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Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013

Evaluation in the current period

Evaluation serves as an important tool allowing to better focus programming on needs, better identify programme process and needs for change, and better give accountancy of public money spent.

In the 2000-2006 period, evaluation of Rural Development programmes is organised as a 4-step process comprising ex-ante evaluation (in 2000), mid-term evaluation (in 2003), mid-term evaluation update (in 2005; non-compulsory for EAGGF-Guarantee funded programmes) and ex-post evaluation (in 2008). These evaluations are all carried out at programme level, while the Commission produces syntheses of the mid-term and the ex-post evaluations.

The process is guided by a set of Guidance documents developed by the Commission in co-operation with Member States. These guidelines aim at co-ordinating and harmonizing the programme authorities' approach to facilitate the task of the Commission to carry out synthesis evaluations producing overall results and conclusions at Community level. For this purpose, the guidelines set out a catalogue of some 40 Common evaluation questions to be treated by all reports, based on some 150 related evaluation indicators.

Main elements of the new evaluation system for the 2007-13:

- A limited number of common indicators used for evaluation are defined in the 'Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework'. Programme authorities will complement them by programme-specific indicators which reflect the specificity of the programme strategy.
- Ex-ante evaluations analyse in detail for each programme its strategy and objectives, including baselines, quantifiable objectives, and target levels.
- Evaluation work will be organised on a continuous basis leading to the mid-term evaluation in 2010 and the ex-post evaluation in 2015;
- Evaluation in the framework of the programme partnerships will be accompanied, where appropriate, by horizontal thematic studies carried out by the Commission in co-operation with programme authorities;

- The Commission will establish a support structure within the European Network for Rural Development which aims at capacity building, exchange, and methodology development regarding evaluation of Rural Development programmes. It will support the evaluation process at Member State level through the following functions: a) helpdesk for programming authorities and evaluators; b) platform and facilitator of transnational exchange between authorities and evaluators in different MS/regions; c) training provider for evaluators and Members of programme authorities and monitoring committees; d) organizer of thematic seminars.

Main changes compared to the current evaluation system from the point of view of programme authorities

- The ex-ante evaluation will be carried out in time to lay the basis for programming. It serves as basis for all later evaluation activities;
- From 2008 onwards programme authorities will report on the outcomes of their ongoing evaluation. In 2008, the provisions for the establishment of the evaluation system in the national/regional context (indicators, administrative arrangements, data collection provisions) will be described. In 2009 and from 2011 to 2014, ongoing evaluation will report on the data collected in relation to evaluation indicators. Only in 2010 (mid-term) and in 2015 (ex-post) should a full analysis and a judgement in how far the programmes contribute to achieving their strategic objectives be provided.
- The Commission will provide a support infrastructure for Member States through the Evaluation network in the context of the European Network for Rural Development.

Synoptic overview of developments from the current to the future Monitoring and Evaluation system

Current System 2000-2006	Criticism	Proposal for 2007-13
Ex-ante evaluations to accompany programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ex-ante evaluations come late; they are not well-developed. Baselines and target levels are normally not well identified. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ex-ante evaluations provide timely contribution to programming. Ex-ante evaluations contribute to defining clear baselines, quantifiable objectives and target levels, as well as related programme-specific indicators
Mid-term evaluations to be submitted in 2003 (year n+4 of programming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluations at Member State level come too early to provide robust judgements on results let alone impacts of measures and programmes. Evaluations came very late as input for post 2006 Rural Development Regulation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Continuous” evaluations with accompanying thematic studies by Commission provide timely input for policy development. The current “one snapshot in time” approach and the overburdening of mid-term evaluations are avoided.
Mid-term <i>update</i> “where appropriate” for EAGGF-Guarantee supported programmes and obligatory for EAGGF-Guidance financed programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Main purpose is information on programme results and impacts, but comes too late for programme changes and as input at Community level for following programming period. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dropped as separate exercise and replaced by ‘continuous’ evaluation
Ex-post evaluation for each programme to be submitted by end 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added-value at MS level not evident 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Light” exercise, representing the final element of the continuous evaluation by programme authorities
EU monitoring system and evaluation system developed independently of each other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of harmonisation leads to a monitoring system that is not used and/or does not cover the needs of evaluations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harmonisation of monitoring and evaluation through the “Common framework” and on basis of a limited set of common monitoring and evaluation indicators
Detailed guidance documents for evaluation, including numerous Common evaluation questions, criteria and indicators (+/- 150)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidelines considered as very useful but criticised as too inflexible and containing too many indicators Guidelines were presented too late when programme preparation was already well advanced in most MS/ regions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear separation between (few) Common monitoring and evaluation indicators and more detailed programme-specific indicators Development of a Guidance document which helps identify baselines and programme-specific indicators (preparations by Commission already under way)
No specific helpdesk function of the Commission for evaluations at MS level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commission should establish a helpdesk and a platform for the trans-national exchange of experiences and good practice for programme authorities and evaluators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commission to develop an evaluation network in the context of the European Network for Rural Development