



Rural Evaluation **NEWS**

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EUROPEAN EVALUATION HELPDESK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

ASSESSING RDP IMPACTS IN 2019: HOW TO CHOOSE THE MOST SUITABLE EVALUATION APPROACH?



Why do we need to assess the EU programmes?

The effectiveness, efficiency and impacts of each EU funded programme is evaluated during and after the programming period, in accordance with the EU legal framework.¹ Evaluation findings are ideally used to improve policy design and implementation. It is also in the interest of policy makers and the general public to know whether the

money is spent reasonably, whether it produces the expected results, and whether the interventions target the right beneficiaries to achieve the EU's policy objectives better. The legal framework and the Common Monitoring and Evaluation System (CMES)² provide the foundation and guidance for the evaluation of rural development programmes (RDPs) and serve as a tool to ensure the comparability of evaluation findings across the EU and to facilitate their synthesis.



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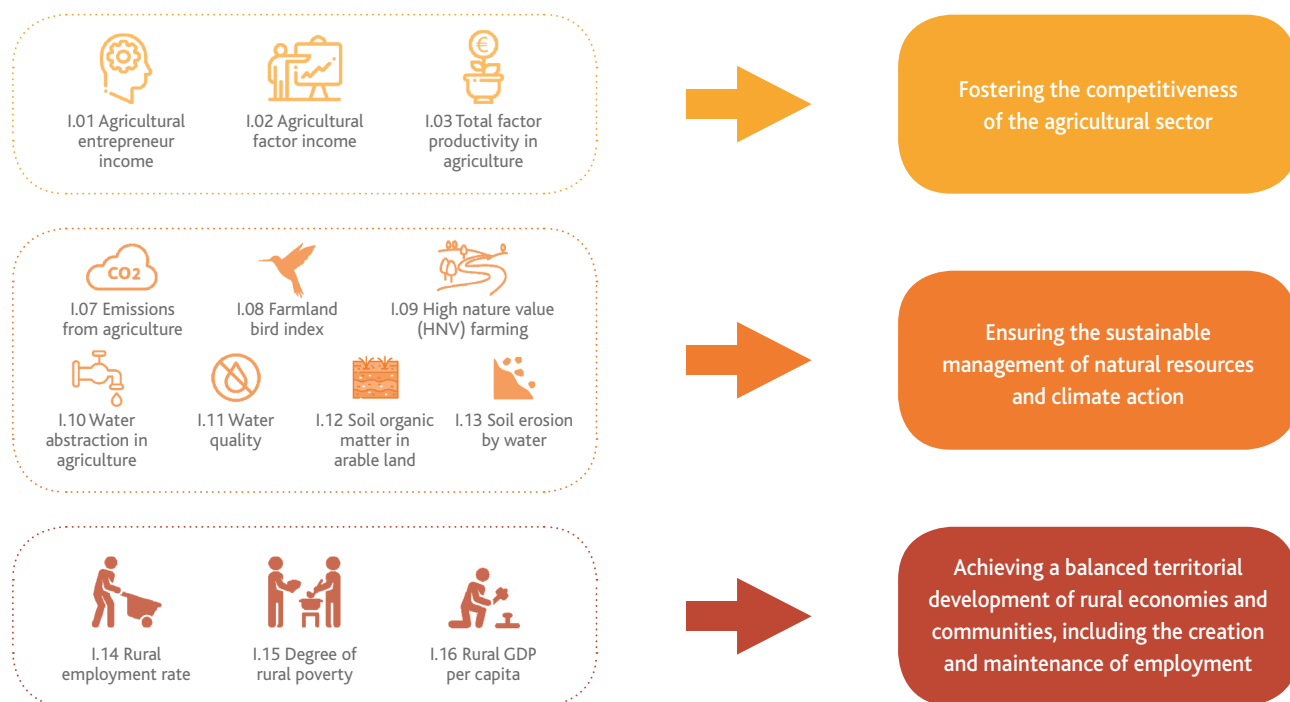


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Common Impact Indicators Related to CAP Objectives



How to measure the impacts of the EU's rural development policy?

The EU's rural development policy (second Pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy) contributes to the above three overall objectives, which are measured with the help of thirteen common CAP impact indicators as well as with possible additional indicators defined by the Member States.

What are the methodological challenges?

Policy achievements and impacts on rural areas are first assessed at the level of rural development programmes. For this purpose, evaluators verify to what extent the policy objectives have been achieved and whether the expected (and non-expected) impacts have materialised as a result of the programmes funded.

The impacts of a single policy intervention can, however, not be directly observed. Intervening factors from other interventions can make deciphering the attribution of specific impacts trying. The real RDP impacts are estimated when comparing the observed RDP outcomes with the outcomes which would occur in

a situation without the RDP. This is called counterfactual analysis and allows one to attribute observed changes in outcomes to the programme (causality).

What data can be used?

The data and information available for an evaluation exercise plays a key role in the choice of evaluation methods. Data availability varies among RDPs, sectors (agriculture, environment, rural communities) and across the programming period.

The collection of monitoring data of the RDP's beneficiaries is unified through the Commission Implementing Regulations and each Member States' operations database. The situation concerning data on entities (agricultural holdings, communities, enterprises, etc.) which are targeted by the RDPs, however, varies widely. The same is true regarding the data situation within the broad spectrum of rural sectors (agriculture, forestry, food industry, environment, rural communities, economies and people) which should be covered in the assessment of the RDP's impacts. In the case of regionalised RDPs, the availability of specific data can be even more challenging.



The EU provides data and databases (EUROSTAT, FADN³, LUCAS⁴, CORINE⁵, European Environmental Agency data, IACS⁶, etc.) which are useful for the assessment of the common impact indicators. However, in many cases only data for the national level is available, which calls for alternative solutions to address the data gaps.

Delays in data provision require additional efforts by the evaluators to screen and use the existing data sources and to collect data directly from holdings if necessary.

Data gaps may also be a result of low RDP up-take. This can be the case if certain RDP measures have not been sufficiently implemented or only a small number of projects have been finalised, it is difficult to identify any changes caused by the intervention(s).

What determines the choice of evaluation approaches?

Generally, there are wide range of evaluation approaches and methods available to assess a RDP's impacts. A careful review of the available data and its quality should be the starting point prior to making any decision about the evaluation approach and methods to be used. For the evaluation of the RDP's impacts in 2019 the uptake of the RDP may still play an important factor in this decision.

Evaluation approaches which include the assessment of the counterfactual situation (a comparison between the situation with and without the RDP) usually require robust data and an advanced quantitative and/or qualitative assessment. Data must be accessible in a suitable format, be of sufficient quality, be in a time-series and allow the evaluator to construct the baseline for participating and non-participating groups.

These are all prerequisites needed to verify if the observed differences in outcomes between the two groups are due to the programme or not.

If data for both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries are available then **quantitative evaluation** approaches are considered the ideal choice and should be strived for. However, these approaches also require specific skills and capacities needed by the evaluators and sufficient resources need to be dedicated to the evaluation if they are to be completed correctly.

If data is missing it will be difficult to apply many of the advanced quantitative methods. In such cases, the statistical analysis of ad-hoc pairwise comparisons or the use of multiple comparison groups using the Difference in Difference (DiD) method accompanied by a qualitative assessment, or naive quantitative comparisons are still considered a good choice, especially for the RDP evaluation in 2019.

If no comparison groups can be established, **qualitative methods** should be considered for the assessment of RDP impacts. The Method for Impact Assessment of Programmes and Projects (MAPP) is one example of a method that facilitates the collection of information from beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries needed to conduct a qualitative counterfactual analysis.

If possible, qualitative methods should not replace a quantitative assessment, but be used to complement the quantitative analysis to triangulate and further validate the findings. With qualitative methods it may be easier to gather up-to-date information and to provide a different point of view, which also explains why certain impacts occur.

Select the evaluation approaches which can produce the most robust evidence to judge realistically the RDP's impacts and achievements to answer the common evaluation questions in the context of the AIR submitted in 2019 or the ex post evaluation.

How to choose the best approach in each context?

Logic models⁷ are decision-making tools, which can support evaluators and Managing Authorities (MAs) to find the most suitable evaluation approach to assess the RDP's achievements and impacts in their context. [ENVIEVAL](#) – a collaborative project under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration, has developed and tested logic models for the evaluation of

environmental impacts of rural development measures and programmes in EU Member States.⁸ Envieval has found that logic models enable a better understanding of:

- **POSSIBILITIES:** what are the available combinations of data, indicators, and methods suitable to answer the evaluation questions.
- **REQUIREMENTS:** what data, indicators, methods, and approaches are required to assess net-impacts and to answer the evaluation questions.
- **CONSEQUENCES:** what implications do the decisions at different stages affect the cost and effectiveness of the evaluation.

The logic model in Figure 1 shows in four layers the steps that lead to a consistent analysis of the RDP's net effects at both the micro and macro levels.

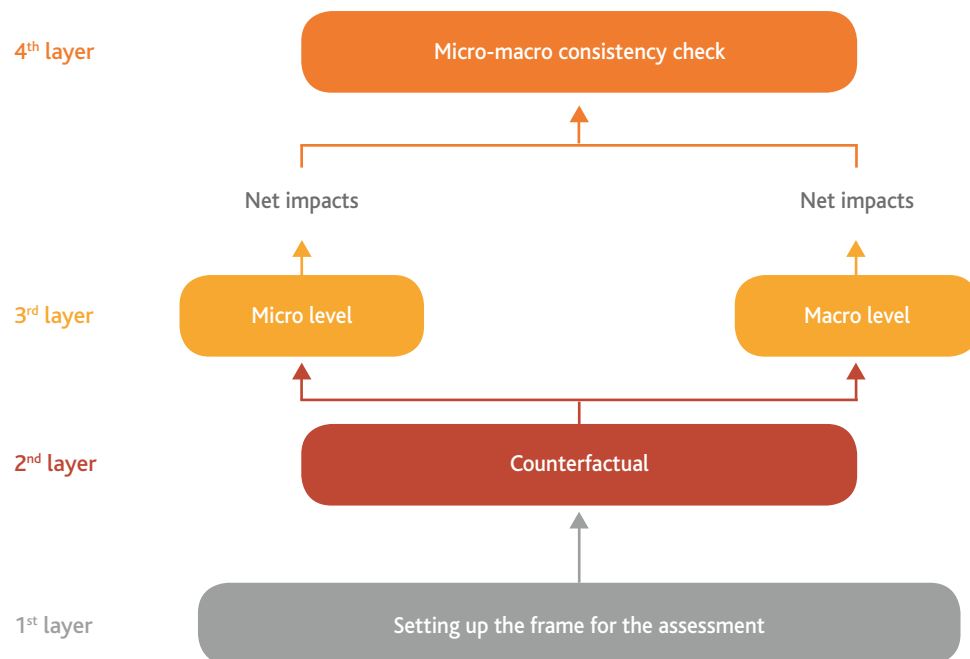
1st layer: It is important to first start with a good understanding of how the CAP overall objectives are related to the evaluation questions, impact indicators and the related rural development priorities, focus areas and measures. This can be achieved through drawing an explicit picture of the specific intervention logics. Later, the connections between impact and result indicators will help for checking the consistency of the assessment. At this initial stage the unit of assessment should already be chosen, which specifies if the assessment will be conducted at the micro and/or macro levels.

2nd layer: Here the options for the construction of the counterfactual are reviewed by taking into consideration the available data and information (see Figure 2). It is important to consider any constraining factors (e.g. scarce data availability, short-term evaluation contracts, limited evaluation capacity) in order to identify not only the optimal, but also, viable second-best solutions. A consistent process categorising the possible methods to design a counterfactual is important, even if data is lacking.

3rd layer: The options to assess the net impacts at the micro/macro levels need to be further refined in order to ensure a consistent assessment.⁹ The upscaling of the micro level findings can serve as the basis for the macro level assessment in cases where both the method and the type of data collected allow for it. Whenever the micro and macro level assessments complement each other, a consistency check is needed (see 4th layer).

4th layer: Here the consistency of the micro and macro level analysis is checked. This helps to validate the findings obtained at each level.

Figure 1: Simplified flowchart of the layers of a logic model



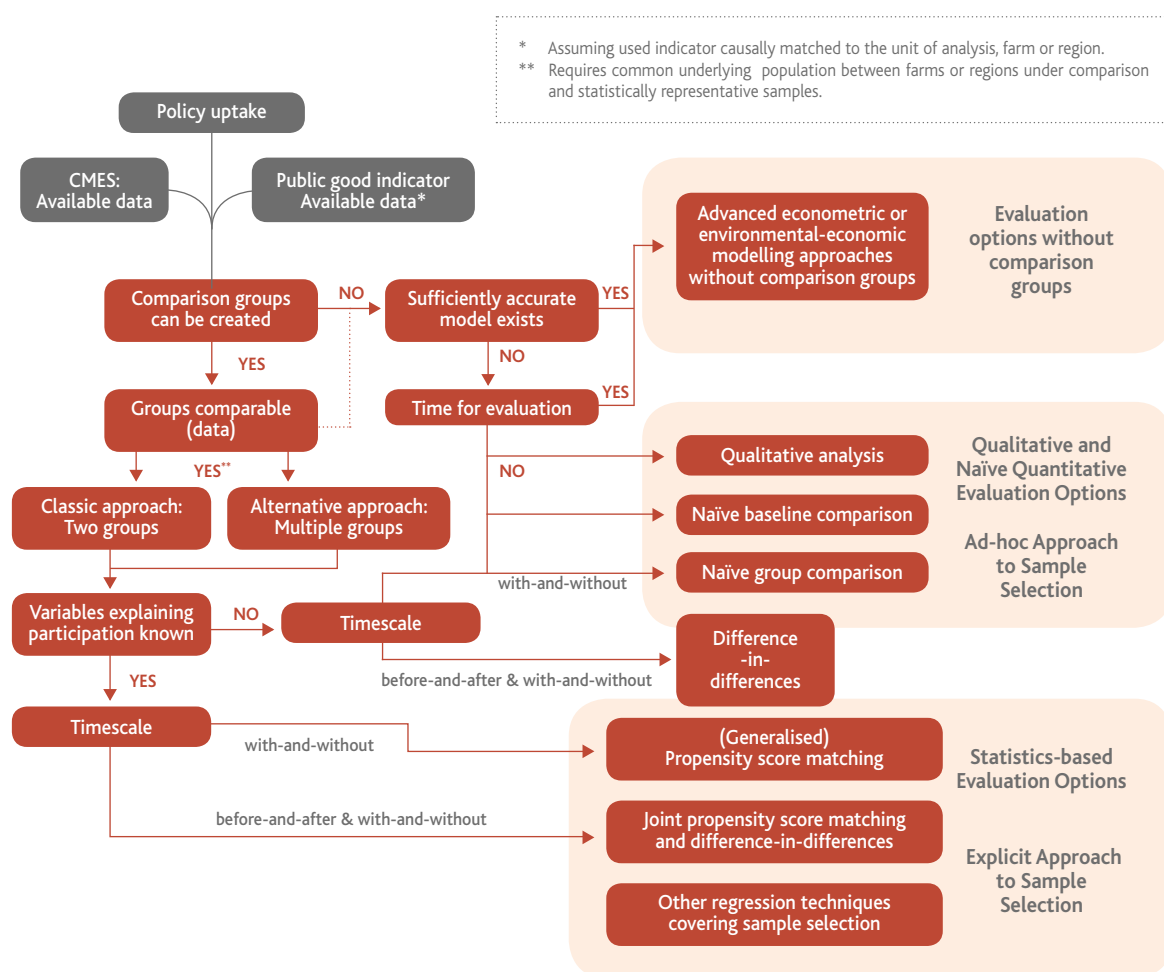
Source: Envieval (2015), modified



Logic models are decision trees that can assist stakeholders to design an evaluation approach (counterfactual) based on what data, information, and resources are available.



Figure 2: Logic model (2nd layer) for identifying options for setting up the counterfactual



Source: Envieval 2015

Supporting Member States in the assessment of RDP impacts in 2019

To support Member States in conducting the evaluation in 2019 the [Evaluation Helpdesk](#) is publishing the non-binding [Guidelines: Assessment of RDP achievements and impact in 2019](#). The Guidelines show **what needs to be assessed in 2019** and provide for each of the common CAP impact indicators a specific **logic model**, which will serve to support MAs and evaluators to find the most suitable approach based on their data availability, resources, and needs. For each indicator an example of an optimal approach and a second-best option is described in detail. **Fiches for answering common evaluation questions No. 22 - 30** will also be published to complement the guidelines. ■

[The guidelines will be available on the Evaluation Helpdesk's webpage in mid-August 2018.](#)

1. Article 54 and 56.3 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 2. Article 67 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 and Article 14, Annex IV, V, VI and VII of Regulation (EU) No 808/2014 3. Farm accountancy data network 4. Land use and coverage area frame survey 5. Corine land cover database 6. Integrated administration and control system 7. Envieval 2015 8. Morkvenas Z, Navickas K, Gulbinas J, Jefanovas A, Schwarz G, Wolff A, Offermann F, Osterburg B, Aalders I, Miller D, Morrice J, Vlahos G, Smyrniotopoulou A, Artell J, Aakkula J, Toikkanen H, Povellato A, Longhitano D, Lasorella V, Balazs K, et al (2015) Methodological Handbook for the evaluation of environmental impacts of RDPs: Report D9.5, ENVIEVAL project (Grant Agreement No. 312071). Brussels: European Commission, 152 p 9. The steps of the net assessment of RDP impacts are further described in the [Guidelines for the ex post evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs](#), namely in chapters 4.2.3 and 4.2.4



COMMUNICATING ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

The [ENRD Workshop on NRN Communication](#), which took place on 1 June 2018 in Prague (Czech Republic) aimed to bring together Network Support Unit (NSU) representatives dealing with communication activities in support of rural development policy across the EU in order to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences; share good practices; and encourage joint initiatives for more effective communication. Presentations were given by NSUs from throughout the Member States as well as external communication experts. This workshop was co-organised by the ENRD Contact Point and the Czech National Rural Network.

Improving Evaluation Communication

Evaluation is fundamentally about providing transparency to citizens and to ensure that funds are being spent in an effective manner. For local action groups (LAGs), farmers and beneficiaries this means showing Managing Authorities and the public that these projects are contributing in a positive way to meet the EU's goals and priorities.

While this workshop was not directly focused on evaluation, the principles and examples, which came out of the workshop can be a source of learning and inspiration for how to improve communication activities related to evaluation.

Three overarching principles were established at the workshop to communicate to stakeholders more effectively:

1. **Reach your audience; through**
2. **Innovative ways; with**
3. **Attractive content.**

Who are you trying to communicate with? What are you trying to tell them? For evaluation these target groups are likely to be Managing Authorities, LAGs, policy makers and possibly the broader public. What communication tools you use to reach these groups will be essential to making sure they receive the message you are trying to deliver. This could mean providing an evaluation specific section to the NRN's website in order to better reach LAGs and other local beneficiaries or it could mean drafting an easy to read summarised version of evaluation findings to be published in a newspaper or presented on the radio for farmers and the general public. The key is that you must find effective ways to reach your audience.

**'The most powerful story is
a personal story!'**

Václav Strnadel (Azteka)

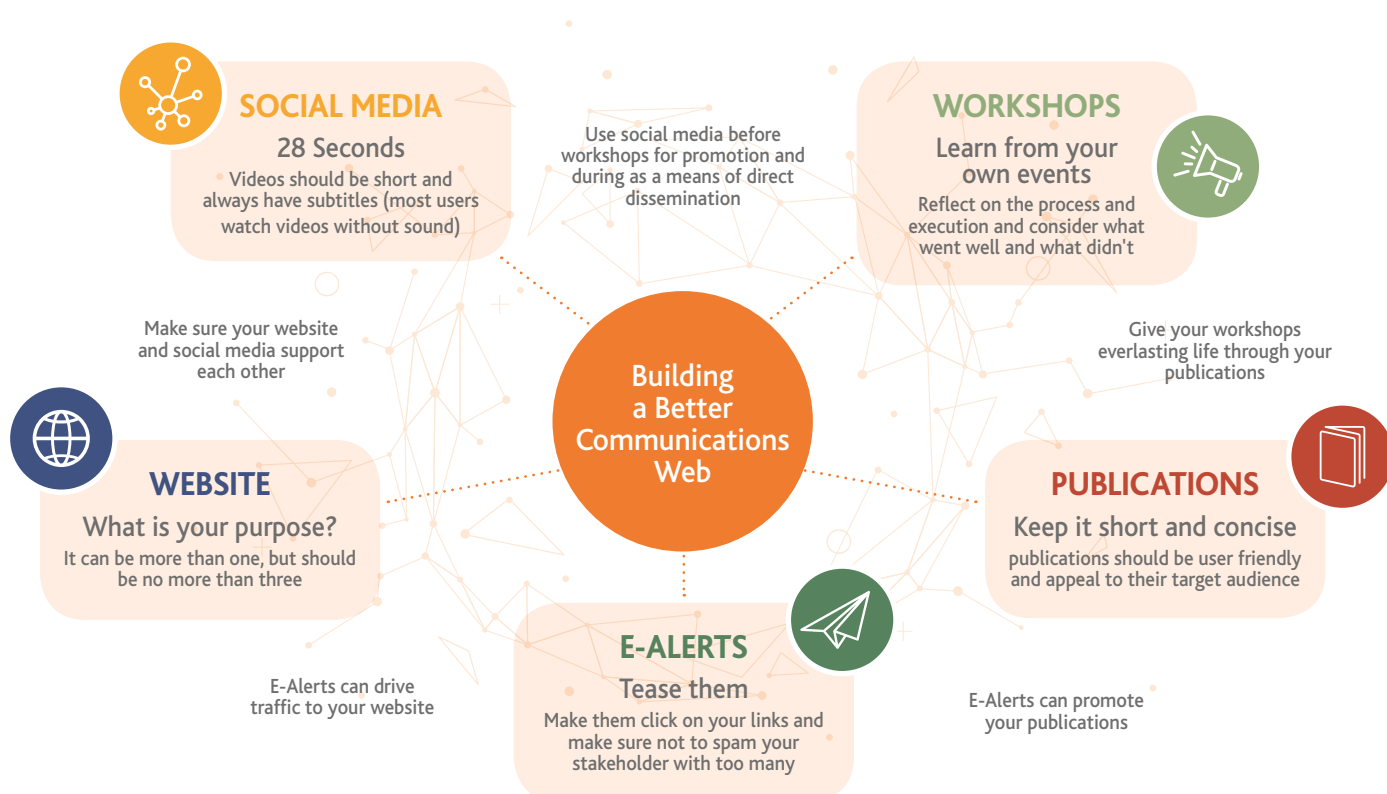




When communicating on evaluation it is essential to make sure the individuals and organisations you are trying to communicate with understand why this information is valuable to them and how it affects their respective situations. Using innovative means and making your content attractive does not necessarily only mean using the latest social media or making a very attractive infographic, but connecting to those groups you are targeting by using inventive communication tools and channels.

Building A Better Communications Web

Many recommendations came out of the workshop on how to effectively use different communication channels and are outlined below. Ultimately, no matter what communication tools are chosen or target groups are planned to be reached, an integrated approach should be considered for all communication activities, as many tools have unique synergies and can create multiplier effects to reach more stakeholders more efficiently and effectively. ■





PREPARING A HAND-
BOOK ON EVALUATION
FOR LAGS



EVALUATION SECTION
ON THE WEBSITE AND
EVALUATION RELATED
WORKSHOP FOR LAGS



PREPARING EVALUA-
TION RELATED VIDEOS
FOR LAG/LEADER
EVALUATION

Selected NRNs' communication activities on evaluation



WORKING GROUP ON
LEADER LAG EVALUATION
AND SUPPORTING LAGS
TO GO TO EVALUATION
RELATED WORKSHOPS



EVALUATION SECTION ON
THE WEBSITE; AS WELL
AS PROVIDING SUPPORT
THROUGH WORKSHOPS,
TOOLS AND CAPACITY
BUILDING ACTIVITIES



FACEBOOK GROUP FOR
LAGS WHERE THEY CAN
DISCUSS EVALUATION
AND SHARE EXPERIENCES



SEVENTH GOOD PRACTICE WORKSHOP: SHOWING THE ADDED VALUE OF LEADER/CLLD THROUGH EVALUATION

The seventh Good Practice Workshop (GPW) took place on 17 – 18 May 2018 in Helsinki (Finland) and was organised in collaboration by the Finnish Rural Network, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Evaluation Helpdesk. This workshop was well attended by 68 participants including, Managing Authorities (MA), National Rural Networks (NRN), Local Action Groups (LAG), evaluators, academics and members of the European Commission representing 22 Member States.



The aim of the workshop was to shape a common understanding and definition of the added value and its links with the LEADER/CLLD delivery mechanism and method.

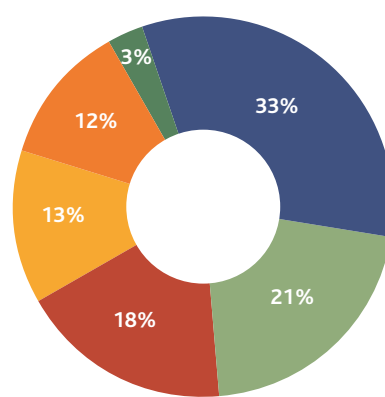
Collectively constructed mind-maps which included participants' experiences and examples of the added value of LEADER/CLLD revealed a clear link to the seven principles of the LEADER method (e.g. partnership, multi-sectoral approach, bottom-up). It confirmed the conclusion that when correctly applied, the LEADER method can lead to added value expressed through improved social capital, governance and enhanced results and impacts. However, it was seen that each evaluation practice is not strictly connected to a

single form of added value and that in order to avoid the risk of oversimplifying the analysis, the assessment should be addressed from a systematic point of view.

Practical examples from [Italy](#), [Germany](#) and [Denmark](#) were presented and further facilitated the discussions on 'what' and 'how' to evaluate the added value of LEADER/CLLD at both the RDP and LAG levels. The importance of understanding the evaluation elements, and how they relate to each other was viewed as a major stepping stone to better capturing the added value through evaluation as well as helping LAGs to understand more about what they can expect from the evaluator.

Connecting the Dots

It is important that the development of the evaluation question, judgment criteria, and indicators are all developed for the same level of analysis (impacts, results, or outputs). Moreover, it is vital to distinguish the evaluation questions between those focused on the implementation of LEADER and those related to the results of LEADER. Lastly, the indicators for the assessment of the added value of LEADER should be simple, specific, and most importantly measurable.



- MANAGING AUTHORITIES
- LAGS, LAG NETWORKS
- EVALUATORS, RESEARCHERS
- EU LEVEL
- NATIONAL RURAL NETWORKS
- PAYING AGENCIES

'Road maps' were drawn for individual stakeholder groups (LAGs, Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, NRNs, evaluators and researchers) which specified the key elements, which would lead to the successful assessment of the added value of LEADER/CLLD. The 'road maps' identified main milestones (what needs to be done for a successful assessment and difficulties that must be overcome) and success factors.

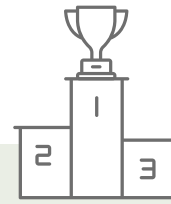
Outcomes of the GPW have provided key lessons on how to conceptually link the theoretical framework with the practical expressions of the added value, and how to set up and manage the evaluation of the added value of LEADER/CLLD. ■



Send your questions to:

info@ruralevaluation.eu





Setting up the evaluation purpose and plan

- 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.

- Develop a shared common framework between stakeholders 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 the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD.

Building the conceptual framework

- Some concepts are difficult to define with measurable indicators.
- It is difficult to tease out the added value of LEADER 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).

- Common understanding around the evaluation topics and frameworks.
- Political and social pressure to legitimise funding.
- Good communication, regular meetings with Managing Authorities, LAGs and others (e.g. informal networks).
- Easy and transparent access to information.

Developing the evaluation elements

- Lack of robust data for collecting evidences.
- Missing data collection systems.
- Insufficient quality of the evaluation system (framework).

- 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 systems for data collection.
- Evaluation developed as an ongoing process with continuous improvement of the system quality.

Conducting the evaluation

- Lack of time available for LAG personnel.
- Inadequate IT systems for monitoring and evaluation.
- Low level of implementation.
- Knowledge and capacity of MAs, evaluators, etc.

- 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.

Dissemination of findings and follow-up

- Motivation and ownership.
- Acceptance of conclusions and recommendations.
- Target the right people.

- Participatory validation of findings.
- Readiness and openness to learning.



Conceptual

- The added value can be observed through many interconnected dimensions. Therefore, each evaluation practice is not strictly connected to a single form of added value (e.g. the assessment of the social capital is intrinsically connected with local governance). The added value of LEADER in terms of enhanced results may only appear in the long-term and therefore, it may be difficult to assess tangible results in the short-term. The assessment of the added value should be addressed from a systematic point of view.
- 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 results.

Methodological

- The development of evaluation questions, judgment criteria, and indicators help to focus the assessment and better understand what can be expected from the evaluation.
- The hypothesis that the LEADER method generates enhanced results in the long-run can be tested with a counterfactual approach, however, there are numerous challenges (e.g. data availability, lack of control areas/group without the application of the LEADER method). For the assessment of the added value of LEADER/CLLD quantitative methods, such as, social network analysis, as well as heuristic and discursive methods (e.g. observations, interviews, and focus groups) can help to understand the dynamics of change and to compare these dynamics to hypothetical counterfactuals.
- The evaluation of the added value of LEADER/CLLD can follow an inductive or deductive approach, or a combination of both. There is not one approach that suits all situations.

Management & Governance

- 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. Regardless of the structure of the assessment it is important to ensure that relevant actors are involved throughout the validation of findings.
- Early planning of evaluation activities was considered one of the major success factors for the assessment of LEADER/CLLD added value. RDP Managing Authorities can harmonise, coordinate, and facilitate the evaluation activities among LAGs by setting up procedures, providing common templates, establishing LAG operations databases and defining specific instructions for data collection at project level.
- 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. Various kinds of support from Managing Authorities, National Rural Networks, evaluators and researchers are essential. Methodological guidelines, such as those developed by the Evaluation Helpdesk: Guidelines: [Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD](#) and FARNET's [Handbook for LAGs and FLAGs: Evaluating CLLD](#) can be constructive building blocks for managing evaluation activities.



BACK TO BASICS: MEASURING CAP IMPACTS (PART 2/3)

Assessing CAP Pillar II impacts on the sustainable management of natural resources and climate actions

Why are CAP impacts on environment assessed?

The European Union has long been a staunch defender of preventing dangerous climate change and has been committed both internationally and within the union to both tackle these adverse effects as well as set an example globally. For this reason, a robust policy has been established specifically in response to environmental challenges from the increased production of GHG and ammonia emissions from intensive farming to the decline in biodiversity and countryside degradation. The CAP aims to ensure the sustainable management of natural resources

What is to be assessed?

Seven common impact indicators help to assess the EU's policy impacts on the use of natural resources and climate actions:¹

How is this assessed?

In accordance with the given data-situation, very different evaluation approaches for calculating and netting out the values of the common impact indicators related to the environment may be applicable.



and to contribute to climate actions through a number of CAP Pillar I and II instruments and Member States are required to show their achievements and impacts on the sustainable management of natural resources and climate actions throughout the programming period.

Two different quantitative approaches will be recommended in the upcoming [Guidelines: Assessing RDP Achievements and Impacts in 2019](#) and can be applied for calculating and netting out the values of these seven common impact indicators.²



What are the possible challenges and solutions?

Estimating the environmental indicators and netting out the effects of the RDP is a challenging exercise for many reasons:

CHALLENGES



Data availability for different environmental indicators

- *Data supply varies significantly across indicators. For example, a lack of updated data at the national or regional levels for soil organic matter (SOM) and Gross Nutrient Balance (GNB).*
- *Make use of available data from various sources reporting on the same indicator or use additional (proxy) indicators.*



Establishment of a counterfactual for assessing the environmental effects

- *The heterogeneity of the biophysical environment is a challenge when designing the counterfactual. Many environmental processes are specific to site and farm characteristics and can affect the intervention in unpredictable ways.*
- *Consider the environmental heterogeneity by making use of various geo-physical and bio-physical maps or monitoring information.*



The RDP's effects on the environment can be difficult to capture

- *Some environmental impacts develop very slowly and do not produce observable and evident changes within the life of a RDP (e.g. for soil erosion or soil organic matter enrichment).*
- *Do not expect to find quantitatively significant impacts, but still carry out the evaluation exercise with a view to reveal possible deadweight loss.³*



Scaling up micro estimates to the macro level should be carried out cautiously

- *Many 'environmental issues' are concentrated in a certain area and are not dispersed over the RDP's territory (e.g. water pollution and water abstraction, soil erosion and soil degradation, threats to biodiversity, etc.).*
- *Conduct a careful micro-macro level consistency check and interpret the findings thoroughly.*

SOLUTIONS

1. <https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/cap-indicators/impact/impact-indicators-fiches.pdf>
 2. Subject to data availability and quality in the Member States/regions.
 3. Description can be found in the [Guidelines for ex post evaluation](#) of 2007-2013 RDPs. Chapter 4.2.3



CALENDAR - WHAT'S ON?

- **DE – 14-15 June 2018 – German Evaluation Society Working Group: 'Structural Policies':** Spring meeting of the working group 'Structural Policies' of the German Evaluation Society (DeGEval) for the future design of structural funds and role of evaluation, evaluation design and evaluations: first experiences with the evaluation plan.
[Read more >>>](#)
- **DE – 12-14 September 2018 – German Evaluation Society 21st Annual Meeting: 'Impact orientation and evaluation':** The demand for more impact orientation has gained in importance in various contexts in recent years. The 21st Annual Meeting of the Evaluation Society therefore wants to provide a forum for discussing the different interrelations between impact orientation and evaluation.
[Read more >>>](#)
- **GR – 1-5 October 2018 – 13th EES Biennial Conference: Evaluation for more resilient societies:** What is the role of evaluation in understanding the multiple crises currently ongoing? Which are our collective responses? How can evaluation help make societies more resilient? The conference will provide the traditional opportunities for exchanging on evaluation politics, capacity, systems, research, methods, communication and use.
[Read more >>>](#)
- **ES – 25-27 October 2018 – Exploring new statistical frontiers at the intersection of survey science and big data:** The conference offers an opportunity to address the ongoing paradigm shift in how researchers produce, analyse, and use statistics.
[Read more >>>](#)
- **PL – 24-25 October – Good Practice Workshop 'Approaches to assess socio-economic and sector related RDP impacts in 2019':** Organised by the Evaluation Helpdesk and the Polish Managing Authority. This Good Practice Workshop will provide a forum for Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, NRNs, LAG-representatives, data providers and evaluators to discuss different approaches for the evaluation of impacts for the evaluation in 2019.
[Read more >>>](#)
- **BE – 11 December - Rural Networks Assembly**
[Read more >>>](#)

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

The contents of this newsletter do not necessarily express the official views of the European Commission.

European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development

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