



ITALIAN CASE STUDY- EVALUATION OF THE NATIONAL RURAL NETWORK PROGRAMMES 2007-2013

FACTSHEET OF THE EUROPEAN EVALUATION HELPDESK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT - December 2016



OVERCOMING COMPLEXITIES IN ITALY'S NATIONAL RURAL NETWORK PROGRAMME (NRNP)

Italy has 21 Rural Development Programs (RDPs), all involving different stakeholder needs and levels of implementation, providing a challenge for the National Rural Network Programme (NRNP) 2007-2013 to effectively serve the needs of all.

The programme, Food and Forestry, managed by the Ministry of Agriculture, was co-funded from regional RDP resources, and had 2 major goals: to improve the network and networking throughout the Italian rural system and to support and enhance the implementation of RDPs by strengthening governance and management capacity. In Italy, the NRNP acts as a technical assistance programme, which attempts to harmonise the rules and practices of the numerous RDPs, while still capturing each RDPs unique specificities and needs.

These complexities challenged both the evaluator and Managing Authority (MA) during the ongoing and ex post evaluations of the Italian 2007-2013 NRNP. The NRNP evaluation's aim was to gauge the efficiency of the RDPs at the regional level and Italian rural policy as a whole.



AN EVALUATION FOR PRACTICAL UNDERSTANDING

The goal of the Italian NRNP evaluation was to make the evaluation findings useful and directly applicable, to improve the implementation of the NRNP. In this context, the choice of the most appropriate evaluation technique was carried out in line with the feedback emerging from needs assessments with stakeholders. The integrated work carried out by the evaluator and the Managing Authority (for example through the establishment of a dedicated Task Force for indicators) was aimed at clarifying and making the evaluation more reliable and valuable.

During a preliminary review, evaluators found that the initial ex ante indicators defined during the NRNP design were insufficient. Many result indicators identified in the ex ante appeared conceptually too similar to output indicators, causing only a partial estimation of the related specific objectives. Regarding the impact indicators, it must be recognised that the work of the MA and the evaluator was to rationalize the existing ex ante set of indicators.

The primary deficiencies detected during the analysis of the ex ante set of indicators were:

- 1) A lack of target values assigned in some cases and insufficient methodologies for assessing targets;



FURTHER INFORMATION

- The Italian National Rural Network Programme 2007-2013
- Period of activity described: 2010-2015
- Further information: angori@lattanziogroup.eu
- Lattanzio Advisory Public Sector SpA was/is the ongoing evaluator

Result indicators	S.M.A.R.T criteria				
	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant, Realistic	Time-bound
% of actors supported by the NRN	H	M	H	H	H
Customer satisfaction	H	M	M	H	M
% use of NRN's outputs	H	H	H	H	H
Good practices and innovations disseminated and/or transferred of the total classified	H	H	M	H	M
Number of networks	H	M	M	M	M
% stakeholders cooperating with the NRN	H	H	H	H	H
Communication actions satisfaction	H	H	H	H	H

The analysis was based on a three-grade scale where High (H) corresponds to an acute level of consistency with the related SMART criterion, Medium (M) to a fair consistency, and Low (L) to poor consistency.

- 2) Large overlaps between the ex ante indicators;
- 3) High number of ex ante indicators.

A specific working group was assembled consisting of the evaluator, MA and stakeholders to properly account for details and more accurately gauge the network's dimension and the capacity of the programme. Through this successful collaboration, a new set of indicators for the NRNP was devised, facilitating a tangible link with the programme intervention logic through increased focus on output and result indicators.

The above-mentioned list of indicators was devised to ensure a balanced combination of qualitative and quantitative elements, which can assess both the tangible and non-tangible effects.

The new set of indicators, primarily those for impacts and results,



MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

OF THE EVALUATION:

The evaluation of the Italian NRNP 2007-2013 faced challenges concerning indicators, which methods to use and data sources. These challenges were overcome through the utilization of the following approaches:

Data sources: Due to a lack of a systematic NRNP information monitoring system in Italy, the evaluator was required to make additional efforts to collect more information by involving stakeholders and the use of qualitative methods such as customer satisfaction analyses.

Indicators: The challenge concerning indicators was rectified, by establishing a working group involving both stakeholders and the MA to revise the indicators to better connect them to the intervention logic.

Methods: Although qualitative methods were used primarily, a mix of both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to overcome the challenging goal of assessing both the NRNP's objectives and results. This was achieved through the use of triangulation of various methods including case studies and social network analysis.

FOR FUTURE EVALUATIONS:

When assessing a network it is important to:

- **Develop a suitable set of indicators** to gauge the network. In the case of the Italian NRNP, a set of output, result and impact indicators were developed to connect the whole intervention logic and valid for each NRNP level. When evaluating network programmes, as in this case, it is important to clearly define how to measure and assess the net effect(s).
- **Use innovative tools** such as social network analysis, as carried out in Italy, to capture the capacity in which the NRNP facilitates the creation of sustainable networks (e.g. young farmers networks, school networks, etc.). For this purpose, it is also essential to involve key actors early in the assessment.
- **Try to apply the correct mix of methods**, both quantitative and qualitative, essential for answering the evaluation questions. In the case of Italy, an experimental approach and case studies were used, as well as needs assessments, customer satisfaction surveys, and social network analysis to achieve more accurate results. A single approach or method is not usually sufficient to capture the complexity of network programmes.



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The Evaluation Helpdesk works under the supervision of Unit E.4 (Evaluation and studies) of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development.

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EVALUATION WORKS!

