



European Evaluation Network
for Rural Development



European Commission
Agriculture and Rural Development

GUIDELINES ON

THE MID-TERM
EVALUATION OF THE
RURAL DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMMES

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European Evaluation Network
for Rural Development

The European Evaluation Network for Rural Development (abbreviated to “Evaluation Expert Network”) operates under the responsibility of the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development. The overall aim of the Network is to increase the usefulness of evaluation as a tool for improving the formulation and implementation of rural development policies by helping to establish good practice and capacity building in the evaluation of rural development programmes up until 2013.

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GUIDELINES ON

**THE MID-TERM
EVALUATION OF THE
RURAL DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMMES**

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I CONTEXT

1.1 Objective of this paper

In 2010 the process of ongoing evaluation of rural development programmes will take the form of separate mid-term evaluation (MTE) reports by independent evaluators. The evaluations will be carried out at Rural Development Programme (RDP) level and will be synthesized by the Commission at EU level.

The objective of this paper is to support Member States and the relevant national or regional authorities to frame the work of their independent evaluators in the context of the preparation and implementation of these mid-term evaluations. In this regard, the paper responds to the needs that a number of Member States have expressed in the needs assessment that was carried out in 2008.

Community evaluation guidelines are already available as part of the Handbook on the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF)¹. The present paper supplements these Community guidelines, in particular by providing further guidance on key aspects of the MTE process, in view of contributing to the adoption of a consistent approach across the EU-27.

1.2 What is the purpose of the Mid-Term Evaluation and what is its link with ongoing evaluation?

Evaluation is the strategic process that looks at programme implementation and the results and impacts achieved. Following Article 86 of Council Regulation 1698/2005, the MTE will assess the utilisation of EAFRD resources, the effectiveness of the way in which this is programmed and the results and impacts of RDP interventions against programme strategies and in achieving Community priorities. Consideration will be given to the relevance and efficiency of the programme and its implementation and factors contributing to the success or failure of programme implementation will be identified. Based on these evaluations, steps to improve the quality and effectiveness of programmes and their implementation will be proposed and lessons with regard to rural development policy will be drawn.

The MTE has a distinctive and critical role as a formal mid-point review which informs adjustments of the current programmes and may also contribute to the design of the subsequent programmes. However, in looking ahead to the MTE it is important to take account of the role that it plays in the context of ongoing evaluation. The Community guidelines stress the importance of embedding the MTE into a continuous process of evaluation-related activities established and carried out from the very beginning of the programming period. This means that the MTE must not be considered as a one-off exercise, but as one element of a dynamic process: ongoing evaluation activities are expected to provide a solid ground for a high quality MTE; in turn, the outcomes of the MTE will feed into the activities to be carried out up to the preparation of the ex post evaluation. The MTE is

¹ See in particular guidance note B, "Evaluation guidelines", in Annex 1 of the Handbook on the CMEF: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/eval/guidance/note_a_en.pdf

thus framed within this ongoing evaluation process as specific element, but is intrinsically linked with this continuous process.

This means that the MTE has to draw on previous evaluation activities. These include the ex ante evaluation (e.g. in terms of establishing the intervention logic of the measures and programme, target levels etc.), data collection activities (including monitoring), as well as any other activity carried out at national/regional or Community level (e.g. thematic studies, recently established Community guidance documents, the Community synthesis of ex-ante evaluations, etc.).

Framing the MTE in the context of ongoing evaluation also implies making the link with previous programming periods. The lessons learned from evaluations of previous RDPs can support the preparation of the MTE, by anticipating possible problems and making suitable preparations for overcoming them. This could concern, for example, evaluation challenges linked with specific rural development measures or particular situations, methodological challenges in assessing certain types of impacts or in quantifying indicators. Accordingly, appropriate methodological requirements could be included in the terms of reference for the MTE; the common and programme-specific evaluation questions and indicators could be reviewed in order to take account of any specific problems identified on the basis of previous evaluations.

Although the MTE is an integral part of the ongoing evaluation approach, a consequence of the distinct nature of its role is that there are specific activities required by way of preparation. It is on these aspects on which this guidance note concentrates.

The MTE also faces its own distinctive challenges as to what can be observed in terms of results and impacts. Although occurring at the mid-point of the programme period, the cycle of programme implementation means that in reality programmes are at an early stage in implementation. Many of the impacts sought take time to emerge, and therefore little by way of impact is likely to be evident by this point. Progress in some areas is therefore more likely to be measurable at the result level and through the associated indicators. For instance, with respect to the Leader Axis, the mid-term evaluation will cover a phase mainly used for preparatory and structuring tasks (capacity building and selection of local action groups).

The processes of programme reporting take time and, depending on the sources of data (e.g. claims) and the frequency of its collection, the availability of result data may also be limited. For example, the indicator fiche for result indicator 3² - number of holdings/enterprises introducing new products and/or new techniques - suggests a survey of beneficiaries two years after the award of support, as best practice in data collection. In a MTE conducted in 2010 this could only therefore address the very earliest beneficiaries, i.e. those awarded support in 2007.

² See in particular guidance note I, "result indicator fiches", in Annex 3 of the Handbook on the CMEF: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/eval/guidance/note_i_en.pdf

1.3 Main steps of the MTE

There are three main steps which must be completed in carrying out a MTE. These are:

- Preparation
- Implementation
- Dissemination of results

Evidence gathered by the Evaluation Helpdesk from the previous programming period along with that from the 2008 Member State needs assessment conducted by the Helpdesk indicates that RDP stakeholders face challenges in preparing for and undertaking MTEs. These challenges include drafting the terms of reference, organising tender procedures, selecting evaluators and using appropriate evaluation methodologies for the MTE. This paper responds to these challenges and mainly concentrates on the first of these steps (see section 2). However, some key considerations in relation to the latter two steps will also be identified (see sections 3 and 4).

II PREPARATORY STEPS, EQUIPPING YOUR EVALUATOR

The following steps are presented in an order which represents the basis of a logical linear approach for undertaking the necessary activities leading to the implementation of the MTE.

2.1 Review of common and programme-specific evaluation questions and related indicators

The CMEF provides a framework for the evaluation of RDPs, which anticipates and makes allowance for the differences between the various Member State and regional programmes. It does not and cannot predict or precisely encompass the full range of specificities of the individual RDPs. This does not compromise the rigour and usefulness of the CMEF; rather it can be added to, complemented or fine-tuned to allow these to be appropriately and accurately addressed, whilst still providing the framework and core indicators to allow for comparability and aggregation at EU level.

In preparing for the MTE it must therefore be borne in mind that the aim is to evaluate your programme, thus capturing its specificities whilst fitting within the CMEF. Unless your preparations take account of both aspects the evaluators may face difficulties in reconciling this. Your preparations for your MTE should therefore anticipate the precise data collection needs for this evaluation to meet both your programme specificities and the CMEF and to facilitate the evaluation process. This is a fundamental and vital step in ensuring that the evaluators are able to undertake an efficient, effective and meaningful evaluation.

In order to achieve this, the evaluators must be provided with an appropriate set of data and evaluation questions and indicators which are demonstrably capable of capturing and assessing the full range of intended effects of the programmes, by respecting both the CMEF requirements and the specificities of the individual RDP. In addition to identifying the data to be provided by the managing authority this should also anticipate the additional data which the independent evaluators will be requested to collect (e.g. from external secondary sources and through primary means, such as surveys of beneficiaries). It would be normal to expect the Managing Authority to provide all the required programme management and reporting data and to identify any sources used in developing the programme baselines. Similarly it is important that the managing authority makes arrangements to ensure that the evaluators are able to readily access relevant data sets. Independent evaluators would normally be expected to propose their own approaches to acquiring primary data on results and impacts and any additional secondary or contextual data to properly support the assessment of impact.

Both the common elements provided by the CMEF and the programme-specific (additional) evaluation questions and their related indicators must be identified. These evaluation questions and indicators should therefore be considered and reconciled against the specificities and objectives of the RDPs, checking for 'fit' and precision to ensure that they are capable of comprehensively reflecting and capturing the intended effects of the supported interventions and activities.

The important thing here is therefore to identify the right questions (see below) that you should be asking in order to ensure that data collection and respective responsibilities are correctly specified, and that any difficulties for the evaluators in this regard are anticipated. This drives a process of cross checking and reconciliation to ensure the relevance, applicability and appropriateness of the framework.

The primary question you must ask yourselves and from which the subsequent and more specific questions will flow is therefore:

What are the common and specific evaluation questions that the MTE will seek to answer and which information and data will be required in order to answer them? This question needs to be considered in the context of your programme overall; this includes its specificities, its contribution to the Community objectives, as well as to wider regional and national objectives and the way in which the RDP measures are implemented and the results and impacts are generated. As a general rule, all common evaluation questions referring to measures which have been included in the programme have to be addressed by the respective MTE.

A number of further points that you need to consider arise here:

With regard to the common evaluation questions and indicators which relate to the measures included in your programmes:

- To what extent do the common evaluation questions and indicators as applied in your programme capture the full range of results and impacts of the respective RDP measures implemented?
- How comprehensive are they in reflecting the full spectrum of what was intended in implementing these measures?
- Is there a need for any further fine tuning?
- To what extent and in what way have any variations from the CMEF arising as a result of fine tuning been justified?
- Are they sufficiently consistent with the CMEF to enable the European synthesis of the MTEs?

Overall, the programme's ex ante evaluation regarding the intervention logic may be helpful to address the topics listed above.

Regarding the programme-specific evaluation questions and related indicators:

- To what extent do your programme specific (additional) questions and indicators reflect and capture the programme-specific effects and characteristics of what it was intended to achieve?
- How well do they address the programme's specificities and its associated priorities and objectives (e.g. at regional or national level as appropriate)?

Where gaps are identified it may be necessary to define further additional questions or indicators.

Work in this area is already progressing in a significant number of Member States or regions in the context of the overall approach to ongoing evaluation. In some cases this is being undertaken in house by the Managing Authorities (e.g. the Republic of Ireland) whilst in other countries (such as Scotland) external contractors have been engaged to fulfil this role. In Italy research suggests a critical role for this phase in developing a working document to guide the evaluation approach.

Once again, the programme's ex ante evaluation findings regarding the intervention logic of the programme and its measures may be helpful in understanding what was intended and how it was justified, thus informing your approach.

2.2 Data collection and information gathering

The work specified in the previous section should ensure that the data requirements for the MTE covering both the CMEF and the programme specific requirements are correctly and comprehensively specified. This should also ensure that data collection responsibilities (e.g. between managing authorities, any other data providers, and evaluators) are clearly demarcated and allocated. In order to ensure that the evaluators are able to undertake the assessment of the results and impacts of the programmes, it is necessary for the Managing Authority to ensure that sufficient data are available. Access to such data is critical in ensuring an effective, timely and efficient evaluation process. There are two main sets of considerations here:

- What the data requirements are; and
- How and by whom these data will be sourced or provided.

Employing an effective framework should ensure that the need to go beyond the core CMEF requirements in specifying the necessary data for the evaluation is addressed in order to enable the full assessment of programme effectiveness, efficiency and relevance.

The evaluation of results and impact depends very heavily on utilising the largely quantitative data and information collected through the monitoring processes. Effective monitoring systems should ensure that the majority of these monitoring data are collated, available and up to date. Notwithstanding this, it is important to recognise that, although the monitoring process and these data are essential to the evaluation process, they are of themselves insufficient to fully inform or support it. The ongoing evaluation approach itself incorporates a clear recognition of this by including provisions to undertake specific studies and investigations.

The programme specific and CMEF data needs covering baselines, inputs, outputs and results should flow directly from the framework of evaluation questions and indicators, if it is correctly specified. This may require further work in order to check where in the programme management process data are actually recorded, what the procedures actually are and that the data are in fact being collected. In effect, the framework of indicators and evaluation questions can act as a checklist here. You should anticipate that the evaluators will need to access management databases and any relevant studies you have undertaken or commissioned.

It would normally be expected that this information and these data would be provided to the evaluators by the Managing Authority either directly or through third parties responsible to the Managing Authority for the delivery of specific measures.

Further key considerations in ensuring the accessibility and utility of such information and data are:

- Clarity of responsibility for ensuring access to data where third party delivery is involved, the responsibility of ensuring this should normally rest with the Managing Authority;
- Checking and ensuring that the reporting tools and software used are accessible to the evaluators or that relevant reports can be extracted;
- Ensuring the provision of clear guidance or explanations of the various data sources;

- Providing clear information regarding the consistency of approach to monitoring data across the programme, delivery organisations, any sub-regions and time, and
- Securing commitment to the evaluation process from stakeholders, such as third party delivery organisations, greatly enhances the accessibility and usability of data and the overall evaluation effort.

In assessing results and impacts and answering the common evaluation questions it can be anticipated that evaluators will necessarily undertake interviews and surveys with managers, beneficiaries and other programme or rural stakeholders. Programme managers should be prepared to identify and provide contact details or data bases to facilitate such activities.

Alongside this it will be essential to ensure that sufficient relevant wider data on general socio-economic and environmental trends are made available at the most appropriate geographical level possible in order to inform the assessment of impacts. Common issues arise here in relation to the evaluation of regional programmes where these wider data may not be available at the programme level and regarding the updating of these data sets, where the frequency of this may be insufficient to illustrate any trend shifts.

Many of these data sources are widely accessible, others may be held by Managing Authorities, their agencies or other government departments. In some cases publicly available versions may be restricted in scope or be less up to date than what is available to Managing Authorities. A pragmatic balance therefore has to be struck and agreed between the Managing Authority and evaluators as to who is responsible for providing which elements of these data. Given the variation between such data sources in the Member States and regions and the specificity of the respective RDPs it is impossible to give definitive guidance here. The best approach therefore appears to be for Managing Authorities and evaluators to negotiate the responsibilities, but the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that this happens must rest with the Managing Authority.

The use of such data is vitally important in establishing baseline positions and trends so that factors such as deadweight may be taken into account in attributing impacts to programme interventions. This aspect is currently the focus of a thematic working group established by the Helpdesk, which addresses the assessment of impacts (good practices, methodological aspects, tools etc).

A recent guidance document prepared for DG Agriculture and Rural Development on implementing the **High Nature Value** impact indicator identified the difficulties presented by the limited availability and variation in the level and completeness of relevant data sources. Some of the lessons from this research are transferable to other aspects of the assessment of the impacts of the RDP where there are similar difficulties in identifying relevant, comprehensive and consistent data sets.

This research highlighted that effective assessment of quantitative changes in HNV farming will require the adaptation and development of existing data bases and that the establishment of new sample surveys is likely to be necessary to capture changes in HNV farming practices and in associated nature values. In order to monitor changes in HNV farming, two aspects need to be addressed:

- Changes in HNV farming practices
- Changes in the ecological condition (species populations and habitats) of HNV farmland.

In an ideal situation, these aspects would be monitored using comprehensive data on farming practices and nature values across a region or country. However, the data sources available generally do not permit such an approach and establishing comprehensive biodiversity monitoring systems is resource intensive. Only an investment in appropriate data collection and monitoring schemes will ultimately allow a full evaluation of the impact. Instead, a case study or stratified random sampling approach designed to provide representative statistics on agricultural holdings at regional and national levels can be used for the assessment of changes in species and/or habitats and in farming practices.

No simple numerical indicators can be devised that would indicate how rural development programmes are impacting on HNV farming and forestry. Rather, it is a question of using baskets of indicators to gather an understanding of how HNV farming is evolving, and then using expert judgment to assess the role rural development measures may be playing in this evolution.

2.3 Establishing the Evaluation Steering Group

Setting up a steering group to accompany and support the MTE process is regarded in the Community evaluation guidelines as being highly advisable and representing best practice in engaging and consulting internal and external stakeholders involved in the planning and implementation of programmes. As such it can extend the relevance of evaluation within the implementing bodies, and contributes to ownership and governance of the evaluation process by enabling them to contribute to and influence the process. Thus it adds value to the evaluation findings and the implementation of any recommendations or adjustments. It also contributes significantly to the development of evaluation capacity within the stakeholder group and through this to ensuring a high quality evaluation.

A steering group may be established as a standing group for the ongoing evaluation of the programme overall or it may be convened explicitly for the MTE. It is this latter case which is considered here. Such a steering group should be established at the earliest possible stage in the process, ideally prior to the establishment of the terms of reference. The key roles an evaluation steering group can undertake will also be affected by the nature and focus of the individual programme, how it is delivered and the membership of the steering group. These core roles and activities for such a group will include³;

- Providing the basis for consultation and involvement of stakeholders;
- Contributing specialist skills, organisational or sectoral expertise supporting the process and evaluators;
- Establishing the evaluation terms of reference;
- Securing buy-in from delivery bodies and other stakeholders helping to facilitate the availability of data, information and contacts;
- Extending and ensuring the relevance of the evaluation to and amongst stakeholders;
- Monitor the work of the evaluators and provide feedback to them on an iterative basis;
- Providing feedback on the effects of interventions to those involved in policy development; and
- Contributing to the dissemination of the evaluation and supporting the implementation of the outcomes.

The membership of an evaluation steering group will be affected by the nature and focus of the programme, its scale, how it is delivered and the roles which it is agreed the group will undertake. It is desirable that as a group it should be sufficiently large to possess adequate technical and methodological skills and knowledge of the programme and evaluation and be representative of the various stakeholders. The technical expertise of the members of the steering group should properly reflect (in a balanced way) the content of the programmes concerned. In the interests of representativeness it seems reasonable to suggest a reasonably large group but this should not be so large as to impede its effectiveness. Where a

³ The working paper 'Organisation of ongoing evaluation' of the Italian Rete Rurale Nazionale 2007-2013 provides further explanations concerning the role of the Steering Group.

See <http://www.reterurale.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/337>

standing group is implemented for the whole ongoing evaluation process, a link with the Programme Monitoring Committee is likely to offer operational advantages e.g. in convening meetings and adding value by extending the relevance of the evaluation.

At the minimum the membership should include;

- Managing Authority and other representatives involved in programme delivery;
- The paying agency;
- Those in charge of rural policy development and programme design;
- Members of the evaluation unit (if established).

2.4 The Evaluation Mandate

Good practice suggests that in setting up the evaluation steering group and involving it in preparing the terms of reference for the MTE an evaluation mandate should be prepared. This mandate will guide the preparation of the terms of reference and the work of the steering group. The mandate should provide an overview of the context, scope, timing and objectives of the MTE and should be consistent with the approach to ongoing evaluation. As such, it is the primary document which will focus the evaluation activity and enable the steering group to prepare target-oriented terms of reference for the MTE.

In the interests of consistency with the remit for the evaluation steering group outlined above it would be desirable that the steering group be involved in the preparation of the evaluation mandate. Where an ongoing evaluation steering group is overseeing that approach, that group would be expected to contribute to the preparation of the mandate from the outset. Where a specific steering group exists or is to be established for the MTE, then that group may become involved in its preparation once established. In both cases the Managing Authority (and where one exists, the evaluation unit) would be expected to initiate that process. Approval of the mandate would be required from the Managing Authority confirming its consistency with the requirements of the CMEF. Good practice would also suggest approval by the steering group.

2.5 Terms of Reference

The preparation of a good quality set of terms of reference is fundamental to the design and implementation of an effective approach to the Mid Term Evaluation. The previous tasks detailed above are all essential preparatory elements in this process and form the basis on which the terms of reference can be developed and drafted. It is the responsibility of the Managing Authority to ensure that these tasks are undertaken, that the terms of reference accurately reflect these and that the resources required and referred to are in place. The evaluators respond to the terms of reference and these two elements together form the basis of the contract for the delivery of the evaluation, i.e. it is a shared responsibility between the contracting partners. The terms of reference of the contract should therefore detail the evaluation requirements and expectations and the way in which the different parties will work with each other in its implementation.

Whilst this guidance note has stressed the distinct and specific needs of the MTE, it is important to bear in mind that it is a constituent part of the ongoing evaluation process. As such it should both be informed by and contribute to that process. Where there are relevant

findings emerging from the ongoing evaluation, these should be fed into the terms of reference to avoid duplication of effort on the one hand and add value to the process on the other.

There is no given prescription for the content of the terms of reference. The following suggested headings are drawn from a variety of sources and reflect common good practice standards.

The Structure of the Tender

An indicative outline for structuring the technical specifications of the terms of reference is provided in the Annex 1 to this guidance document. Contracting Authorities may wish to adapt this standard layout. The technical specifications have to be complemented by the relevant provisions concerning tendering procedures and contractual clauses applying to each specific tender.

The content of the main elements of the tender technical specifications is provided in the following:

(a) The Context of the MTE

This should set out the statutory requirements and the framework for the evaluation. Relevant legislation and supporting documents should be provided as an annex to the terms of reference.

A description of the background and purpose of the evaluation should be provided along with a description and definition of the actors involved, specifically the Managing Authority and the steering group.

(b) Scope of the MTE

This should include the scope of the evaluation in terms of the programme (including a description of the rural development measures included in the programme), the geographical area concerned, its focus and the programming period. Any specific focus intended within the evaluation, be that on specific geographical areas, approaches or sectors should be identified and justified.

(c) Objectives of the evaluation

Here the following common objectives for the MTE should be detailed, together with any programme-specific objectives that you wish to incorporate.

- To assess the degree of utilisation of resources, the effectiveness and efficiency of the programming of the EAFRD, its socio-economic impact and its impact on the Community priorities.
- To review the goals of the programme and aim to draw lessons concerning rural development policy.
- To identify the factors that contributed to the success or failure of the programmes' implementation, including as regards sustainability, and the identification of best practice.
- To propose measures to improve the quality of the programme and its implementation.

(d) Evaluation questions

The formal requirements of the evaluation mean that the terms of reference must list the common and additional/programme specific evaluation questions to be answered by the evaluator.

(e) Tasks to be performed by the evaluator

The terms of reference should essentially reflect the four main phases or tasks of evaluation which will be required in the methodology and within which the evaluators should propose their detailed approach. Sufficient scope must be permitted to allow the evaluator to design and propose a method based on their expert judgement. In a competitive tendering process this will afford a basis for differentiation in identifying the most appropriate tender. The four main phases are:

- Structuring;
- Observing;
- Analysing; and
- Judging.

A brief explanation of each of these phases, focused on the specificities of the MTE, is provided in the textbox at the end of this section. A fuller explanation is provided on pages 10 and 11 of the Community guidelines on ongoing evaluation (Handbook on the CMEF, Guidance Note B).

(f) Timing and content of deliverables

You should set out:

- The required outputs and deliverables from the evaluation;
- Your requirements in terms of the content, style or format of these;
- The key contract milestones;
- A clear timeline set against all these elements.

These outputs and deliverables might include:

- The evaluation report and its supporting documents and appendices;
- An executive summary report/reports for wider dissemination and distribution (these may be differentiated by target group);
- Any specific sectoral or thematic reports developed either as part of the programme evaluation or, for example, for regional programmes contributing to a national report; and
- Any requirements for presentations to disseminate the report.

(g) Organisation of the work

This section should include the required information for the management and delivery of the contract. Key components of this are:

- The budget and anticipated workload;
- Responsibilities for the management of the contract;
- Information on procedures (interaction with the steering group etc.);
- Invoicing arrangements and schedule.

(h) Sources and Documentation

You should provide a listing of appropriate and relevant sources and materials together with information on how these will be accessed, e.g. on the Web via hyperlinks or through steering group members, the Managing Authority, etc. Essential elements of this are the programme monitoring data and the wider national and regional baseline and contextual sources such as those relating to agricultural, socio-economic and environmental data.

This should also include as a minimum all relevant programme documentation, specifically the programme document and constituent or supporting documents (SEA, ex ante evaluation etc). Previous relevant RDP evaluations should be made available (including Leader+ evaluations).

In drafting the ToR it is essential that the Managing Authority takes account of and incorporates the relevant provisions for data protection and data security.

Evaluation Methodology

Structuring

The structuring phase essentially sees the evaluators establish a clear understanding of the programme, its measures and their intervention logic, the evaluation questions and the evaluation tasks. The MTE re-examines this in the light of assessing the continuing relevance and validity of the strategy, the intervention logic as established in the ex ante stage and, on the basis of this, appraises the targets set, validating or revising them as appropriate.

Observing

In the observing phase the available and relevant data and information are identified (drawing on the framework and data specification which should accompany the Terms of Reference) and collected. The critical point here will be the identification of relevant sources, tools and approaches for gathering data, principally result data and where possible impact data. This is likely to involve primary research approaches such as surveys, due to the relatively short period in which the programmes have been operational. The selection of relevant case studies will have high priority and will demand the identification of clear criteria.

Analysing

The analysis involves processing and synthesising all the available information contributing to the assessment of impacts against programme objectives and targets and assessing the overall progress made.

Guidance note B to the Handbook on the CMEF makes reference to the possibility to 'establish appropriate typologies of measures and/or beneficiaries'. This may involve grouping measures or beneficiaries which have either a demonstrably high degree of commonality or a natural affinity or cohesion to reduce the number of cells or variables in the analysis i.e. to draw more direct results and conclusions.

There is a specific focus on quantification of impacts in the rural development regulation, and the estimation of impact and corresponding indicators are central to the evaluation reports. Thus, specific tools for assessing and quantifying the efficiency, effectiveness, degree of targeting etc. of the programmes should be explicitly requested by the terms of reference and provided by the evaluators based on techniques, tools and evaluation methodologies which conform to and reflect the state of the art.

Judging

In this phase the evaluator develops the answers to the common and specific evaluation questions, draws conclusions and develops recommendations including for potential adjustments to the strategy and the programme based on the evidence from the analysis. These will cover the individual measures and the programme as a whole and will explain the basis of the outcomes. This must also address the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme, the balance of the measures within the programme, the contribution to the national and Community strategy and the factors contributing to the success or failure of the programme or elements of it.

2.6 Considerations prior to launching the tender

Delivery Considerations

A primary consideration in undertaking an effective and efficient evaluation is ensuring that it is adequately resourced, and Member States are responsible for ensuring this (Art. 84 5) and 86 1) of Council Regulation 1698/2005). This means that in establishing the terms of reference sufficient consideration must be given to the scale and scope of the programme and its evaluation and the specific activities which will be required. Key references in doing so will be the framework of indicators and questions, the data requirements, the lessons learned from previous evaluations, the ongoing evaluation activities and the evaluation mandate.

The tender appraisal process should be informed by your prior assessment of the resource requirements and the realism of tender proposals should be judged against this. The object is to conduct an effective and efficient evaluation. A tender which underestimates the required resources is unlikely to deliver this and may therefore not represent best value.

When setting out terms of reference it is not uncommon that insufficient consideration be given to the practicalities of an appropriate timetable for the evaluation. It is essential to allow sufficient time for the different stages and tasks in the process as laid out above. In particular it is vital to ensure that the timetable for the deliverables is well thought out to ensure that targets will be met and that sufficient time is allowed e.g. for preparation, primary research with beneficiaries (which is notoriously slow), delays in data access (which are inevitable even in the best managed evaluations) and for sufficient and effective interaction with the steering group. This final point is absolutely essential if the steering group is to contribute effectively to the evaluation informing, feeding back and adding value to the process.

You should therefore set out an indicative timetable (incorporating a consistent sequence of interim deliverables) which takes account of this and lays out the key milestones and deadlines which must be met by the evaluation.

Decision Making and Criteria

You should clearly set out how and on what basis decisions on the award of the contract will be made, including the specific criteria that will be used along with the relative weighting to be applied. You should include information on how the decision will be communicated and what the feedback procedures are for unsuccessful tenders.

Contract Management

The respective responsibilities must be clearly laid out. This should include the way in which the evaluators and the responsible management bodies will interact e.g. through a dedicated project manager or via the Steering Group. A communication plan for contract management is highly desirable here.

Procedural Issues

The principal procedural issues in conducting the Mid Term evaluation which must be addressed lies in ensuring the independence of the evaluation and effective tendering processes.

The provisions for ensuring an independent evaluation are specified in Art. 84 5) and 86 1) of Council Regulation 1698/2005. The Community guidelines on ongoing evaluation make clear that public institutions that fulfil the necessary criteria of independence and competence, may also undertake this role.

Tendering procedures to be applied will depend on the specific approach taken to engaging evaluators (e.g. by contracting directly with a Government agency, through a single open call for tender or through the establishment of a framework panel where a pool of suitably

qualified evaluators have been pre-selected through a tendering process). In each case it is essential to ensure that relevant tendering procedures are respected and that their timing takes account of the time required for tendering and ensuring that the final report is submitted to the EC within the specified deadline. The establishment of a projected calendar including all phases of the MTE process (establishing and approving the mandate and the terms of reference, ensuring the tendering procedures, awarding the contract and implementing the MTE) can be a valuable tool in ensuring this.

III IMPLEMENTING THE MTE

The MTE is an integral part of the ongoing evaluation approach and a key element in the adjustment of the programmes. As such it is essential to understand that the independent evaluators should be actively and effectively engaged with those involved in the management and delivery of the programme. Independent evaluation should be a part of the process, not apart from it; ensuring the independence of the evaluators by no way means leaving the evaluators alone during the evaluation process, but supporting them through an iterative process and regular exchanges with the steering group. The latter should make full use of its specific knowledge, skills and expertise, and should ensure active participation in informing the evaluators, and in reviewing and revising the various interim deliverables. An effective MTE will therefore involve a highly interactive approach and the evaluation steering group has a critical role in this in helping to guide and support the evaluation process.

The work involved in preparing for and planning your evaluation and an effective inception process should provide you with an accurate project management plan for the implementation of the evaluation. This should include:

- Clearly identified and agreed project management roles for the Managing Authority, the evaluators and the evaluation steering group;
- A clear basis for iterative and interactive work involving the MA project manager, the evaluators and the evaluation steering group;
- A clear and agreed timetable with specified objectives, deliverables and milestones which is realistic and allows time for iteration;
- Adequate financial and human resourcing for a high quality evaluation;
- A structure for monitoring progress of the evaluation;
- A clear agreement on respective responsibilities and resources to be provided (e.g. access to data and people);
- Agreed criteria for the assessment of the quality of the evaluation report and for signing off its approval; and
- An action plan for disseminating and acting on the outcomes and results of the evaluation.

Good practice in evaluation suggests that the steering group should carry out a quality assessment of the final report. The criterion for assessing the quality of an evaluation report will vary between programmes and evaluations given their respective specificities; these may be specified in the terms of reference.

Following Article 78(c) of Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, the final MTE reports shall be submitted to the respective Monitoring Committees for examination.

IV DISSEMINATING THE RESULTS

Evaluation is an activity that accompanies a programme in the course of its implementation and therefore is not merely a product (represented by the evaluation report), but a process that is realised over time, hence the process of ongoing evaluation of RDPs. It follows that, if the MTE process is to be fully realised, giving importance to the effective dissemination of the results and outcomes should be regarded as good practice.

In order to be effective, dissemination must be part of the design of the evaluation approach from the outset, and should be monitored and reviewed by the steering group. Considerations here include factors such as:

- The purpose or objective of such dissemination;
- Target audience(s);
- Dissemination tools;
- Timing and available resources; and
- The subsequent use to be made of the results.

This may be taken into account in drafting the terms of reference, where consideration should be given to identifying the necessary and most effective channels for dissemination. A key consideration in this is in ensuring that the findings are readily accessible and can be clearly understood by the target audiences. This is therefore likely to involve a number of different products such as executive summaries, extracts, synthesis of main findings and recommendations etc., and various means of dissemination, such as:

- Targeted presentations to managers, policy makers and other stakeholders;
- Contributions to professional meetings, workshops and conferences;
- Publication of the report, extracts, summaries, case studies and thematic papers or notes;
- Newsletters and websites; and
- Discussion forums (virtual and actual).

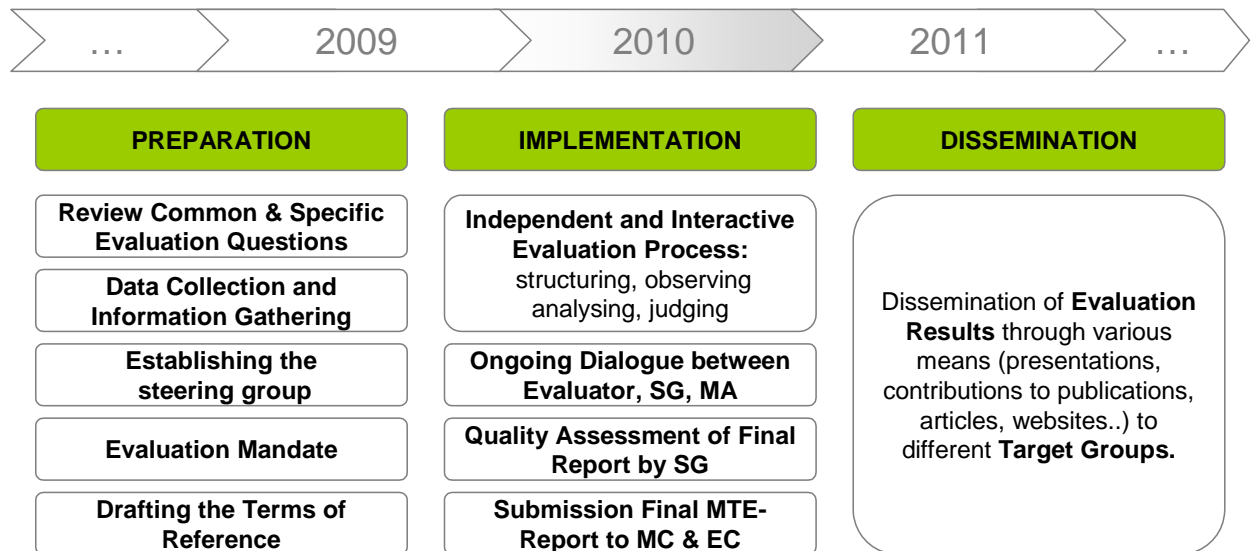
Annex 1: Outline of the technical specifications of the Terms of Reference for the Mid-Term Evaluation

The single headings of the proposed structure are explained in section 2.5

(a) Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ background ○ purpose ○ actors involved ○ reference to relevant legislation and supporting documents
(b) Scope of the MTE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ programme ○ description of RD measures ○ geographical area concerned ○ focus of programme ○ programming period ○ specific focus intended (areas, approaches, sectors)
(c) Objectives of the evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ common objectives for the MTE ○ program specific objectives for the MTE
(d) Evaluation Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ list of common evaluation questions ○ list of programme-specific evaluation questions
(e) Tasks to be performed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ structuring ○ observing ○ analysing ○ judging
(f) Timing and content of deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ deliverables ○ requirements regarding content, style, format ○ milestones ○ timeline for all deliverables
(g) Organisation of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ budget ○ responsibilities for contract management ○ interaction with the steering group ○ invoicing arrangements and schedules
(h) Sources and documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ list of appropriate sources and materials ○ programme documentation (Reg. 1698/2005; 1974/2006, National Strategy Plan, Rural Development Programme, Ex-Ante Evaluation, previous evaluations, CMEF etc.) ○ provisions for data protection and data security

Annex 2: Indicative timeline for the main steps of the MTE

The timing of the various stages is determined by the requirement to submit the Final MTE-Report to the EC by 31 December 2010. The following table provides an indication of the stages and the respective timing:



Annex 3: Frequently asked questions in relation to the MTE

This first set of questions has been raised in the context of the Evaluation Expert Committee Meeting on 23 June 2009 in Brussels:

Q1: What is the EC exactly expecting from the MTE, knowing that there is likely to be little room to assess impacts at this stage?

- In acknowledging this limitation, the EC expects that the provisions of art. 86(6) will be matched to the greatest possible extent. The MTE has an important role in informing possible revisions of the RDPs. Preliminary impacts should be assessed; if not yet possible, future impacts could be inferred from the analysis of the results obtained so far. The MTE has also to prepare for the ex post evaluation and, more generally, future ongoing evaluation activities. Work on methodological aspects of assessing impacts is currently being carried out by the specific working groups established by the Helpdesk.

Q2: Can data from previous periods be used for the MTE?

- The MTE must cover the current reference period but a link to previous period should be established. It is clear that measures carried over from previous programming period are also having their effects in the current programming period. These have to be assessed in the context of the MTE. The assessment can be based also on the experience of previous programming periods

Q3: Should the Health check and the Economic Rescue Package be considered in the MTE?

- Very little data about these programme modifications is expected to become available before June 2010, when the Member States must submit the new indicators to the Commission. Therefore, for most programmes, the assessment of the impacts related to the Health Check and the Economic Recovery Plan is likely to provide only limited information. However, it should be reported on how Member States or regions have programmed changes in relation to the Health Check and the Economic Recovery Plan (options taken).

Do you have any further questions related to the Mid-Term-Evaluation? If yes, please send an e-mail to info@ruralevaluation.eu



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