



Rural Evaluation NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EUROPEAN EVALUATION HELPDESK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

EVALUATIONWORKS! 2017

The Evaluation Helpdesk has organised its yearly capacity building events, EvaluationWORKS! 2017, on the topic, 'Follow up of the AIR 2017: lessons learnt for the evaluation in 2019'. Between November 2017 and February 2018, 23 trainings in 24 Member States have been concluded.

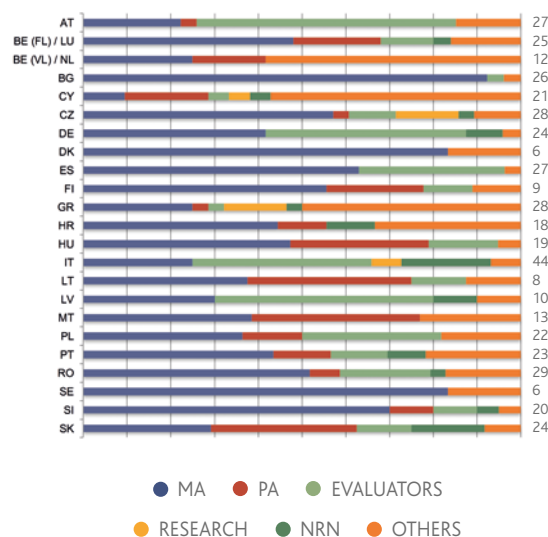
The Evaluation Helpdesk provides the overall methods and material for the EvaluationWORKS! 2017 trainings but each event is adapted to the individual needs and requests of the Member States.

The EvaluationWORKS! 2017 events aimed to:

- **Achieve a common understanding** of the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation process in 2017.
- **Identify needed areas of support and capacity buildings** that should be provided at the EU and national/regional levels in view of the 2019 AIR.
- **Operationalise follow up actions** to address 'systemic issues' to ensure a better evaluation in 2019.

469 participants have attended the EvaluationWORKS! 2017 events. The primary participant groups were Managing Authorities (44%), evaluators (20%), Paying Agencies (11%), representatives of NRNs (5%) and researchers (3%) (see chart).

Participants by event and role



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'The reflection on the evaluation process in 2016 and 2017 and the provision of the feedback by 26 participants was important to fine-tune the upcoming evaluations in 2018 and 2019'

ANDREAS RESCH,
EVALUATION HELPDESK GEOGRAPHIC EXPERT FOR AUSTRIA



DATE OF WORKSHOP:
18 December 2017

LOCATION:
BMLFUW – Federal Ministry of Agriculture,
Forestry, Environment and
Water Management, Vienna, AUSTRIA



MAIN STRENGTHS of the evaluation process in 2017:

- Planning and contracting of evaluators for the evaluation started at an early stage, which allowed for a smooth evaluation.
- The timing was kept by all involved actors and the 2017 AIR was delivered in a timely fashion.



MAIN WEAKNESSES of the evaluation process in 2017:

- It was difficult to handle the different levels of detail: the RDP should be evaluated on a very detailed level and summary results should be provided at the level of Focus Areas.
- Technical difficulties in filling out the SFC template.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

Summary of main follow-up actions discussed to ensure a better evaluation in 2019:

- More transparency in the criteria used by the EC for the observation letter.
- Getting prepared to reply to the common evaluation questions 1 to 21, including those from 22 to 30 to be answered in the AIR submitted in 2019.

What support should be provided to implement the proposed actions?

EU level

- Provide best practices on the calculation of common indicators.
- Provide best practices on how to fill out the SFC template (e.g. it was not known that the answers to CEQs should be structured along the evaluation judgement criteria).

National/Regional level

- The content of the internal evaluation report to be delivered in 2019 should be better defined and outlined.
- The role of the coordinators should be better defined.

'By setting a common framework for the evaluation of the Austrian RDP, the contributions of the evaluators were better structured compared to the previous period 2007-2013'

MICHAELA SCHWAIGER, HEAD OF THE EVALUATION UNIT





DATE OF WORKSHOP:

20 December 2017

LOCATION:

Athens, Greece

'Significant progress has been reached in the RDP evaluation, although a greater focus on the expected results at individual Focus-area related measures is needed'

DIMITRIS LIANOS,
EVALUATION HELPDESK GEOGRAPHIC EXPERT FOR GREECE



MAIN STRENGTHS of the evaluation process in 2017:

- Communication actions to inform all stakeholders through workshops in the evaluation planning phase.
- Updating the information system to collect all necessary data.
- The setting up of an evaluation unit within the Managing Authority (MA).
- The pre-setting of the selection criteria served to link the indicators with the RDP intervention logic.



MAIN WEAKNESSES of the evaluation process in 2017:

- RDP planning was 'theoretical' and did not consider the potential issues that could arise during the implementation.
- Lack of coordination between the MA, the Intermediate Bodies and the Implementation Bodies (IBs).
- Availability of baseline data.
- Little internal capacity and training for building evaluation skills within the IBs.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

Summary of main follow-up actions discussed to ensure a better evaluation in 2019:

- Better information to the stakeholders on their obligations regarding the evaluation.
- Interconnection of data with the Information System.
- Better information about good evaluation practices at the EU level.
- Greater frequency of communication actions on the evaluation findings.

What support should be provided to implement the proposed actions?

EU level

- Publication of a good practice guide for reporting findings in the AIR.
- Better information on good evaluation practices at EU level.

National/Regional level

- Increase capacity building and training activities.
- Better information available for the stakeholders on their obligations regarding the RDP evaluation.

'There must be a closer and more permanent cooperation between the Managing Authority and the Implementation Bodies, the Intermediate Bodies, universities and researchers to avoid problems in 2019'

NIKOS MANETAS, DIRECTOR OF THE MA





'This Yearly Capacity Building Event was one of the few opportunities to meet and discuss with all evaluation stakeholders on the Annual Implementation Reports'

LINA DUMCIUTE,
EVALUATION HELPDESK GEOGRAPHIC EXPERT FOR LITHUANIA



DATE OF WORKSHOP:
28 November 2017

LOCATION:
Ministry of Agriculture,
Vilnius, Lithuania



MAIN STRENGTHS of the evaluation process in 2017:

- Environmental indicators were used in the 2017 AIR and special research studies have been conducted to receive values for these environmental indicators.
- Productive negotiations with competent institutions to provide data (FADN data) for counterfactual analysis.
- Multiple data sources have been deployed to undertake counterfactual analysis.



MAIN WEAKNESSES of the evaluation process in 2017:

- Limited clarity on the appropriateness of the methodology used to calculate the values for environmental indicators.
- Indicators are sometimes poorly defined/unclear and the provision of some indicators is very work intensive.
- The delivery of some data was delayed.
- Because of data protection legislation some data was unavailable for counterfactual analysis.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

Summary of main follow-up actions discussed to ensure a better evaluation in 2019:

- To conduct further negotiations with competent authorities on data provision for the application of counterfactual methods (FADN data).
- To consider other data sources for the 2019 AIR.
- To learn from the examples in other Member States concerning the methodologies used for the calculation of environmental indicators.



'The event is a good opportunity to meet with specialists of the National Paying Agency to discuss on data provision issues'

ALMA RASIMIEN, CHIEF SPECIALIST AT THE MANAGING AUTHORITY





'EvaluationWORKS! 2017 was a good opportunity for evaluation stakeholders to share their experience with the evaluation process in 2017. The participants identified the relevant steps to improve capacities for the evaluation in 2019'

JULIJA MAROŠEK,
EVALUATION HELPDESK GEOGRAPHIC EXPERT FOR SLOVENIA



DATE OF WORKSHOP:

15 December 2017

LOCATION:

Ljubljana, Slovenia



**MAIN STRENGTHS
of the evaluation process in 2017:**

- Good cooperation between the Managing Authority (MA) and the evaluator.
- Involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation.
- Availability of guidelines for the evaluation.
- Vast range of data available in the monitoring system.
- Precise monitoring of the land through the Land Parcel Identification System.



**MAIN WEAKNESSES
of the evaluation process in 2017:**

- Insufficient data due to the low uptake of the RDP.
- Challenges in using the appropriate methodologies for the evaluation of ecosystems (Priority 4).
- Weak descriptions of the secondary effects related to economic performance and environment.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

Summary of main follow-up actions discussed to ensure a better evaluation in 2019:

- Further capacity building for the MA to learn about the evaluation elements including increased information exchange between the MA and the Paying Agency (PA).
- Engage RDP measure managers in the development of the ToR for the evaluation in 2019.
- Conduct ad hoc case studies to support the evaluation (Priority 4, Agri-environment-climate measures).
- Organise a public presentation of evaluation findings and results in 2019.

What support should be provided to implement the proposed actions?

EU level

- Organise meetings to exchange best practices among Member States with similar RDPs or difficulties identified.
- Present LEADER/CLLD evaluation guidance to the Slovenian LAGs/MA/PA.
- Present additional good practices on the evaluation methods used for the assessment of Priorities 4 and 5.
- Improve technical deficiencies related to reporting on the evaluation in SFC.

National/Regional level

- Enable internal knowledge transfer between the MA and the PA.
- Provide trainings for the MA staff on the use of advanced quantitative methods, including the use of FADN and AJPES data.
- Involve the NRN in the dissemination of evaluation findings.

'The event was an excellent opportunity to review what we have done so far in the field of evaluation and to meet the challenges that await us in 2019. Collaborative brainstorming has empowered the participants in deepening their knowledge about evaluation'

ZVONKO HARDI, MEMBER OF THE MANAGING AUTHORITY



'The event showed that the Slovak RDP authorities were still interested in improving the RDP evaluation for 2019, despite the positive experience gained from the evaluation approach established in 2017. Numerous important issues were discussed to ensure further improvements'

JELA TVRDONOVA,
EVALUATION HELPDESK GEOGRAPHIC EXPERT FOR THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

DATE OF WORKSHOP:
16 November 2017

LOCATION:
Ministry of Agriculture and
Rural Development,
Bratislava, Slovakia



MAIN STRENGTHS of the evaluation process in 2017:

- Very good and effective communication between the Managing Authority (MA) and evaluators.
- Existing high-quality data sources were used.
- Evaluators with a high professional capacity were contracted early in the process.



MAIN WEAKNESSES of the evaluation process in 2017:

- Insufficient definition of the evaluation framework by the MA.
- Some of the data needed for the baseline was missing.
- Changes in public procurement rules have put an emphasis on costs, often making those organisations with the best data less likely to receive tenders.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

Summary of main follow-up actions discussed to ensure a better evaluation in 2019:

- Fine-tune the evaluation framework for each common and programme specific evaluation question and adapt the evaluation plan accordingly.
- Ensure the consistency between data sources and indicators, and establish agreements with data providers.
- Improve the evaluation approach for the assessment of contributions of forestry measures to RDP impacts.

What support should be provided to implement the proposed actions?

EU level

- For the assessment of RDP impacts, more guidance is necessary, specifically for assessing: HNV farming, water management, and soil erosion.
- Increased technical support to fill out the SFC template and establish effective communication with IT services.

'The event was very useful for us. It helped us to articulate recommendations on how to better collect data for evaluators, to build more capacities within the evaluation team, and to improve evaluation methods. I do hope that these recommendations will lead to a better evaluation and report in 2019'

JAROSLAV GUDÁBA, HEAD OF THE MANAGING AUTHORITY

EVALUATION OF THE CAP GREENING MEASURES

Independent consultants Alliance Environment and the Thuenen Institute have conducted in 2017 an evaluation study of the CAP greening measures under the Direct Payments Regulation. This study evaluated the motivations behind Member States' and farmers' implementation choices, as well as the effect of the measures on farming practices and production, their effectiveness in relation to environmental and climate objectives, their efficiency, coherence, relevance and EU added value.

The evaluation was conducted only two years after the implementation of the greening measures, and compares the effects of these measures compared to the baseline year of 2014. Ten case studies were carried out in Austria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain and the United Kingdom.



the greening measures for Member States or farmers. The main factor influencing decisions were:

- Ease of implementation on the ground;
- Minimising administrative burden;
- Avoiding mapping errors and risks of fines.

In general, this study found that greening measures did not conflict with the other CAP measures to meet the CAP's environmental and climate objectives, although more could be done to make measures work together more effectively.

Recommendations for future policy design

1. Member States should be required to justify their implementation choices with reference to environmental needs and priorities and report on progress.
2. Suitable greening practices for permanent crops should be found.
3. Greater synergies between the implementation of the greening measures and the agri-environment-climate measure (AECM) should be encouraged.
4. The importance of advisory services must not be underestimated – these should not be limited to the administrative and compliance aspects of greening but focus on their purpose and ways of optimising their environmental and climate effects.
5. The types of EFA permitted and their management rules should be reviewed to ensure they are compatible with delivering environmental outcomes.
6. The ESPG measure should be implemented more widely: all Annex 1 grassland habitats under agricultural use and requiring strict protection under the Birds and Habitats Directives should be designated as ESPG and the designation of ESPG outside Natura 2000 sites should be increased. ■

Green direct payments account for 30% of EU countries' direct payment budgets. Farmers in receipt of direct payments under Pillar 1 of the CAP must carry out various, non-contractual practices, which benefit the environment and the climate including:

- Crop diversification
- Maintenance of permanent grassland
- Dedicating 5% of arable land to 'ecological beneficial elements' ('ecological focus areas (EFAs)')

The study found that overall the greening measures have led to few changes in management practices, except in a few specific areas. As a result, their environmental and climate impacts have been limited, making only a limited contribution towards promoting more sustainable farming practices, although this effect is difficult to quantify and very locally specific. These measures have had a negligible effect on production or economic viability of farms and the additional administrative costs associated with them have been low. This study further found that environmental priorities were not a deciding factor in decisions about how to implement



Deepen your knowledge
Read the [full report](#) and see all conclusions and recommendations.
Read more about Greening [here!](#)

SIXTH GOOD PRACTICE WORKSHOP: NRNs SUPPORT TO THE EVALUATION OF RDPs

The sixth Good Practice Workshop (GPW) took place on 30 November – 1 December 2017 in Athens (Greece) and was hosted by the Greek Managing Authority of the RDP 2014-2020 – Ministry of Rural Development and Food. This workshop was attended by 60 participants including members of the European Commission, Managing Authorities (MA), National Rural Networks (NRNs), Local Action Groups (LAGs), evaluators, and academics representing 20 Member States.

The workshop provided a space for the exchange of challenges NRNs are facing when dealing with evaluation and discussion on practical solutions.

Practical examples from [Italy](#) and [Portugal](#) as well as posters which described cases from [Germany](#), [France](#), [Poland](#), [Latvia](#) and [Estonia](#) were presented and followed by discussions among the participants on how NRNs can support building evaluation capacities and raising awareness on evaluation. These discussions demonstrated that NRNs are very active and enthusiastic to go beyond the legal requirements in supporting the evaluation of RDPs and can be important facilitators of evaluation capacity building events.

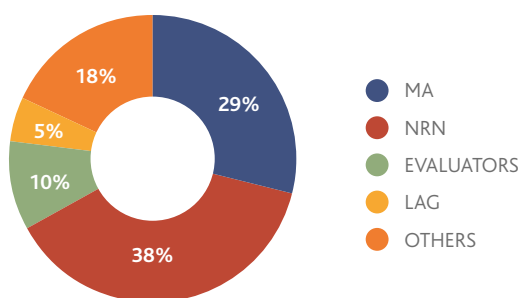
These discussions further highlighted numerous areas where NRNs can serve to enable better evaluations including:

- Helping to **communicate evaluation findings** (e.g. explaining the importance of the evaluation to the main stakeholders and translating the evaluation findings).
- **Connecting and coordinating stakeholders** in the evaluation cycle.
- The **collection and dissemination of good practices**.
- **Raising awareness** on evaluation with attention to LAGs.



'The workshop was useful to discuss with other NRNs about the problems and opportunities in supporting evaluation, but also to meet the evaluators and Managing Authorities of other Member States to see their expectations and needs. It was interesting to compare the different structures of the NRNs and to take inspiration from the activities realized by other NRNs'

Valentina Carta, Regional Antennas of the Italian NRN





CASE "SHARING SUCCESS STORIES OF AGRI-ENVIRONMENT MEASURES" ESTONIA



SUMMARY

The Estonian Rural Network Support Unit together with the ongoing evaluators (Agricultural Research Centre) conducted several dissemination activities concerning the positive evaluation results of environmental measures supported by the Estonian RDP 2007-2013. These activities included a public competition for best practices, field visits, and the publication of a best practices guide: 'Notice the environmentally friendly agriculture'.

POSITIVE ASPECTS

- Better demonstration of policy results
- Evaluators were happy to connect good projects with evaluation findings
- Beneficiaries can see that they are the ones making the policies successful
- High involvement of social media and prominent environmental magazines in disseminating these practices and evaluation findings

CHALLENGE

- It was difficult to involve non-agriculture related media groups in this campaign





Key Recommendations

Role	What?	How?
Coordination and networking on evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bringing evaluators, researchers and LAGs together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep an open dialogue with evaluation stakeholders to identify new challenges Provide forums for exchange
Collection of data to support evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect quantitative and qualitative data of use for the evaluator (e.g. on NRN events, on LAGs, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapt data to the needs of the evaluator Create a user-friendly database
Carry out thematic work to develop practical guidance/manuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop guidance/manuals on evaluation Help to define indicators and evaluation questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anticipate and assess the needs of MAs/ evaluators Set-up thematic working groups Consult material with users
Build capacities on evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide trainings on: How to evaluate LAGs, LEADER/CLLD and non-investment measures, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess the training needs Prepare training material
Communicate and disseminate M&E findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlight the importance of evaluation Strengthen a common understanding of evaluation Provide specific evaluation findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain evaluation findings in simple and concise language or stories to make it accessible to the public ■



For further outcomes of this workshop read the [full report](#) on our website.

A NETWORK APPROACH TO MEASURE THE SOCIAL CAPITAL IN LEADER/CLLD

The application of the LEADER method is widely acknowledged as generating added value, which can be observed through improved governance, increased social capital, and enhanced results.

In Italy, a group of researchers of the [TESAF department of the University of Padova](#) has developed and applied an evaluation framework based on a network approach to measure and visualise the 'social capital' generated at LAG level through the LEADER/CLLD strategy. The LAG Prealpi Dolomiti (Veneto Region, Italy) has integrated this approach into its Local Development Strategy's [Monitoring and Evaluation System](#), in the current programming period.

The Evaluation Helpdesk spoke to Elena Pisani, a researcher and expert in evaluation from the TESAF department of the University of Padova and the primary designer of the approach to gain further insights into this innovative practice.

'In this case the LAG Prealpi Dolomiti was very proactive and understood the importance of capturing and showing the added



Elena Pisani

value of LEADER/CLLD and therefore decided not only to promote this practice in its monitoring and evaluation strategy, but it has taken a very active role in diffusing the acquired knowledge to other LAGs, also thanks to the intermediation of the Italian National Rural Network. Their commitment toward the evaluation has been present since the design of their LEADER/CLLD strategy' states, Elena.

A self-evaluation framework based on a network approach

The self-evaluation framework for the assessment of social capital is based on a network approach and it considers social capital as a multidimensional concept composed of 'networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups'¹. Elena states, '**disentangling social capital into multiple forms, dimensions, sub-dimensions and indicators is essential for getting more meaningful and precise insights into which specific factors are contributing to a higher or lower level of social capital**'. 'While many indicators can be quite burdensome or time consuming for the LAG, we have observed

Figure 1. Forms of LAG's Social Capital



Source: [LAG Prealpi and Dolomiti \(2018\)](#)

that having only one or two indicators may make it difficult to provide the LAG with sufficient information needed to interpret such a complex concept as the added value of LEADER/CLLD' further elaborates Elena. Consequently, having a lack of information to adequately interpret this concept may undermine any evidence-based follow-up actions. Based on this premise, the approach recognises three forms of social capital: structural social capital, normative-cognitive social capital and governance related aspects, which are graphically represented in **Figure 1**.

How does it work?

Each form of social capital has been further broken down into dimensions, sub-dimensions, and then assessed through [78 indicators](#). Data for these indicators are collected via questionnaires administered via direct interviews from a selected target group composed of the LAG Manager, all the LAG members and a sample of beneficiaries of the LEADER/CLLD strategy. An example of one of these indicators ('trust among the LAG's members') from data collected in the previous programming period can be observed in **Box 1**.

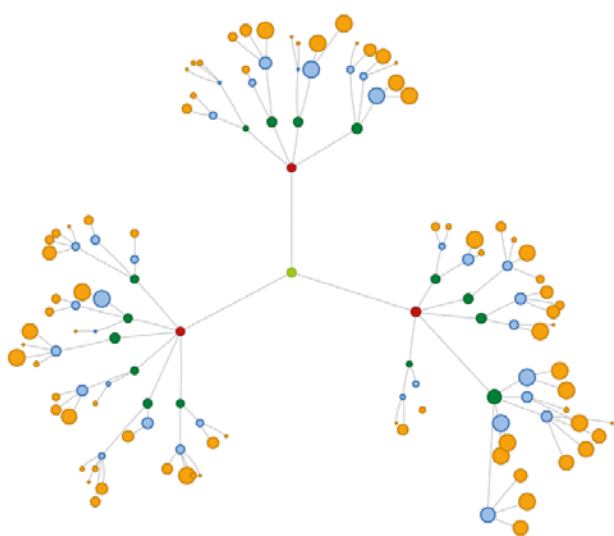
'In order to present the evaluation framework in a less complex way, once data for each indicator is collected, the values are normalised and progressively aggregated first into sub-dimensions and then into dimensions and forms in order to give a unique number for

the social capital generated in the LAG network' states Elena. This can range from 0 to 1, with a higher number representing better performance in terms of social capital. The findings are then reported and visualised through an interactive [tool](#). 'The LAG Prealpi Dolomiti has been the first to adopt this approach into its monitoring and evaluation system for this programming period and at the moment we are still collecting data for the baseline, so in a few months we will be able to populate the first graph for this programming period' suggests Elena. The [network visualised](#) is composed of numerous nodes, each one representing an indicator (yellow), sub-dimension (light blue), dimension (green), and form of social capital (red). By observing the size of a specific node, one can see the contribution of that node to the generation of social capital. The larger the size of the node, the greater its contribution is to the social capital (each node is also expressed in numeric terms). An example of this visualisation from the previous programming period can be observed in **Figure 2**.

'This tool is a practical way to measure the temperature of the social capital in the local context'

Elena expounds

Figure 2. LAG Prealpi Dolomiti's social capital generated in LEADER 2007-2013



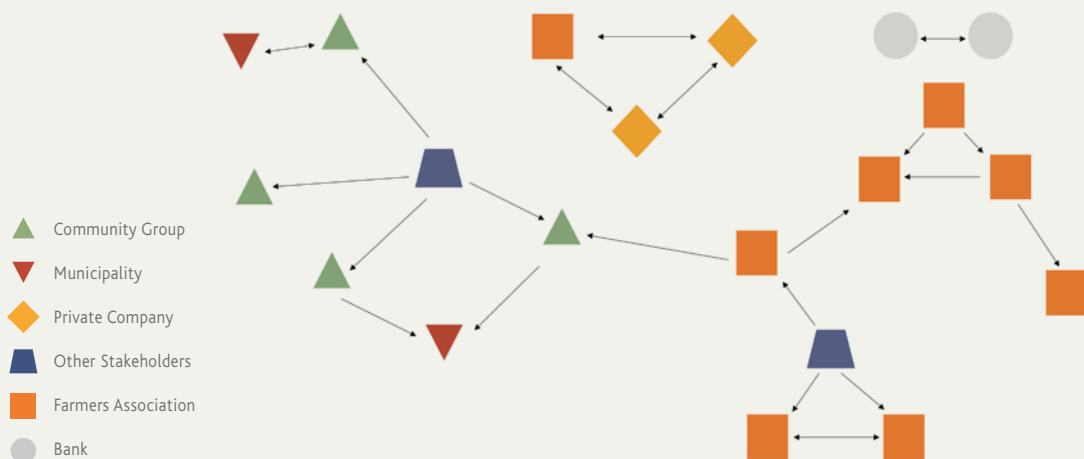
Source: [LAG Prealpi and Dolomiti \(2018\)](#)

Strengths and weaknesses of the approach

'One of the strengths of this evaluation framework is its ability to facilitate the analysis of the correlation between the efficiency and effectiveness of the LEADER/CLLD strategy and the social capital generated in the LAG' enunciates Elena. Elena continues, 'Moreover, the combination of quantitative (e.g. SNA) and qualitative methods allowed us to compare the level of social capital in different time periods'. This helps the LAG in its self-evaluation exercise to net out the perceived impact of the LEADER/CLLD strategy before and after its implementation. Finally, by using the visualisation tools employed, it not only increases the transparency and accountability of the evaluation efforts, but also, serves to enhance the understanding and discussion of the findings. While the tool can help to analyse the correlation between social capital and the LEADER/CLLD strategy's results, the tool cannot be used to explain a definitive causal link between them. Unfortunately, the approach is not able to conclude that the results achieved in the local area are only determined by the social capital generated by the LAG, as many other factors contribute to the changes observed or results achieved, and the method cannot fully disentangle them. The method can further produce biased results if sensitive data is not collected by an independent evaluator, which is why Elena recommends, 'that the LAG should involve an external actor at least for the collection

Box 1. Example of indicator: 'rate of interpersonal trust among LAG members' in 2012-2013

In the LAG Prealpi Dolomiti the values for the trust indicator collected through Social Network Analysis (SNA), were quite low. The rate of interpersonal trust among members, measured as the density of the interpersonal trust network, was 3% and 32% of LAG members were perceived by other members as isolated nodes in the trust network. The figure below graphically represents this situation. It identifies the isolated members and highlights clusters of members belonging to the same socio-economic category (e.g. banks connected to banks, public institutions with public institutions, private enterprises with private enterprises, etc.). This means that bonding features of the social capital exist.



Source: [Pisani E, Franceschetti G., Secco L., Christoforou A., \(2017\) Social Capital and Local Development: From Theory to Empirics. Palgrave Macmillan. Springer International Publishing](#)

of sensitive indicators (e.g. interpersonal trust)'. Finally, there are some open questions as to whether the social capital should be linked only to the LAG, or to the entire territory covered. 'One of the main weaknesses concerns exactly the interpretation of the findings since the social capital assessed is the one promoted by the LAG as an organisation and by its beneficiaries, so not all the actors of the territory are included' suggests Elena.

Insights for other LAGs

In terms of skills and capacity, Elena advises that 'four hours of training activities to provide the minimum information required for the LAG to learn how to run this self-assessment tool and one person working full time for a month on data collection is sufficient'. A pre-defined excel file containing all the indicators and the algorithms to measure the social capital is already established, however, it is important that other LAGs adapt this approach

to their own situations. Furthermore, the NRN can serve as a valuable support to this method. 'The Italian Rural Network has participated in the 2007-2013 programming period by facilitating data collection in nine LAGs where the research has been realised and directly collected the data for a LAG in the region of Sardinia' emphasises Elena. Elena continues, 'for this programming period TESAF and the Italian NRN have jointly organised two events in Rome where the method was presented to all of the LAG directors in Italy in order to diffuse the knowledge on the method and to offer it as a possible instrument to assess the added value of the LEADER approach'. The assessment of the added value of LEADER/CLLD is not simple, and this approach cannot be applied without challenges but, as the LAG Manager Matteo Aguanno of LAG Prealpi Dolomiti states, **'Now we can finally measure it!'** ■

1. [OECD, 2011](#)

THE EVALUATION OF LEADER/CLLD WITHIN A MULTI-FUND APPROACH

Q&A with Sweden's Madielene Wetterskog and Tina Wallin¹



Madielene Wetterskog and Tina Wallin

In Sweden, 48 LAGs have been selected to implement CLLD strategies during the programming period 2014-2020. Roughly 88% of them are being implemented through a multi-fund approach across the different European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds). Given this unique situation, the RDP Managing Authority, and specifically the Secretariat responsible for RDP evaluation has decided to assess how well the multi-fund approach works, and whether it should be improved from its current form.

How are you preparing the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD across multiple ESI Funds?

All evaluations within the RDP are coordinated by the Secretariat of Evaluation. Consequently, we can make sure that the evaluations do not overlap too much. They can even complement each other and provide insights that can be used for our future operations.

Concerning the CLLD evaluations across multiple ESI Funds, these are planned in a collaborative forum where the Managing Authorities of other ESI Funds are actively participating. In this way, the collaboration across funds and organisational borders should ensure relevance and complementarity between all evaluations related to CLLD. In the beginning of the programming period, we conducted a joint evaluation effort together with the other Managing Authorities for the EMFF, ERDF and ESF, in part focusing on the implementation of CLLD.

How are you preparing the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD across levels of governance?

Within this joint effort, the Secretariat of Evaluation plays a crucial role in providing methodological support for LAGs as well ensuring that they do not evaluate the same things across different levels of governance (e.g. RDP and local).

What evaluations are currently ongoing?

Currently, there are several evaluations that incorporate CLLD, but the evaluation primarily targeted at the RDP level is the 'Evaluation of the impact of CLLD'. For this evaluation we plan to use mainly quantitative methods that can separate CLLD and, among other things, geographical and demographical aspects. This evaluation is currently in the startup-phase and we expect preliminary results by the end of 2018. Additionally, we are also conducting two evaluations that focus both on the local and country level.

- On-going evaluation of CLLD – This evaluation is focused at the LAG level to see how the programme can be improved and, at the request from stakeholders, analysing specific phenomena, for example the Swedish four-fund construction of CLLD (University West together with the Secretariat of Evaluation).
- Evaluation of the duration of CLLD effects – Evaluators are working closely with a few LAGs that have initiated a joint evaluation project together with the Secretariat of Evaluation. Part of the evaluation is to identify successful factors for the long-term sustainability of projects, while another aspect



is to improve learning and knowledge spill overs between projects (Halmstad University together with the Secretariat of Evaluation).

Are you planning to evaluate the added value of LEADER/CLLD in any of these evaluations?

In the 'Evaluation of the impact of CLLD', besides evaluating the programme itself, this evaluation serves to find the added value of CLLD.

Have you developed any additional indicators at the RDP level for these evaluations and what data and information are you going to collect for them?

Apart from the common indicators as defined by the EU, we have a few common indicators that we use for all projects regardless of LAG, which were defined by us as the Managing Authority. These indicators are collected twice, when the applicant applies for the support (predicted value) and when the operation is completed (realised value). In addition to these, we also have LAG specific indicators that they developed themselves to address their own specific evaluation needs.

What would you recommend to other Member States based on your experiences?

The evaluation of LEADER/CLLD requires a great deal of communication and coordination activities between stakeholders across and within the funds, as well as across the multiple levels

of governance. We believe that it is vital to involve all of these stakeholders in the evaluation process and for that reason we established dedicated biannual meetings on the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD with all stakeholders. We also suggest involving the National Rural Network, especially with regard to the dissemination of evaluation findings. ■



Send your questions to:

info@ruralevaluation.eu



1. Madielene Wetterskog is the analyst responsible for the evaluations of CLLD at the Secretariat of Evaluation and Tina Wallin is an analyst working with the monitoring of CLLD at the Swedish RDP Managing Authority – The Swedish Board of Agriculture.

A FOCUS ON THE LEADER/CLLD DELIVERY MECHANISM

A Conversation with the Finnish Managing Authority



Laura Jänis



Peer-to-peer visit of LAG Aisapari (Western Finland) to LAG Jyväskylä (Central Finland)

The Evaluation Helpdesk sat down with Laura Jänis, Senior Officer of Rural Affairs at the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in Finland to discuss the intricate process of evaluating LEADER/CLLD, why it is so important and what makes the Finnish approach unique and innovative.

'We are starting to get prepared for the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD at the RDP level with a view towards the Annual Implementation Report to be submitted in 2019. For us, this is quite an ambitious process, because we decided to go beyond the common evaluation questions set up in the EU Regulation' states Laura. Laura continues, 'one of the special features of the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD in Finland revolves around an additional question established at the RDP level, which concerns how LEADER/CLLD is delivered through the seven principles of the LEADER method'. While this question is established at the RDP level, the activities to answer it are linked

with those undertaken by the Local Action Groups (LAGs) at the local level. 'In our evaluation objectives, we want to make sure that LEADER/CLLD strategies are designed and implemented according to the LEADER method' asserts Laura. However, a greater focus on the delivery mechanism means going beyond a simple consistency check of the LEADER principles. In Finland, this means assessing how LAGs work on a day-to-day basis as important facilitators of local development within their territories.

A peer-to-peer approach

LAGs must design their own quality management handbooks, which explain in detail how the LAG will work and the activities it will carry out. This handbook is then used as the backbone to prepare a peer-to-peer assessment of the LAGs organisational performance. After the visits, a peer-to-peer report is drawn up and submitted from LAG to LAG. The report is handled with the staff and board



of the LAG. A follow up of recommendations and findings is an important part of the process. The RDP Managing Authority collects good practices from the peer-to-peer findings and circulates these with all the LAGs. 'Through this kind of evaluation, we not only try to complement the common evaluation requested by the EU regulation, but we also try to improve the delivery process, identify good practices, and enhance the achievements of the CLLD results' explains Laura.

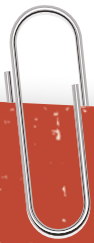
Annual reporting templates for Local Action Groups

Peer-to-peer assessments by LAGs represent just one of the instruments used to coordinate and collect information for the RDP Managing Authority. Another instrument used consists of a common reporting template for all LAGs with a maximum length of 10 pages. The template has been devised under the supervision of a specific 'LEADER expert group' set up within the RDP Managing Authority, whose role is to orchestrate different stakeholders and activities connected to LEADER/CLLD. 'The template collects several pieces of information on the CLLD strategy, such as the trainings, animation, and networking activities undertaken by the LAGs, the main results, impacts and conclusions from the supported projects, and a short description of the most innovative projects supported' states Laura. The reports also contain a section on the assessment of the added value of the CLLD strategy. 'In this specific section it is up to the LAG to decide how to assess and report on the added

value generated' suggests Laura. Laura elaborates, 'Questionnaires or more quantitative analysis can be conducted, but LAGs can also simply describe their own view in qualitative terms'. 'It is very important to carefully define the data and information requested from the LAGs as one must remember that an in-depth analysis of all information received must later be undertaken' postulates Laura.

Performance oriented evaluation of LEADER/CLLD

In Finland, nine percent of the RDP budget allocated to Measure 19 (LEADER) is saved as a reserve fund to incentivise the LAGs to improve their performance. 'The RDP Managing Authority assesses the overall performance of the LAG using roughly 20 criteria' states Laura. This assessment is completed twice in the programming period and the LAGs with the best performance are rewarded. 'Among these criteria, the RDP Managing Authority monitors the progress of each LAG towards the three most relevant objectives specified in their LEADER/CLLD strategy, as well as through more qualitative information collected in the reporting templates' suggests Laura. Laura concludes, 'The assessment of the delivery mechanism becomes a useful exercise when it brings practical lessons, and better performance in terms of results...in this way, lessons and good practices on the delivery mechanism of LEADER/CLLD can be stored at the RDP level, and shared with multiple actors, as well as transferred between the LAGs themselves'. ■



BACK TO BASICS: MEASURING CAP IMPACTS (PART 1/3)

Assessing CAP Pillar II impacts on the competitiveness of agriculture

Why are CAP impacts assessed?


The latest CAP reform has shifted policy support from product to producer support and at the same placed greater emphasis on an area-based approach. Moreover, to provide a response to economic challenges (declining rates of productivity growth, pressures on production costs due to high input prices and the deteriorating position of farmers in the food supply chain) the current CAP aims to enhance viable food production through a set of adapted CAP Pillar I and II instruments. CAP Pillar II instruments, specifically, contribute to the competitiveness of the agricultural sector operating within a properly functioning supply chain over the long term. Chapter 7 of the Annual Implementation Report to be submitted in 2019 requires Member States to show the achievements and impacts of CAP Pillar II interventions on the competitiveness of the agricultural sector in the form of net values.

What is to be assessed?

Three common impact indicators and answers to evaluation questions are related to the EU level objective of viable food production (CEQ 27).

How is this assessed?

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 three common impact indicators.²



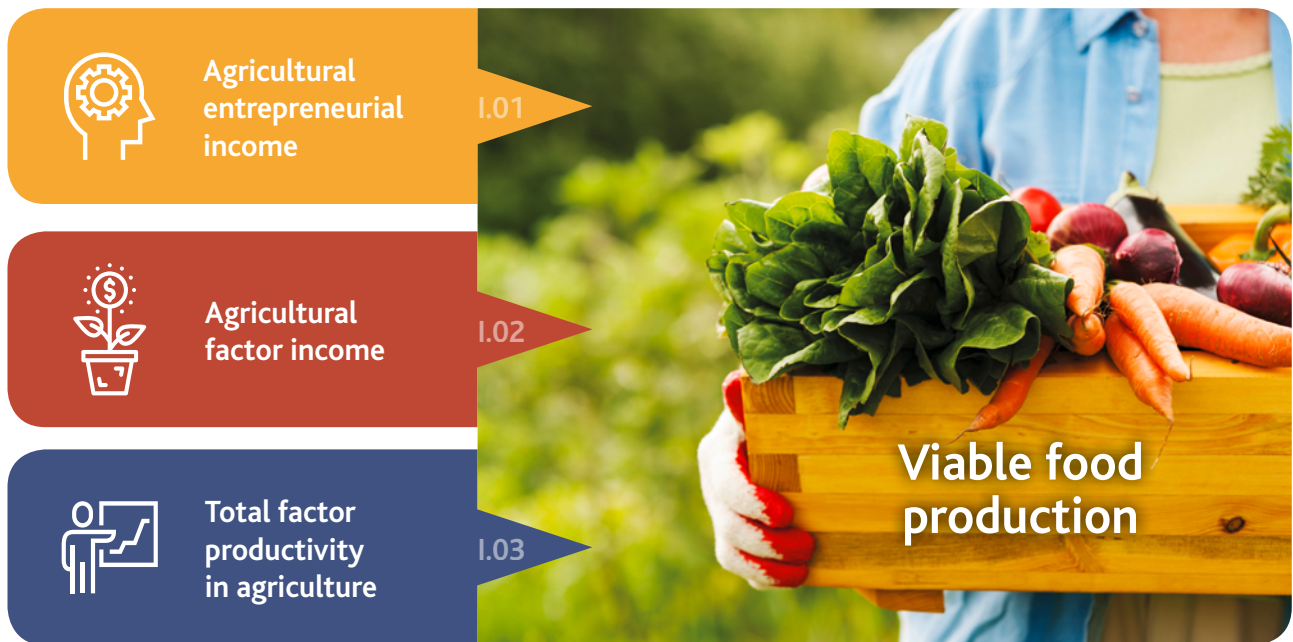
SEE FIGURES
ON THE
NEXT PAGE!

The Evaluation Helpdesk will be providing further guidance in the upcoming [Guidelines: Assessing RDP Achievements and Impacts in 2019](#) on the selection of evaluation approaches for the assessment of CAP Pillar II impacts on the competitiveness of agriculture.

1. <https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/cap-indicators/impact/2016-impact-indicators-fiches.pdf>
2. Subject to data availability and quality in the Member States/regions.



Impact Indicators Related to Viable Food Production¹



What are the possible challenges and solutions?

CHALLENGES



Evaluation for 2019 must be conducted in a short period of time

The preparation and structuring phase should therefore start as early as possible, ideally in 2018.



Delays in data provisions at the EU level (FADN, Eurostat) needed for the assessment

Evaluators should use national/regional databases and accounts. Data may also be collected through the RDP monitoring system. Data gaps can be bridged through quantitative surveys or by using qualitative methods.

SOLUTIONS





CALENDAR - WHAT'S ON?

- **DE – 20-21 March 2018 – NRN Meeting:** The 10th NRNs' meeting focused on inspiring examples of rural development projects which are forward-looking in their delivery. The event featured workshop sessions on digital villages, rural mobility and smart supply chains, as well as field visits to projects and a rural planning simulation game. [Read more >>>](#)
- **NL – 4-5 April 2018 – M&E on the Cutting Edge: Communicating Evidence for Sustainable Development:** This conference aims to seek clarity in the role that communication can play in generating and using evidence for sustainable development. How can evidence generated by research, monitoring and evaluation be better used to influence decision making and transformational change. [Read more >>>](#)
- **NL – 4-6 April 2018 – Research Transparency and Reproducibility Training (RT2):** RT2 provides participants with an overview of tools and best practices for transparent and reproducible social science research. [Read more >>>](#)
- **UK – 2-3 May 2018 – UKES Annual Evaluation Conference: The Quality of Evidence from Evaluation - demand, supply, and use:** This year's theme focuses on quality throughout the evaluation cycle. By framing the theme around the evaluation cycle, we can consider the demand for, production and uptake of high quality evidence from evaluations. [Read more >>>](#)
- **IT – 3-4 May 2018 – Evaluating Rural Inequality: Identifying effective approaches to reduce rural disparities IFAD:** This event will explore critical questions regarding whether strategies and programmes that aim to eradicate rural poverty reduce disparities within rural areas and what potentials evaluation has to inform organisations and governments if their interventions are indeed contributing to reducing inequality within rural areas. [Read more >>>](#)
- **FI – 17-18 May 2018 – Good Practice Workshop on Evaluating the Added Value of LEADER/CLLD:** Organised by the Evaluation Helpdesk and the Finnish 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 the added value of LEADER/CLLD. [Read more >>>](#)
- **BE – 25 May 2018 – Rural Networks Steering Group:** [Read more >>>](#)
- **DE – 14-15 June 2018 – Spring meeting of the working group "Structural policies" of the German Evaluation Society (DeGEval):** Future design of structural funds and role of evaluation; evaluation design and evaluations; first experiences with the evaluation plan. [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 >>>](#)

What's Going on in
YOUR Member State?

Share evaluation related
events by emailing
info@ruralevaluation.eu

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.*

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