

EUROPEAN
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HELPDESK
FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT



REPORT

SHOWING THE ADDED VALUE OF LEADER/CLLD THROUGH EVALUATION

GOOD PRACTICE WORKSHOP,
HELSINKI 17-18 MAY 2018

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The Evaluation Helpdesk is responsible for the evaluation function within the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) by providing guidance on the evaluation of RDPs and policies falling under the remit and guidance of DG AGRI's Unit C.4 'Evaluation and studies' of the European Commission (EC). In order to improve the evaluation of EU rural development policy the Evaluation Helpdesk supports all evaluation stakeholders, in particular DG AGRI, national authorities, RDP managing authorities and evaluators, through the development and dissemination of appropriate methodologies and tools; the collection and exchange of good practices; capacity building, and communicating with network members on evaluation related topics.

Additional information about the activities of European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development is available on the Internet through the Europa server (<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu>).

REPORT

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SUMMARY

Throughout its long history, the evaluation of LEADER has brought several actors together to assess the results and impacts achieved for the development of EU rural areas. The multi-level governance of the LEADER delivery mechanism, as well as the specific principles of the LEADER method, have raised additional questions on "*whether*" and "*how*" the proper application of the LEADER method generates an added value, compared to those benefits that would have been obtained without applying this method. The 7th Good Practice Workshop of the European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development took place under this flag, trying to understand how the added value of LEADER/CLLD can be observed and assessed at Rural Development Programme and Local Action Group level. The workshop provided a forum to reflect on both evaluation theory and practice. Three practical examples from Italy, Germany and Denmark were presented and discussed with participants. The outcomes have allowed for the emergence of some key lessons on the conceptual, methodological, and management aspects:

- **From the conceptual point of view**, participants' experience was used to critically think about the fitness and validity of the added value's conceptual framework proposed in the Guidelines [Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD](#). The social capital, local governance, and enhanced results offered a broad theoretical frame to guide participants in understanding this multi-dimensional topic and develop the related evaluation elements. However, the workshop reiterated the importance of seeing these different forms of added value as intertwined and complementary concepts, rather than self-standing and isolated dimensions. It is also important to keep in mind that theoretical concepts are not necessarily the starting point to show the added value of LEADER. Indeed, empirical observations could also be used in "*inductive*" evaluation approaches.
- **Concerning methodology**, the decisions about the conceptual approach (i.e. *deductive: providing evidence to verify a theory; inductive: exploring practices to generate valid theories*) are essential for setting up suitable evaluation elements, such as: evaluation questions, judgment criteria, indicators, data and methods. The exchange of practices among participants revealed that multiple elements can be applied to the same topics, or *vice-versa*. Moreover, the assessment of the added value of LEADER/CLLD offers an opportunity to apply more innovative evaluation approaches, such as Social Network Analysis or interactive visualisation tools. However, more methodological capacity needs to be built among stakeholders, especially for developing and linking the right indicators to their corresponding questions and judgment criteria.
- **In relation to the evaluation management or governance**, the assessment of the added value of LEADER calls for greater collective and coordination efforts, due mainly to the multi-level governance of the LEADER/CLLD delivery mechanisms. High enthusiasm and good will among stakeholders is clearly present for the assessment of added value, although participants often mentioned a lack of capacity and resources, especially at LAG level. A common and agreed understanding of the overall purpose of this assessment (i.e. *how are the evaluation findings are going to be used, and by whom?*) have been considered essential for the setting up of an effective coordination along the whole evaluation process. The definition of roles and responsibility between the RDP Managing Authorities and the Local Action Groups has also emerged as a critical factor for a successful evaluation process.

Adding to this, the workshop highlighted the important role that the European Evaluation Helpdesk, as well as other technical support units - such as RDP National Rural Networks, [FARNET](#), or research centres - can play in supporting Managing Authorities, Local Action Groups, and evaluators. This can range from developing evaluation guidance and tools, as well as facilitating the exchange of practices and dissemination of evaluation findings.

On the occasion of the workshop Finnish Rural Network and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry organised a session presenting LEADER quality management process in Finland (see Annex 4).

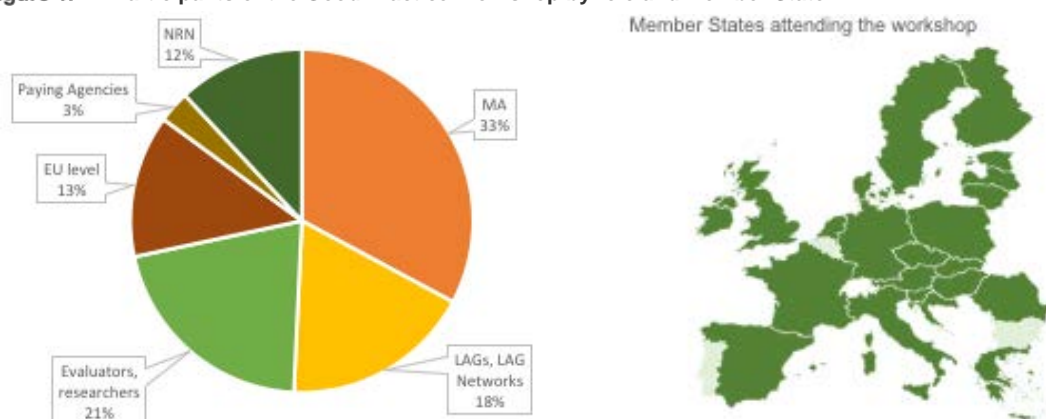
1. SETTING THE FRAME

1.1 Introduction

The 7th Good Practice Workshop – **Showing the added value of LEADER/CLLD through evaluation** - was co-hosted by the Finnish Rural Network (NRN) and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The Workshop aimed at shaping a common understanding and definition of added value and its links with the LEADER/CLLD delivery mechanism and method, exchanging experiences among Member States, and discussing challenges and recommendations on possible evaluation approaches on how to show the of LEADER/CLLD's added value.

The Workshop was very well attended with 68 participants including, members of the European Commission (EC), Managing Authorities (MA), National Rural Networks (NRN), Local Action Groups (LAG), evaluators, and academics representing 22 Member States (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Participants of the Good Practice Workshop by role and Member State



In the introductory part of the Workshop, Teresa Marques (EC, DG AGRI, Unit C.4) presented the legal requirements established for the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD. These are divided between Rural Development Programmes (RDP) MAs and LAGs. MAs are responsible for assessing the contribution of LEADER/CLLD towards the EU 2020 strategy and towards the RDP objectives, alongside developing an evaluation plan. Each RDP evaluation plan identifies, amongst others, the topics linked to the contribution of LEADER/CLLD strategies and the support for evaluation to be provided to LAGs.

At LAG level, they do this by:

- Monitoring the implementation of the LEADER/CLLD strategy and operation supported & carrying out evaluation activities (or self-assessment) of the strategy.
- If they so wish, developing LEADER/CLLD strategy specific evaluation questions and indicators linked to specific objectives.

LAGs should:

- **Monitor** primary and secondary contributions (when possible) of projects to focus areas.
- **Record** and maintain electronically information on projects (LAG operations database).
- **Transmit** to the MA/evaluator the required information for monitoring and evaluation.

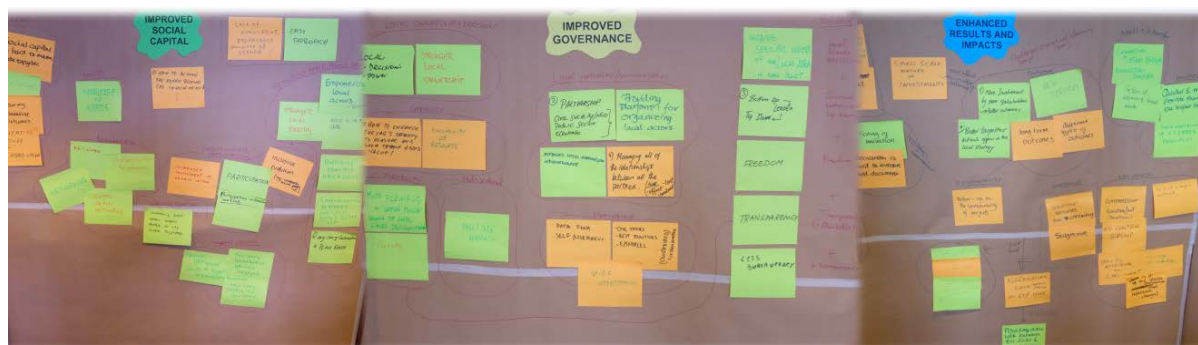
The guidelines, [Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD](#), published in 2017 by the Evaluation Helpdesk, and the handbook for LAGs and FLAGs [Evaluating CLLD](#), published by FARNET in 2018 represent two important guiding materials to support the MAs and LAGs in undertaking evaluation activities on LEADER/CLLD.

The evaluation of LEADER/CLLD should ideally be carried out in an ongoing manner, as done in Finland, where evaluation is planned throughout the entire programming period. This however is not always possible for some Member States who have started to implement LEADER only recently. Both LAGs’ evaluations/self-assessments and RDPs’ evaluations could be used as valuable inputs for the submission of enhanced Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) and ex-post evaluation from Member States to the Commission.

1.2 How is the added value observed in LEADER/CLLD

Participants were first asked to construct a collective mind-map based on their experiences and proposed elements/examples of the added value of LEADER/CLLD (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Mind- map “The added value of LEADER/CLLD”



The outcomes were discussed in plenary and transcribed in Annex 1. Through this mapping a clear link to the seven principles of the LEADER method (e.g. partnership, multi-sectoral approach, bottom-up) were revealed. Therefore, when correctly applied, the LEADER method can lead to added value expressed through improved social capital, improved governance and enhanced results and impacts. Challenges and examples of added value are not only or strictly connected to one individual form of added value, but can be attributed to several of them. The higher number of challenges in assessing enhanced results (see orange post-its) can be correlated to the longer-term period necessary to generate and assess them, as if they were the result of “improved social capital” and “increased local governance”. In fact, the “incubation” of LAGs within local territory is essential to achieve enhanced results, which are more elusive and difficult to grasp in tangible terms, such as for example social innovations.

By linking the mind-map with the conceptual framework developed by the Evaluation Helpdesk for the assessment of the added value of LEADER/CLLD, Robert Lukesch (Evaluation Helpdesk) highlighted the role of evaluation: to capture the changes obtained by an intervention, and to identify what could have happened without the intervention. However, when the LEADER/CLLD effects are intangible and non-quantitative, as for instance for the improvements of social capital and governance capacities, it is difficult to create a counterfactual situation. Quantitative methods, such as the social network analysis, as well as heuristic and discursive methods (e.g. observations, interviews, focus groups, documentary analysis) can help to understand the dynamics of change and to compare these dynamics to hypothetical counterfactuals (e.g. *‘What would have happened without any support from the LAG?’*).

Link to the [PPT](#): *Assessing the added value of LEADER/CLLD: insight into the guidelines*

To contribute to a common understanding of evaluation, particularly at the local level, and to support evaluation capacities of LAGs and FLAGs, Monica Veronesi (FARNET Support Unit) presented the handbook [“Evaluating CLLD”](#). The handbook is rich in practical examples and describes the recommended evaluation process at the LAG/FLAG level, step by step. Ms Veronesi mentioned several aspects of the evaluation, such as the CLLD being very broad and therefore, the evaluation plan should help in narrowing down the focus of the evaluation whilst fitting into a realistic timeline, resources, data

sources, evaluation tools and methods. These decisions should be taken keeping in mind the final use of the evaluation.

Link to the PPT: *Evaluation handbook for LAGs and FLAGs*

2. SHARING EXPERIENCES ON THE ASSESSMENT OF THE ADDED VALUE

EU Member States all have different experiences, practices when it comes to assessment of the added value of LEADER/CLLD. These practices vary greatly in terms of purpose, methods and focus. For instance, the assessment of the added value can range from analysing the application of the LEADER principles following the LAG delivery mechanism¹, to capturing the enhanced results generated by LEADER/CLLD through quantitative methods such as the social return of investment². Given such diversity, the workshop aimed to foster the exchange of practices among participants within a broader conceptual framework for the added value of LEADER/CLLD. Three practical examples were presented to feed the discussion about "WHAT" and "HOW" to evaluate the added value of LEADER/CLLD at RDP and LAG level.

2.1 Improved social capital

In this session, Elena Pisani (researcher and evaluation expert) and Matteo Aguanno (LAG manager) presented the network approach used in Italy to assess the social capital generated by LEADER/CLLD in the LAG Prealpi & Dolomiti. '*Social capital is a multidimensional concept. Once one identifies its multiple dimensions, it is possible to develop a logical set of evaluation elements for each of them, such as: evaluation questions, judgment criteria, and indicators*', Ms Pisani emphasised. While this approach has only been applied in a few Italian LAGs, it is also possible to transfer this practice to other Member States, as well as to scale up its application from LAG to the RDP level. The presentation was followed by a Question & Answer session (see Table 1 in Annex 2). Furthermore, participants discussed in groups about their experiences with other possible methods and indicators for the assessment of social capital at RDP and LAG level (see transcriptions Table 2 and 3 in Annex 2).



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Link to the PPT: *The assessment of the added value of LEADER/CLLD as improved social capital in the LAG Prealpi & Dolomiti.*

2.2 Improved local governance

Kim Pollermann (researcher and evaluation expert) presented an input-output approach applied in Germany to assess the added value of LEADER/CLLD in terms of improved local governance. '*The approach is based on surveys to collect information, and it looks at local governance from two different sides*', explained Mr Pollermann. On the input side, the approach analyses who is involved in LEADER to improve local governance (e.g. gender balance, number of participants, typology of actors).

¹ Mötte M., et al (2017) LEADER approach in Estonia: seven key elements in the local development strategies and in the implementation of LEADER. Retrieved from: <http://conf.rd.asu.lt/index.php/rd/article/view/533>

² Powell, John R and Courtney, Paul (2013) *An assessment of the Social Return on Investment of Axes 1 and 3 of the Rural Development Programme for England*. Technical Report. Countryside and Community Research Institute, University of Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire

As for output, the approach evaluates the effects of LEADER on local governance arrangements, expressed in terms of better cooperation between actors from different bordered municipalities or more recognition for local specificities. After the presentation, participants worked in groups to develop possible evaluation elements to assess governance-related topics, such as: local-ownership, partnership, or multi-sectorial approach (see transcriptions Table 4 in Annex 2).



Link to the PPT: *Assessing improved local governance through LEADER/CLLD – looking at the input and output of governance arrangements.*

2.3 Enhanced results and impacts of LEADER/CLLD implementation

Morten Kvistgaard (evaluator) described the mixed qualitative and quantitative approach used in Denmark to assess the enhanced results achieved through LEADER/CLLD. For the Annual Implementation Report submitted in 2017, the Danish MA decided to complement the quantitative indicators collected through the LAG operation database ([PROMIS](#)) with a qualitative evaluation. This consisted of focus group discussions and interviews with LAG managers. *'We structured our qualitative analysis of the added value around the seven LEADER principles being the key criteria through which LAGs can reach enhanced results'* argued Mr Kvistgaard. The evaluation was completed by a case-study analysis of a selected list of supported projects suggested by the LAG managers. The



presentation was followed by a Question & Answer session and group discussion (see Table 5 and transcription Table 6 in Annex 2). Among the several challenges to assess enhanced results, participants discussed how to build a counterfactual situation given the data protection regulation or lack of resource at LAG level, or how to agree on a common definition of innovative projects among actors from different backgrounds and levels of governance.

Link to the PPT: *Evaluating enhanced results of LEADER: the Danish experience.*

3. DEVELOPING PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 What is needed to assess the added value of LEADER/CLLD?



After the exchange of experiences on the assessment of the added value of LEADER/CLLD, each group of stakeholders worked on a "road map" pointing out elements leading to the successful assessment of the added value of LEADER/CLLD from the perspective of LAGs, MAs and Paying Agencies, NRNs, evaluators and researchers. This activity helped to review initially identified challenges and to propose practical recommendations/ideas needed to assess the added value of LEADER/CLLD. The

"road maps" identified main milestones (what needs to be done for successful assessment), roadblocks (difficulties that must be overcome) and success factors (see transcription Table 7 in Annex 3).

Presentations of the group work's results clearly expressed the enthusiasm among participants to assess the added value of LEADER/CLLD. However, some concerns were raised about the evaluation capacity which needs to be built for the stakeholders at both RDP and LAG level. This includes the need to develop a common understanding among stakeholders of the various aspects of evaluation (i.e. purpose, topics, indicators, etc.). This requires a timely development of a common conceptual framework (at RDP level) to guide the assessment of the effects





of LEADER/CLLD and develop a clear logic of objectives, judgement criteria and indicators. In addition, the availability and quality of data can be a crucial roadblock that, to some extent, can be overcome by the development of smart and user-friendly IT systems for data collection. Participants have identified the participatory approach in planning and conducting evaluation, as well as the validation of findings as significantly improving the success of evaluation efforts for showing the added value of LEADER/CLLD. However, the lack of time, knowledge, skills, money and other resources remain major roadblocks on the "road maps". Sari Rannanpää (moderator of the Good Practice Workshop) stressed that "reinventing the evaluation wheel" for each LAG can be expensive in terms of time and moneywise; that is why several support tools which are mentioned as success factors (e.g. guidance, consultancy, trainings, template terms of reference for evaluators etc) on the "road maps" could improve the situation if they are developed in joint efforts.

Figure 3. Synthetized road map that leads to the successful assessment of the added value of LEADER/CLLD

<p>Setting up the evaluation purpose and plan</p> <p>Roadblocks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of partnership-based dialogue between MA, LAGs and evaluators. • Conflicting objectives among actors from different governance levels. • Lack of clarity of roles between evaluation stakeholders. • Bureaucracy and inflexible procedures. • Lack of skilled evaluators in the LAG and limited budget to attract skilled evaluators. • Unclear ToR and difficult public procurement rules for tendering evaluation. <p>Success factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common framework and agreed set of goals to demonstrate the effects of LEADER/CLLD. • Positive commitment of stakeholders to the evaluation process. • Constructive relationships between LAGs, MAs and evaluators. • Clarity of roles in who supports LAGs in evaluation of LEADER/CLLD. 	<p>Building the conceptual framework</p> <p>Roadblocks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some concepts are difficult to define with measurable indicators. • It is difficult to tease out the added value of LEADER/CLLD from other interventions and impacts. • Low priority for this topic: more interest in other RDP measures. • Different interests and expectations among stakeholders. • Ineffective and vague flow of information (ENRD - MA – NRN – LAGs). <p>Success factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common understanding around the evaluation topics and frameworks. • Political and social pressure to legitimate funding. • Good communication, regular meetings with MAs, LAGs & others (e.g. informal networks). • Easy and transparent access to information.
<p>Developing the evaluation elements</p> <p>Roadblocks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of robust data for collecting evidences. • Missing data collection systems. • Insufficient quality of the evaluation system (framework). <p>Success factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear logic framework of objectives, criteria, and indicators established. • Early collaboration between LAGs, MA and evaluators. • Involvement of external actors/evaluators. • Good/smart/simple IT system for data collection. • Evaluation developed as an ongoing process with continuous improvement of the system quality. 	<p>Conducting the evaluation</p> <p>Roadblocks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of time available for LAG personnel. • Inadequate IT systems for M&E. • Low level of implementation. • Knowledge and capacity of MAs, evaluators, etc. <p>Success factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely support to LAGs from MA and NRNs. • Good IT systems to collect data. • Not only the statistical data bases but also workshops/focus groups with different stakeholders for interpretation.
<p>Dissemination of findings and follow up</p> <p>Roadblocks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation and ownership. • Acceptance of conclusions and recommendations. • Target the right people_ <p>Success factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory validation of findings. • Readiness, openness to learning. 	

3.2 Concluding remarks and outlook

By bringing together a broad range of stakeholders, the Good Practice Workshop helped to identify various aspects essential for showing the added value of LEADER/CLLD through evaluation:

Conceptual aspects		
Concluding Remarks	Outlook	
The added value can be observed through multiple and interconnected dimensions. Therefore, each evaluation practice is not strictly connected to a single form of added value. For instance, the assessment of the social capital is intrinsically connected with local governance.	The assessment of the added value should be addressed from a systematic point of view. Avoid the risk of oversimplifying the analysis. It is recommendable to look at all the links between different forms of the added value.	
Assessing the LEADER method, and LEADER/CLLD as RDP measure or the CLLD strategy are two distinct but interconnected evaluation focuses. The first can ask questions like: <i>how is the bottom-up approach applied in the delivery mechanism?</i> The second can address questions like: <i>to what extent have LEADER/CLLD interventions supported local development in rural areas?</i>	In the assessment of the added value of LEADER/CLLD, it is important to look at the links between the LEADER method and the LEADER/CLLD results.	
The added value of LEADER/CLLD in terms of enhanced results (e.g. social innovations or spill-over effects) may only appear in the longer-term and therefore, it may be difficult to grasp it with tangible terms.	The hypothesis that the LEADER method generates enhanced results in the long-run could be tested with counterfactual techniques and indicators.	
Methodological aspects		
Concluding Remarks	Outlook	
The development of evaluation questions, judgment criteria, and indicators helps to narrow down the assessment and to better understand what can be expected from the evaluation.	The assessment of the added value should be addressed from a systematic point of view to avoid the risk of oversimplifying the analysis. It is recommendable to look at all the links between different forms of the added value.	
The setting up of classical approaches to counterfactual analysis might be difficult for LEADER/CLLD (e.g. data availability, lack of control areas/group without the application of the LEADER method).	In the assessment of the added value of LEADER, it is important to look at the links between the LEADER method and the LEADER results.	
The evaluation of the added value of LEADER/CLLD can follow an inductive approach (look at the practice to generate valid theories), a deductive approach (look at the questions you want to answer with evidence), or a combination of both. There is no one approach that suits all situations.	The hypothesis that the LEADER method generates enhanced results in the long run can be tested with counterfactual techniques and indicators.	

Management/governance aspects	
Concluding Remarks	Outlook
<p>The assessment of the added value can be carried out through either a LAG's self-assessment or the contracting of an independent evaluator. A combination of the two is also feasible.</p>	<p>Regardless of the structure of the assessment of LEADER/CLLD it is important to ensure involvement of stakeholders in the validation of evaluation findings. Especially for the assessment of social capital, an external view or facilitator can play a significant role in capturing changes in the behaviours.</p>
<p>Early planning of the evaluation activities has been considered as one of the success factors for this assessment.</p>	<p>RDP Managing Authorities can harmonise, coordinate, and facilitate the evaluation activities among LAGs by setting up procedures, providing common templates, establishing LAG operation databases, defining specific instructions for data collection at project level.</p>
<p>LAGs need support and incentives to undertake additional evaluation activities for the assessment of the added value of LEADER, which go beyond the minimum requirements established in the EU regulation.</p>	<p>Different kind of support from Managing Authorities, National Rural Networks, evaluators and researchers is essential. Methodological guidelines, such as those developed by the Evaluation Helpdesk: "Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD" and FARNET: "Evaluating CLLD" can be a good starting point to manage evaluation activities.</p>

Figure 4. Participants of the 7th Good Practice Workshop



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