>110</sup>												
PREPARATION <sup>111</sup>												
IMPLEMENTATION <sup>112</sup>												
REPORTING & DISSEMINATION <sup>113</sup>												
<b>Total</b>												

<sup>110</sup> Summary of planned resources for governance

<sup>111</sup> Summary of planned resources for preparation of evaluation

<sup>112</sup> Summary of planned resources for the implementation of evaluation

<sup>113</sup> Summary of planned resources for reporting and dissemination

# 4 INDICATIVE TEMPLATE FOR TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR EVALUATION DURING THE PROGRAMMING PERIOD

## Introduction

The Terms of Reference (ToR) helps to structure the evaluation activities to be carried out by external evaluators. They are developed by the Managing Authority (MA) or the evaluation steering group on the basis of the activities outlined in the evaluation plan (EP). External evaluators respond to the ToR with an offer and both elements (ToR and offer) combine to form the basis of the contract for the delivery of the evaluation.

The ToR for the evaluation contract should specify the evaluation requirements, activities and outcomes expected and also clarify the way in which different parties will work together. It usually consists of a general introduction for the consultant, the specifications of the technical requirements, and various annexes (e.g. references to key documents, evaluation questions, templates for price offer, draft service contract).

The following indicative outline provides some recommendations for the development of the ToR and in particular its technical part. However, the contracting authorities will also need to ensure that the ToR is consistent with public procurement procedures in the Member State (MS). The following elements of the ToR's technical specifications should be considered.

### 1. Context, objective and purpose of the evaluation

This starting section should set out the statutory requirements and the framework for the evaluation (e.g. legal references at EU and national level). A description of the background and purpose of the evaluation should be provided. The evaluation's subject should also be clarified.

*When drafting this section the purpose and objectives stated in the minimum requirements for the evaluation plan 2014-2020 should be considered as a starting point and be further complemented with programme-specific objectives (see chapter 3.1 of the evaluation plan guidelines).*

### 2. Scope and tasks of the evaluation

In this section the ToR specifies the scope and content of the evaluation. The most important evaluation needs and the expected focus of the evaluation should be explained. The chosen evaluation topics for the programming period should be listed (e.g. evaluation of the programme strategy, achievements of rural development priorities / focus areas / group of measures, assessment of cross-cutting issues, programme delivery, cost-effectiveness of programme implementation). The ToR should also indicate the time when the evaluation topics will be addressed during the programming period and how evaluation tasks and activities relate to the selected topics.

*When drafting this section the provisions set out in the minimum requirements for the evaluation plan 2014-2020 discussion on evaluation topics and activities should be considered (see chapter 3.3 of the evaluation plan guidelines).*

### 3. Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Questions in the ToR specify the focus of the evaluation and contribute to more targeted evaluation activities. The ToR should specify which kind of Evaluation Questions are expected to be answered:

- (a) **Common Evaluation Questions (CEQs)** relate to rural development policy objectives, both horizontal and focus area-specific;



- (b) **Programme-specific Evaluation Questions** are defined at RDP level in order to take account of the specificity of the programme and its objectives.

*When drafting this section the working document “Evaluation Questions for Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020” should be considered (see chapter 3.3 of the evaluation plan guidelines).*

#### **4. Methodological approach**

The aim of this section is to specify the methodological approach for the evaluation; this can either be achieved by asking those submitting tenders to describe in their offer their proposed approach for the evaluation topics and activities or, alternatively, by asking specific methodologies to be applied by the contractor (e.g. counterfactual analysis). It is generally recommended to give flexibility to the contractor to propose a method and to provide a detailed description of their approach for the assessment of RDP results, impacts and achievements. However, it must be kept in mind that the Managing Authority will need to arrange for sufficient capacity to judge the quality and robustness of the proposed approaches. Examples of possible methods include:

- Basic analysis using descriptive statistics;
- Statistical analysis using counterfactuals;
- Regional input-output econometric models;
- System dynamics modelling (systemic view on complex cause-chain effects);
- Geographic Information System (GIS) based tools (observation of changes in territories);
- In-depth analysis through case studies;
- Desk and field research (including surveys, interviews, and focus groups).

#### **5. Information sources**

The ToR should contain an overview of the available data and information sources relevant to the evaluation task. This includes the specification of the information collected via the monitoring system, other available databases and documents, details on who holds the information and how it can be assessed, and reference to any relevant analysis and research work that has already taken place. It is also helpful to highlight what information / data is not available and is expected to be collected by the evaluator. This information is also essential for a realistic assessment of the offer.

*When drafting this section the provisions set out in the minimum requirements for the evaluation plan 2014-2020 on data and information should be considered (see chapter 3.4 of the evaluation plan guidelines).*

#### **6. Time schedule and deliverables**

The ToR specifies the duration of the evaluation contract and the timing of the deliverables. One should also state fixed events or deadlines to which deliverables are linked. The ToR may further specify the purpose and the target audience of the main deliverables (e.g. improvement in RDP implementation, programme modification, communicating evaluation findings to RDP stakeholders, policy makers and the general public, etc).

The expected deliverables, their length, format and content, should be carefully described (e.g. content of evaluation reports, contribution to standard and enhanced Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs), executive summaries (in English), other required deliverables for a broader dissemination of evaluation results).

A link between the expected deliverables and (interim) payments is provided in the invoicing arrangements of the ToR.

*When drafting this section the provisions set out in the minimum requirements for the evaluation plan 2014-2020 on constructing a timeline should be considered (see chapter 3.5 and 3.6 of the evaluation plan guidelines).*

## **7. Management of the evaluation contract**

This section describes how the evaluation contract will be steered and managed. If there is an evaluation steering group, the ToR may list its members and describe their specific roles.

It should also be specified how the evaluators are expected to interact with the contracting authority (e.g. contact persons, frequency of meetings, presentations to specific target groups).

*When drafting this section of the ToR the provisions set out in the minimum requirements for the evaluation plan 2014-2020 on governance, coordination and communication should be considered (see chapter 3.2 and 3.6 of the evaluation plan guidelines).*

## **8. Budget**

The budget for the evaluation contract should be clearly specified (costs for data purchase should be listed separately). It is considered good practice if the contracting authority specifies a maximum and minimum budget for tenders. This allows evaluators to develop realistic financial offers.

*When drafting this section the provisions set out in the minimum requirements for the evaluation plan 2014-2020 on resources should be considered (reference to chapter 3.7 of the evaluation plan guidelines).*

## **9. Qualification of the team**

The requirements related to the qualification of the evaluating team are closely linked to the requested methodology and project management needs. Categories of experts are often specified (e.g. years of professional experience, academic degrees). More flexible ToRs limit themselves to only specifying what skills and experience must be available in the evaluation team, rather than specifying requirements for each position. This gives more choice to the contractor to compose a well-functioning team.

## **10. Submission rules**

Information concerning the submission of offers include:

- The exact deadline for submission (specific date and time, as proved by the post stamp or the day of delivery);
- The institution and address to which the offer has to be sent.

The ToR also specifies if offers have to be submitted in one or two envelopes (with separate financial sections or anonymous technical sections), the number of copies required, the date offers will be opened (if public), and a contact address for questions concerning the ToR.

## **11. Exclusion, selection and award criteria**

The ToR details the criteria for the selection of contractors in line with national procurement legislation. Selection criteria can be divided into three groups; exclusion, selection and award criteria:

**Exclusion criteria** refers to the exclusion of a contractor who is in a bankruptcy situation, has shown grave professional misconduct, or who has not fulfilled obligations towards the tax office, social security, etc. In most cases a simple 'Declaration of honour' is required as evidence. In addition proof that the contractor does not have a conflict of interest (e.g. was involved in the implementation of the RDP) can be requested.

**Selection criteria** usually refer to the contractor's legal position, and their economic, financial, technical and professional capacity. If the national legislation allows, the contracting authority may

request only copies of relevant documents, whereas the originals are collected only from the successful bidder. This helps to simplify the tendering procedure.

Furthermore the categories of experts and expertise are described in the ToR, including the level of qualification and professional experience required. For instance, in the case of a counterfactual evaluation design, the ToR will request an experienced expert in this field. The required proof of qualification will be specified, but requesting too detailed formal proof will create an unnecessary administrative burden for contractors.

**Award criteria** refer to the quality of the technical and financial offer. Besides price, they generally relate to the proposed evaluation approach, understanding of the task, methodology, the roles of team members and the overall organisation / management of the work. A clear idea within the contracting authority as to what makes a good offer will enable a clear assessment and – most importantly – the best offer will be chosen.

Clarity and transparency of the weighting of award criteria is important, in particular between the assessment of the technical offer (content) and the financial offer (price). It is important to consider carefully if the lowest price offer is also the best from a technical point of view. A lower weighting for the financial offer usually allows the highest quality technical offer to be chosen. Often the ratio between content and price is between 60:40 and 80:20. Recent experiences suggest a weighting between 20 and 25% for price is appropriate. In general, an overview table listing the criteria and corresponding proof (including where they can be found in the offer) is helpful during the assessment process.

## 5 GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### A

#### **Ad hoc evaluation**

Evaluation activity which complements planned evaluation during the programming period, in response to specific evaluation needs or information gaps. *Ad hoc* evaluation can be conducted in the form of specific evaluation study, survey, set of case studies, etc.

#### **Administrative capacity**

Synonymous to 'administrative and institutional capacity' as defined in the glossary of DG Regio: it relates to the ability of public structures to identify and solve implementation problems. Capacity deals with a set of functional conditions that allow governments to elaborate and implement programmes with better performance. These conditions are shaped by important factors such as human resource characteristics, management strategies, diffusion of ICT applications, etc., but also by strategies aimed at building cooperation between governments and stakeholders, etc.

#### **Annual Implementation Report**

Comprehensive report on the implementation of a Rural Development Programme in the previous financial year. The required contents of the report are spelled out in the Common Provisions Regulation, the Rural Development Regulation and related implementing acts. The report is submitted to the Commission.

### B

#### **Baseline**

State of the economic, social or environmental situation relevant in the context of a programme, at a given time (generally at the beginning of the intervention), and against which changes will be measured.

#### **Beneficiary**

A person or organisation directly benefitting from the intervention whether intended or unintended. Some people may be beneficiaries without necessarily belonging to the group targeted by the intervention. Similarly, the entire eligible group does not necessarily consist of beneficiaries.

### C

#### **Capacity building**

Activity that seeks to develop the knowledge and skills of actors involved in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Rural Development Programmes.

#### **Common Evaluation Question**

An element of the Common Evaluation Framework which focuses the evaluation on measuring achievement against EU policy objectives. The Common Evaluation Questions should be complemented with programme-specific evaluation questions.

#### **Common Indicator**

An indicator is a quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to measure achievement, to reflect changes connected to an intervention, or to help assess the performance of a development actor. In the context of the rural development policy, the set of common indicators, binding for all Member States, serves to measure achievements and changes at both RDP and European level.

#### **Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework**

It consists of a common set of indicators, as defined in article 80 of Council Regulation No 1698/2005. The list of common baseline, output, result and impact indicators for the Rural Development Programmes 2007-13 is found in Annex VIII of Commission Regulation (EC) No 1974/2006

of 15 December 2006. Guidance on the CMEF was drawn up by the European Commission, in cooperation with the Member States, and has been published in the form of a handbook.

## **Common Strategic Framework (CSF)**

The document translating the objectives and targets of the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth into key actions for the CSF Funds, establishing for each thematic objective the key actions to be supported by each CSF Fund and the mechanisms for ensuring the coherence and consistency of the programming of the CSF Funds with the economic and employment policies of the Member States and of the Union.

## **Community-Led Local Development**

To facilitate the implementation of multi-dimensional and cross-sector interventions at sub-regional and local level, the Commission proposes CLLD to strengthen community-led initiatives, facilitate the implementation of integrated local development strategies and formation of Local Action Groups, based on the experience and following the methodology of the LEADER approach. The implementation of CLLD is regulated by Articles 32 to 34 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and further detailed by corresponding provisions in the regulations governing the ERDF, ETC, ESF, EMFF and finally the EAFRD, where CLLD is implemented through LEADER.

## **Complementarity**

Several public interventions (or several components of an intervention) that contribute towards the achievement of the same objective.

## **Consistency**

The harmony, compatibility, correspondence or uniformity among the parts of a complex thing. In European legal texts and working documents it is often used equivalently to coherence.

## **Context**

The socio-economic and environmental situation in which an intervention is implemented. The contextual situation and trends are taken into account in programming as well as in programme evaluations.

### **.Context indicator**

It provides information on relevant aspects of the external environment that are likely to have an influence on the design and performance of the policy, e.g. GDP per capita, rate of unemployment, water quality.

## **Control group**

A group of study participants who have not been exposed to a particular treatment. The term is typically used in experimental designs with random assignment. A control group is closely related to a comparison group. However, whereas a comparison group is exposed to all the same conditions as the experimental group except for the variable that is being tested, the control group is not exposed to any condition.

## **Comparison group**

A group of study participants which resembles beneficiaries in all respects, except for the fact that it is unaffected by the intervention (i.e. non-beneficiaries). A comparison group is closely related to a control group. However, whereas a comparison group is exposed to all the same conditions as the experimental group except for the variable that is being tested, the control group is not exposed to any condition.

## **Counterfactual situation**

A situation which would have occurred in the absence of a public intervention, also referred to as "policy-off" situation. By comparing the counterfactual and real situations, it is possible to determine the net effects of the public intervention. Various tools can be used for the construction of the counterfactual situation: shift-share analysis, comparison groups, simulation using econometric models, etc. At the baseline, the real situation

and the counterfactual situation are identical. If the intervention is effective, they diverge.

## Cross-cutting issues

Issues that horizontally affect all areas of the policy. Important cross-cutting issues for rural development include innovation, environment and climate change.

## D

### Delivery mechanism

The way in which a policy is implemented, more specifically the set of administrative arrangements and procedures which ensure that policy objectives become concrete actions on the ground. Delivery mechanisms vary amongst Member States (and sometimes also between regions and across measures) due to differences in the legal and administrative arrangements related to policy implementation.

## E

### Effectiveness

This is the extent to which objectives pursued by an intervention are achieved. An effectiveness indicator is calculated by relating an output, result or impact indicator to a quantified objective.

### Efficiency

Best relationship between resources employed and results achieved in pursuing a given objective through an intervention. Efficiency addresses the question whether the more effects could have been obtained with the same budget or whether the same effects could have been obtained at a lower cost. An indicator of efficiency is calculated by dividing the budgetary inputs mobilised by the quantity of effects obtained.

## EIP Operational Group

European Innovation Partnership groups are groups set up by interested actors (farmers, researchers, advisors, businesses) to develop, test, adapt or implement an innovative project related to agricultural productivity and sustainability. The tasks of the groups are defined in the Rural Development Regulation.

## Europe 2020 Strategy

As laid down in the Communication from the Commission (COM [2010] 2020 from 3.3.2010), it sets out a vision of Europe's social market economy for the 21st century, with the aim to turn the EU into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. The EU2020 Strategy is the common reference document for all European policy support instruments for the programming period 2014-2020.

## Evaluation

Evaluation is a process of judgement of interventions according to their results, impacts and the needs they aim to satisfy. Evaluation looks at the effectiveness, the efficiency and at the relevance of an intervention. Rural development evaluation must provide information on the implementation and impact of the co-financed programmes. The aims are, on the one hand, to increase the accountability and transparency with regard to the legal and budget authorities and the public and, on the other hand, to improve the implementation of the programmes by contributing to informed planning and decisions concerning needs, delivery mechanisms and resource allocation.

## Evaluation activity

Covers all the activities that Managing Authorities and other stakeholders have to carry out during the evaluation process. Evaluation activity enables evaluators to conduct evaluation tasks and to assess programme result and impact, as well as the contribution of the Rural Development Programme to Union priorities.

## Evaluation approach

A conceptually distinct way of designing and conducting evaluations.

## Evaluation capacity

The personal resources and evaluation-related skills necessary to fulfil evaluation tasks and activities.

## Evaluation during programming period

Evaluation which takes place throughout the implementation of a programme (formerly known as 'ongoing evaluation'). It includes all evaluation activities carried out during the whole programming period, comprising *ex ante* evaluation, reporting in enhanced Annual Implementation Reports, *ex post* evaluation as well as other evaluation-related tasks such as the compilation and refinement of indicators and data collection.

## Evaluation governance

The set of appropriate institutional arrangements for managing evaluation aimed at ensuring effective processes and for making full use of the information generated by monitoring & evaluation systems. The institutional arrangements must address three requirements: developing a policy and a set of guidelines for evaluation; ensuring impartiality and independence; linking evaluation findings to future activities.

## Evaluation management

This is the targeted employment of resources and coordination of processes with the aim to carry out an effective evaluation. Evaluation governance sets the institutional frame for evaluation management.

## Evaluation plan

It sets out the evaluation activities including the institutional arrangements (evaluation governance) and management provisions (evaluation management) for a whole programme implementation period. For the programming period 2014-2020, Managing Authorities of

programmes under the five funds covered by the Common Strategic Framework shall draw up an Evaluation Plan. For rural development the Evaluation Plan will be included in each RDP and must conform to the minimum requirements established in the implementing act.

## Evaluation / Evaluative question

A question that need to be answered by evaluators. These are usually posed by those commissioning an evaluation. Evaluation questions normally feature in the terms of reference of evaluation projects. In the case of the evaluation of Rural Development Programmes, evaluation questions form part of the common guidelines. Evaluation questions have three dimensions: descriptive (what happened?), causal (to what extent is what has happened really an effect of the intervention?) and normative (is the effect satisfactory?).

## Evaluation results

Outcomes of the assessment of efficiency, effectiveness, impact and achievements of an intervention in comparison with policy objectives.

## Evaluation stakeholders

Groups or organizations with an interest in the evaluation of the policy in question. The evaluation stakeholders typically include, but are not limited to, programme managers, decision-makers, beneficiaries and evaluators.

## Evaluation task

Tasks to be completed by evaluation, defined in the legislative texts and the EU evaluation guidelines, or, in the case of programme-specific evaluation tasks, the Managing Authority. If an external evaluator is involved in evaluation the Terms of Reference specify the evaluation tasks to be carried out.

## Evaluation topic

Specific subject that a particular evaluation is focused on. For example, rural development priorities and focus areas, or cross-cutting issues.

## Ex ante conditionality

It seeks to ensure that the necessary preconditions for investments to flourish are in place. Four types of preconditions can be identified: (i) regulatory, (ii) strategic, (iii) infrastructural-planning and (iv) institutional. Regulatory preconditions primarily relate to transposition of EU legislation. Strategic preconditions are linked to strategic frameworks for investments; while infrastructural-planning preconditions relate to major infrastructure investments. Institutional preconditions aim to ensure institutional effectiveness and adequate administrative capacity.

## Ex ante evaluation

Evaluation which is performed before programme implementation. Its purpose is to gather information and to carry out analyses which helps to ensure that an intervention is as relevant and coherent as possible. Its conclusions are meant to be integrated at the time decisions are made. *Ex ante* evaluation mainly concerns an analysis of context, though it will also provide an opportunity for specifying the intervention mechanisms in terms of what already exists. It provides the relevant authorities with a prior assessment of whether development issues have been diagnosed correctly, whether the strategy and objectives proposed are relevant, whether there is incoherence between them or in relation to Community policies and guidelines, whether the expected impacts are realistic, etc. Moreover, it provides the necessary basis for monitoring and future evaluations by ensuring that there are explicit and, where possible, quantified objectives. In fulfilling these functions, *ex ante* evaluation supports the preparation of proposals for new or renewed community actions. Its purpose is to ensure that the policy objectives will be delivered successfully, that the measures used are cost-effective, and that the ground is prepared for reliable mid-term and *ex post* evaluations.

## Ex post evaluation

Evaluation which recapitulates and judges an intervention when it is over. It aims at accounting for the use of resources, the achievement of intended and unintended effects. It strives to understand the factors of success or failure of programmes. It also tries to draw conclusions which can be generalised to other interventions. For impacts to have the time to materialise, *ex post* evaluations need to be performed after implementation.

## F

### Focus area

The sub-field of policy at which the intervention is targeted. The six Union priorities for rural development are broken into 18 operational focus areas in order to better structure the attribution of measures and planned interventions.

## G

### Governance

It can be understood as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. In contrast to older (narrower) definitions the term does not only indicate what a government does, but also includes structures set up and actions undertaken in partnership with the civil society and the private sector.

## H

### Hierarchy of objectives

This is a tool that helps to analyse and communicate programme objectives and shows how interventions contribute to global, intermediate and operational objectives. It organises these objectives into different levels (objectives, sub-objectives) in the form of a hierarchy or tree, thus showing the logical links between the objectives and their sub-objectives. It presents in a



synthetic manner the various intervention logics derived from the regulation, that link individual actions and measures to the overall goals of the intervention. The rural development regulation contains also horizontal objectives that cut across all programme measures.

## Human resources

The set of individuals who make up the workforce of an organization, business sector or an economy. The definition includes the treasure of knowledge embodied by these individuals. 'Human capital' is sometimes used synonymously with human resources, although human capital typically refers to a more narrow view; i.e., the knowledge the individuals embody and can contribute to an organization. Likewise, other terms sometimes used include 'manpower', 'talent', 'labor' or simply 'people'.



## Impact

Effects of an intervention lasting in medium or long term. Some impacts appear indirectly, (e.g. turnover generated for the suppliers of assisted firms). Others can be observed at the macro-economic or macro-social level (e.g. improvement of the image of the assisted area); these are overall impacts. Impacts may be positive or negative, expected or unexpected.

## Impact indicator

These refer to the benefits of the programme beyond the immediate effects on its direct beneficiaries both at the level of the intervention but also more generally in the programme area. They are linked to the wider objectives of the programme. They are normally expressed in "net" terms, which means subtracting effects that cannot be attributed to the intervention (e.g. double counting, deadweight), and taking into account indirect effects (displacement and multipliers). Example: increase in employment in rural areas, increased productivity of agricultural sector, increased production of renewable energy.

## Indicator

A tool to measure the achievement of: an objective, a resource mobilised, an output accomplished, an effect obtained, or a context variable (economic, social or environmental). The information provided by an indicator is a quantitative datum used to measure facts or opinions (e.g. percentage of regional enterprises which have been assisted by public intervention; percentage of trainees who claim to be satisfied or highly satisfied). An indicator must, among other things, produce simple information which is communicable and easily understood by both the provider and the user of the information. It must help managers of public interventions to communicate, negotiate and decide. Therefore it should preferably be linked to a criterion on the success of the intervention. It should reflect as precisely as possible whatever it is meant to measure (validity of construction). The indicator and its measurement unit must be sensitive, that is to say, the quantity measured must vary significantly when a change occurs in the variable to be measured.

## Innovation

The term can relate to products, processes, organisations, governance arrangements or complex systems comprising all these. For pragmatic reasons it is therefore useful to define this term within the wide limits of existing definitions, according to the definer's purpose. Here are four examples of well-established definitions:

"The act of introducing something new" (the American heritage dictionary);

"A new idea, method or device" (Webster online);

"Change that creates a new dimension of performance" (Peter Drucker);

"The introduction of new goods (...), new methods of production (...), the opening of new markets (...), the conquest of new sources of supply (...) and the carrying out of a new organization of any industry" (Joseph Schumpeter).

## Input

Financial, human, material, organisational and regulatory means mobilised for the implementation of an intervention.

For example, sixty people worked on implementing the programme; 3% of the project costs were spent on reducing effects on the environment. Monitoring and evaluation focus primarily on the inputs allocated by public authorities and used by operators to obtain outputs. Private inputs mobilised by assisted firms, for example, are considered to be results of public intervention. The above definition gives a relatively broad meaning to the word "input". Some prefer to limit its use to financial or budgetary resources only. In this case, the word "activity" can be applied to the implementation of human and organisational resources. The term "financial outputs" is sometimes used in the sense of consumption of budgetary inputs.

## Input indicators

The financial or other resources allocated at each level of assistance. Financial input indicators are used to monitor progress in terms of the (annual) commitment and payment of funds available for any operation, measure or programme in relation to its eligible costs. For example, expenditure per measure declared to the Commission.

## Intermediate bodies

Delegated bodies (Local Authorities, Regional Development Bodies or Non-Governmental Organisations) that the Member State or Managing Authority has designated to carry out the management and implementation of rural development operations.

## Intervention logic

A methodological instrument which establishes the logical link between programme objectives and the operational actions envisaged. It shows the conceptual link from an intervention's input to its output and, subsequently, to its results and impacts. Thus intervention logic allows an assessment of a measure's contribution to the achievement of its objectives.

## J

## Judgement criterion

Also known as evaluation criterion, this specifies an aspect of the evaluated intervention that will allow its

merits or success to be assessed. Judgement criteria are closely connected to evaluation questions; the criterion is used to answer an evaluation question. One or more judgement criteria are derived from each question.

## K

## L

## LEADER

LEADER stands for 'Links between actions for the development of the rural economy'. It used to be the name of a Community Initiative (LEADER I: 1991-1993; LEADER II: 1994-1999; LEADER+: 2000-2006) and is currently known as the method by which Axis 4 measures of the current Rural Development Programme are implemented (2007-2013).

The LEADER method is used for mobilising and delivering rural development in rural communities through local public-private partnerships ('local action groups'). It is designed to help rural people, groups and enterprises, to consider the potential of their area and to encourage the implementation of integrated, high-quality and original strategies for sustainable development. The LEADER method is the mode of delivery stipulated for Community-Led Local Development in the 2014-2020 programme period. CLLD will continue to be called LEADER in the EAFRD framework.

## M

## Method

Families of evaluation techniques and tools that fulfil different purposes. They usually consist of procedures and protocols that enable systematic and consistent evaluations. Methods may focus on the collection or analysis of information and data, may be quantitative or qualitative, and may attempt to describe, explain, predict or inform action. The choice of methods follows from the evaluation questions being asked and the mode of enquiry; causal, exploratory, normative, etc. Understanding a broad range of methods ensures that evaluators will select suitable methods for different purposes.

## Methodology

Most broadly, the overall way in which decisions are made to select methods based on different assumptions about what constitutes knowing (ontology) what constitutes knowledge (epistemology) and more narrowly how this can be operationalised i.e. interpreted and analysed.

## Minimum requirements of the evaluation plan

The legally required aspects that the evaluation plan which must be submitted as part of the RDP and approved by Commission Decision. The minimum requirements, which are defined in the implementing acts, contain seven sections; objectives and purpose of the evaluation plan, governance and coordination, evaluation topics and activities, data and information, timeline, and communication, and resources.

## Monitoring

An exhaustive and regular examination of the resources, outputs and results of public interventions. Monitoring is based on a system of coherent information including reports, reviews, balance sheets, indicators, etc. Monitoring system information is obtained primarily from operators and is used essentially for steering public interventions. When monitoring includes a judgement, this judgement refers to the achievement of operational objectives. Monitoring is also intended to produce feedback and direct learning. It is generally the responsibility of the actors charged with implementation of an intervention.

## Monitoring data

Data regularly gathered on programme beneficiaries through the monitoring system. This data includes information on inputs and outputs and permits the monitoring of the programme's progress.

## Monitoring and evaluation system

A system for collecting information at regular intervals to facilitate the reporting, analysis and evaluation of programme performance with evaluation methods. The system covers all monitoring and evaluation activities, including the governance of the system itself. The monitoring and evaluation system is coordinated by the Managing Authority and is the basis for communicating evaluation findings internally and externally.

In the Rural Development Regulation the term specifically describes a common system, developed by the Commission and Member States, which aims to demonstrate progress and achievements, assess the impact, effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of rural development policy interventions. It contains a limited number of common indicators relating to the context, outputs, results, and impacts of the programmes.

## Multi-annual work plan

A work plan that extends over several years and covers all items to be accomplished over the time period with a breakdown of tasks and their timelines. A multi-annual work plan can be divided into smaller segments, such as annual work plans.

## N

## Net effect

Effect imputable to the public intervention and to it alone, as opposed to apparent changes or gross effects. To evaluate net effects, based on gross effects, it is necessary to subtract the changes which would have occurred in the absence of the public intervention, and which are therefore not imputable to it since they are produced by confounding factors (counterfactual situation). For example, the number of employees in assisted firms appears to be stable (change or gross effect equal to zero). However, it is estimated that without support there would have been 400 redundancies (counterfactual situation). Thus, 400 jobs were maintained (net effect).

## O

### Objective

Clear, explicit and initial statement on the effects to be achieved by a public intervention. A quantitative objective is stated in the form of indicators and a qualitative objective in the form of descriptors, e.g.: 30% of all outputs must be accomplished by the end of the third year; the public intervention must first benefit the long-term unemployed. Specific objectives concern the results and impacts of an intervention on direct beneficiaries. A global objective corresponds to the aim of the intervention. The aim of an intervention is to produce an impact expressed in global terms, e.g. reducing regional disparities in development levels. Objectives may also be intermediate. Objectives which specify outputs to be produced are called operational objectives. If the objectives of a public intervention have not been clearly defined beforehand, the evaluation can try to clarify them afterwards. In that case, it is preferable to refer to implicit objectives. Objectives may incorporate targets.

### Output

Action which is financed and accomplished (or concretised) with the money allocated to an intervention. A project promoter undertakes to produce an output in immediate exchange for the support granted. Outputs may take the form of facilities or works (e.g. building of a road, farm investment; tourist accommodation). They may also take the form of immaterial services (e.g. training, consultancy, information).

### Output indicator

These measure activities directly realised within programmes. These activities are the first step towards realising the operational objectives of the intervention and are measured in physical or monetary units. Example: number of training sessions organised, number of farms receiving investment support, total volume of investment.

## P

### Partnership

An arrangement where by parties agree to cooperate to advance their mutual interests. Partners in the context of the Common Strategic Framework are the parties involved in the Partnership Agreement between the Member State and the Commission. According to the legal requirements, these partners shall comprise:

- (a) Competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities;
- (b) Economic and social partners;
- (c) Bodies representing civil society, including environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting equality and non-discrimination.

In accordance with the multi-level governance approach, partners shall be involved in the preparation and evaluation of programmes and shall also participate in the programme Monitoring Committee.

### Partnership Agreement

A document prepared by the Member State with the involvement of partners in line with the multi-level governance approach, which sets out the Member State's strategy, priorities and arrangements for using the CSF Funds in an effective and efficient way to pursue the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The Partnership Agreement is approved by the Commission following assessment and dialogue with the Member State.

### Programme-specific Evaluation Question

Programme-specific evaluation questions are formulated for the purpose of the evaluation of a specific programme, in view of providing a deeper insight into the overall implementation of that programme or to reflect specific objectives of that programme. Contrary to them, "common" evaluation questions apply to all the programmes.

## Programme-specific indicator

An indicator is a quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to measure achievement, to reflect changes connected to an intervention, or to help assess the performance of a development actor. The set of common indicators, binding for all Member States, serves to measure achievements and changes at programme and European level. Since common indicators may not fully reflect all effects of programme activities, the Managing Authorities in the Member States are asked to complement the common indicator set by defining additional indicators to capture the full range of intended effects of a given programme, in particular for national priorities and site-specific measures. These additional indicators are called programme-specific indicators.

## Proxy indicator

Also known as an indirect indicator, a proxy indicator is a variable that is used to approximate, or to be representative of, a change or result that is difficult to measure directly.

Q

R

## Relevance

The extent to which an intervention's objectives are pertinent to needs, problems and issues. Questions of relevance are particularly important in *ex ante* evaluation because the focus is on the strategy chosen or its justification. Within the framework of mid-term evaluation, it is advisable to check whether the socio-economic context has evolved as expected and whether this evolution calls into question the relevance of a particular initial objective.

## Reporting

A comprehensive summary and presentation of monitoring and evaluation findings with regard to effectiveness, efficiency, impact and achievement of the intervention.

Precedes communication of evaluation results to stakeholders and general public.

## Result

Advantage (or disadvantage) which direct beneficiaries obtain at the end of their participation in a public intervention or as soon as a public facility has been completed. Results can be observed when an operator completes an action and accounts for the way in which allocated funds were spent and managed. At this point s/he may show, for example, that accessibility has been improved due to the construction of a road, or that the firms which have received advice claim to be satisfied. The operators may regularly monitor results. They have to adapt the implementation of the intervention according to the results obtained.

## Result indicators

These measure the direct and immediate effects of the intervention. They provide information on changes in, for example, the behaviour, capacity or performance of direct beneficiaries and are measured in physical or monetary terms. Example: gross number of jobs created, successful training outcomes.

## Retro planning

Also known as reverse scheduling and backward planning, retro planning refers to the process of planning a project by identifying a deadline and working backwards to the start date, designating the component steps in reverse order of time.

S

## Self-evaluation

Evaluation that is conducted and managed by a project or LAG management.

## Stakeholder

A person, group or organisation that can affect or be affected by the policy in question, i.e. has an interest in the policy.

## Strategic Environmental Assessment

This is a similar technique to Environmental Impact Assessment but normally applied to policies, plans, programmes and groups of projects. Strategic Environmental Assessment provides the potential opportunity to avoid the preparation and implementation of inappropriate plans, programmes and projects and assists in the identification and evaluation of project alternatives and identification of cumulative effects. Strategic Environmental Assessment comprises two main types: sectoral strategic environmental assessment (applied when many new projects fall within one sector) and regional SEA (applied when broad economic development is planned within one region). Within the EU, SEA is governed by the provisions of Directive.

## T

### Target

Detailed performance requirement, arising from a policy objective, which needs to be met in order to achieve the stated objective. Targets are quantified whenever possible and are typically time-bound.

### Target indicator

For each focus area chosen among the six RD priorities, quantifiable target indicators are defined at Community level. Target indicators should be linked, as directly as possible, to RDP interventions, minimising the effect of external factors. They should be indicators which can be simply and regularly monitored, minimising the data requirements for beneficiaries and administrations, as the values of these indicators will be monitored regularly throughout the lifetime of each RDP. Wherever possible established indicators and methods should be used. For the most part, target indicators will be at the result level, with the exception of Priority 1, which is horizontal and whose results are captured through the outcomes of other priorities. For the focus areas under this priority, the target indicators will be established at output level.

## Target level

Estimates of an impact in relation to the baseline situation, based on past experience and expert judgement. A standard approach is to use benchmarks established in past programme reporting, evaluation and studies. Evaluators generally play an important role in the context of the *ex ante* evaluation by verifying quantified targets for outputs and results and in the setting of quantified (and where appropriate qualitative) targets for impact.

## Technical assistance

With regard to public support programmes or programming frameworks, Technical Assistance is the providing of advice, assistance, and training pertaining to the setting up, implementation and management of the programme. From the Technical Assistance budget, the CSF Funds may support actions for preparation, management, monitoring, evaluation, information and communication, networking, complaint resolution, and control and audit. The CSF Funds may be used by the Member State to support actions for the reduction of administrative burden for beneficiaries, including electronic data exchange systems, and actions to reinforce the capacity of Member State authorities and beneficiaries to administer and use the CSF Funds. These actions may concern preceding and subsequent programming periods. Up to 0,25% of the EAFRD can be dedicated to Technical Assistance activities such as listed under Article 51 of the CPR.

## U

### Union priority

Six European-level priorities that translate the EU2020 goals and CAP objectives into rural development interventions. The Union priorities for rural development are defined in the Rural Development Regulation.

## V – W – X – Y – Z

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DRAFT



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