

*Synthesis of Ex Ante
Evaluations of Rural
Development Pro-
grammes 2007-2013*

Final Report

11/12/2008

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*Synthesis of Ex Ante Evaluations of
Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013*

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Executive Summary

Context

This synthesis of the 94 ex evaluations of rural development programmes has been carried out by a team of core experts supported by geographical experts over the period January 2008 to December 2008.

As starting point of the ongoing evaluation for the programming period 2007 – 2013, the general objective of this synthesis is to provide a stocktaking of the rural development programmes across the EU. Specific objectives include the provision of data sets, the identification of European trends, and the investigation about the extent to which the needs of rural areas in the Member States are pertinently covered by rural development measures.

The synthesis is structured around six evaluation themes, which mainly reflect the structure and content of the single evaluation reports. The findings related to these themes are mainly based on an in-depth screening of available programming documents (ex ante evaluation reports, national/regional rural development programmes, National Strategy Plans, Strategic Environmental Assessment reports). An additional seventh evaluation theme concerns the preparation and future implementation of the ongoing evaluation system by the Member States. The content of this theme is based on primary data directly collected for the purpose of this meta-evaluation.

As regards our methodological approach, a set of tools was defined for extracting the relevant information from the different sources. In order to ensure consistency in the analysis of the different documents, specific guidelines were provided to the geographical experts, and a glossary of key terms was finalised. An in-depth review of relevant literature complemented the screening of programming documents, and expert judgement supported the drawing-up of conclusions.

In order to reduce the inherent complexity of this synthesis, the 94 programming areas were arranged in a set of 10 cluster groups. This clustering analysis was developed around 18 factors, derived from relevant baseline indicators, in view of obtaining as much as possible homogenous groups in terms of needs of the respective programme areas, as depicted by the baseline indicators. Despite the intrinsic methodological limitations of this approach (e.g. in terms of data availability, inclusions of regional and national programme areas, etc.) the cluster groups proved to be useful for the purpose of synthesising findings related especially to themes 1 and 3, and to some extent to theme 2 (see respective chapters for a detailed description).

Findings

Concerning the approaches to ex-ante evaluations, in general these were carried out in an accompanying way, following an interactive and iterative process between evaluators and programming authorities, and this very intensive coordination process led to improvements of the quality of programmes. The recommendations issued by the evaluators seem to have been taken into account in the formulation of the programmes, although the lack of formal reporting about this process makes it not always possible to identify whether this was the case. Little involvement of stakeholders was reported, but an interesting range of tools was utilised to ensure the iterative nature of the work.

The findings derived from theme 1 (SWOT analysis and needs assessment) show that Member States have devoted considerable efforts in the development of their strategies, which are based on a thorough assessment of needs of their respective programme areas. Our analysis has permitted to categorize the relevant needs identified in the different programme areas and to aggregate them around the different cluster groups. The main needs identified range from structural adjustments of rural areas and modernisation (productivity deficits, fragmentation, capital...) to biodiversity loss and lack of specialization/diversification/de-concentration/quality of the agricultural sector.

Despite this overall positive judgement, a number of elements in need of further improvement were identified. In many cases we have observed that the identified needs, driving forces and causes of disparities do not play the expected prominent role in the definition of the strategies. This is mainly due to the problems in translating the identified needs into an appropriate ranking of disparities to be addressed, with the latter having generally not been sufficiently analysed. As a result of the above, the SWOT analysis, and the subsequent identification of needs, driving forces and causes of disparities are often conducted along the three axes of the second pillar rather than in terms of broader economic, social and environmental categories, a fact potentially limiting the establishment of needs-driven strategies. We have also noticed a lack of common understanding concerning the terms "needs", "driving forces" and "causes of disparities", which are all usually described in negative terms or normative goals, whereas they can actually also refer to positive opportunities. In this respect we see room for further action, e.g. through the activities of the European Evaluation Network.

As for theme 2 (policy objectives), we have observed that, while the programmes reflect the objectives of the rural development policy referred to in Council Regulation 1698/2005, they tend to do so in a rather unspecific manner: the refinement and adaptation of these objectives to the different national or regional contexts seem to have been made only to a limited extent. In addition, the identified objectives are usually not translated into quantified target levels and their link to the outcomes of the SWOT analysis is generally weak. Examples of well defined programme objectives have been also identified.

The new approach to programming includes the elaboration by the Member States of strategies established at national level within the National Strategy Plans. These strategies appear to be very structuring for the rural development programmes, since they are prepared before them, at a time when the ex ante evaluation is not yet started (although the National Strategy Plans could be revised following the completion of the ex ante evaluations). This represents in our eyes an important limitation of the role of the ex ante evaluations in supporting the elaboration of the programmes.

In a large majority of the programmes, full intervention logics (general objectives – specific objectives – operational objectives – expected results) are included, although not always in a structured way. In a number of cases we have observed problems in referring correctly to the different levels of (operational, specific and global) objectives. We consider that appropriate training can enhance the „culture“ of programming.

In a majority of programmes, the ex ante evaluations state that there is a high level of coherence between the objectives of the programmes and those of the National Strategy Plans, although the funding allocations among different axis do not always appear well balanced with respect to the priorities of the national strategies

The EU common baseline and impact indicators are applied in the programmes to a varying level of completeness and homogeneity: many programmes have omitted to quantify some indicators (or subcategories); qualitative data has been provided in a number of cases; some indicators have been quantified in a way that differs from EU common measurement.

Concerning theme 3 (measures) the ex ante evaluations provide a lot of relevant information on the lessons learned from previous programming periods. The most recurrent topics concern: improving coherence and complementarity between different policies and interventions, setting clear strategic priorities and reaching significant concentrations of funds for each of them, increasing flexibility of funding through simplification and reduction of transaction costs, strengthening bottom-up based strategies, and improving the mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating programmes. The ways through which these lessons have been incorporated into the current programmes are developed to a lesser extent, whereas few details are given on those lessons that have not been considered.

As regards the main measures applied in view of achieving the programmes' objectives, the analyses shows that *Axis 2* measures are those with the highest share of total public funding; among these, the agro-environmental measures are the most applied, with up to 66% of the total public funding in a single programme (i.e. *UK England*). In *Axis 1* the main measures comprise measure 121 (farm modernisation), measure 123 (adding value to agricultural and forestry products) and measure 125 (improving and developing infrastructure related to the development and adaptation of agriculture and forestry). In *Axis 3* "basic services for the

economy and rural population“ (measure 321) achieve the highest relative value followed by “village renewal and development” (measure 322). In *Axis 4*, measure 413 (quality of life/diversification) has a share of up to 29% of total public funds in one single programme (i.e. *UK Northern Ireland*).

Around half of the ex ante evaluations state that the overall balance between the measures is appropriate with regard to the needs identified and the established objectives, although this is not always supported by evidence (e.g. through matrix and tables comparing objectives and budget per measures). In other cases we find an imbalance reflecting a clear strategic choice (focus on agriculture, on environment, on diversification) which does not seem always justified in terms of identified needs. In a minority of cases the issue is not even mentioned. In some cases the ex ante evaluators point out that all interventions in a given programme area (all funds included) should be considered, but these statements are not followed by concrete analyses.

As regards theme 4 (impacts), the expected economic, social and environmental impacts of the programmes are generally seen by the ex ante evaluators as positive and coherent with the rural development problems identified in the respective regions. Positive combined effects of different measures on relevant issues (e.g. biodiversity or the social capital of rural areas) are frequently reported.

Problems have been generally experienced in quantifying target levels for the seven impact indicators, with the latter generally assessed in a qualitative way. In particular, the bottom-up aggregation of the effects of the measures in terms of impacts at programme level has proved to be difficult, as well as the assessment of possible trade-off effects of measures of different axis on a given parameter (e.g. effects of measures in different axis on biodiversity). In addition, the different methodologies followed for the quantification of the indicators (when this has been done) makes their aggregation at European level difficult. In this respect, as part of the development of the Handbook to the CMEF, we suggest to explore possible ways of promoting commonly shared qualitative approaches for the assessment of impacts.

Overall, the unintended impacts that have been identified are considered irrelevant, although general concerns are expressed regarding possible conflicting effects of measures under Axis 1 and 2.

In theme 5 (added value of Community involvement) we have observed that the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality have been generally carefully considered, in particular in those Member States that implement regional programmes. However, in some cases the lack of operational details makes it difficult to understand how these two concepts are expected to be applied in practice.

In general, the concept of complementarity is considered in the sense of avoiding possible overlaps between different funds, whereas synergies between different interventions have been pursued to a lesser extent (although good practices in this respect were identified, in particular in the "small" Member States).

The environmental and sustainability goals of the Gothenburg agenda are prominently considered and targeted by rural development programmes, whereas Lisbon goals are referred to especially with respect to axis 1 measures. Coherence with these overarching EU objectives seems to be ensured overall, although in a number of cases the stated coherence is not concretely demonstrated.

We see the further empowering of LEADER-type partnerships and of other de-concentrated/decentralised bodies as means for improving subsidiarity. Intensive inter-service consultations, adequate steering structures, standardised information flows and the strengthening of local implementation bodies (e.g. LAGs) represent in our eyes relevant mechanisms for increasing the internal and external coherence of rural development programmes.

In theme 6 (monitoring and evaluation) we have concluded that the established monitoring and evaluation systems and – even more – the proposed systems for collecting, storing and processing monitoring data are described and assessed by the ex ante evaluators only to a limited extent. Within the programmes, these systems are generally developed to the extent necessary to reflect the requirements of the EU framework for monitoring and evaluation of rural development programmes. We consider this as being essentially due to the low stage of maturity of these systems at the time of the ex ante evaluation, a fact that should be considered for the future programming periods in terms of fixing the timing for carrying out ex ante evaluations.

Examples were found of more innovative approaches where systems are developed in a way to exploit synergies with already existing regional information systems, or to cover efficiently monitoring requirements of different funds and/or of different intervention levels (national, regional etc.).

Monitoring indicators were generally established following the requirements of the Handbook to the CMEF, although not all programmes have exhaustively quantified them. Their inclusion in structured tables annexed to the programmes and/or ex ante evaluation reports would make their analysis and aggregation easier. Problems have been experienced in the establishment of programme specific indicators, in particular as regards axis 2.

The information necessary to cover the topics included in theme 7 (ongoing evaluation system) was collated through questionnaires and interviews with evaluators, managing

authorities and members of the monitoring committees in the Member States. The feedback received shows that ongoing evaluation is generally seen as a useful instrument to improve the quality of programme evaluation, and that substantial effort has been made to implement it.

When referring to possible future needs to implement the system of ongoing evaluation, the people interviewed generally mentioned issues involving methodological support, in particular the development of guidelines for implementing specific elements of the ongoing evaluation system (e.g. quantification of indicators of axis 2 and 3 measures, quantification of impacts etc.). Support concerning data collection/availability was also mentioned, although without specifying concrete needs.

More generally, concerned actors underlined the need of keeping consistency in terms of monitoring and evaluation requirements along different programming periods, and of ensuring the necessary harmonisation between different funding mechanisms. Managing authorities that deal with programmes with a small budget often request a reduction of the complexity of the system.

The main expectations in terms of the activities of the European Evaluation Network are generally in line with its planned activities: qualification and networking, methodological support, provision of information, establishment of a European platform for communication, and exchanges of good practices.

Based on the feedback received – usually of a general nature – we conclude that the advantages that ongoing evaluation can provide as a management tool for rural development programmes are not yet fully understood. Further communication efforts in this respect are envisaged, e.g. in the context of the planned activities of the European Evaluation Network.

Overall conclusions

Overall, the new “Objective-led” approach to programming seems to have been adopted by the Members States, although it has not yet been fully absorbed by all Members States, nor by all the evaluators. Despite this progress, improvements remain to be made on the logical sequence SWOT – Rationale – Objectives – Measures, and on the way objectives are defined.

As for the key underlying question of this synthesis – i.e. “the level of correspondence between measures included in rural development programmes and the identified needs of European rural areas” we have observed that substantial efforts have been made in the Member States to identify needs, and that these have been carefully considered in the programming phase. However, mainly due to the described gaps in the quantification of indicators and target levels, we cannot firmly conclude on the extent to which the measures included in the programmes

have represented the *best* choice for addressing the needs of the European rural areas. In this respect, mainly based on qualitative information and on expert judgements, we consider that there is still room for improvements, in particular as regards the definition of clear priorities for action and their (justified) link to concrete measures. The mid-term in 2010 will be an opportunity to deepen the analysis of these issues.

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List of Acronyms

List of Member States abbreviations

AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
ES	Spain
FI	Finland
FR	France
GR	Greece
HU	Hungary
IE	Ireland
IT	Italy
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
LV	Latvia
MT	Malta
NL	Netherlands
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
UK	United Kingdom

List of cluster groups abbreviations (see chapter 2)

DIVs	The Diversifiers
DTRs	The Drained Traditionalists
ECO_high	The economic high-performers
ECORUR	The Eco-ruralists
INTENS	The Intensives
RAEs	Rural areas endangered
RAPs	Rural areas under pressure
RAs	Remote Areas
TOUR_I	The “strong” tourist regions and islands
TRADs	The Traditionalists

List of most used acronyms

AA	Agricultural Area
AWU	Annual Work Unit
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CMEF	Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
CSG	Community Strategic Guidelines
DG Agriculture	Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development
DG Regio	Directorate General for Regional Policy
EA	Ex Ante Evaluation
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EAGGF	European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund
EC	European Commission
EEC	European Economic Community
EFF	European Fisheries Fund
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESA	European System of Accounts
ESF	European Social Fund
ESPON	European Spatial Planning Observation Network
ESU	European Size Units
EU	European Union
FADN	Farm Accountancy Data Network
FSS	farm structure surveys
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent Employment
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMO	Genetically Modified Organism
GVA	Gross Value Added
HNVA	High Nature Value Farming and Forest Areas
ICT	information and communications technologies
ISPA	Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession
LAGs	Local Action Groups
LEADER	<i>Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale</i>
LFA	Less Favoured Area
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MS	Member State
NACE	Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
National Strategy	Plans National Strategic Plan
NSRF	National Strategic Reference Framework
NUTS	Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OJ	Official Journal of the European Union
PPP	Purchasing Power Parities
PPS	Purchasing Power Standards

R+D	Research and Development
RD	Rural Development
RDIS	Rural Development Information System
RDP	Rural Development Programmes
SAC	Special Areas of Conservation
SAPARD	Special accession programme for agriculture and rural development
SDEC	Schéma de Développement de l'Espace Communautaire
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SF	Structure Funds
SGM	Standard Gross Margins
SMART	specific, measurable, acceptable, relevant, time-related
SPA	Special Protection Areas
SWOT	Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats
UAA	Utilised Agricultural Area
WFD	Water Framework Directive
WTO	World Trade Organisation

1 INTRODUCTION

Council Regulation 1698/2005 on support for Rural Development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) provides the legal framework for the preparation and the implementation of Rural Development programmes in the Member States for the period 2007 – 2013. Following Art 16 and 85 of Council Regulation 1698/2005, ex ante evaluation is an obligatory task in establishing a Rural Development (RD) programme; carrying out ex ante evaluations is the responsibility of the Member States.

Following the provisions of article 85 of Council Regulation 1698/2005, ex ante evaluation *shall identify and appraise medium and long-term needs, the goals to be achieved, the results expected, the quantified targets particularly in terms of impact in relation to the baseline situation, the Community value-added, the extent to which the Community's priorities have been taken into account, the lessons drawn from previous programming and the quality of the procedures for implementation, monitoring, evaluation and financial management.*

Programming authorities have finalised 94 ex ante evaluations, one for each of the 94 national or regional RD programmes. Those ex ante evaluations are the object of the present synthesis which has been inscribed in the DG AGRI annual evaluation plan for the year 2007.

Although Regulation (EC) 1698/2005 does not foresee any obligation to carry out an European level summary of the different national and regional ex ante evaluations, with this synthesis the European Commission intended to start the new programming period by a thorough stocktaking of the different programmes, in view of supporting the Member States in the implementation of the new ongoing evaluation system.

1.1 Scope of the work

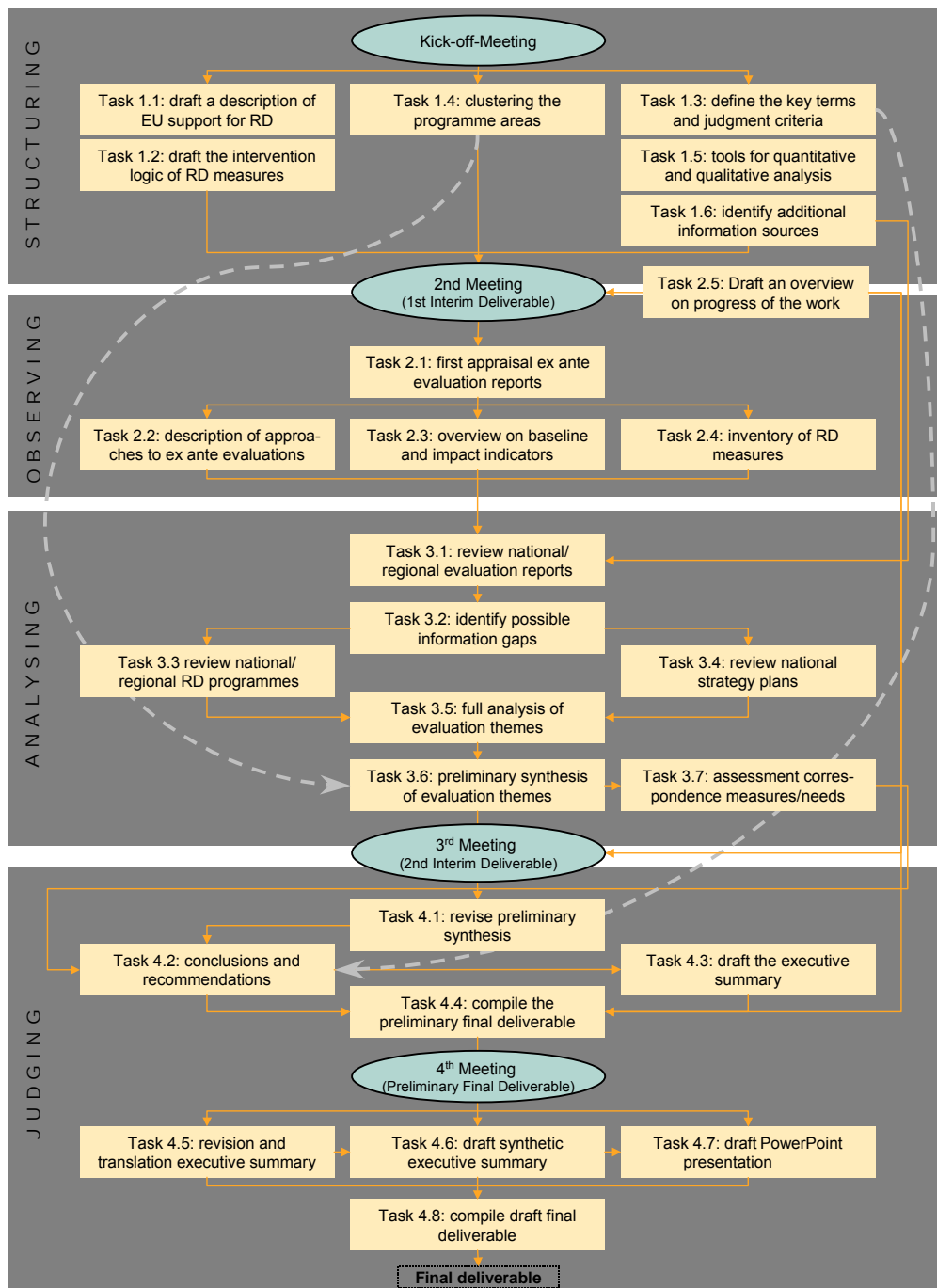
The purpose of this synthesis is to summarize and analyse the ex ante evaluations with a focus on the expected results and impacts of Rural Development programmes for the period 2007 – 2013. In particular, the synthesis investigates into the question to which extent Rural Development strategies and measures established by Member States correspond to the needs of European rural areas. In this respect, the synthesis analyses identified needs and corresponding objectives by referring as much as possible to baselines and quantifications of objectives and target levels.

This synthesis is also meant to provide elements for improving the monitoring and evaluation of RD programmes, in particular by assessing evaluation practices, by synthesising trends at

Community level, and creation of data set, and by assessing the overall coherence between the expected impacts of the programmes and the overarching Community strategic priorities.

Following the Terms of Reference, the present report has been prepared as a result of the following working steps and tasks:

Figure 1
Working Phases



1.2 Overall description of the EU support for Rural Development

1.2.1 A short history of rural development policy and measures

Rural development policy has had a long process of evolution since the establishment of the Community and can be traced back to the Treaty of Rome. It became a policy on its own right with the publication in 1988 of the European Commission's Communication 'The Future of Rural Society' and the different evolutions that followed, which have progressively given rural development a growing importance in EU policies. The following section presents the milestones of this evolution, with a particular focus on the new policy framework – and respective arrangements for the monitoring and evaluation of rural development programmes – concerning the programming period 2007 – 2013.¹

1988: Commission Communication on "The Future of Rural Society"

In 1988, the European Commission presented its communication on 'The Future of Rural Society'. It recognised rural development as being a legitimate EU policy area in its own right, and from 1989, all EU Agriculture Commissioners from Ray Mac Sharry onwards have officially had responsibility for 'rural development' as well as for 'agriculture'. This Communication also led to the start in 1991 of the Community Initiative LEADER, which pursued a new, small-scale approach to rural development.

1992: The MacSharry reforms

The first major reform of the Common Agricultural Policy to focus specifically on rural development issues was the 1992 Mac Sharry reform. This reform was largely a reform of the market measures (reduction of price support, introduction of compensatory payments for farmers linked to set-aside obligations, etc.), but included a set of enhanced 'accompanying measures' that were meant to accompany market measures:

- Agri-environmental measures (Council Regulation (EEC) No 2078/92)
- Early retirement for farmers (Council Regulation (EEC) No 2079/92)
- Farmland forestry (Council Regulation (EEC) No 2080/92)

¹ Detailed information on the evolution of Rural Development policies in Europe are available within a number of evaluation reports already published on the Internet site of DG Agriculture:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eval/index_en.htm#rep2.

See in particular:

– Synthesis of Rural Development Mid-Term Evaluations, DG Agriculture, November 2005

– Synthesis of Mid-term evaluations of LEADER+ programmes, DG Agriculture, November 2006

With the reform of the structural funds carried out in 1993, Objective 5b ("development and structural adjustment of rural areas") programmes were launched in view of promoting rural development by speeding up the adjustment of agricultural structures and facilitating the development and structural adjustment of rural areas. This represented an important shift of emphasis: no longer is the reform of the CAP seen as an end in itself but rather as a means of achieving a wider goal for the rural sector as a whole. In this context, new measures promoting the diversification of agricultural activities, the quality of agricultural/forest products, and the enhancement of rural areas were also introduced.

Based on the LEADER I Community Initiative (1989-1993) in 1994 LEADER II was launched, to broaden the experience to 1,000 rural areas. With LEADER II, the Commission intended to promote a decentralised approach in partnership with the Member States. Innovative measures by public and private actors were stimulated at local level, joint learning and networking became an important asset.

1996: European Conference on Rural Development, Cork

The first European Conference on Rural Development was held in November 1996 in Cork, Ireland. It served as an opportunity for a large variety of stakeholders to discuss and provide input to the future of rural development policy. The conference concluded with a 10-point declaration, which paved the way to further reforms of the rural development policy.

The Cork declaration claims for a growing share of available resources to be spent for rural development and environmental objectives. It asks for the extension of the territorial approach to rural policy, which should be based on an integrated approach. It stresses the diversification of economic and social activities, and highlights the importance of sustainability over time. Furthermore it stresses a decentralized bottom-up and community driven approach and asks for a greater coherence between Rural Development Policy and Common Agricultural Policy: The declaration particularly claims for coherent and transparent procedures as well as for capacity building in terms of investments, management and Evaluation and Research.

1999: Agenda 2000 reform

In 1999, the Agenda 2000 package reformed the CAP, the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund, and introduced two financial pre-accession instruments (ISPA and SAPARD) in order to prepare candidate countries to access the Union. It also provided the new financial framework for the period 2000-06.

The reform brought funding for rural development predominantly within the ambit of the EAGGF-Guarantee Section, making clear that rural development and agri-environmental schemes were seen as being an integral part of the mainstream CAP. In addition, the reform increased the

financial resources available for rural development. Agenda 2000 also introduced the 'CAP Pillar 1 and 2' concept, which comprises traditional market measures and price support under 'Pillar 1' and rural development and agri-environmental measures under 'Pillar 2'.

The Agenda 2000 agreement also gave the possibility to the Member States of shifting funds from "Pillar 1" to "Pillar 2" by reducing direct payments (for certain categories of farmers) and using them as additional funds for rural development ('voluntary modulation').

2001: LEADER +

The third stage of the Community Initiative Leader+, launched in 2001, was designed to encourage the implementation of integrated, high quality and original strategies for sustainable development. Leader+ continued to play its role as a laboratory aiming at encouraging the emergence and testing of new approaches to integrated and sustainable development and at complementing other rural development programmes by encouraging those involved in rural communities to conceive and implement integrated and innovative development strategies.

2003: 'Mid-Term Review' of the CAP

In June 2003 as part of the so-called Mid Term Review, EU Agriculture Ministers agreed a major reform of the CAP. It strengthened rural development policy both in scope and financial resources by introducing an important set of reformed measures:

- Increase in funds for rural development by introducing compulsory 'modulation';
- Introduction of new rural development measures (meeting standards, animal welfare, food quality, developing and applying new technologies), increasing the number of measures from 22 to 26;
- Increase in EU-funding rates for agri-environmental and animal welfare schemes;
- Increase in investment support for young farmers, compensatory payments in certain less favoured areas and areas with environmental restrictions, expansion of forestry support measures to state-owned forests.

2003: European Conference on Rural Development in Salzburg

The second European Conference on Rural Development was held in Salzburg, Austria in November 2003. It provided a platform for a wide range of rural stakeholders to debate how they saw the Community rural development policy for the period 2000-06 and what they considered as priorities for the future development of the policy in the programming period 2007-2013 in a wider EU. The results of the conference served as a basis for developing rural development policy post-2006 and led to simplification (rural development measures were

grouped under a single fund), to more flexibility for Member States and regions to decide on how their funds are allocated, and to a greater emphasis on the rural economy.

1.2.2 A renewed rural development policy for the 2007-2013 period

A Overall evolution of EU policies: Lisbon and Goteborg

Since 1992, the EU Rural Development policy has gone through a sequence of reforms against the background of a successive enlargement of the Union. The reforms resulted in an important policy shift from the prevailing “measure-led” to an “objective-led” and more strategic approach. As a consequence a new way of programming and implementing rural development interventions was designed, in which the concept of on-going evaluation became one central element.

This shift to a more strategic approach corresponds to a larger movement in EU policy-making, made necessary by the adoption of the Lisbon strategy in 2000. This strategy, complemented by the Goteborg strategy, aimed at making the EU the most competitive economy in the world by 2010, whilst keeping a sustainable approach to growth and development.

The challenge of the Lisbon – Goteborg strategy has forced a revision of the former policy instruments, including expenditure programmes. These were asked to become more efficient in their approach, by creating a strategic framework in which different interventions could be coordinated towards common objectives. This strategic framework had to be defined at the level of the Member States, taking into account the priorities established at EU level.

B The new policy framework for RD:

In February 2006, the European Council adopted the EU strategic guidelines on rural development². The guidelines set out the strategic approach to be followed by Member States for the preparation of their Rural Development programmes for the period 2007 – 2013. The new Regulation broadens the possibilities to use Rural Development funding to boost growth and create jobs in rural areas – in line with the Lisbon Strategy – and to improve sustainability – in line with the Gothenburg sustainability goals. The six key EU strategic objectives on rural development are established as follows in the guidelines:

- Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors;
- Improving the environment and countryside;

² 2006/144/EC: Council Decision of 20 February 2006 on Community strategic guidelines for rural development (programming period 2007 to 2013) (OJ L 55, 25/02/2006, p. 20–29)

- Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification;
- Building local capacity for employment and diversification.

In the Community Strategic Guidelines, the Council encourages the Member States to focus their interventions on a series of actions within each axis. These are set out below.

- In axis 1, the encouraged key actions include facilitating innovation and access to research and development, improving integration within the food chain, encouraging the uptake of ICT, fostering entrepreneurship, developing new outlets and value added chains including non-food production, quality products etc.
- In axis 2, the encouraged key actions include combating climate change, preserving the landscape, promoting territorial balance, promoting organic farming, along with more traditional forms of intervention such as less favoured area payments.
- In axis 3, the encouraged key actions focus on raising economic activity rates, drawing women and young people into the labour market, encouraging the development of rural tourism and renewable sources of energy and upgrading local infrastructure and services to the population.
- As a transversal axis, Leader can be used in all axes for increasing the endogenous capacity of rural areas, for stimulating innovation and/or for improving local governance.

Council Regulation 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 “On support for rural development by the European Agriculture Rural Development Fund (EAFRD)”³ lays down the operational framework for transforming the new orientation into programmes and simplifying their implementation procedures. The new policy has three major objectives, each of which corresponds to a thematic axis in the new regulation:

- Increasing the competitiveness of the agricultural sector through support for restructuring (axis 1);
- Enhancing the environment and countryside through support for land management (axis 2); and
- Strengthening the quality of life in rural areas and promoting diversification of economic activities through measures targeting the farm sector and other rural actors (axis 3).

A fourth horizontal “Leader” axis mainstreams the local development strategies that were previously financed under the Leader initiative through a bottom up approach.

³ Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) (OJ L 277, 21.10.2005, p. 1–40)

The new legal framework improves the implementation and governance of EU rural development programmes as follows:

- All existing measures are grouped under a single funding and programming instrument, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD);
- The EU strategy for rural development serves as the basis for the national strategies and programmes. This ensures better focus on EU priorities, and improves complementarity with other EU policies (e.g. cohesion and environment);
- Reinforced monitoring, evaluation and reporting ensure more transparency and accountability of EU funds;
- Less detailed rules and eligibility conditions leave more freedom to the Member States on how they wish to implement their programmes;
- The emphasis on the subsidiary principle brings along the coping of regional needs with EU rural development objectives.

The National Strategy Plans (National Strategy Plans) are translating the EU priorities to the Member State situation and ensure complementarity with Cohesion policy. These plans are the basis for national or regional Rural Development programmes which – – breakdown the strategy into action through the implementation of specific RD measures. The Member States will be reporting on the implementation of the Strategy every two years, starting in 2008.

The content of national or regional Rural Development Programmes (Rural development programmes) is prepared in close cooperation with the Commission's services. The Rural development programmes represent a Commission decision taken to support the realisation of the National Strategy, and therefore they have to be formally approved by the Commission.

In the new Regulation, there were relatively modifications in the content of the measures, while the structure was changed from formerly 22 measures into 43 measures, arranged in three vertical axes and one transversal Leader axis. New measures concern cooperation for development of new products, processes and technologies.

The Rural Development Programmes started to be approved in 2007, and this process has been finalised in 2008.

The new framework for monitoring and evaluation of rural development programmes

The new emphasis placed on a more strategic approach to rural development has implications for the way Monitoring and Evaluation are carried out in the new programming period. Article 80

of the new Rural Development Regulation (1698/2005) introduces the concept of “Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework” as follows:

“The common monitoring and evaluation framework shall be drawn up in cooperation between the Commission and the Member States [...]. The framework shall specify a limited number of common indicators applicable to each programme”.

The “Handbook on Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework” is a guidance document prepared by the European Commission in collaboration with the Member States. Following this guidance document, the approach to monitoring and evaluation for the period 2007-2013 is based on the arrangements in the former periods, but will be implemented in a more systematic manner and adapted to a number of new requirements in the RD regulation, especially the explicit definition of objectives in the regulation, strategic guidelines and programmes. The need to undertake strategic monitoring of the Community and national strategies requires the definition of common indicators and their quantification.

Monitoring and Evaluation are now seen as two complementary exercises that should run throughout the entire life of the programmes. The new arrangements provide a single framework for monitoring and evaluation of all rural development measures. In the programming phase, specific attention is paid to the identification of needs in the course of the SWOT-Analysis and to the definition of respective priorities and measures for each programme. The availability of the full set of guidance documents right from the beginning of programming period ensures its effective implementation and constitutes a major change with respect to the previous programming periods.

To implement this new approach, the EC has undertaken several studies and evaluations in order to prepare the new Rural Development Policy, to prepare the ground for common indicators and for mainstreaming the Leader approach.⁴ As foreseen in Article 80 of Council Regulation 1698/2005 the Common monitoring and evaluation framework was drawn up in cooperation between the Commission and the Member States. The Commission has set-up an “Evaluation Expert Committee” with the Member States, in which the CMEF was discussed before its adoption.

A further step has been taken with the creation of the “European Evaluation Network for Rural Development” in April 2008 by the EC. Its aim is to continue the development of the “bottom-up” approach to the development of the CMEF. It will aim at establishing good practice and capacity building in evaluation of rural development programmes, thereby increasing the utility of

⁴ Notably the studies « PAIS II : Proposal on Agri-Environmental Indicators” undertaken between 2002 and 2004, and “Indicators for the Evaluation of the EU’s Rural Development Programmes” (November 2005)

monitoring and evaluation as tools for improving the formulation and implementation of Rural Development Policies.

C Role of the ex ante

“Following Articles 16 and 85 of Council Regulation 1698/2005, ex ante evaluation is an obligatory task in establishing a rural development programme for a geographical region concerned. (...) Ex-ante evaluation aims at improving programmes and contributing to capacity building for future monitoring and evaluation activities.”

Against this background we see ex ante evaluation as a two steps process:

- The first phase is directed at supporting the programming authorities to improve the quality of their proposed programmes, to ensure that the measures correspond to the needs of the programme areas and to respect the obligatory requirements, including the definition of a full set of indicators for the programme. This phase is often carried out as an interactive process, where the programming authorities revise their draft programmes in order to take into account the recommendations of the evaluator. This includes the assessment of the potential environmental impact of the programme (SEA report) and the inclusion of corrective measures in the programme in the case of negative impact.
- The second phase is the drafting of a formal report (following a standard format required by the EC) in which the ex ante evaluator will highlight the key components of the programme (SWOT analysis, strategy, measures, added value, etc.) and propose a judgement on their coherence and relevance. Special attention should be given to the sets of indicators proposed by the programming authority at national or regional level.

The ex ante evaluation report (including the SEA report) is an integral part of the programming document, and represents an important first step in the building-up of the “ongoing” evaluation system.

RD programmes (budget)

The European Council agreed in its meeting of December 2005 the new Financial Perspectives for the period 2007– 2013. Within this framework, rural development was allocated 69.75 billion Euros. In September 2006, the Commission approved a Decision fixing the total budget for the period 2007–2013 to a total of 77.66 billion Euros. This includes compulsory modulation to first pillar payments (4% in 2007 and 5% onwards) and transfers from the cotton and tobacco common market organisations. After the latest amendment in October 2007, the total budgetary allocation for Rural Development 2007-2013 amounts to 90.98 billion Euros and shows the following breakdown by Member State:

Table 1

Budgetary allocation for Rural Development 2007-2013^{5 6}

Country	EAFRD amount (in EUR)	Total public (in EUR)
Belgium	418.610.306	1.144.554.103
Bulgaria	2.609.098.596	3.241.938.393
Czech Republic	2.815.506.354	3.615.803.370
Denmark	444.660.796	830.339.175
Germany	8.112.517.055	13.207.160.695
Estonia	714.658.855	924.863.846
Greece	3.707.304.424	5.077.995.174
Spain	7.213.917.799	13.814.062.684
France	6.441.965.109	11.943.585.079
Ireland	2.339.914.590	4.298.753.800
Italy	8.292.009.883	16.702.075.804
Cyprus	162.523.574	325.047.148
Latvia	1.041.113.504	1.361.646.324
Lithuania	1.743.360.093	2.260.374.510
Luxembourg	90.037.826	368.457.902
Hungary	3.805.843.392	5.159.109.184
Malta	76.633.355	100.251.131
Netherlands	486.521.167	973.042.334
Austria	3.911.469.992	7.822.289.053
Poland	13.230.038.156	17.217.817.440
Portugal	3.929.325.028	4.996.309.767
Romania	8.022.504.745	9.970.795.600
Slovenia	900.266.729	1.158.928.916
Slovakia	1.969.418.078	2.562.585.914
Finland	2.079.932.907	6.625.673.754
Sweden	1.825.647.954	3.917.170.025
United Kingdom	4.598.674.420	8.634.789.039
Total EU-27	90.983.474.687	148.255.420.164

⁵ Commission Decision of 1 June 2007 amending Decision 2006/636/EC fixing the annual breakdown by Member State of the amount for Community support to rural development for the period from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2013 (notified under document number C(2007) 2274) (2007/383/EC)

⁶ Commission Decision of 22 October 2007 amending Decision 2006/410/EC, (2007/680/EC)

2 METHODOLOGY

The methodological design, tasks and activities followed the sequence of structuring, observing, analysing and judging. Our team used a mix of methodological approaches in parallel, which was especially important, first in order to fill information gaps and second to validate the information gathered by various sources.

During the structuring phase the background and understanding for the observing, analysing and judging phase were prepared. The introduction on Rural Development was prepared in form of a description of EU support on Rural Development. Moreover, the contractor and its transnational working team prepared jointly the common understanding of the central aspects of the synthesis – in practical terms this implies the further development of the intervention logic and the definition of the key terms. The particular methodological challenge consisted in the elaboration and adoption of the criteria for clustering the 94 programme areas and the tools for quantitative and qualitative analysis, which formed the practical basis for data collection and analysis. The identification of additional information sources helped to prepare a consistent and complete data-set, capable of covering all evaluation themes.

In the observing phase the research team collected the relevant and available information for the synthesis by means of the methods and tools developed in the previous working phase. This refers to the practical adoption of tools for data gathering, the list of key-terms and the intervention logic. The data sources for this phase comprised the ex-ante evaluation reports, regional/national RD programmes as well as other identified sources. In a first step the ex ante evaluation reports were analysed with the help of the First Assessment Grid. During this phase, the use of the list of key-terms ensured, that central terms were understood and interpreted in the same way by the research team. In a next step the filled analysis tool (common data collection grid) provided the basis for drafting the description of the approaches, the inventory of RD measures, as well as the overview of baselines and programme specific impact indicators.

The analysing phase was devoted to analysing all information available in view of assessing the evaluation themes. Available data and information contained in the national/regional ex ante evaluation reports, their updates and from additional information sources. Where data gaps had been identified, additional information from national/regional Rural Development programmes and National Strategy Plans were compiled to complement the review. Finally a full analysis of the evaluation themes was carried out and a preliminary synthesis was drafted. For the synthesis the identified clusters of programme areas were playing a leading role in view of reducing the complexity. Finally a preliminary assessment of the level of correspondence between measures included in the programmes and identified needs of European rural areas was carried out.

In the judging phase, the preliminary synthesis was be revised by the core team and critically reflected. Hereafter, respective, conclusions and recommendations were drawn for all evaluation themes and topics. All conclusions and recommendations were based on evidence of the quantitative and qualitative assessment.

2.1 Thematic focus of the European synthesis of ex ante evaluations

2.1.1 Preliminary remarks

Before setting out the scope of the European synthesis of ex ante evaluations, we shortly recall the core elements of the European multi-tier programming system for reasons of better comprehension:

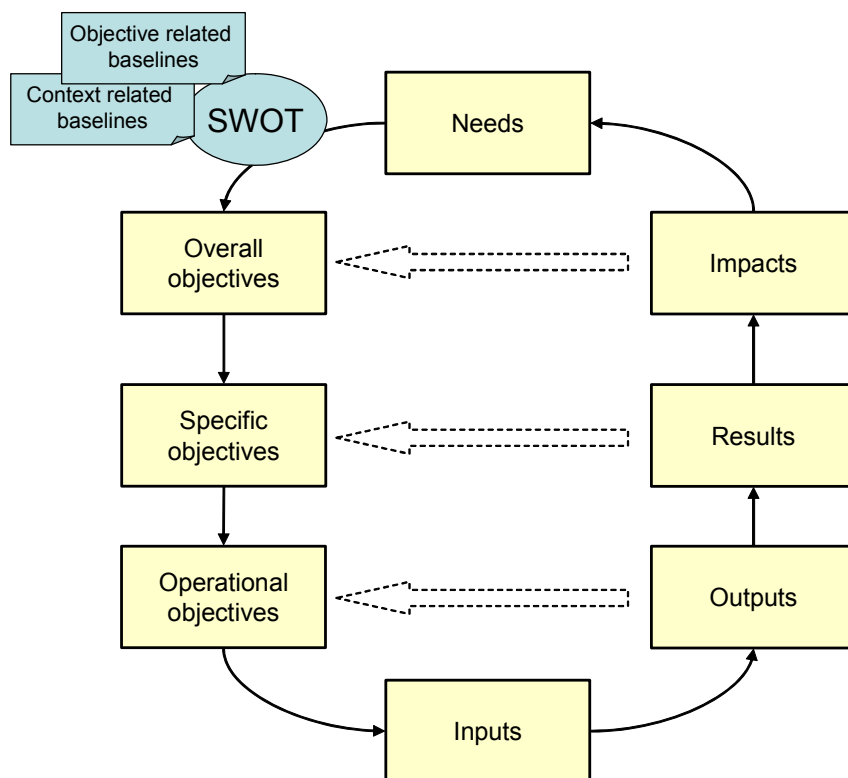
- The intervention logic
- The indicators

The intervention logic

The intervention logic is a methodological instrument establishing logical links between programme objectives and the envisaged operational actions. The model exhibits the conceptual path from an intervention to its outputs and, subsequently, to its results and impacts. The different elements of the intervention logic are shown in the following diagram:

Figure 2

Relations between objectives and impacts in the programming cycle



The intervention logic of each Rural Development Programme should be based on the “hierarchy of objectives” or “objective tree” set out in Guidance note D in Annex 2 of the Handbook to the CMEF. Furthermore, each measure is operationalised in respect to the hierarchy of objectives in Guidance note E in the same Annex (“Measure Fiches”).

The indicators

Indicators are evidences on facts and circumstances, serving to justify value judgments relating to them. Ideally, indicators established to measure a programme’s progress towards the achievement of pre-defined targets have to be specific, measurable, available/achievable in a cost effective way, relevant for the programme, and timely available (SMART).

Ex ante evaluations have to include an assessment of indicators proposed for measuring success of respective rural development programmes. It will assess the coherence between these indicators and the programme’s targets and ensure that indicators are applied and filled with data in meaningful manner in order to form a useful basis for monitoring and evaluation. The “Rules for Application of Council Regulation 1698/2005” define compulsory common baseline indicators (both context-related and impact-related baseline indicators) which reflect

Community priorities and objectives. In addition to these, also programme-specific baseline indicators shall be defined in view of covering specific national or regional information needs.

Apart from baseline indicators, the programmes provide indicators for the measurement of inputs, outputs, results and impacts. Among these five types of indicators, the baseline and impact indicators are most relevant in ex-ante evaluations, as they give information about the expectable usefulness, relevance and coherence of the programme.

Each Rural Development Programme should be monitored and evaluated according to the common indicator framework set out and operationalised in Guidance notes F, G, H, I and J in Annex 3 of the Handbook to the CMEF. According to article 81 (2) of Council Regulation No. 1698/2005 the member states should add their own programme indicators to the common information basis. An example for operationalised programme indicators is set out in Annex 3, Guidance note K of the Handbook to the CMEF.

2.1.2 The seven themes of the synthesis of ex-ante evaluations

Guidance note C in Annex 1 of the Handbook for the Common Monitoring Evaluation Framework stipulates that

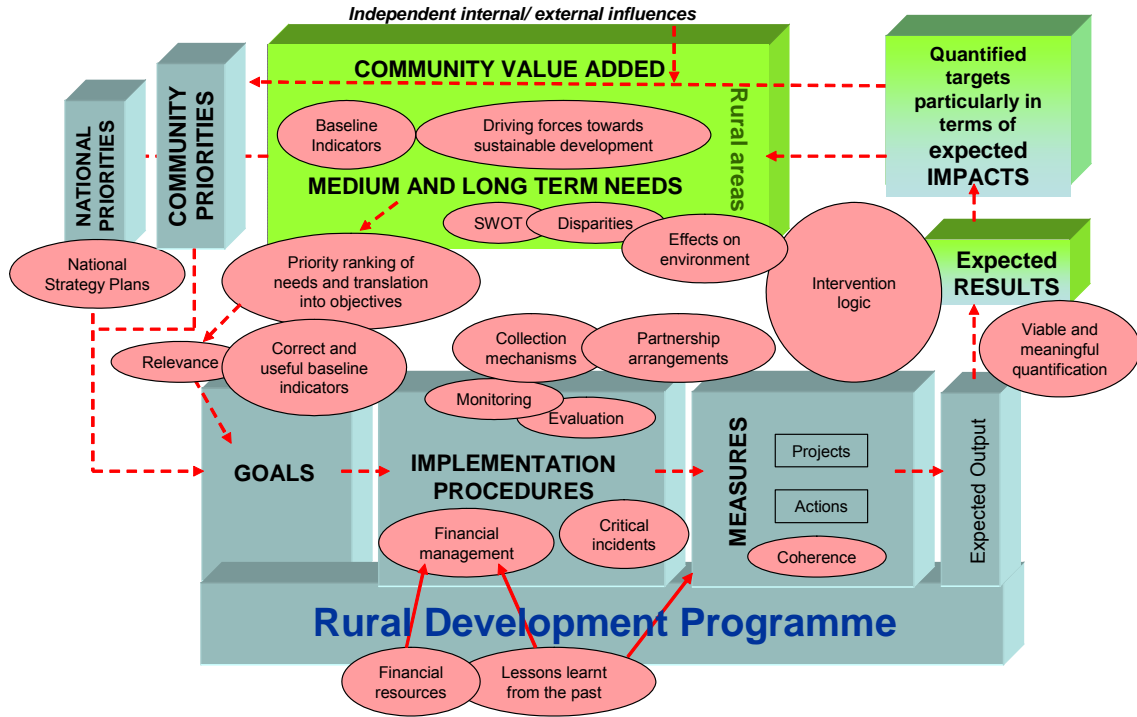
“ ex ante evaluation in the context of rural development programmes analyses in detail for each programme its underlying strategy and objectives – including baselines, quantifiable objectives and target levels. It takes place before the implementation of the programme, with a view to support programming, and has to be designed to clearly identify needs and development strategies.”

The European guidelines for ex ante evaluation provide a regulatory framework in which all member states shall identify and appraise

- The medium and long term needs;
- The goals to be achieved;
- The results expected;
- The quantified targets particularly in terms of impact in relation to the baseline situation;
- The Community value-added;
- The extent to which the Community's priorities have been taken into account;
- The lessons drawn from previous programming;
- The quality of the procedures for implementation, monitoring, evaluation and financial management.

If we look at the whole programming system and the places of the enumerated fields of interest in that programming system, we can draw up the following model-like figure:

Figure 3
Scope of Regional/National Ex-ante Evaluations

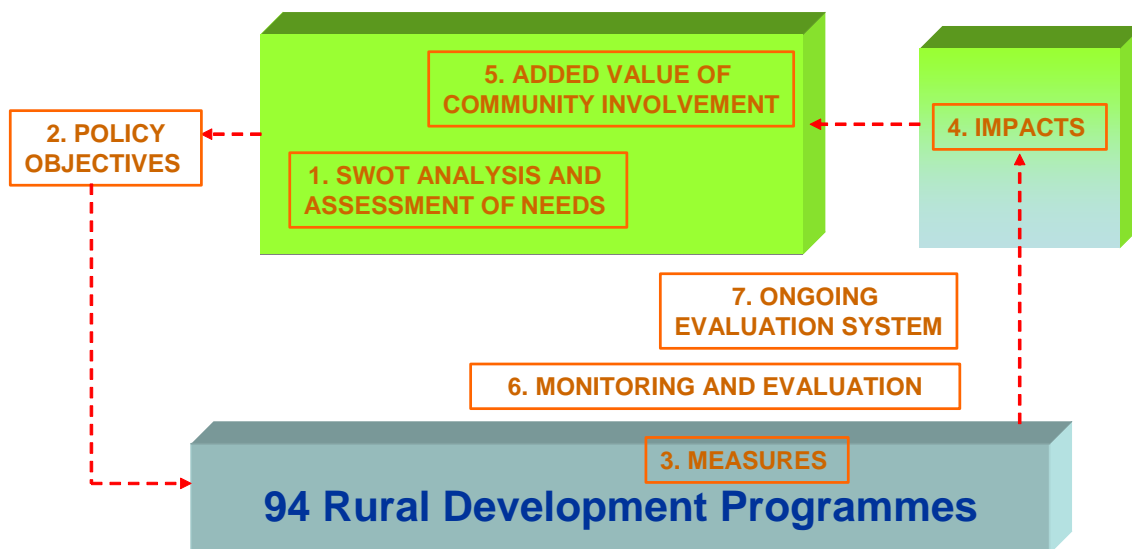


According to the terms of reference of the present European synthesis of ex ante evaluations of 94 Rural Development Programmes, the following seven themes and related topics have to be thoroughly analysed:

THEMES	TOPICS
SWOT analysis and assessment of needs	<p>Main problems, risks and needs of the EU rural areas in terms of social, economic and environmental criteria;</p> <p>Main driving forces, strengths and opportunities in the EU rural areas;</p> <p>Main identified causes of disparities between rural areas at European level;</p> <p>Main categories of beneficiaries identified by the ex ante evaluations as priority target groups of interventions and their needs;</p> <p>Possible other problems/beneficiaries not addressed by the implementation of the programmes.</p>
Policy objectives	<p>Main policy objectives in terms of expected impacts identified by the Member States (including objectives reflecting national priorities);</p> <p>Main general, specific and operational objectives and expected results identified by the Member States;</p> <p>Overall level of coherence between programmes' objectives and the National Strategy Plans;</p> <p>Main baseline and impact indicators (common and programme specific) proposed for measuring the programmes' success and overall assessment of their application.</p>
Measures	<p>Ways and extent to which lessons learned from previous programming periods have been taken into account in designing the programmes;</p> <p>Main measures applied to in view of achieving the programmes' objectives;</p> <p>Overall assessment of the balance among the measure applied in view of objectives pursued.</p>
Impacts	<p>Main expected impacts at EU level of the measures to be applied (social, economic and environmental);</p> <p>Other possible impacts and/or unintended effects;</p> <p>Potential conflicts between different impacts;</p> <p>Main categories of stakeholders who are (positively or negatively) affected by the programmes.</p>
Added value of Community involvement	<p>Overall assessment of the extent to which subsidiarity and proportionality have been taken into account in the programmes;</p> <p>Overall assessment of the coherence of the programmes with respect to Community objectives;</p> <p>Overall assessment of the level of complementarity, synergy and coherence of the programmes with other Community interventions (e.g. structural funds).</p>
Monitoring and evaluation	<p>Proposed ways of implementing the monitoring and evaluation system;</p> <p>Proposed indicators for the measurement of inputs, outputs, results and impacts;</p> <p>Proposed systems for collecting, storing and processing monitoring data.</p>
Ongoing evaluation system	<p>Possible future needs of Member States for the implementation of the ongoing evaluation system;</p> <p>Possible ways of supporting the Member States in the implementation of the future ongoing evaluation system through the European evaluation framework;</p> <p>Suggestions for possible revisions of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.</p>

Using the model set out in figure 4 the seven themes can be placed in the programming system as figure 5 shows:

Figure 4
Scope of the European Synthesis of Regional/National Ex-ante Evaluations



Whereas the first six themes will mainly be explored by having a “second look” on the national and regional provisions and arrangements for implementing Rural Development Programme, using the ex ante evaluations, the National Strategic Plans and the Rural Development Programmes as the main sources of information, the seventh theme goes beyond their scope and will mainly be inspired by good practice examples from different sources (e.g. stakeholder interviews and new ideas generated by the team of evaluators).

2.2 Clustering the Programming Areas

2.2.1 Background and approach

Within this synthesis of ex-ante Evaluations of Rural Development it is also requested to develop the criteria for clustering the 94 programme areas and group them accordingly.

Why is clustering such a crucial task? The main reason for defining clusters from a rather large sample of study objects is the reduction of the complexity produced by the sheer number of programmes. They show a high heterogeneity of different regional/national settings, administrative logic/organisation.

At the same time analysis on the European level will be necessary, so that clear and usable judgements for the Commission become possible.

Thus criteria for such a clustering are as follows:

- Grouping the programmes along qualities, which allow homogenous characteristics per group.
- Grouping the programmes without losing too much information on specific features of RD programmes all over Europe
- Grouping the programmes so that clear and effective EU policies may be deduced from the analysis and judgement on the group level, which means aggregation of programmes without losing too much information on the single programmes.

In terms of methodology of such a clustering the following criteria will have to be taken into consideration:

- Easily to be applied – this implies the use of information/data which is readily available together with a methodology, which is transparent and accessible for all stakeholders
- Differentiating the clusters far enough to depict characteristics of the programmes. The problems which have to be taken care of in this respect are:
 - Regionalisation of information vs. nationalisation (see e.g. ESPON results: the MAUP⁷ [modifiable aerial unit problem]) – especially for the analysis of rural development.
 - Mix of criteria depicting regional/national characteristics in socio-economic and geographical terms and criteria depicting framework conditions in the polity sphere (e.g. administration, programming level)
- Keeping the number of clusters on a manageable basis – this means that too many different groups/clusters of programmes will increase the complexity of information to be conveyed, again.

Taking these preconditions and criteria on board, this leads to the question, along which logic should RD programming areas best be clustered in order to meet the requirements of this synthesis of ex-ante evaluations of RD – Programmes?

It would be possible to group them along the lines of the programme characteristics: i.e. administrative background, size/volume of programmes etc., but this will not allow for answers

⁷ The MAUP points at the fact that by depicting territorial qualities along pre-fixed territorial units (e.g. NUTS), we rather deliberately “create” reality instead of picturing reality as it is. In other words – the sheer fact that territorial observations are restricted by pre-fixed units biases the picture even more than it would be anyway due to the restrictions of depicting territorial quality.

to the core evaluation question of this exercise – i.e. to which extent RD strategies and measures established by the Member States correspond to the needs of European rural areas. Therefore a more content oriented approach had to be followed – i.e. clustering the programming areas along their needs – as depicted by the baseline indicators of the CMEF. The rationale behind this approach is, that if we identify groups of programming areas showing similar needs/territorial characteristics, it will be easier to mirror them against the strategies adopted and the measures taken in these programmes. One interesting aspect will be to find out whether programming areas (resp. the Managing Authorities of these RD programmes) have adopted similar strategies to meet their similar problems/needs, or whether their strategies differed.

Still this approach is fighting the challenge that the definition of “needs” of rural areas is vague and complex. The CMEF provides some guidance on this challenge by establishing the new strategic approach to RD (objective rather than measure lead).

Consequently we followed this approach and based our clusters upon those territorial qualities, which link the baseline conditions of the programming areas with the core objectives of the EU RD policy.

2.2.2 The general approach – the needs of rural areas as depicted in the baseline indicators

The intervention logic of each Rural Development Programmes should be based on the “hierarchy of objectives” or “objective tree” set out in Guidance note D in Annex 2 of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. Furthermore, each measure is operationalized in respect to the hierarchy of objectives in Guidance note E in the same Annex (“Measure Fiches”). The “Rules for Application of Council Regulation 1698/2005” define compulsory common baseline indicators (both context-related and impact-related baseline indicators) which reflect Community priorities and objectives. At the same time these baseline indicators are supposed to depict societal needs and characteristics in the programming areas. According to the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework they build the basis for the SWOT analysis in each of the programming documents for the Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013.

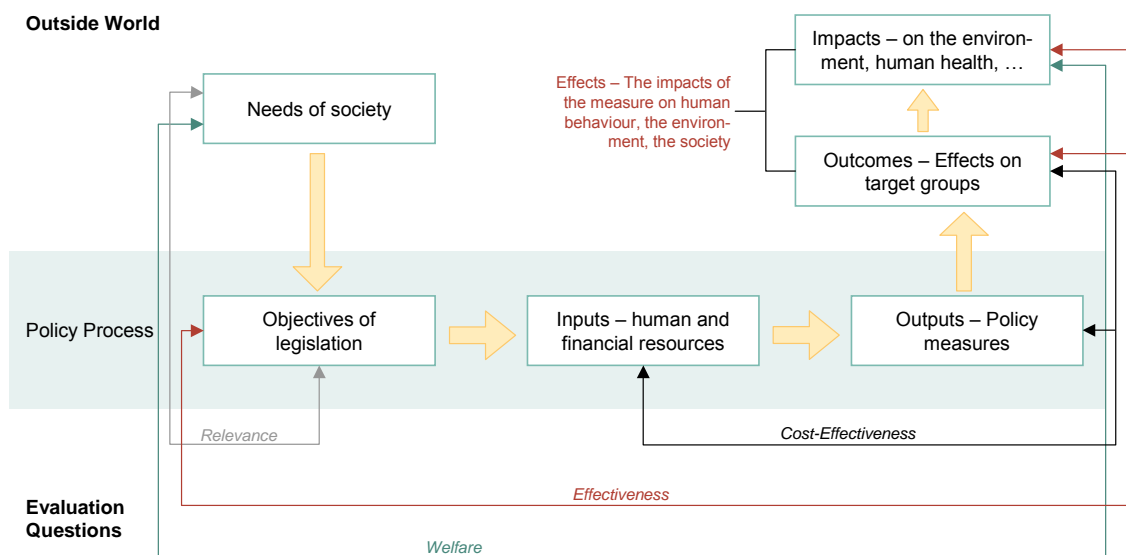
“Baseline Indicators are used in the SWOT analysis and the definition of the programme strategy. They fall into two categories:

Objective related baseline indicators. These are directly linked to the wider objectives of the programme. They are used to develop the SWOT analysis in relation to objectives identified in the regulation. They are also used as a baseline (or reference) against which the programmes’ impact will be assessed. Baseline indicators reflect the situation at the beginning of the programming period and a trend over time. The estimation of impact should reflect that

part of the change over time that can be attributed to the programme once the baseline trend and other intervening factors have been taken into account.

Context related baseline indicators. These provide information on relevant aspects of the general contextual trends that are likely to have an influence on the performance of the programme. The context baseline indicators therefore serve two purposes: (i) contributing to identification of strengths and weaknesses within the region and (ii) helping to interpret impacts achieved within the programme in light of the general economic, social, structural or environmental trends... (Handbook to the CMEF – RD Programmes 2007 – 2013)

Figure 5
Evaluation logic – general



Consequently these Baseline Indicators have been the starting point for the selection of indicators for the clustering of programming areas. The aim was to group programming territories along their societal and environmental conditions as expressed in the context and objective related baseline indicators. The list of indicators suggested in the Handbook to the CMEF depicts a variety of territorial conditions, which are grouped along the three Axis of the RD Programme. They range from economic, demographic, environmental to structural indicators (36 indicators – objective related and 23 indicators context related).

Since the strategy of each programme is expected to be built on a thorough analysis of programmes area needs (to be then translated into programmes objectives and priorities for action), referring to those needs can represent a meaningful way of clustering programmes areas. Consistently with the approach of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, the common baseline indicators to be used in the SWOT analysis can be used as proxies for clustering programmes areas according to needs.

The attempt to apply these indicators in the clustering exercise has led to the following challenges:

- Comparability of territorial units – the question of size: The programming areas within the RD programmes are quite heterogeneous in terms of size. While national programmes dominate in the New MS and the small MS, the “old” and big MS have split-up their programmes into regional units (mostly NUTS 2). Thus the comparability of a region (e.g. Marche (IT), Castilla y Leon (ESP)) with a nation state (e.g. Poland, Bulgaria) in terms of their needs and territorial condition is impossible along some of the indicators listed in the common monitoring and evaluation framework.
- Comparability of territorial units – the question of territorial character: Together with the question of size the heterogeneity of regional character is the main obstacle to arrive at inter-territorial comparison over the programming areas. Especially the agglomeration effects in the large programming areas would lead to biases when identifying the needs of areas along the baseline indicators. Delimitation of urban/rural areas has been the tedious attempt for decades with various results (see ESPON Project 1.1.2. “Urban-rural relations in Europe”, ESPON Project 1.4.1. “The role of small and medium sized towns”).
- Data availability: The approach of clustering the programming areas along their needs as depicted by the baseline indicators would call for a data set as complete as possible in terms of regional availability as well as geographical coverage. Unfortunately it turned out that only a very limited number of indicators as mentioned in the inventory of baseline indicators in the common monitoring and evaluation framework seem to be available with this quality. Especially the environmental indicators suffer from huge data gaps (both for the New MS as well as the regional (i.e. NUTS 2) level. What is more – even if this information is available on the MS/regional level – the comparability and thus aggregation on the European scale is difficult.
- Development issues: Following the logic of the common monitoring and evaluation framework, the common baseline indicators are expected to depict the respective geographical areas in terms of economic, social and environmental conditions at the beginning of the programming period. This will then support the assessment of the impacts of the programmes against baseline trends. However, in the context of the present analysis we find useful to add some dynamic indicators to the observation of the programming areas since regional needs and conditions in terms of society and the environment can be better depicted by looking at developments/changes over time (e.g. the economic structure of a region in terms of a shift from the primary to the secondary and tertiary sector). Deficits and needs are often stemming from the speed and irreversibility of such changes.

2.2.3 Clustering of programming areas along status and development indicators

It has to be pointed out, that a clustering exercise is always a reduction of complexity of reality. This means that a loss of information is quite obvious. We therefore would like to stress the point that even if we have provided homogeneous groups of programming areas of RD Programmes the labelling and character of these groups is depicting a regional average, which becomes increasingly difficult with the size of the area. There may be numerous single examples of regional characteristics to be found within each programming area, where the overall character of the cluster does not hold true (in terms of farm size, tourism etc.). Still this result is the best grouping possible with the existing data depicting territorial characteristics.

The concrete approach for setting up the database of clustering:

The challenges in terms of methodological restrictions (see previous chapter), due to the data basis has been tackled in the following way:

Comparability of territorial units – the question of size: Generally the challenge in comparing territorial units with different size is how to normalize the criteria depicting specific aspects. The GDP of a country is not to be compared with the GDP of a province in absolute terms. We have met this challenge by calibrating those indicators used over normalisation units (see description of the indicators below), which met the requirement of arriving at comparability and taking into account territorial specifics of rural areas (e.g. arable land, inhabitants). Moreover, due to the different denominators of the different indicators and the weak comparability and commensurability the indicator values had to be standardised for the applicability of the clustering methods (mean value = 0, standard deviation = 1).

Comparability of territorial units – the question of territorial character: The bias of keeping the metropolitan areas within the calculation would have lead to significant misgrouping of programming areas. Again this bias becomes more significant the larger the territorial unit is. Spatial observation studies (as conducted e.g. in the ESPON programme) have shown that growth and employment is strongly centred in metropolitan areas⁸. In order to depict rural development it would be misleading to include large agglomerations as their growth and employment potentials would hide the real needs of the rural areas. We have met this challenge by cutting of metropolitan regions out of the programming territories. However it would have been necessary to cut out all agglomerations. This would have called for data at a very low aggregated territorial level (NUTS IV – V). As data of this quality is not available in all the MS (especially not in the New MS), we have decided to cut out the respective NUTS 2 regions, but

⁸ having for instance lead to the picture of the “Pentagon” – the area enclosed by the cities Paris, London, Hamburg, Munich and Milano – showing the major proportion in EU growth and innovation within the last decade.

have limited ourselves to the capitals of each MS – as these are the largest metropolitan areas in the respective programming areas. In the cases of MS with several RD programmes this approach could not be applied (as the programming areas are already on the NUTS 2 level – thus posing the problem of eliminating properly the agglomeration effects. However the results of the clustering exercise have shown that in these cases the programming areas with the most significant agglomeration effects (e.g. Comunidad de Madrid, Hamburg, Niedersachsen + Bremen) did “stick-out” due to their economic performance vis-à-vis all other programming areas and had to be eliminated from their clusters in the end.

We are aware of the limitations of this approach⁹ – still data analysis has shown that the bias of including the “growth” peaks of each MS by including the capitals would have been larger than the loss of information if also rural areas surrounding the capitals would have been included. In other words – the clustering follows by definition a rather loosely meshed grid – providing rather trends, than precise regional analysis. Still this approach has produced a much more balanced picture of the areas, especially by eliminating the peaks of agglomeration effects.

Data availability: As described above one of the main challenges was to compare territorial units as heterogeneous as countries and provinces. However, in order to arrive at comparability over all programming areas, the starting point and smallest unit to be depicted has been NUTS 2. Still this observation focus has been necessary throughout the programming areas – i.e. all the information we wanted to depict in our analysis would have to be available at this level. When mirroring the data necessities (as described in the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines) with the data stock available for this purpose¹⁰, we had to realise, that regional data is not available for the majority of indicators in the time series needed. We have tackled this challenge by reducing the number of indicators used in the clustering exercise considerably – ensuring that at least one representative per groups of indicators¹¹ is represented – thus ending up with a total of 18 indicators. Especially the field of environment is hardly to be covered by “hard data”¹², but also data from the New MS is hardly available in time series long enough for a proper analysis.

Development issues: The need to include dynamics in the picture of needs in rural areas, has lead to the conclusion that we will not only stick to the indicators as included in the list of baseline indicators in the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, but enlarge this list by indicators depicting development over time. We have met this challenge by using a third of the indicators used for clustering in a dynamic way – thus depicting changes over time (in most

⁹ Many urban agglomerations have not been cut out (e.g. in France, Germany or Great Britain).

¹⁰ In some cases an area too large has been cut out, which already comprises “rural areas” (e.g. Bulgaria, Poland)
main sources available: EUROSTAT, Rural Development in the European Union – Statistical and Economic Information – Report 2006 (DG Agri)

¹¹ baseline Indicators as listed in the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines are grouped along the 4 Axis of RD Programmes + one horizontal group of indicators

¹² One remarkable data deficit is the lack of data on NATURA 2000 areas on the regional scale throughout Europe, although EU regulations will have to be executed on the basis of this information.

of the cases 10 years). Sure enough for this approach the lack of data has been even more striking.

The clustering of programming areas has been done by two subsequent cluster analyses along a group of status- and development indicators.

Description of indicators

The following set of indicators has finally been used for the clustering exercise:

- Population change 2000-2006 in % of population 2000
- Share of over-65-year-old population 2006 in % of total population 2006
- Population density (inh./km²) 2006
- Gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices (Purchasing Power Parities per inhabitant) 2004
- Change of gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices (PPS) 2000-2004 in % of GDP 2004 at current market prices (PPS)
- Unemployment rate 2006
- Share of employed persons in agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing 2006 in % of total number of employed persons 2006
- Share of employed persons in industry 2006 in % of total number of employed persons 2006
- Share of employed persons in services 2006 in % of total number of employed persons 2006
- Change of employed persons in agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing 1999-2006 in % of total number of employed persons 1999
- Change of employed persons in industry 1999-2006 in % of total number of employed persons 1999
- Change of employed persons in services 1999-2006 in % of total number of employed persons 1999
- Number of tourist beds per 1000 inhabitants 2006
- Average farm size in agriculture 2005
- Utilized agricultural area in % of total area 2006
- Organic crop area in % of total agricultural area 2006 (national value)
- Emission of greenhouse gases (Global warming potential, CO₂ equivalent, Average 2003-2005) in tons per hectare of agricultural area (national value)
- Average economic farm size 2005 (ESU)

The number of clusters – between homogeneity and equal distribution

The computation of clusters has led to a variety of numbers of clusters with rather varying numbers of members in each of them. The final decision to be taken within the clustering exercise has therefore been the fixing of the final number of clusters.

In general the decision of the total number of clusters within a rather large number of members (in our case 94 Programmes) is a decision between maximizing the homogeneity of the clusters and a maximum of equal distribution of number of members within the single cluster. We have tested a range from 6-9 clusters in terms of their homogeneity and their distribution of members.

For the choice of the optimal number of clusters in standard literature there is no commonly accepted rule. However this choice should be oriented upon the underlying aim of the clustering and the practicability of the result vis-à-vis the research question. In our case the overall aim of the clustering exercise is to help to reduce the complexity of the sheer number of RD programmes to be synthesised and compared with each other. By clustering them along their needs the synthesis should be facilitated. This means that a balance had to be achieved between the maximum of homogeneity within the single cluster and the minimum number of clusters possible with a reasonable distribution of members in each of them. In order to arrive at this complex solution we had to check various variants. As the framework conditions were rather strict (i.e. low number of clusters, maximum likelihood of members within them and equal distribution of members) we decided not to use standard stopping rules of clustering procedures, but rather relied on trial and sensitivity tests in order to arrive at the optimal number and composition of clusters.

The choice of number of clusters followed the need to keep the number of clusters at a reasonably low number. The results of the hierarchical clustering approach show that a number between 7 and 9 clusters would be optimal (as depicted in the relative differences between the results of “number of clusters”). The final decision for eight clusters was based upon the most equal distribution of members to the different clusters:

- Distribution of members with 7 Clusters: 27 – 5 – 18 – 14 – 17 – 4 – 5
- Distribution of members with 8 Clusters: 18 – 5 – 18 – 14 – 17 – 9 – 4 – 5
- Distribution of members with 9 Clusters: 18 – 4 – 18 – 14 – 17 – 9 – 4 – 1 – 5

In order to test the robustness of these clustering results the so called “F-values” have been computed. This test is used to check upon the homogeneity of clusters over all indicators used. In other words it is a robustness check for the number of clusters over all indicators with respect to the balance of total number of clusters, and homogeneity within the single cluster¹³. These

¹³ We preferred this method to the so called R² test, because of the clear advantage in terms of testing the homogeneity of the single clusters.

values are optimal in a range between 0 and 1. The calculation is done by dividing the variance of the single criteria within the single clusters by the variance of the criteria in total. The smaller the resulting “F-value” (it should be below 1) the more homogeneous is the cluster in question. The rationale behind this analysis is that in this case (minimized “F-value” – at least below 1) the variable within the single cluster is less diverting than within the total of criteria.

The results for the different variants – i.e. 7-9 clusters in the hierarchical clustering, 8 clusters in the final version by k-means clustering – show overall no significant differences in the homogeneity of the clusters (except for the single element-cluster in the 9 cluster variant). Thus – due to the fact that in the case of 8 clusters the most equal distribution of members in the single clusters is ensured – the choice of this clustering variant seemed to be justified.

2.2.4 The results

After the clustering procedure we arrived at eight clusters with objects ranging from 19 to 4. However, this number of cluster groups was expanded to ten in order to better reflect some specifics of programming areas, which were rated as disturbances in the homogeneity of the original eight clusters. These two additional clusters are therefore merely based upon selected characteristics of programmes, which made them “stick-out” from their former ones and are not entirely justified by clustering methodology. In the following we will therefore present the eight computed clusters first and already mark within each of them, which members will be extracted in the following. Then we will present the two “new” clusters with their respective Programming areas.

The clusters and their members

“The Traditionalists” (TRADs)

Two criteria determined the membership to this cluster: the relatively high density of population (in absolute terms) relative to all other programming areas and the large size of farms.

These programming areas – although rather heterogeneous in terms of their territorial character (large agglomerations embedded to a larger extent than in all the other clusters), is characterised by a rather “traditional” agricultural approach and embraces the agricultural core regions in Europe. They all show a comparably high economic performance (which is only to a small extent based upon agricultural production) on the other hand the population in the areas is stagnant or only slightly increasing. The areas around agglomerations are facing an increasing competition of land use (urban sprawl). Another common “need” within this cluster is the lack of diversification of the agricultural sector and cooperation between the primary, secondary and tertiary sector.

The only factor, which sticks out in terms of disturbing the overall homogeneity of the cluster is the case of Luxemburg (Grand-Duché), which shows an outstanding performance in terms of economic performance (GDP).

The members of this cluster are 17 programming areas:

Denmark	Saarland (GER)
Hexagone without Île de France	Germany – National Programming area
Bayern (GER)	<i>Luxemburg (Grand-Duché) – shifted to new cluster!</i>
Rheinland-Pfalz (GER)	Pais Vasco (ESP)
Baden-Württemberg (GER)	Great Britain (without London)
Hessen (GER)	Northern Ireland (GB)
Nordrhein-Westfalen (GER)	Scotland (GB)
<i>Niedersachsen + Bremen (GER)</i>	
<i>- shifted to new cluster!</i>	Wales (GB)
Schleswig-Holstein (GER)	

“The Intensives” (INTENS)

This cluster is determined by two dominant qualities of its members: the economic farm size of the members of this cluster is comparably high compared to the rest of Europe. Moreover the programming areas of this cluster show a positive population development.

Agriculture is conducted in comparably smaller plots with a high degree of economic efficiency, but due to the pressure from settlements and other economic sectors the “need” of these areas is a balanced management of land. Moreover these areas are rather highly industrialised with a major proportion of their wealth stemming from the secondary and tertiary sector. Still the agricultural sector has significant output, but has to compete with the other sectors thus leading to a rather industrialized type of agriculture and intensive farming practices.

The main diverting factors within this cluster are the indicators “population density” and “economic performance”: while the Région Wallonne (BE) shows a comparably low population density, the programming area of Hamburg (GER) is one of the territories with the highest density of population (due to the fact that it is almost entirely an agglomeration area). The same holds true for the economic performance, where again Hamburg (GER) sticks out. One other specific is the mal-performance of Malta and Hamburg in terms of green-house gas emissions (with Malta showing the worst performance for all over Europe).

There are 5 programming areas in this cluster:

Vlaams Gewest (BE)	Malta
Région Wallonne (BE)	Netherlands without Noord-Holland (Amsterdam)
<i>Hamburg (GER) – shifted to new cluster!</i>	

“The Diversifiers” (DIVs)

This cluster is determined by two dominant qualities of its members “medium to high economic level, medium farm size compared to the rest of the sample of programming areas.

This cluster is not so much joined through the common character of agriculture (farm sizes vary considerably and extensive and intensive farming practices are to be found), but the fact that economic performance is quite high and the tertiary sector development seems to be stronger than average, but overall starting from a rather advanced level. These regions are characterised by the attempt to bridge agriculture and the tertiary sector – benefiting in most of the cases from the topographic conditions (Scandinavia, Alpine/mountainous regions). The agricultural production is diversified (wood, crops) because of the very same reason. The pressure from population and land use competition is not so significant in Scandinavia, but certainly an issue within mountainous programming areas (see e.g. Bolzano).

The indicators producing the most deviations in this overall homogenous cluster are “change in primary sector”, which is especially high in Corse (FR) and “tourism”, with three small, but highly specialized tourist regions included in the cluster (i.e. Valle d'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste (IT), Provincia Autonoma Bolzano-Bozen (IT) and Provincia Autonoma Trento (IT)).

The objects within this cluster are 9 programming areas:

Manner-Suomi without Etelä (FI)	<i>Valle d'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste (IT) - shifted to new cluster!</i>
Åland (FI)	Provincia Autonoma Bolzano-Bozen (IT)
Corse (FR)	Lazio (IT)
Provincia Autonoma Trento (IT)	Sweden without Stockholm
Liguria (IT)	

“The Eco-ruralists” (ECORUR)

This cluster is determined by three dominant qualities of its members a relative low deviation of farm size among the cluster (compared to all other clusters), with a comparably low absolute farm size compared to the European average and a comparably high proportion of organic farming.

Again the agricultural sector in these regions is rather heterogeneous – thus allowing for no common characterisation. Economic performance of the regions is varying among the members of the cluster – moreover the structure of the economy is divers and the pressure from other sectors and on land use can not be generalized. This is depicted – for instance by the average level of greenhouse gas emissions compared to the EU average (which is another factor establishing the overall homogeneity of the cluster) There is no common topographic pattern behind these programming areas. The only striking quality, which combines these programming areas, is the comparably high proportion of organic farming practice. This determining factor

“organic farming” leads also to one more dominating character of this cluster, that only comparably small programmes (in terms of land cover) are included. The quality of “comparably high proportion of organic farming“, only strikes on the small territorial scale (programmes like Poland or France would be by far too heterogeneous in themselves to qualify for this cluster.

Due to the comparable large size of the cluster (largest cluster after all), there are some diverting aspects to be listed as well: the development of the primary sector is overall homogeneous, except for Molise (IT), where the primary sector has been increasing. The programme of Austria somehow sticks out for the indicator of the economic performance, although the Northern Italian regions (e.g. Friuli-Venezia Giulia (IT), Veneto (IT)) are not that far behind in their performance. The two programming areas Região Autónoma da Madeira (PT) and Região Autónoma dos Açores (PT) are showing deviating results in terms of comparably low ageing of populations and a rather stable economic performance (i.e. low change of GDP).

There are 19 regions included in this cluster:

Austria without Vienna - shifted to new cluster!

Piemonte (IT)	Campania (IT)
Abruzzo (IT)	Puglia (IT)
Umbria (IT)	Basilicata (IT)
Marche (IT)	Calabria (IT)
Emilia-Romagna (IT)	Sicilia (IT)
Toscana (IT)	Sardegna (IT)
Friuli-Venezia Giulia (IT)	Molise (IT)
	<i>Região Autónoma da Madeira (PT) - shifted to new cluster!</i>
Veneto (IT)	<i>Região Autónoma dos Açores (PT) - shifted to new cluster!</i>
Lombardia (IT)	

“Rural areas under pressure” (RAPs)

This cluster is determined by three dominant qualities of its members “medium to high economic level, which shows a strong increase compared to the rest of the clusters, together with population increase”. The economic farm size in absolute terms is on a mid-field level compared to the other EU programming areas.

Like in cluster 6 (“Diversifiers”), the combination of a good economic performance, heterogeneous agricultural structures and a strong tertiary sector dominates in these programming areas. But unlike in the latter case the pressure on land and the competition between the primary and the other economic sectors is quite significant here. To a large extent programming areas are included in this cluster, which show the same pattern of demographic pressure: generally agglomerations are the most likely areas, where population increase may be observed. But population increase may also be found in areas of high attractiveness due to

climatic reasons and/or quality of life (e.g. the southern Spanish programming areas). It seems that the latter case may be one explanation of the character of the regions in this cluster. The needs stemming from this characteristic will be to integrate economic sectors to the maximum and link economic sectors horizontally. Moreover the age structure of these regions will have to be observed closely, as demographic shifts are more likely to occur in these programming areas.

The diverting aspects within this cluster, is the level of tourism on the one hand: the “strong” tourist regions of Illes Balears (ESP), Cyprus and Canarias (ES) are sticking out in this indicator. Like in other clusters with “urban programmes” the diminishing of the primary sector is another aspect: Comunidad de Madrid (ESP) as well as Canarias (ES) show a rather striking decrease of agriculture, while for instance in Cyprus this sector increased.

There are 15 programming areas included in this cluster:

<i>Cyprus – shifted to new cluster!</i>	Cantabria (ESP)
Ireland	Andalucia (ESP)
Aragón (ESP)	<i>Canarias (ES) – shifted to new cluster!</i>
<i>Illes Balears (ESP) – shifted to new cluster!</i>	Castilla-la Mancha (ESP)
Cataluña (ESP)	Comunidad Valenciana (ESP)
La Rioja (ESP)	Región de Murcia (ESP)
<i>Comunidad de Madrid (ESP) – shifted to new cluster!</i>	Spain National Programming Area
Comunidad Foral de Navarra (ESP)	

“The Drained Traditionalists” (DTRs)

This cluster is determined by three dominant qualities of its members a “medium to low economic level, population decrease and an in average large farm size (in absolute terms)”.

Basically this cluster shows the same character as cluster 5 (“Traditionalists”) – especially in terms of the quality of the agricultural sector. Still the differences are to be found in the genesis of this structure, which is brought from the tradition of a centrally planned economy. Moreover the most significant difference is the negative demographic development in these areas. This cluster is characterised by an outflow of population thus the pressure on land use and the economic performance in general is low. Rural areas are facing the challenge if diminishing infrastructure and a “brain drain” to the agglomerations. Still agriculture is organised in a traditional way and through the large scale to some extent still competitive.

In general this cluster is very homogenous. The only diverting aspect is to be found in the indicator economic farm size, where Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (GER) shows a better performance than the rest of the cluster members.

The cluster consists of 5 programming areas:

Sachsen-Anhalt (GER)	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (GER)
Sachsen (GER)	Brandenburg + Berlin (GER)
Thüringen (GER)	

“Rural areas endangered” (RAEs)

This cluster is determined by three dominant qualities of its members a low economic performance in terms of absolute GDP/capita. Still all members of this cluster (except for Contiente without Lisboa (PT)) show a comparable high growth of GDP. Secondly the combining factor is the population decrease and thirdly the small sized farms – especially in terms of comparably low economic farm sizes.

This cluster includes the prototype of a rural area in danger. The danger of depopulation together with a decrease of economic performance brings along the decline in social structures and infrastructure. The character of agriculture – consisting mostly of small units without real competitive advantage vis-à-vis the world agricultural market enforces the tense situation in these areas. After such an analysis these areas would be considered as the main beneficiaries of political support in order to stop or even turn around these tendencies. The pressure on land is small and the attractiveness of the regions for economic activities and quality of life is comparably low. This cluster is probably best supported by comparable studies on the overall regional character of EU regions. ESPON 2.4.2. showed in the attempt to depict regional performance over 26 indicators¹⁴ (on the NUTS 2-3 level) this very same situation of the regions represented in this cluster. In cohesion policy terms these would be typical regions “lagging behind”.

Even though the homogeneity of this cluster is high, there are some specifics to be noted: The employment in the primary sector is showing a relatively wide range from very high in Romania without Bukarest to comparably low in Slovakia without Bratislava as well as Czech Republic without Prag region. This variation may be explained by the relative high proportion of secondary and tertiary activities in the latter two programming areas and in differences in the historical development of farming in the three cases (with a stronger emphasis on collective farming in the former Czechoslovakia than in Romania. Another striking specific of this cluster is the relative high proportion of organic farming in Estonia and Latria contrasted by the least proportion of organic farming among the programming areas all over Europe in Bulgaria without Yugozapaden as well as Romania without Bukarest.

There are 16 programming areas included in this cluster:

Bulgaria without Yugozapaden	Contiente without Lisboa (PT)
Czech Republic without Prag region	Romania without Bukarest

¹⁴ The so called Regional Classification of Europe (RCE) – see ESPON 2.4.2 Integrated analysis of transnational and national territories (http://www.espon.eu/mmp/online/website/content/projects/243/388/index_EN.html)

Estonia	Slovakia without Bratislava
Greece without Attiki	Slovenia
Hungary without Közép-Magyarország	Principado de Asturias (ESP)
Latvia	Castilla y León (ESP)
Lithuania	Extremadura (ESP)
Poland without Mazowieckie	Galicia (ESP)

“The Remote Areas” (RAs)

This cluster includes the rural areas of the French Overseas Departments and Territories. They are quite naturally within a separate cluster as their regional profile and character is unique and not comparable with the rest of the EU. This does not only stem from the climatic and topographic conditions but also from the historical genesis of the regional structures. The agricultural sector plays quite a significant role in these regions. Diversification into other sectors is comparably low, as is the economic performance.

The only aspect, which separates those members within this cluster, is the fact that in Guyana (FR) the increase of population shows a comparably higher extent than in all the other overseas departments.

There are 4 programming areas included in this cluster:

Réunion (FR)	Guadeloupe (FR)
Martinique (FR)	Guyana (FR)

After this first round of clustering conducted in a pure mathematical way, it might be argued that some of the memberships of specific programming areas to specific clusters may be debated in terms of practicability and common sense. Especially those members of the various clusters, which did not meet the homogeneity criterion of the single clusters to a satisfactory extent (as described for each of the clusters above), seemed to be worthwhile to be eliminated from the clusters. When analysing these programming areas common patterns of how to re-group but still integrate them into the cluster analysis, were detected. Thus it has been decided to add two more clusters to the analysis hosting the “misfits” from various clusters, but building themselves rather homogenous clusters:

The economic high-performers (E-high-perf)

This new cluster hosts programming areas, which stuck out from their original clusters because of their economic performance. In almost all of these cases were facing the biases of agglomeration effects – i.e. these are programming areas with a highly urban character – thus showing quite well the phenomenon of increased economic performance in an urban context.

There are 5 programming areas included in this cluster:

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Luxemburg (Grand-Duché) (LU) | Comunidad de Madrid (ESP) |
| Hamburg (GER) | Austria without Vienna |
| Niedersachsen + Bremen (GER) | |

The “strong” tourist regions and islands (TOUR_I)

This new cluster comprises the (rather small) programming areas, which are characterised by a very strong tertiary sector (tourism). They stuck out from their original clusters due to their specific character – small areas, mostly islands, high income from tourism.

There are 6 programming areas included in this cluster:

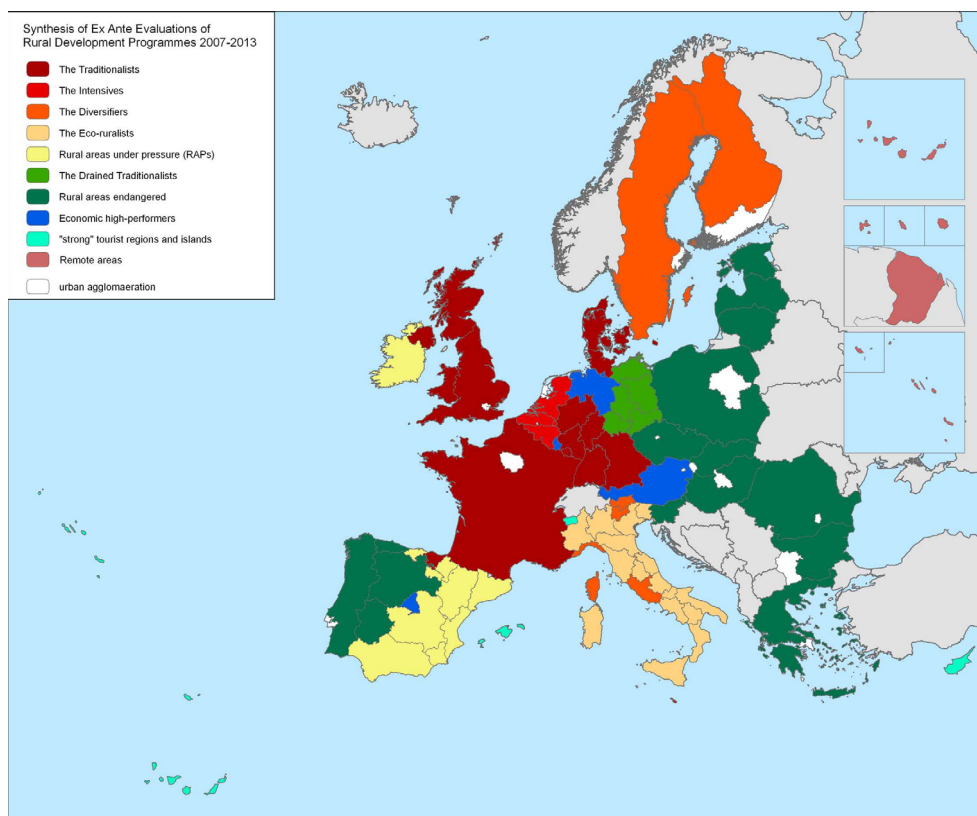
- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Illes Balears (ESP) | Região Autónoma da Madeira (PT) |
| Cyprus | Região Autónoma dos Açores (PT) |
| Canarias (ESP) | Valle d'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste (IT) |

With these changes we would arrive at ten clusters with the following distribution of members:
16 – 4 – 8 – 16 – 12 – 5 – 16 – 4 – 5 – 6

The following map provides an overview of the distribution and members of the ten clusters:

Figure 6

Clustering of programming areas – the final clusters



When comparing these results with similar exercises on the European scale it becomes quite clear that only limited parallels are to be found. The reason is to be found in the specifics of this clustering exercise as pointed out above:

- The approaches taken by other clustering/typology attempts depicting rural areas, are limiting themselves to a very low number of indicators (in the case of the typology mentioned above – only demography and GDP adjusted to commuting have been used). – Thus the results seem to be more homogenous, but are poorer in their focus.
- The approaches cut out more precisely urban areas – thus reducing the biases of agglomeration effects more appropriately.
- The territorial units are comparable – as only one type of NUTS areas (either NUTS 2 or 3) has been used for the classification/clustering exercise.

2.3 Tools for quantitative and qualitative analysis

For the purpose of this work our approach includes a combination of quantitative with qualitative tools, analytical with inductive investigations.

The compilation of qualitative and quantitative information from each ex-ante synthesis report study, the standardizing of the information contained will be conducted with the assistance of tools developed for extracting the information (tool 1a, and 1b), for assessing the information and identifying information gaps (tool 1), and for synthesizing the information according to clusters (tool 2). Additional information sources will be collected according to the format defined in tool 3. During the judgement phase additional guidelines (tool 4) will help to draft the final deliverables.

The analysis tool (tool 1, 1a, 1b, 2) have been prepared and tested by the core team as basis for the work of the geographical experts. The expert feedback led to considerable improvements of the tools, which have been adapted to the necessity of a quick assembling of relevant information.

Table 2

Overview of tools

Tool	Components
<p>Tool 1: Assessment grid</p> <p><i>Data sources: ex-ante reports (and of their updates, where applicable); regional/national RD programmes, Additional Data sources and National Strategy Plans (where appropriate)</i></p> <p>⇒ phase 2 (first appraisal) ⇒ phase 3 (analysis)</p>	<p>a) Methodological section:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – basic identification data – ex-ante-evaluation process/approach – ways of integrating lessons learned into programmes <p>b) Thematic section for the full review covering</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – information on evaluation topics 1-7 – information gaps – SWOT sections necessary for addressing theme 1 – overall national objectives from the National Strategy Plans <p>c) guidelines for filling out</p>
<p>Tool No. 1a: Data collection grid for Indicators (Task 2.3.)</p> <p><i>Data sources: ex-ante reports (and of their updates, where applicable); regional/national RD programmes</i></p> <p>⇒ basis for theme 2</p>	<p>a) Data Collection Grid for Baseline Indicators (obj.)</p> <p>b) Data Collection Grid for Baseline indicators (cont.)</p> <p>c) Data Collection Grid for programme-specific baseline indicators</p> <p>d) Data Collection Grid for impact indicators</p> <p>e) Data Collection Grid for programme-specific impact indicators</p>
<p>Tool No. 1b: Data collection grid for Inventory of RD measures (Task 2.4)</p> <p><i>Data sources: ex-ante reports (and of their updates, where applicable); regional/national RD programmes</i></p> <p>⇒ basis for theme 3</p>	<p>a) Data collection grid for Inventory of RD measures (breakdown by measure)</p> <p>b) Data collection grid for Inventory RD measures (total EAFRD)</p>
<p>Tool 2: Synthesis grid</p> <p><i>Data sources: ex-ante reports (and of their updates, where applicable); regional/national RD programmes, Additional Data sources and National Strategy Plans (where appropriate)</i></p> <p>⇒ phase 3 and 4</p>	<p>Corresponds to assessment grid tool no1. structured along the identified clusters of programmes areas, synthesizing information</p>
<p>Tool 3: Guideline on gathering additional information</p>	<p>a) list for literature-collection (see chapter 7) grouped according to proposed structure</p> <p>b) guidelines for semi-open telephone interviews for theme 7</p>
<p>Tool 4: Guideline on drafting of final deliverables</p>	<p>Reporting format for cluster reports; Preliminary Final Deliverable, executive Summary, synthetic summary, Draft final deliverable defining components, responsibilities, extent.</p>

Differentiating the information to be collected has proven to be very useful in previous synthesis work: the grids and questionnaires are therefore structured in different columns, which allow distinguishing findings, information gaps and own judgments.

2.3.1 Pre-test of tools for data gathering and processing

During the pre-test-phase the tools no. 1, 1a and 1b were applied on three different RD programmes (Basque Country, Luxembourg and Austria). During this exercise the tools and guidelines were tested primarily with respect to

- completeness
- availability of information
- usefulness for the purpose of work
- practicability

The core team was invited to fill the tools and to send their feedback in order to develop them further. During this intensive discussion-phase the following issues have emerged:

The test-phase of Tool no. 1 (Assessment Grid) has shown that the grid works reasonably well as it follows the sequence of the Ex-Ante report. However, Ex-Ante Reports do not always follow the same sequence and the geographical experts need to be provided with guidelines and examples of the kind and level of detail required. For this purpose a column with sub-headings was introduced, listing the components that are necessary to be covered in order to sufficiently describe the respective topic.

It is also important to be clear whether any further information will be required and to calculate the time from the outset. For this purpose, it will be necessary, that geographical experts write down and mark the page numbers of the sources used. It is much more time consuming to go back to a document after having looked at other sources. It is therefore necessary to remember where information can be found in each document.

Considering the fact, that the ex-ante evaluations are usually carried out in a very interactive process between programme authorities and ex-ante evaluators, it can be assumed, that most ex-ante recommendations are integrated into the respective programmes, while the final ex-ante report does not contain too much critical remarks. Therefore special attention has been paid, to give the geographical experts the possibility, to add emphasize any critical issues and context information:

- The information, which the experts can provide in the findings column of tool 1 is about what the problems, objectives, measures are – rather than whether they are right or wrong.
- To complement this information critically, the column “expert’s consideration” is rather important. However, the geographical experts need to be careful here too. The programmes and evaluations are immense (e.g. over 1000 pages for the small Basque Region) and there is very little time and resources compared to the programmers and evaluators. In the framework of this synthesis, the geographical experts can only

provide preliminary impressions of gaps and contradictions but to substantiate this would take more time.

- Furthermore it is important in this section that not only gaps and contradictions are covered but also point to innovations or interesting or promising developments. For this purpose a proper column has been introduced.

The nature of the 7 evaluation themes is rather descriptive. Only theme 7 (Ongoing evaluation system) explicitly requires to find prospective answers, whereas theme 1 to 6 suggest, that a mere “summary” is asked. Concerning theme 7, therefore additional feedback from the experts involved in the programming and ex ante evaluation is considered essential for covering the ground satisfactorily. For this purpose a questionnaires for interviews (optionally to be used for an e-mail inquiry) has been designed.

In order to create a common understanding of work and to ensure the comparability of the information gathered the following approach has been developed:

- Round letter: geographical experts are introduced to their tasks via regular round letters, which summarize the tasks ahead, the next deadlines and give short background information concerning the tasks to be carried out.
- Geographical Expert Meeting: during a one-day meeting the geographical experts are introduced to the synthesis tasks. They get presented the draft analysis tools and have the opportunity to clarify any related questions, to suggest modifications to the tools, before they are effectively applied.
- SharePoint-site with information sources and examples of pre-filled grids: a password-protected SharePoint site is accessible for the geographical experts and serves as a platform for information-exchange.
- The key terms are provided centrally in form of a glossary. Geographical experts will be further asked to mention terms, which they consider particularly interesting, or where they need further definitions. In the understanding of a “living-document” the key-terms are therefore updated throughout the conduction of the synthesis tasks.
- Questions & Answers Catalogue: Emerging questions during the elaboration of the synthesis are forwarded to the core team, which works as a clearing-house for unforeseen problems. Within the core-team a definite answer for the question is being searched. If the provided questions and answers are potentially relevant also for other geographical experts, it is included into the question & answer catalogue, which is regularly updated and uploaded to the SharePoint site and/or sent out via e-mail to the geographical experts.
- Quality-Check of filled tools with feedback-loop for geographical experts: Once the geographical experts fill their tools, they have the possibility to “comment” in appropriate “remark” columns. During the quality check, the overall quality of the filled tools, as well

as any particular remarks or problems encountered is checked. The geographical experts receive a feedback after this quality check and are asked to (1) improve the information where necessary (2) to correct where the quality check has detected mistakes (3) to verify, where the quality check has identified some doubts concerning the plausibility of findings. Only after such a double-check the respective tools are then passed on to the further synthesis tasks.

2.3.2 Brief description of tools

Various templates for the analysis tools described below have been designed and used by the geographical experts in order to gather the data on the specific RD Programmes.

Tool 1 – Assessment grid

The assessment grid is the main information grid for the work of the geographical experts. It contains a methodological section as well as a thematic section for the full review of the 7 evaluation topics. Two sub-tools (tool no. 1a, 1b) provide additional quantitative information in order to support the assessment of specific themes (in particular theme 1, 2 and 3).

The assessment grid contains the following columns:

Table 3

Assessment grid

Column	CONTENT
[1]	THEME
[2]	TOPICS: These are the topics which should be covered in the synthesis and which follow from theme 1 to theme 6 the CMEF-guidelines concerning the Ex-Ante reports. *) Topics which refer to "EU level" are however to be understood in the national/regional context. The reference to EU level is mostly relevant for the synthesis of the 94 programmes.
[3]	SUB-HEADINGS. Findings (in the findings row) are structured according to the proposed sub-headings, by indicating (a); (b),(c)... within the text
[4]	FINDINGS: Description and summary of findings related to the evaluation topics (rows) as found in the different sources. "Own interpretations" or "judgements" are avoided. The findings stay as close as possible in the "terminology" of the analysed documents.
[5]	REPORTED IN THE EX-ANTE: Estimation to what extent the topic is reported in the Ex-Ante (e.g. 10%, 20%, 30% etc.). This indicates how complete the ex-ante reports were and to what extent other sources (Rural development programmes, National Strategy Plans, additional sources) had to be used. This should however not be understood as a quality judgement.
[6]-[11]	SOURCES: Indication of main sources (incl. page numbers): [6] Ex-Ante Reports [7] SEA Reports; [8] RD-Programmes; [9] National Strategy Plans; [10] Additional sources (specify the latter in [11]). The information concerning the page numbers serves mainly for the geographical expert's conveniences lock up information in a later stage. The green sources are OBLIGATORY for the respective topic!!!
[12] (only if relevant!)	CRITICAL EXPERT'S CONSIDERATIONS such as critical judgement; own preliminary impressions of gaps and contradictions; give critical hints, indicate what was difficult to understand; information and data gaps
[13] (only if relevant!)	Emphasizing EXPERT'S CONSIDERATIONS concerning the findings, such as what you consider particularly interesting, innovations and particularly interesting and promising developments

Tool 1a – Data collection grid for indicators

This tool has the aim to give an overview on the baseline indicators and on the programme-specific impacts indicators established in the regional/national RD programmes. It provides the basis for the analysis of theme 2, in particular for topic 2.4. 'Main baseline and impact indicators proposed for measuring the programmes' success and overall assessment of their application.'

The overview of established CMEF baseline indicators will be present at least at two levels: The Member State level and in aggregation of this data at the EU level. In Member States with regional RD programmes it will be possible to consider also the regional level. In these cases the Member State level will be an aggregate of analysis of the regional programmes.

The tables concerning different types of indicators (i.e. common baseline indicators, programme specific baseline indicators, common impact indicators, programme specific impact indicators) are divided into different data-sheets within the EXCEL-file.

Tool 1b – Data collection grid for Inventory of RD measures

This tool helps to prepare an inventory of the Rural Development measures included in the regional/national RD programmes as well as their respective financial allocations (including national co-financing). The inventory represents the basis for addressing theme 3, in particular topic 3.2. "Main measures applied to in view of achieving the programmes objectives" and 3.3. "Overall assessment of the balance among the measure applied in view of objectives pursued".

Tool 2 – Synthesis grid

The synthesis grid corresponds to the assessment grid tool no. 1 and is additionally grouped along the identified clusters. The respective information from the 94 programmes will therefore be summarized for each of the identified clusters. The tool has been designed as a support tool for the analysing and judging tasks of the core team.

Tool 3 – Guideline on gathering additional information

Depending on the outcome of task 3.2 concerning the most relevant information gaps, additional information sources are gathered in order to cover the evaluation themes (see list in chapter 7).

The list for literature-collection (tool 3a) is proposed to be grouped along the following structure:

- Commission documents
- Regulations, guidelines, handbooks and information material
- Studies and reports commissioned by DG Agriculture
- Studies related to groupings of countries or specific types of areas: e.g
- Comprehensive studies and reviews
- Country specific analysis, studies and background materials

3 b Interview guidelines

For addressing evaluation theme no. 7 (Ongoing Evaluation System) the geographical experts are requested to conduct for each programme 1-3-telephone interviews with relevant programme bodies (Managing Authorities, Ex-ante Evaluators, stakeholders etc.). Alternatively, the answers to the three evaluations topics can also be gathered via e-mail.

The guidelines contain a short introductory text concerning the context and purpose of this study. The three interview questions are formulated in close relation to the topics of theme 7.

- What are the future needs for the implementation of the ongoing evaluation system on Rural development programmes level (topic 7.1)
- Regarding the above-mentioned needs, what are the expectations and demands addressing the future services provided by the European Evaluation Network (please distinguish from the National Network!!) (topic 7.2)
- What are the general suggestions for possible revisions of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (topic 7.3)

The interview phase is additionally supported by a support letter of DG Agriculture and is available in the community languages.

Tool 4 – Guideline on drafting of final deliverable

This tool consists of a reporting format for the final report, including the executive summary. It defines the structure of the chapters, the respective responsibilities for the Members of the Core team, which are drafting the respective sections and the envisaged extent of the chapters.

3 ANALYSIS OF EVALUATION THEMES – SETTING THE FRAME

3.1 Content and structure of the following chapter:

The following two chapters (3 & 4) present the main findings of the analysis of all ex-ante evaluations of EU RD programmes. In general these findings are grouped along the seven themes, which largely reflect the “indicative outline of an ex-ante evaluation report”, which has been included into the Commission guidelines for ex-ante evaluations. The seven themes are furthermore subdivided into various topics, which could be understood as research/evaluation questions to be answered by the evaluators. Thus the following chapters will follow this logic tackling theme by theme and within each theme answering the topic related research questions. The following table provides an overview of the themes and their related topics:

THEMES	TOPICS
SWOT analysis and assessment of needs	<p>Main problems, risks and needs of the EU rural areas in terms of social, economic and environmental criteria;</p> <p>Main driving forces, strengths and opportunities in the EU rural areas;</p> <p>Main identified causes of disparities between rural areas at European level;</p> <p>Main categories of beneficiaries identified by the ex ante evaluations as priority target groups of interventions and their needs;</p> <p>Possible other problems/beneficiaries not addressed by the implementation of the programmes.</p>
Policy objectives	<p>Main policy objectives in terms of expected impacts identified by the Member States (including objectives reflecting national priorities);</p> <p>Main general, specific and operational objectives and expected results identified by the Member States;</p> <p>Overall level of coherence between programmes’ objectives and the National Strategy Plans;</p> <p>Main baseline and impact indicators (common and programme specific) proposed for measuring the programmes’ success and overall assessment of their application.</p>
Measures	<p>Ways and extent to which lessons learned from previous programming periods have been taken into account in designing the programmes;</p> <p>Main measures applied to in view of achieving the programmes’ objectives;</p> <p>Overall assessment of the balance among the measure applied in view of objectives pursued.</p>
Impacts	<p>Main expected impacts at EU level of the measures to be applied (social, economic and environmental);</p> <p>Other possible impacts and/or unintended effects;</p> <p>Potential conflicts between different impacts;</p> <p>Main categories of stakeholders who are (positively or negatively) affected by the programmes.</p>

THEMES	TOPICS
Added value of Community involvement	Overall assessment of the extent to which subsidiarity and proportionality have been taken into account in the programmes; Overall assessment of the coherence of the programmes with respect to Community objectives; Overall assessment of the level of complementarity, synergy and coherence of the programmes with other Community interventions (e.g. structural funds).
Monitoring and evaluation	Proposed ways of implementing the monitoring and evaluation system; Proposed indicators for the measurement of inputs, outputs, results and impacts; Proposed systems for collecting, storing and processing monitoring data.
Ongoing evaluation system	Possible future needs of Member States for the implementation of the ongoing evaluation system; Possible ways of supporting the Member States in the implementation of the future ongoing evaluation system through the European evaluation framework; Suggestions for possible revisions of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.

Technically the answers to each of the topics will be structured in a standardized format in order to clarify, which information is derived from the ex-ante evaluations or other sources and mostly unfiltered by the expert judgement of the authors of this report, and which information is the judgement and classification of the authors of this synthesis. Furthermore a brief summary for each topic will be provided. – Thus the following content per topic within each theme will be followed:

“Rationale”: The background and theoretical concept of each topic will be explained and how the topic is embedded into the theme as well as the overall CMEF. “Key Terms” will allow for a linking of the single topic to the overall context of the CMEF and shall provide some guidance for the reader. Introduction: The “main findings” are derived from the summaries done by the geographical experts. The “critical points/innovations” are also based on the findings of the geographical experts supplemented by the core team and in some cases by the ex ante evaluators of the Rural development programmes (reported by the geographical experts). In those cases, where restrictions in the findings were caused by a lack of information – the “Completeness/Information gaps” are listed. An overall statement on the coverage of this topic in the ex-ante evaluations is given. The last ones were indicated by the Rural development programmes-code. The “conclusions” are based on the synthesis work of the core team.

The findings within each theme and topic, has been checked against the clusters of programming areas as set up above. In some cases there have been relevant findings and useful additional information in terms of cluster specifics, and patterns of performance of the RD programmes have helped to generalize some of them. Still the evaluators have only stated these findings where relevant – this means that an additional top has been included in those topics – “Cluster specific findings”. On the other hand this implies that in those topics, where this sub-heading cannot be found, the cluster specific findings did not deliver any significant results.

3.2 Approaches of ex ante evaluations

Rationale

Regarding the approaches of ex ante evaluations, the “Guidelines for the Ex Ante Evaluations” (Guidance note C) refers to Article 84 of Council Regulation 1698/2005 and defines the following roles and responsibilities: “The task of ex ante evaluation is to provide an independent judgement and recommendations on technical and/or policy issues linked to the programme in view of improving and strengthening its quality. (...) The interaction between programme formulation and ex ante evaluation should permit the responsible authorities to develop each component of the programme in the light of the input progressively acquired from the ex ante evaluation. During the different stages of the programming process, the competent authorities can decide which of the recommendations made by ex ante evaluation to take on board, and which are the changes to be introduced to the programme. This interaction may lead to revisions of programmes. For example, the evaluation of the impact of the strategy might lead to a reconsideration of the policy mix and to a revision of the programme strategy. Considering its important function to critically review the (draft) programme in relation to strategies and objectives, it is clear that ex-ante evaluation has to be carried out by an ex-ante evaluator who is not directly involved in conceiving, implementing, managing or financing the programme.”¹⁵

The methodical framework of the ex ante evaluation contains especially the intervention logic and the indicators of the CMEF. Special tasks are the assessment of the programme-related SWOT analysis, the programme targets, the expected impacts and of the proposed implementation procedures, including monitoring, evaluation and financial management. The ex ante evaluation is an obligatory element of the Rural development programmes programming phase and an integral part of the Rural development programmes (Article 16 CR 1698/2005) whereas an ex ante evaluation is not obligatory for the establishment of the National Strategies.

Regarding the above mentioned issues one can distinguish between two main topics: First, the description of the approach of carrying out ex ante evaluation (organisation of the evaluation process, main actors, integration of stakeholders, methodological approaches), keeping in mind that a documentation of the process in the ex ante report is not required by the evaluation framework (regulations, CMEF) and second, the question which recommendations were taken into account and which not. As described above, the analysis is based on summaries done by the geographic experts. To give an impression how often one aspect was named in these summaries the following text contains “directly mentioned in XY cases”. This means, that the geographical expert has mentioned this aspect in his grid. But this does not automatically mean that the aspect was not addressed in the ex ante evaluation itself because of two reasons: First, the aspect is not mentioned in the ex ante report although it was executed (because the

¹⁵ Handbook for the CMEF: Guidance note C – Ex-ante evaluation guidelines including SEA, p. 8.

description of the evaluation process was not required by the evaluation framework). Second, the aspect is mentioned in the ex ante report but not documented by the geographical expert. As a result, the figures are a kind of estimation.

Key terms

Ex ante evaluation, CMEF, stakeholders

Main findings

All ex ante evaluations were executed in an accompanying way and nearly always carried out as an interactive and iterative process with constant coordination between the evaluator and the programme authorities following the CMEF-guidelines (directly mentioned in 57 cases). Often it is stated that the evaluation has been accomplished by assessing step-by-step individual sections and chapters of the Rural development programmes. The results were fed into the ongoing planning process of the Rural development programmes (directly mentioned in 24 cases). A specific approach was executed in DE-Lower Saxony: The ministry has delegated the development or even the coordination and writing of the Rural development programmes to an external consultant. The ex ante evaluator was a subcontractor of this consultant. This structure led to a complex process: The interaction between the ministry and the evaluator was always indirect via the consultant. This has caused friction losses and considerable time delay although a formative evaluation with continuous feedback processes was conducted.

In general the evaluation process has followed the above-mentioned special tasks and the CMEF as a whole (IT-Molise). In most cases, the evaluators have assessed chapters of the Rural development programmes several times (e.g. SWOT and measures up to three times, from a draft "0" to the final version (ES-La Roja)).

(Nearly¹⁶) all ex ante evaluations were carried out by external independent evaluators. The main group of evaluators were private (consulting) companies (directly mentioned in 42 cases) followed by public (research) institutes and universities (directly mentioned in 20 cases). Sometimes global acting consulting companies were involved (HU-National), whereas often regional evaluators were involved in the ex ante on regional level (IT-Lombardia, ES-Valencia, HU-National). In many cases a team of at least two companies carried out the evaluation (main reason: a lot of evaluation companies needed external support to run the SEA; directly mentioned in 8 cases). As a result often-multidisciplinary teams of evaluators were built up (ES-Castilla y León). The second main actors were the managing authorities. In general the ministry of agriculture (all German Rural development programmes) on state level (directly mentioned in

¹⁶ Please note: Not all geographical experts have documented who has conducted the ex ante respectively it was not explicit stated if the evaluator was an external/independent institution. In addition, Austria (AT-National) has conducted an approach where the evaluators were related very close to the managing authorities (see "critical points" below).

13 cases or managing authorities on regional level (Spanish Rural development programmes; directly mentioned in 26 cases). Other ministries or regional authorities were involved to coordinate the different planning and funding activities (e.g. Ministry of Finance, Education, Transport; DE-Hessen, IT-Liguria, FR -Guyane, CZ-National, SK-National).

Although this was not explicitly requested by the CMEF, stakeholders were involved in some evaluations through interviews or measure specific workshops (see below). But in general the ex ante evaluation process was organised between the managing authorities and the evaluators with no stakeholder involvement. Related to this one has to distinguish between three different processes, where a stakeholder involvement is possible: a) within the ex ante evaluation (with no explicit request), b) within the SEA (consultation of the stakeholders is obligatory as well as the documentation of this process) and c) within the programming phase of the Rural development programmes itself. Regarding the Rural development programmes programming the broadest approach found was a so-called “Rural World Congress” (ES-Cataluña): This took place over sixteen months. Forty-eight workshops were carried out on 12 basic rural themes. Participants included: the administration, civil society associations, trade unions, companies, institutions, federations, universities and investigation centres. Fifteen assemblies were held culminating in a closing event with 1.500 participants. A total of fifty-four meetings were held to develop the SWOT analysis and the strategies to be applied within the fifteen rural territories defined.

The methodological approaches of the ex ante evaluations were based upon the EU evaluation framework (EU-documents especially CMEF and Council Regulations) (directly mentioned in 44 cases). In addition, national and regional sources such as research studies and reports of previous funding periods were used (directly mentioned in 8 cases). Additional interactive events such as workshops, meetings, round table discussions, interviews and continuous exchange via telephone and mail were carried out in some cases (directly mentioned in 8 cases). Those interactive events were used for the organisation of the

- “Internal” ex ante processes: coordination and discussions between the evaluators and the managing authorities and/or other responsible departments or persons for developing the Rural development programmes, the SEA evaluator (directly mentioned in 30 cases), through institutionalised boards for the programme planning and evaluation (directly mentioned in 3 cases): Steering group, working groups and meetings e.g. for each axis or SWOT (“panel groups”) (FI-National),
- “External” ex ante processes: coordination with other evaluators or managing authorities responsible for EU-funds with periodic presentations and discussions (IT-Molise, IT-Lombardia, BG-National) as well as stakeholder involvement through interviews (MT-National) workshops or (series) of regional/local events (e.g. for the presentation and discussion of draft results of the ex ante evaluation to economic and social partner; DE-Thüringen) (directly mentioned in 10 cases).

The theoretical approaches of the ex ante evaluations were sometimes based on economic theories e.g. about market failure (SE-National), small scale economic model to assess the impact of each intervention within the Rural development programmes on the baseline indicators (MT-National) or a model of input-output analysis (GR-National). But in nearly all cases a documentation of the theoretical approach was missing.

The evaluation of the SWOT was one main task of the ex ante and was done systematically with checklists concerning the following issues: completeness, adequacy, actuality, contradictions, coherence with ERDF and ESF. Another specific approach was conducted in FR-Hexagone: to analyse the regional aspects, an inquiry has been executed in six of the twenty-one regions (Alsace, Champagne-Ardenne, Languedoc-Roussill, Limousin, Pays de la Loire and Rhône-Alpes). Based on this regional analysis the assessment of the measures was conducted.

Regarding the issue of the extent to which recommendations by ex ante evaluators were integrated into the programming documents, the geographical experts report that the majority of the recommendations were taken into account. Concerning the documentation of this process one can distinguish between different possible situations:

- A list of recommendations provided by the ex ante evaluators, as well as possible considerations on them by the managing authorities are clearly reported (PT-Madeira, SI-National, directly mentioned in 6 cases)
- Recommendations provided by the ex ante evaluators are stated as having been taken into account, however without clearly reporting on this process so that it was often not clear which recommendations were taken into account and which not (directly mentioned in 30 cases)
- The interaction between ex ante evaluators and managing authorities concerning issued recommendations is not documented at all (especially regarding the recommendations not taken into account; PT-Madeira, ES-Galicia, PL-National) or only covered by general statements that all recommendations were integrated or largely covered by the Rural development programmes (FI-National, DE-Thüringen, directly mentioned in 20 cases).

In general the recommendations were formulated with respect to the different tasks of the ex ante evaluation as described in the respective EC guidance document (SWOT analysis, target levels, measures, expected impacts, proposed implementation procedures) (directly mentioned in 7 cases). The assessment of these tasks also caused a time lapse respectively the time lapse was caused by the status of the Rural development programmes drafts: From SWOT-related recommendations in the beginning to related implementation procedures at the end (from the general things to the details; IT-Molise):

- The SWOT-related recommendations were mainly focussed on the necessity of a more detailed analysis (SE-National, directly mentioned in 9 cases)

- The target-related recommendations (on Axis-level) were more general ones mainly asking for a closer relation between the targets and the chosen measures (LT-National, FR-Corsica)
- The most detailed recommendations were the measure-related ones

The duration of the ex ante evaluations proved to be varying: from relatively short periods (6 month; DE-Schleswig-Holstein, FR-Hexagone, LU-National) to more than one year and a half (16 month SE-National; 18 month UK-England, ES-Castilla y León). The length of the ex ante reports varies between 53 (ES-Andalucía) to 363 pages (ES-La Roja).

Critical points/innovations

Although a description of the approach of carrying out ex ante evaluation was not required by the evaluation framework (regulations, CMEF) a lot of additional information was given in the ex ante reports. Nevertheless, in many cases the process was described only in general terms (e.g. missing descriptions of main actors (ES-Navarra, DE-National) or of how the recommendations were taken into account).

In addition, the theoretical and methodological approach of the evaluation was not explicitly reported neither in the ex ante nor in the Rural development programmes (IT-Lombardia, IE-National, UK-Northern Ireland). The same was observed in the field of the issues “achieving cost-effectiveness” (ES-Navarra, ES- Andalucía) and the beneficiaries (ES-Aragon, all German ex ante). A transparent documentation was found in IT-Basilicata: The evaluator includes a matrix describing all steps of the iterative process in terms of date, object and output.

In general a very intensive coordination process between the program authorities and the ex ante evaluators can be stated. This process had a positive influence on the quality of the programming process which confirms the meaningfulness of the institutionalisation of an ex ante evaluation.

Another important point is that a formative ex ante evaluation tends to lead to a less critical ex ante report because points which could had led to objections have already be clarified and taken into the program. On the one hand this could be regarded as an indicator for a successful interaction between the evaluator and the managing authorities. On the other hand the ex ante reports present in many points a flat image or an identical copy of the rural development programmes (GR-National). In some cases the general analysis and description as well as SWOT on rural areas are nearly identical in the National Strategy Plan, Rural development programmes and ex ante evaluation (BE-Flanders, NL-National, GR-National). In combination with the above mentioned fact, that it is often difficult to distinguish which recommendations have been taken into account and which not, one cannot firmly conclude on the quality of interaction between the evaluator and the managing authority or to the improvement of the Rural development programmes. Based on anecdotic evidence, we can however presume that the support provided by ex ante evaluators was generally appropriate.

The formative evaluation process, with continuous feedback and intensive discussions, can cause problems regarding the relationship between the evaluator and the managing authorities since the evaluator has to keep the right balance between an external view and the involvement into the program planning process.

Completeness/Information gaps

The coverage of this aspect in the ex ante evaluations¹⁷ is assessed as good and very good.

Conclusions

The very intensive coordination process between the programming authorities and the ex ante evaluators (with their external view) improved the quality of the programmes. This has confirmed the meaningfulness of the institutionalisation of an ex ante evaluation as part of the Rural development programmes planning process.

Because of no explicit request to document the evaluation processes in the planning documents the information in this respect was (as expected) incomplete. To avoid those information gaps in future reports an explicit demand of a description should be integrated into the guidelines. This refers especially to the theoretical and methodological approaches and the recommendations, which should be documented in one table including the information and reasons which of them were taken into account and which not. A good example is ES-Asturias, where the list of problems not taken into account is unusually complete and points to serious gaps (ES-Asturias).

Although the ex ante evaluation is an integral part of the Rural development programmes it should be thought about, if in future ex ante processes the ex ante report should be just an obligation or if it should be a document with the claim of completeness. It should be thought about, which aspects/chapters should be integrated into the ex ante report, which ones into the Rural development programmes and which ones in both documents (in order to reach completeness).

The differences of the duration and the point in time of the ex ante evaluation show that there is a clear need to coordinate the programming process on two levels: First between the Rural development programmes and the ex ante evaluation and second between the Rural development programmes and the higher planning documents (especially the National Strategy Plan). In general it would be good if the ex ante starts right in the beginning of the Rural development programmes development so that the evaluators could play an active part in the stakeholder involvement processes (e.g. presenting draft results). As a result, the duration of the ex ante is related to the programming process as a whole and will vary also in future.

¹⁷ Assessed by the geographical experts.

4 ANALYSIS OF EVALUATION THEMES

4.1 Theme 1 – SWOT analysis and assessment of needs

4.1.1 Topic 1.1 – Main problems, risks and needs in rural areas in terms of social, economic and environmental criteria¹⁸

Rationale

Guidance note C of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, providing the ex-ante evaluation guidelines, states that “The analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT analysis) of the geographical area covered by the programme precedes the ex-ante evaluation. It represents the *first step* to define the strategy of the programme and aims to bring out *the needs of the rural areas* concerned.... The ex ante evaluation is required to assess the results of the programme-related SWOT analysis, with particular emphasis on the identification and appraisal of the medium and long term needs.

These recommendation correspond with the section 2.4 on “meeting the challenges” in the Community Strategic Guidelines on Rural Development which open with the phrase that “rural areas are characterised by a very large diversity of situations, ranging from remote rural areas suffering from depopulation and decline to peri-urban areas under increasing pressure from urban centres”. This is then followed by a brief analysis of the importance of rural areas within Europe and the disparities between them using the OECD definition.

From both texts above we can deduce the following:

Firstly, the correct identification of needs is the initial founding stone upon which the rest of the programme strategy rests.

Secondly, the subject to which the need refers is the programme area. The underlying logic is that, there should be a clear identification of the most important needs in the programme area and not simply those that refer to one sector or axis.

Thirdly, for the purpose of the synthesis of the ex-ante evaluations, the country experts were asked to focus on needs. Needs are meant to be derived from the diagnosis and, particularly, the SWOT analysis. It is important to see whether the ex ante evaluations take the step of specifically identifying needs, as is intended, or whether these have to be inferred of the SWOT, and finally, whether they only refer to deficits and problems or also to the requirement for taking account of potentially positive trends.

¹⁸ In Guidance note C of the CMEF the question is phrased slightly differently as: Problems, risks and needs in a respective programme area in terms of social, economic and environmental criteria.

Fourthly, according to the CMEF, needs are to be identified at programme level and classified according to three criteria – social, economic and environmental – the three corners of sustainable development. These three criteria are closely related to but not at all the same as the three axes of the Rural Development Regulation. For example, Axis 1 is probably more concerned with the economy and competitiveness but mainly from the point of view of the agro-food and forestry sector – and it has both social and environmental repercussions. Axis 3 covers the broad rural economy and society and also has environmental measures. It will be important to see whether the needs are considered in an integrated way for the programme area.

Key terms

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT), needs, programme area (Programme area. Geographical area covered by the programme).

Main findings

There is a common, fairly standard set of weaknesses, threats, problems and needs which are mentioned in nearly all programmes.

An analysis of the needs in general shows the following “top ten” list of needs in EU rural areas as identified in their SWOTs (i.e. these needs have been listed in the SWOT analyses of several programmes):

1. Structural adjustments & modernisation (productivity deficits, fragmentation, capital, dependency)
2. Natural resources/nature protection
3. Unemployment/disparities/create job-offers/income alternatives
4. Demographic change (migration, aging, depopulation, brain drain)
5. Sustainable practices (in land/forest management), awareness
6. Basic services (access, provision, housing)
7. Physical infrastructures (creation, adaption access)
8. Biodiversity, ecologic structures, habitats
9. Value chains, added value, integration between sectors
10. Lack of specialization/diversification/de-concentration/quality

However, the intensity and sometime the direction of the problem/need vary between the clusters (for example, in the case of population change). There is a close correspondence between these common problems/needs and the objectives of the measures in the Rural Development Regulation.

In more detail the most commonly raised problems include:

- Social problems and needs related to: population change caused by ageing, falling birth rates, emigration and in some case immigration, low density, the relative quality of social infrastructure and services, education, opportunities for employment outside the agricultural sector...
- Economic problems and needs related to: the agro-food and forestry sector such as: the size of farms, low productivity, modernisation of farms, age of farmers, education of farmers, physical difficulties due to things like the altitude and slope of the land, low value added + quality of food products, and integration into the food chain, lack of valorisation of forests, etc.
- Environmental problems and needs related to: climate, altitude and slope of the land, water quality and availability, soil quality, lack of care of forests, farming practices and attitudes, abandonment, need to extend and improve management of protected areas.

In fact, many programmes and ex ante evaluations do not refer explicitly to needs (exceptions, Lombardy, Madeira, Azores, Flanders, Portugal, Castilla Leon, many of the Italian regions). Many refer to problems rather than needs (Finland, Liguria, Lazio, Asturias, most Spanish regions), while in many others it is necessary to deduce the needs from the weaknesses and threats in the SWOT analysis.

Needs are nearly always dealt with in negative terms as a deficit. This makes it harder to assess whether the programme fully takes into account the opportunities for rural development – for example, whether expenditure on rural tourism is being targeted at areas with a tourist potential rather than just a shortage of tourists.

It has not been possible to find references to programmes where weaknesses, threats, problems or needs are ranked (even although much very rich quantitative information is usually provided in the diagnosis and the baseline indicators). This means, that although it is possible to create matrices showing the link between programme objectives and identified needs, it is very difficult to assess whether the programme priorities and budget correspond to the most important needs of rural areas. Within Theme 3 (“correspondence between measures applied and objectives pursued”) we will return to this problem and present some findings.

Many programmes do not analyse the needs of rural areas explicitly in social, economic, and environmental categories. Instead they consider the weaknesses, threats and disadvantages in the first three axes of the Regulation (most Spanish regions, Hungary, Greece, Poland, Ireland, Slovenia). Broader social and economic needs often have to be deduced entirely from the analysis in axis 3.

In some regions (Corsica) it is said that the needs are defined in an overly general way being influenced more by the National Strategy Plan than the specificities of the territory.

The evaluations make very little reference to the delimitation of rural areas or to the typologies used to distinguish between different types of rural areas within the programme area. This is not surprising as there is no explicit requirement about this in the CMEF. However, this means that it is very difficult to assess what is happening within programme areas to processes such as migration patterns from smaller villages to larger service centres, commuting patterns and so on. It is also difficult to judge whether resources are being spent on those rural areas that need them most (needs driven strategies) or those that have most opportunities for using them (absorption driven strategies). However, there are exceptions to this rule (Campania, Liguria, Cataluña). In one region (Liguria) the Rural development programmes carries out a SWOT analysis of four different types of rural areas with special reference to their needs for diversification.

Critical points/innovations

Needs are usually interpreted in negative or deficit terms as the requirements (of the programme area) for dealing with a particular weakness or threat. However, in theory, they could also refer to the requirements for taking advantage of a particular strength or opportunity.

In most cases, the evaluators themselves do not make explicit criticisms of the final analysis of needs in their final report. They generally limit themselves to providing a summary of the analysis in the Rural development programmes or simply referring back to it as being satisfactory. This could imply that their comments have been taken into account during the evaluation process but is not usually possible to identify whether this is the case (see in this respect our findings under chapter 3).

However, there are exceptions: in one case, the evaluators say that the analysis focuses too heavily on market orientation rather than the general problems of rural areas and that the needs should be ranked (Sweden), there is said to be a poor definition of rural areas (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Germany); the ex ante evaluation recommends more attention to issues like immigration and ageing (Ireland); the evaluation criticises the lack of a formal SWOT analysis of the programme area and argues that the analysis of need was based on each measure (England). However, there was no explicit evidence that all these issues were finally taken on board in the programmes.

There are very few references from our geographical experts to innovations in this area. However, once again there are exceptions: In one region (Cataluña), the ex ante evaluations itself carried out a very thorough analysis of rurality and its diversity. The team of ex ante evaluators was also involved in a highly participative exercise to analyse needs. First of all the

team developed a general SWOT analysis. This was then broken down by axis. This regional analysis was then used as the basis of local SWOT analyses by the stakeholders in the rural areas identified. Their recommendations were incorporated into the final regional SWOT. In another region (Flanders –BE), the SWOT analysis was broken into three sections to better identify economic, environmental and social strengths and weaknesses

Completeness/Information gaps

This topic is always covered in the programmes.

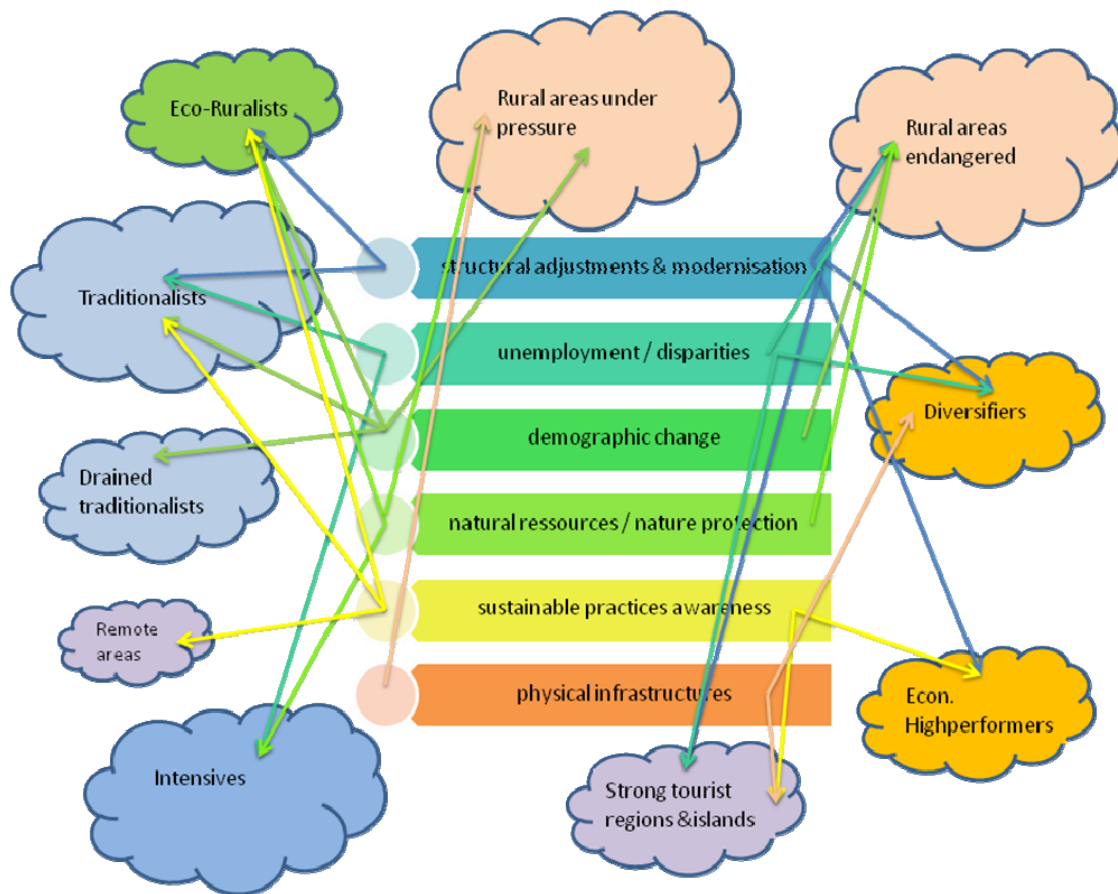
Cluster-specific findings

The exercise of analysing the needs as expressed in the SWOT analyses of the RD programmes in the light of the clusters can be seen as a broad “cross-check” of the plausibility of these identified needs. In fact, the clusters are based upon some of the baseline indicators as stipulated in the CMEF – thus reflecting the baseline situation within the programming areas and underpinning deficits and problems through the grouping of programming areas with similar character (in other words needs).

The findings are quite striking with respect of the accuracy of the programming authorities to capture the needs:

In terms of clusters the following graph shows a “map” of rural area needs within the clusters:

Figure 7
Clusters and their prevalent needs



The following table provides an overview of these results:

Selected findings therein are:

- Diversity of problems and thus the need for adopting various strategies within the different RD programmes becomes quite apparent.
- While the “classical” problems of rural areas – demographic change, unemployment – seem really rather to touch those clusters which have shown these deficits through their baseline indicators – i.e. Rural areas endangered, traditionalists, the clusters oriented towards diversification and economic growth (Strong tourist regions & islands, diversifiers) show more concern with the lack of structural adjustments & modernisation as well as physical infrastructure.
- In those clusters, where competition of agriculture with other economic sectors is an issue (Remote areas, economic high-performers, strong tourist regions & islands) the concern for sustainable practices in agriculture and forestry seem to prevail. The same holds true for those clusters where competition for land is an issue (Eco-ruralists,

intensives and rural areas under pressure) – as those clusters seem to be combined in their need for nature protection.

Table 4
Clusters vs. needs – a cross tabulation

	structural adjustments & modernisation (productivity deficits, fragmentation, capital, dependency)	unemployment/disparities /create job-offers/income alternatives	demographic change (migration, aging, depopulation, brain drain)	natural resources/nature protection	sustainable practices (in land/forest management), awareness	physical infrastructures (creation, adaption access)
Eco-Ruralists	⊗		⊗	⊗	⊗	
Intensives		⊗		⊗		
Rural areas endangered	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗		
Rural areas under pressure			⊗	⊗		⊗
Traditionalists	⊗	⊗	⊗		⊗	
Diversifiers	⊗	⊗				⊗
Remote areas					⊗	
Drained traditionalist			⊗			
Econ. High-performers	⊗		⊗		⊗	
Strong tourist regions & islands	⊗	⊗	⊗		⊗	⊗

The table above provides an overview of the different clusters and the needs, which were to be found in the SWOT analysis of the programmes.

When zooming in on the specific clusters the following detailed information may be provided:

The most severe concentrations of social and economic problems are raised in the “drained traditionalist” (DTRs) and “rural areas endangered” (RAE) clusters. The first is made up primarily of the East German Lander while the second is made up of Bulgaria, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Greece, mainland Portugal and parts of Spain. In social terms both clusters suffer major population loss, ageing, inadequate social services and infrastructure, very low employment rates and few employment opportunities outside agriculture. In the drained traditionalists declining population is making it hard to maintain existing infrastructure.

In economic terms, both clusters also refer to the extreme fragmentation of farms, very low productivity, low level of modernisation, ageing, lack of training, lack of quality systems, marketing and weak power in the food chain. In environmental terms the DTRS refer more to pollution and contamination while the RAEs refer to the use of water, abandonment of farms and forests, forest fires etc. Both clusters have major needs for investment in social and economic infrastructure (farming and non farming)

At the other extreme there is the “intensive cluster” which includes Flanders, Wallonie and the Netherlands. Here the social needs refer to the problems created by population and urban growth, the marginal role of agriculture, ageing, poor education and the need for diversification. On the economic side, agriculture faces pressure from other uses and world competition. The environment also suffers from the pressures of urbanisation and intensive farming practices.

The Rural Areas under Pressure (RAPs) include countries and regions where there are strong poles of urban and sometimes rural development together with far more remote fragile rural areas (Ireland, a series of Spanish regions, Czech Republic). This is one of the clusters that puts most emphasis on clearly defining different types of rural areas and their relationship with the urban centres (Cataluña, Valencia...). On the economic front the emphasis shifts from physical infrastructure and investment to training, integration, support services, quality products that can be sold in the urban centres and so on. There is greater emphasis on the management of natural resources

The Traditionalists cluster (TRAD) includes some of Europe’s agricultural and rural heartland with larger “traditional” farms. On the social front, there are many references to the effects of the centralisation, reorganisation and privatisation of public services on rural areas. Some villages are losing their rural identity due to commuting and second homes and there is a need to create alternative employment to retain young people and women. As in the RAPS the emphasis is on integration in the food and forestry chain, quality and marketing to deal with global competition and make the most of proximity to lucrative markets. On the environmental front there is a need to protect natural resources (water, land, forest) from urbanisation and intensive farming.

In theory, the eco-ruralist (ECORUR) cluster includes many regions with potential for rural development related with environmentally friendly tourism and agriculture. However, they also refer to needs related to population loss, ageing, low levels of education lacks of basic services, small farms and low productivity and lack of quality systems and marketing power within the food chain in the more remote or marginal areas. Some regions report imbalances between fast growing areas and more marginal areas (Calabria, Basilicata)

The situation in the three Islands covered in the Remote Areas (RAs) cluster (Reunión, Guadeloupe and Guyana) is very different. Guyana reports huge deficits in basic social infrastructure and services. Access to land, remote settlements, the development of banking

and training are seen as essential needs. Réunion also refers to the need for housing and basic infrastructure for a rapidly growing population.

The economic high-performers (E-HIGH-PERF.) were all highly urban regions and included Hamburg and Bremen in Germany, Luxemburg, Austria and Madrid. Common social problems reported were demographic, such as aging and depopulation, accompanied by a decline in employment possibilities in rural areas. An insufficient qualification of those working in agriculture and forestry was also a concern in some of these regions and a deficit in services and infrastructure widely reported. The need to improve inter-sector and public-private cooperation, and the opportunity to better fulfil the tourist potential of these regions were also common remarks.

The E-HIGH-PERF. cluster was experiencing increasing pressure on land and water. Farm abandonment was also a recurring issue as was the need to improve land use and the water, soil and air quality. Structural changes in the agricultural sector and increasing competition have posed significant challenges to rural areas in this cluster, which affirms the need to make agriculture and forestry more profitable, competitive and sustainable.

The strong tourist regions and islands (TOUR I) such as Cyprus and the islands off Portugal and Spain face a common problem of isolation and a heavy dependence on tourism. Population loss, aging and low qualifications among agricultural communities are a common problem together with deficient public services and infrastructure such as ICTs and irrigation systems. Contamination by nitrates and chemicals is mentioned both in the Canaries' and the Valle d'Aosta's (Italy) evaluation as is the need to raise the quality of life. Promoting more diverse economic activities including the agro-food and forestry sectors is also a widely reported need.

Conclusions

Our analysis shows that the Member States have devoted considerable efforts to carry out a thorough assessment of the needs of their respective programme areas. In addition, we can conclude that a close correspondence exists between the most common problems/needs identified and the objectives of the rural development measures.

Our analysis has also permitted to categorize the relevant needs identified in the different programme areas in terms of broad social, economic and environmental categories, and to aggregate them around the different cluster groups. In this context, we have observed a high level of correspondence between the main needs identified within each cluster group, and the common characteristics (in terms of needs) that each of these cluster group – as for their methodological construction – were meant to reflect. A fact that tends to confirm the overall coherence of the needs identified with the features of the different national/regional contexts.

Despite this overall positive judgement, we consider that some elements can be further improved, as detailed in the following:

The needs of the programme area are often not defined explicitly and have to be deduced from the weaknesses, threats and problems raised in the diagnosis and SWOT analysis.

Needs are usually defined in deficit terms rather than in terms of the “requirements” of the programme area for responding to the both the opportunities for rural development.

The analysis of needs is usually carried out in terms of each axis of the Rural Development Regulation rather than in terms of the economic, social and environmental needs of the programme area as a whole.

There is little information in the ex ante evaluations about the delimitation of rural areas and differences in the needs of different types of rural area. This makes it difficult to know whether the programme concentrating on the areas with greatest needs (needs led strategies) or the areas with the greatest potential (absorption led strategies).

The step recommended in the CMEF of actually ranking needs does not seem to have been commonly applied. This makes it difficult to assess whether the volume of resources dedicated to particular axes and measures reflects the most important needs of the programme area.

4.1.2 Topic 1.2 – Main driving forces, strengths and opportunities in the rural areas¹⁹

Rationale

In the glossary, produced for the synthesis of ex-ante rural development programmes we explain that driving forces are sometimes associated with the underlying trends of change and sometimes with the causes for these trends. In the second case, there is a great similarity between the “driving forces” referred to in this topic and the “underlying causes of disparities” referred to in the following topic.

Guidance note C of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, providing the Ex-ante evaluation guidelines states that “the ex-ante evaluation has to identify and address the driving forces towards sustainable rural development....²⁰. This suggests that the driving forces should

¹⁹ As above In Guidance note C of the CMEF the question is phrased slightly differently as: Driving forces, strengths and opportunities in a programme area concerned.

²⁰ The Guidance note continues that the ex-ante evaluation should “contribute to the quantification of context and objective related baseline indicators (common and programme related) by verifying and where appropriate suggesting, modifications of the proposed indicators and figures, – assess and where appropriate suggest revisions of the ranking of disparities and priorities assigned to identify needs and their translation into objectives and concrete priorities for action”

be interpreted in a positive light as changes which open the door to the making use of the strengths and opportunities identified in the SWOT. However, in theory, a driving force can be positive or negative – so it remains to be seen how they have been interpreted

As for the previous topic it is important to consider:

Firstly, whether the programmes explicitly identify driving forces or whether they have to be deduced from the SWOT.

Secondly, whether these driving forces treated in purely positive terms or whether they are equated to the “underlying causes” for disparities referred to in the following topic.

Thirdly, whether strengths are separated from opportunities or whether they are lumped together as “positive factors”. As we have explained in the glossary, strengths should be interpreted as the advantages or endowments of an area which exist in the present. Opportunities refer to the future and their realisation depends on both internal strengths and external factors.

Finally, it will be important to examine whether the driving forces, strengths and opportunities refer to rural territories and are classified into social, economic and environmental categories as in the case of the needs dealt with in the previous topic – or whether they are simply organised into the three axes of the regulation.

Key terms

Driving forces, strengths, opportunities (SWOT),

Findings

The Ex-ante Evaluations frequently provide a summary of the analysis carried out in the Rural development programmes on driving forces, strengths and opportunities and comment on whether this reflects the reality in the area (e.g. Niedersachsen Bremen). Sometimes this summary provides an excellent synthesis of the analysis in the Rural development programmes but on other occasions the ex ante evaluation simply refers to the Rural development programmes and expresses the view that the analysis is satisfactory.

In fact, many programmes did not distinguish driving forces explicitly. They have to be deduced from the SWOT analysis (e.g. Abruzzo, the Netherlands, Martinique, Extremadura, most Spanish regions, Hungary).

Unsurprisingly, for rural areas, the driving forces were in fact usually presented, more in negative terms as a series of problems, threats and risks (e.g. Bulgaria, Galicia, Ireland, most Spanish regions).

However, certain strengths – or competitive advantages – of rural areas were mentioned many times in the ex ante evaluation reports and RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES. These include:

- First and foremost, the *high quality of the environment and natural resources* which were seen to provide the basis for a range of activities including:- quality food and craft products, tourism and an attractive working and living environment (e.g. Hessen, Sweden)
- *The low costs of land* and housing in certain rural areas which could create the conditions for attracting firms and people (e.g. Azores, Lithuania)
- *Proximity to markets* and growth centres were cited in some clusters (e.g. Valencia, Rheinland Pfalz)
- *Strong rural communities* were also a strength identified sporadically amongst certain regions (e.g. Hungary, Ireland)

There were also many points in common in the opportunities. These were most often defined in economic terms along two major vectors – the opportunities for new activities in the agro-food and forestry sector – and the opportunities for diversification into other areas. In terms of the *agro-food sector*, the most commonly mentioned opportunities were:

- Firstly, certain programmes pointed to the opportunity for converging or catching up rapidly with more advanced EU countries via the introduction and adaptation of *modern production* processes, often linked to technological development or improvements in education and training which could provide a competitive edge in the global economy (e.g. Greece).
- Secondly, nearly all clusters pointed to *new agricultural and forestry products* – particularly the development of local speciality products, healthy products or organic foods (which could be supported by certification systems) to meet growing local, national and international demand. Forests could also be used more sustainably for the exploitation of non-wood products, such as chestnuts, pine nuts, mushrooms and resin (e.g. Castilla Leon, Portugal).
- Thirdly, as above, *strong local markets and or proximity to urban centres* were seen as being particularly advantageous in this context
- Finally, certain programmes point to further opportunities to be exploited by focusing on *the whole production chain* in many rural areas with increases in the value added at the processing and marketing stages (e.g. Saarland, the Netherlands)

Many of the opportunities referred to the diversification of income sources in rural economies beyond agriculture, often playing on synergies between agriculture, landscape and the environment. These opportunities included:

- *New sustainable uses of rural territories and forests*, including tourism and recreation, which is a particularly important opportunity for rural areas, which can benefit from natural advantages in: climate (e.g. Madeira), landscape, including niche activities in mountainous areas (e.g. Austria), cultural and historical heritage (e.g. Malta)
- *Shorter commercial circuits*, the potential of which can be increased with the growing disposable income in surrounding urban areas (e.g. Navarra). These new activities can furthermore be carried out alongside continuing agricultural production (multiple land use), particularly where local food is a tourist attraction in itself (e.g. Abruzzo)
- *Energy production*, particularly renewable resources, such as biomass (e.g. Hungary, Portugal), which plays on rapidly expanding markets.
- *Environmental protection and services* including Natura 2000 sites (e.g. La Rioja, France).

The development of the *services sector* is seen as key to the development of many rural economies (e.g. Malta, Andalusia) – particularly in the light of ageing and the integration of migrants and growing need for environmental and business services etc. Interestingly, new technology was mainly only mentioned in negative terms as in avoiding the growth of a digital divide (e.g. Veneto).

Critical points/innovations

Numerous programmes present strengths and weaknesses in a rather general way (e.g. Poland). On certain occasions the strengths can simply be the other side of the coin presented in the weakness section (weakness: – a large number of small farms. Strength: – a certain number of large ones). In some cases of course, this is totally justified. One region, for example, (Cataluña) presented integrated farm contracts both as an opportunity for encouraging diversification and more environmentally friendly agriculture and as a threat, because of the complexity.

In some cases, programmes, and ex ante evaluations, put current strengths in the same category as future opportunities (e.g. Hessen, Sweden). In Cyprus the Rural development programmes SWOT analysis consists only of two parts: one for the problems/weaknesses and another one for the advantages/strengths; on the other hand, the Ex-Ante evaluation SWOT follows the normal structure: strengths; weaknesses; opportunities and threats.

No examples were identified of programmes which clearly ranked or prioritised driving forces.

However, regional experts praised some regions, (*Calabria*) were praised for articulating and discussing their driving forces, strengths and opportunities in a very comprehensive and clear manner, depicting a scenario of coherent logical links among them.

Completeness/Information gaps

As with needs, this aspect is dealt with by all programmes.

Cluster-specific findings

Generally, when it comes to describing their opportunities, the “drained traditionalists” (DTR) reveal a strikingly positive outlook. Thüringen, for example, states that there is: “relatively equally distribution of growth and income...[and overall] no serious development shortfall of the rural area.” A key strength and opportunity is provided by the attractiveness and preparedness of the cluster for attracting tourism.

The availability of affordable land and buildings – often surrounded by places of cultural and historic interest and beauty – provide incentives for people to work or live here. The agricultural side of the economies is also benefiting from already developed agricultural specialisations, highly efficient mechanisation of agricultural processes and the high level of qualifications amongst agricultural professionals.

Amongst the Rural Areas Endangered cluster (RAE), Asturias identifies some interesting driving forces towards healthier quality foods, including “CAP reform, forest fires, animal diseases, the restructuring of farming and food sectors and growth in the power of supermarkets.” As well as strengths common with many areas, tourism is further encouraged by the existence of networks of good quality rural accommodation (e.g. Castilla Leon).

Despite low base educational levels, the cluster talks about the potential of vastly improved educational establishments, technology centres and links with research and development, particularly in the Spanish regions. Castilla Leon enjoys the presence of “four public universities, five technological centres and 30 research laboratories”. Opportunities were also identified around environmental efficiency gains, such as in water efficiency and forest fire protection measures (Portugal). European programmes and approaches, including the LEADER initiative, were seen as opportunities in various regions, particularly within the new Member States.

The major recurring strength for the “Intensives” (INTEN) cluster was the proximity of strong local markets, often linked to developing markets for sustainable local products as consumer attitudes change. High levels of productivity and added value, typically thanks to efficient and modern agricultural production techniques and knowledge, linked to high levels of education or innovative capacity were also typical of the cluster.

Developing full agricultural chains were seen as a strength and an area of opportunity more than once, as was multi-functional land use covering “agriculture and non-agricultural land use functions including recreation, nature and landscape protection and water protection... and farmers as energy producers” (Flanders). In broader diversification terms, possibilities were seen from the strengthening of the services sector and high levels of rural internet connectivity (the Netherlands).

Most regions in the “rural areas under pressure” cluster (RAP) fail to explicitly set out the main driving forces. Some forces that are mentioned, include global competition, new societal demands around environmental protection, the economic growth of the services sector and technological progress (Valencia and Navarra)

The existence of a reasonable infrastructure and developments in the services sector were strengths for many zones, whilst strong traditions of municipal associations, particularly in Spanish regions constituted a strength to be built on. Interestingly, several regions noticed the positive socio-economic impact of the arrival of migrants into rural areas, boosting population numbers and economic activity.

Tourist attractiveness was a common strength and opportunity for most of the regions in the “Eco-ruralist” (ECORUR) cluster, often linked with the agro-food sector. Many areas farmed specialist food products, which both acted as an attraction to tourists and provided exports to national or international markets. As well as the quality of the natural environment and/or local cultural heritage, these developments were often linked with technological progress or impressive developments in education and training of agricultural professionals.

The “Traditional” (TRAD) cluster showed a much clearer identification of significant driving forces, including: demographic changes (aging and emigration is also dealt with as a threat in some programmes); globalisation; increased purchasing power in developed economies; industrial structural change; the liberalisation of markets and shifts in attitudes to public and private responsibilities; climate change; reform of CAP; enlargement of the EU; sustainable development concepts; migration trends; changing consumer preferences; urban pressure. Baden Württemberg viewed the structural changes confronting the agricultural sector as an opportunity; this is an atypical, but useful way of thinking

A major strength and opportunity in many regions in this cluster is the proximity to large and rich markets. This also contributes to further opportunities to engage along the value chains, for example in production, processing and marketing, particularly where there is a competitive advantage in local markets. Or where a high level of organisation is already a strength (e.g. in Niedersachsen Bremen)

Most of the opportunities identified in this chapter applied to regions in this cluster. Where it stands out is in the potential of high education levels, strong capacity for innovation and adaptation, including the use of ICT to promote home working (the Basque country) and broadband internet connections (UK).

One emerging driving force amongst the diversifiers (DIV) was the specific local geography and cultural elements and evolving demand in the agro-food sector. The regions of the cluster typically consider themselves to benefit from a high quality living and working environment, including attractive climates and high environmental and landscape values with low levels of pollution

The presence of important forestry resources in numerous regions (e.g. Corsica) can provide for increased, yet sustainable economic activity, including for the development of non-wood products as part of the overall drive towards diversification.

Driving forces in remote areas (RA) included the transition from French colony to integration in the European Union and the global market place (e.g. Réunion) and the emergence of new markets. There is great potential in this cluster to increase the efficiency of agricultural production and the diversification of rural economies

The solidity of local identity and social networks were considered a major strength (e.g. Reunion). This was combined with a good reputation for rich biodiversity, environmentally friendly agriculture and quality of agricultural production. However, analysis also suggests “that the issues to be looked at in terms of rural development are [so] specific [that] the tools proposed at EU level might not be too appropriate, notably for what concerns the EAFRD” (Guyana)

Among the E-HIGH-PERF. regions, Austria was the only one to mention driving forces explicitly. These included globalisation, EU enlargement, reform of the CAP and society’s changing expectations towards agriculture and forestry. In terms of strengths, however, there were several recurring factors in this cluster: market proximity was seen as a key strength as well as an opportunity – further developing urban-rural relations was mentioned both by Hamburg, and Luxembourg. Environmental conditions and landscape in these areas were also seen as strengths combined with good social structures, culture life and engagement of the population. Low unemployment and relatively high levels of education were also characteristic.

The main opportunities to emerge from this cluster included a better use of regional identity and marketing (e.g. bundling regional groups), better coordination between conservation, agriculture and tourism, and the development of niche products and SMEs. Finally, the concept of farmers as energy producers and the growing market for bio-energy was a strong theme among the E-HIGH-PERF. regions.

The strong tourist regions and islands (TOUR I) also concentrated on strengths and opportunities. These included good climatic conditions, natural wealth and biodiversity, and the potential these offered for rural tourism, agriculture and energy production. Their association with high quality food production was also a common strength in the TOUR I cluster. Capitalising on these environmental strengths and quality products was seen as the main opportunity. The Canary Isles also pointed to its strategic geographical position that could be exploited for external trade.

Conclusions

Driving forces are often not mentioned specifically in the programmes and ex ante evaluations but have to be deduced from the SWOT analysis. There is often reference to fundamental problems, challenges and underlying causes of change. These terms can have a similar meaning to that of driving forces but the interpretation seems to vary in different programmes. In addition, some programmes make no separation between present strengths and future opportunities.

As before, driving forces, strengths and opportunities are often analysed at the level of each axis of the Rural Development Regulation rather than that of the programme area as a whole.

The step recommended in the CMEF of actually ranking needs does not seem to have been commonly applied. This makes it difficult to assess whether the volume of resources dedicated to particular axes and measures reflects the most important needs of the programme area.

4.1.3 Topic 1.3 – Main identified causes of disparities between rural areas at European level

Rationale

Guidance note C of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, providing the Ex-ante evaluation guidelines states that “the SWOT analysis refers to the main structural components of rural areas, and has to lead to an appropriate and coherent ranking of disparities that need to be addressed”. It has to assess the completeness of the SWOT analysis and analyse the causes of disparities identified.²¹

²¹ The Guidance note continues that the ex-ante evaluation should “contribute to the quantification of context and objective related baseline indicators (common and programme related) by verifying and where appropriate suggesting, modifications of the proposed indicators and figures, – assess and where appropriate suggest revisions of the ranking of disparities and priorities assigned to identify needs and their translation into objectives and concrete priorities for action”

The logic behind this topic clearly suggests that the programmes should not just focus on the symptoms of differences and change, however dramatic they may be. As suggested in the previous section, they should go further to identify and assign importance to the key underlying processes and causes leading to these differences. Moreover, the CMEF suggests that the ranking of these disparities should be the basis for the subsequent stages of assigning priorities and resources to different objectives.

This leads to a number of considerations.

Firstly, it will be important to see how far the programmes do try and untangle the complex web of cause and effect underlying rural development processes and how far they simply refer back to the SWOT and describe the problem, weaknesses and threats.

Secondly, as a result there may be some overlap between the driving forces of the previous topic, the causes identified in this topic, and the weaknesses and threats in topic one.

Thirdly, as for the previous topics, are the causes explicitly related to the sustainable development of the programme area as a whole or only to the three axes of the Regulation. Is there also an attempt to isolate those causes, which have a bigger effect as well as those, which it is possible to influence.

Key terms

Underlying cause of disparities, driving forces.

As specified in our glossary, it has to be noted that the term underlying cause of disparities refers to the way in which the economic, social and natural endowments of an area lead to differences or disparities in a series of indicators like GDP per capita, employment rates, unemployment, environmental conditions and the quality of life. In order to understand the underlying causes of these differences it is necessary to analyse the processes through which certain variables influence others and assess both the direction of causality and the importance of the impact. As in the previous section the disparities do not necessarily have to be looked at in negative terms as deficits but in rural areas this is usually the case. There is a very close resemblance between the term driving force and underlying cause so for the purposes of the programme the relationship between them should be clarified

Findings

There is often no mention of the causes of disparities in the ex ante evaluations. Only twenty-nine of the ex ante evaluations analyse contain specific information on this area. Even where there are isolated references, many of the ex ante evaluations and programmes do not have a separate section dedicated to the causes of disparities. These have to be deduced from the

diagnosis and from the SWOT analysis. As a result there is a certain similarity between the information provided on the main weaknesses and threats to rural areas and the “driving forces

Where the ex ante evaluation does have a specific section dealing with the underlying causes, this is often presented as list, or couched in quite descriptive terms, simply confirming the analysis made in the programmes. In general, it seems that the evaluators have made their comments during the evaluation process and are relatively satisfied the way in which the Rural development programmes have dealt with this area.

In general, we can see that the “causes” referred to in the ex ante evaluations and Programmes can be grouped into: *social causes*, *economic causes*, *physical and environmental causes*. However, most ex ante evaluations and Rural development programmes do not explicitly group the causes into these three categories. In fact the “menu” of causes referred to in the ex ante evaluations and Rural development programmes’s is often very similar. The most commonly mentioned causes are described in negative terms as follows

Social causes

- Population change due to ageing, falling birth rates and, above all, the migration of young people
- Low participation and high unemployment of women
- Low levels of education particularly among farmers
- Low levels of social, health, educational and cultural services. Insufficient population to maintain these services.

Economic causes (these mainly refer to agriculture, forestry and food)

- Dependence on agriculture
- Low productivity of agriculture in global context
- Small size of farms.
- Lack of integration of food sector.
- Pressure from other economic and residential activities (in certain clusters)
- Small size + equity of firms, low level of entrepreneurial spirit and managerial capacity to take opportunities in other sectors.

Physical and environmental causes

- Extremes of climate, poor soil conditions, altitude and gradient

- Shortage or excess of water
- Poor accessibility
- Low levels of basic amenities (water, energy.....)

In the section on cluster specific findings we provide examples of some of the main points that emerge in the different clusters

Critical points/innovations

In addition to the points made above, few programmes explicitly attempt to rank the causes of disparities, or to distinguish which processes have a multiplier effect on others. It is rarely possible to isolate which causes are susceptible to being influenced by the programme and those, which are out of reach. Also, it is often difficult to distinguish cause from effect. (For example, is the emigration of young people the cause or the result of the disparities between rural areas?)

Completeness/Information gaps

As mentioned above there is often no explicit section dealing with the causes of disparities in the ex ante evaluations. This usually has to be derived from the diagnosis of the area and the SWOT in the Rural development programmes. Where there is a section this is usually presented as a list without any ranking of the relative importance of the many causes which may be contributing to a particular disparity.

Cluster-specific findings

Among the “drained traditionalists” (DTR), there were few identified causes of disparity between the programme areas and other areas. For example, whilst some areas recognized significant differences in population trends, only Berlin Brandenburg went on to explain the causes of these trends: “decline of the birth-rate, higher expectancy of life and migration of qualified, active persons.” One can assume that these factors are also relevant in the other regions in this cluster, although the decline in population was seen to vary substantially between areas.

Thuringen identified some specific business development issues, highlighting the “weak equity base of the enterprises” and differences in the “quality of the management”. Notably, however, the region of Saxonia-Anhalt considered that “The situation of rural areas does not differ in principle from the situation in the cities regarding the economical, the job market and the demographical challenges for the future.”

The areas in most regions of the Rural Areas Endangered cluster (RAE) are heavily dependent on agriculture and in many this sector is characterised by being unsuited to the modern globalised market-place (Slovakia where its agricultural productivity is 5 times lower than EU

average). Issues range from the lack of specialised local products (Castilla y Leon), to an ageing agricultural sector (e.g. Portugal), difficulties for farmers to adapt to changing markets (Hungary) and the small size of agricultural holdings, which prevents gains in productivity (Slovenia where the average farm size is only 6.3ha and Bulgaria + Romania where many farms are run as semi-subsistence activities).

Many of these trends are aggravated because of the low levels of educational attainment and training and the low levels of economic activity amongst women (Estonia). The loss of young people to cities, coastal areas or other countries borders is an issue raised by many (Lithuania, Galicia) which is contributing to an ageing of the active population in rural areas. Poor services and communication or access to these compared to the city is a problem for the development of rural areas identified (Bulgaria, Romania). Romania refers to very basic lacks like water and electricity. However, several programmes simply described problems facing their area rather than looking to explain the disparities between rural and urban areas.

At the other extreme, four of the five regions in the “Intensives” cluster (INTENS) do not identify the causes of disparities. Wallonie refers to the competition for rural space as opposed to the small size of farms and agro-food businesses, ageing farmers and the low succession rate

Many regions in the “rural areas under pressure” cluster (RAP) also lack an explicit presentation of the main causes of disparity. Nevertheless, numerous causes are implicit in the SWOT analysis. Common themes are similar to the RAE cluster and include: ageing; depopulation to urban or coastal regions; poor services; low levels of education and training; low levels of female employment; the lack of modern and sustainable competitive production schemes; inadequate physical and social infrastructures; and dependency on agriculture.

Other rural problems are more geographically specific, (Andalucia refers to the harm done to rural areas through environmental adversities such as drought. La Rioja observes the particular problems in mountainous zones).

Many of the regions in the “Eco-ruralist” (ECORUR) cluster also did not explicitly identify the causes of disparities. Key factors that came up repeatedly were: depopulation and ageing (Sicily, Veneto, Basilicata); dependence on agriculture, particularly in a context of globalisation; unemployment of women; and agricultural activities that are more social and subsistence-level than economic in nature. Some regions or zones within regions had geographical conditions that hampered their ability to perform in the modern economy, including mountainous terrains (e.g. Lombardia, Friuli-Venezia) and a number of zones classed as ultra-peripheral (e.g. Azores). Cultural and institutional factors are raised in Calabria. The digital divide, differences in communication and services between different types of rural area are raised in Friuli-Venezia.

Strikingly, many of the regions in the “Traditionalists” cluster (TRADs) talked predominantly about disparities arising because of natural or historical factors, including climate conditions and soil quality. The implication is that areas of higher population concentration have formed around the most fertile land. On top of these natural advantages, diversification of the economy and the

business advantages of clusters in the growth (urban) areas have caused: “Reciprocal effects and mutual influence [which] contribute to the fact that existing lines of development.... solidify and favourable and/or unfavourable structures accumulate.” (Hessen)

Several regions highlight the negative effects of the closure of key services such as post offices, banks, schools, health services and administrative offices and poor/reduced transport facilities on rural economies and societies. England and Nordrhein-Westfalen both recognise the impact on rural economies of the need to manage “land-based resources in the interests of the environment. As with other clusters, more rapid demographic change in rural areas, a lack of competitive advantage in agriculture and dependence on agriculture are factors in rural difficulties. More particularly, a few regions, (Baden-Württemberg) mention the “low vertical integration between agriculture and food industry as one cause of the weakness of the whole sector.”

The diversifiers (DIVS) also make many references to natural factors such as the Northern latitude and huge distances (Finland), the Island nature (Aland Islands), the mountainous terrain (Liguria, Corsica, Trento,). The mountains have a double edge and can be a strong environmental and economic attraction as well as a disincentive for certain activities (Trento). Production structures in both agriculture are said to be based on small units with little power down market (Bolzano). Some areas mention poor social services, the risk of exclusion and depopulation of the marginal areas (Corsica, Sicily).

From the E-HIGH-PERF. cluster, geographic and related accessibility conditions are pointed out by Austria as well as the current economic structure and the relationship with central areas. Bremen highlights the concentration advantages that cities have over rural areas and their resulting ability to be more competitive. Luxembourg also mentions ability to compete but mentions the small size of firms and insufficient cooperation between farmers that hinders competitiveness in rural areas. It also singles out lack of training and low levels of innovation and service/infrastructure provision in rural areas.

The “strong” tourist regions and islands for their part do not point to any causes for disparities in their ex-ante evaluations.

Conclusions

The term “causes of disparities” is often taken to mean the same as “driving force”, “weakness” or “threat”

In order to arrive at the underlying causes of disparities it is generally necessary to consider the sum total of both the internal strengths and weaknesses of the area and the external threats and opportunities. In other words, as before, it is necessary to go one step further than the SWOT analysis and to analyse the balance of endowments that the rural areas covered by the programme have compared to other areas (for example, to the large cities, service centres, coastal areas and so on) and how this effected by external changes.

Programmes and ex-ante evaluations do not usually take the second step of identifying and ranking those underlying causes, which have an important multiplier effect and those where there is the greatest chance to have an impact.

4.1.4 Topic 1.4 – SWOT analysis and assessment of needs: Main categories of beneficiaries identified by the ex ante evaluations as priority target groups of interventions and their needs

Rationale

Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, Article 2, provides a definition: (h) 'beneficiary': an operator, body or firm, whether public or private, responsible for implementing operations or receiving support. Commission Regulation (EC) No 1974/2006, defines the legal and financial frameworks to which beneficiaries must comply, but makes no particular provision for categories of beneficiaries or target groups, nor the level of precision within those categories

The guidance documents included in the Handbook to the CMEF does not provide any specific provisions regarding the way of addressing beneficiaries and their needs/problems, although we find a detailed definition of the term "beneficiaries" in the Glossary and there are many mentions of beneficiaries in the Common Indicators and the fiches on Measures.

This review aims at identifying the beneficiaries. Section 1.4. is focused on the main categories of beneficiaries identified by the ex ante evaluations as priority target groups of interventions and their needs. Section 1.5. will assess if other problems/beneficiaries not addressed by the implementation of the programmes can be identified.

Key terms

Beneficiary; need; SWOT analysis; target level

Main findings

Main targeted beneficiaries are farm owners and forestry land owners. The level of precision within these two categories varies greatly. Some Rural development programmes (*Germany, Romania, Latvia, Slovakia, Corsica, etc.*) describes beneficiaries as 'applicants' and provides lists of potential beneficiaries. Other Rural development programmes (*France, Italy, Finland, Catalonia, Aragon, etc.*) identify beneficiaries under each measure of the programme and identify broad priority target groups in their ex ante evaluations.

The level of precision in defining target beneficiaries varies greatly. In some cases, it is very focused (*Lithuania* targets the setting up of 1 800 young farmers' holdings, *Poland* allows only certain types of 'public benefit' NGOs as beneficiaries), whilst in other cases, it is loose

(agricultural producers, training bodies, agro-food holdings, (*Portugal*: all enterprises from the same processing chain, including industrial enterprises).

In some Rural development programmes, an attempt is made at focusing the funding. This can be done via geographical concentration, whereby intensity of farming support is identified as a means to reduce regional disparities (*Scotland, Hessen*), or the opposite where regional differentiation of the programme is not considered (*Bayern*). In other cases, concentration by sector is envisaged (*wine and horticulture in Luxemburg, timber industry in Thüringen*). Organic farmers are rarely put forward as priority target groups, except for *Italy, Wallonia*. In *NorthRhine Westphalia*, Measure 313 (development of tourism activities) is restricted to local authorities below 10,000 inhabitants. Besides farming and forestry, representatives of environment protection are well identified, mostly relating to agricultural and wood land management (biodiversity).

Other priority target groups include local authorities and non profit organisations, mostly under Axis 3 & 4. In some cases the “population” – meaning all the people living in the area, beyond farmers – is identified as a target (*Basque country, Luxemburg, Saxonia Anhalt, etc.*). Private firms are mostly appearing in the food processing sector. Some Rural development programmes (*Estonia, Greece*) target support to small firms (less than 10 employees) in order to boost the local job market and maintain population.

The assessment of specific needs of beneficiaries is not very well covered in the ex ante evaluations. Training and skills development within the farming and forestry sectors appear repeatedly in all types of clusters (*Abruzzo, Malta, Hamburg, Flanders, Poland, Portugal, La Rioja, Andalusia, Ireland, Pais Vasco, Luxemburg, Northern Ireland, Molise, Wales, Greece, Navarra*). Some Rural development programmes describe only very general needs such as secure farming, protect income basis, reduce seasonality and avoid risks related to climate change (e.g. *Flanders, Thüringen, Saxonia Anhalt, Luxemburg, Basque country, Andalucía*). Other Rural development programmes adopt a more development-oriented approach (e.g. training, marketing, new operating concepts) to answer needs for higher growth and employment or improvement of the rural economy, services and quality of life (*Hessen, Berlin Brandenburg, Baden Württemberg, La Rioja, Navarra*). Small agro-food businesses are mentioned for their need to get easier access to innovative processes and techniques (*Hamburg*). Some innovative approaches are pointed as needing support, like productive outsourcing as a form of maintenance of agricultural activity (*Valencia*).

Critical points/Innovations

There is little coverage of potential conflicts between different targets. In *Niedersachsen Bremen* for example, the funding of bio-energy is not balanced by the increasing costs of food production/animal feed. In *Schleswig Holstein*, there are potential conflicts between the beneficiaries from the implementation of the Rural Development Measures and the people targeted by actions under the Water Framework Directive.

Axis 3 'Diversification' is sometimes limited to the needs of the farming sector (*Nordrhine Westphalia*).

Completeness/Information gaps

The needs of beneficiaries are often not mentioned. Moreover, the needs are often deducted from the general strategy and listed as a set of policy goals (e.g. diversification, compensation of economic loss from Natura 2000, etc.). This confusion between needs and goals does not provide appropriate data (*Mecklenburg, Malta, Abruzzo, Ireland, Hungary, France*).

Outside the classic set of beneficiaries – farm and forestry owners, local authorities and local NGOs, the high number of references to “inhabitants”, “population”, “broad public”, “consumers”, “residents”, “rural communities” illustrates the absence of target, mostly under Axis 3 and 4.

Conclusions

From the ex ante exploration of target beneficiaries and their needs, the patrimonial weight of agriculture and forestry is a common point to all programmes and allows the sector to be a major beneficiary, whereas other local interests are represented to a less degree.

Under Axis 1 & 2, targeted beneficiaries correspond to the traditional recipients of public support in the farming and forestry sector. Private firms are mostly appearing in the food processing sector, or when their size is small (less than 10 employees).

Under Axis 3 & 4, local authorities seem to be the leading beneficiaries, together with the non profit sector.

Attitudes such as securing current amenities and maintaining farm income or developmental approaches (training, marketing, new operating concepts, etc.) are the main vectors for identifying the needs.

4.1.5 Topic 1.5 – SWOT analysis and assessment of needs: Possible other problems/beneficiaries not addressed by the implementation of the programmes

Rationale

In Recital 40, Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 specifies that specific support should be granted to forest holders to help address specific problems resulting from their implementation. In Recital 9, the Commission Regulation (EC) No 1974/2006 recommends that, in case of early retirement support, specific problems arising where a holding is transferred by several

transferors or by a tenant farmer should be solved and that the non-commercial farming activity of the transferor should not be eligible for support under the Common Agricultural Policy.

In its Annex 2 (Content of a Rural Development programme), Regulation (EC) No 1974/ requires that each Rural Development Programme describes the general socio-economic context of the geographical area: the demographic situation including analysis of the age and gender population structure, in- and out-migration and problems arising from peri-urban pressures and remoteness.

The Handbook for the implementation of the CMEF and its Note C on the ex ante evaluation does not provide any explicit guidelines regarding beneficiaries and needs/problems not being addressed. The Annex 1 to Guidance Note C: "Indicative Outline of an Ex-ante Evaluation Report" foresees two sections entitled "Identification of target groups of intervention and their needs" and "Problems not addressed by the implementation of the programme".

Section 1.5. complements the former section (1.4) and investigates if, according to our survey of ex-ante evaluations, there are any problems/beneficiaries who should be addressed and that are not addressed, i.e. is there anything mentioned in this respect within the ex-ante evaluations?

Key terms

Balanced representation of local interests; beneficiary; need; SWOT analysis

Main findings

There is little information to be found in the ex ante evaluations on problems or beneficiaries not addressed. It is therefore very difficult to analyse this beyond the following lists, which are based on the identification of „unusual“ beneficiaries, and/or needs in some Rural development programmes.

Beneficiaries rarely targeted:

- Producers from agricultural sectors under restructuring (e.g. tobacco in Umbria)
- The private sector beyond agriculture and food processing (trade, handcraft, health services)
- Environmental bodies dealing with agro-food process (waste management, quality assessment, etc.)
- Gender equality is not a priority issue for most Rural development programmes
- Unemployed, underemployed, immigrants (major issue for Guyane), low skilled workers, young people are hardly mentioned

Needs/problems seldom addressed

- Problems related to research and technology transfer in the agro food and agro-environmental sectors (Navarra, Trento, Denmark)
- Pressure on agricultural soils and land market (Navarra, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Romania)
- Weak focus on needs for innovative processes in farming and forestry (Hamburg)
- Short distribution channels linking rural producers to markets town and neighbour urban areas (Slovakia, Northern Ireland, Trento, Basque country)
- Governance issues such as working methods of public administration (Piemonte), networking capacity (Czech Republic)
- Unbalanced representation of local interests (Flanders, Sweden, Poland, Scotland)
- Lack of appraisal on pluri-activity, seasonality and off-farm employment
- Deficiencies in the main infrastructures and services to the rural population are not well addressed
- Socio-economic issues related to demography, peri-urban issues or remoteness are absent

Critical points/Innovations

There is an issue of targeting some types of “traditional” beneficiaries (for example for maintaining an ageing labour force in *Malta, or Flanders*), which can prevent the innovative approaches necessary for restructuring the farming sector.

The lack of regional differentiation of beneficiaries is a serious shortcoming for *Poland's* rural development policy; This issues also appears in other large national programmes (*Hungary, Greece, Ireland, Romania, etc.*).

Completeness/Information gaps

This issue is not covered in general by ex ante evaluators and the information is very difficult to assemble.

Conclusions

Examining the few elements of analysis relating to needs and beneficiaries not clearly targeted in ex ante evaluations, a number of shortcomings can be identified which could weaken the achievement of the overall Community objectives of EARDF of supporting job creation and boosting endogenous development potential. By omitting some target groups, a balanced representation of local interests will be difficult to establish.

Thematic Conclusion Theme 1: SWOT ANALYSIS AND ASSESMENT OF NEEDS

Topics	<p>The identification of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – needs in rural areas in terms of social, economic and environmental criteria – driving forces in rural areas – causes of disparities between rural areas – main categories of beneficiaries as priority target groups – problems and beneficiaries not addressed by the programme
What was expected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evidence to justify that the strategy, priorities and measures adopted by the programme as well as the budget dedicated to them are a well-founded response to the real needs of rural areas, the driving forces and the causes of disparities. – Evidence to show that the programme is targeted at those beneficiaries with greatest needs.
What has worked well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The diagnosis of the programme area, the SWOT analysis and the common baseline indicators encourage programmers to think “out of the box” and look at their area in far broader and deeper terms than they would do normally – They also create the basis for comparing the situation between rural areas and the strategies they have adopted across Europe – Many of the diagnosis are genuinely interesting pieces of research in their own right and deserve further dissemination. – Member States have devoted considerable efforts to assess the needs of the respective programme areas, based on the SWOT analyses. – As a result, it is possible to categorize the needs identified at European level to broad social, economic and environmental categories.
What did not work and why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – There is an unresolved tension between the broad needs of the programme rural areas and the axes and measures that the programmes can support under the RD regulation. In many cases, programmers concentrate on what they can achieve with the programme rather than on needs, driving forces and causes of disparities that fall outside its scope. – This means that the SWOT analysis and the subsequent identification of needs, driving forces and causes of disparities are often conducted in terms of the axes of the regulation rather than in terms of broader economic, social and environmental categories. The identification of beneficiaries also tends to refer back to the main groups mentioned by the RDR.
What did not work and why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – In fact, many of the programmes do not specifically go beyond the SWOT to separate out needs, driving forces and causes of disparities. These have to be deduced from the SWOT. – The needs of beneficiaries, and the beneficiaries and problems <u>not</u> addressed are rarely mentioned. – There is a lack of clarity in the definition of the terms needs, driving forces and causes of disparities. All are usually described in deficit terms whereas they can actually refer to positive opportunities. – There is often very little analysis of disparities <u>within</u> the programme area – In general, the Programmes and and ex ante evaluations do not rank or prioritise needs or identify the size and importance of the driving forces and causes.
Elements to be further improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The scope of the SWOT analysis and assessment of the needs of the programme area and its relation to the scope of the RDR. – The definition of the terms needs, driving forces and causes. The recognition that these can be positive as well as negative – The explicit ranking and prioritisation of needs, driving forces, causes and target groups and types of area – The analysis of underlying, longer term processes, causal chains and challenges

Recommendations

- The SWOT analysis and assessment of needs should refer to the entire programme area and not just those parts that the programming measures can affect. This analysis should be seen as a reference point and guide for the intervention of other EU and national funds in the rural areas concerned.
 - Based on clear definitions, the Programmes and ex ante evaluations should explicitly devote a separate section to the identification of needs, driving forces and causes.
 - More attention should be paid to identifying and responding to the opportunities rather than just compensating for the deficits.
 - These should also explicitly be prioritised and ranked using techniques like stakeholder analysis, problems trees etc.
 - The Programmes and ex ante evaluations should provide more evidence of the needs and priorities of different typologies of rural areas within the programme area
 - They should also provide more evidence of the priority given to different target groups taking into account a better definition of their needs and factors such as location (in or out of cities of a certain size), the size of firms, the sectoral distribution, gender, age etc.
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4.2 Theme 2 – Policy objectives

4.2.1 Topic 2.1 – Overall policy objective(s) in terms of expected impacts identified by the Member States (including objectives reflecting national priorities)

Rationale

Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 establishes in its Article 4 the European objectives that are attributed to the Rural Development Programmes: “Support for rural development shall contribute to achieving the following objectives:

- a) Improving the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry by supporting restructuring, development and innovation;
- b) Improving the environment and the countryside by supporting land management;
- c) Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of economic activity.”

In its “Guidelines for the Ex Ante Evaluations” (Guidance note C) the Commission refers to Article 85 of Council Regulation 1698/2005 which requires the ex ante evaluation to “identify and appraise medium and long-term needs, the goals to be achieved, the results expected, ...”. The Guidance document specifies that “in view of fulfilling these tasks, ex ante evaluation has to assess the programme related targets as derived from needs and the relevance of the programme objectives (“the goals to be achieved”) to those needs”.

Therefore, with the help of the ex ante evaluation, the expectation is to find in each programme a set of overall policy objectives clearly identified that are:

- In coherence with the objectives set at European level
- Well fitted with the strategies adopted at Member State level
- Reflecting the specific needs of the area(s) covered by the programme

Due to the focus of the topic on the level of the Member States, among the information sources for the synthesis on this theme also the content of the National Strategy Plans has been included. However, the analysis starts at the level of programmes and looks how these Member State objectives have been taken up in the programmes. It is complemented under Topics 2.2. and 2.3. by a deeper assessment of the intervention logics.

Key terms

Core objectives of rural development policy; national strategy plan (National Strategy Plans); intervention logics; need; objective; result; strategy; subsidiary principle

Main findings

Overall, the objectives of the rural development policy as expressed in Council Regulation 1698/2005 tend to be reflected into the programmes in a rather unspecific manner. In this respect, the refinement and adaptation of these objectives to the different national or regional contexts seem to have been made to a limited extent. In *Cyprus* for example, diversification of the rural economy is considered to be an important priority, but there are no related actions in the programme. As a consequence, the overall objectives of the programmes are generally formulated in general terms (*Molise, Marche, Toscana, Madeira, Bulgaria, Asturias, Castilla Y Leon, Baleares Islands, Murcia, Canarias, Cantabria, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Cyprus, ...*).

However, some examples of well-defined objectives can be traced back in a number of programmes, as described in the following. *Madeira* proposes two general objectives (Quality Axis and Sustainable Axis), which are used to organise the specific objectives in two logical grouping. *The Netherlands* expects more precise impacts (maintain biodiversity and agricultural and forest systems with High Nature Value, implementation of the Water directive, fight climate change). In the *Czech Republic*, the objective is to base the development of the rural areas on upholding the principles of sustainable development, a systematic improvement of the environment, care for the landscape and nature and reducing the negative effects of intensive agricultural and forestry management. *France (Hexagone)* has well-defined objectives that are more specific than the ones of the Regulation (“Axis 1: stabilising the farmers age balance, maintaining farming activities in mountain areas; Axis 2: maintaining conservation of specific birds and their habitats, developing tools for the protection of water, developing organic farming; Axis 2 and 3: increasing the number of contracts aiming to maintain areas of high natural value like Natura 2000 zones”). In *England (UK)*, the National Strategy Plans has identified 4 main themes, which are coherent with the overall objectives of the Regulation, but formulated in a more precise way (“Build profitable, innovative and competitive farming, food and forestry sectors, that meet the needs of consumers and make a net positive contribution to the environment, enhance opportunity in rural areas and mobilise the development potential of rural areas in a way that stimulates innovation”). In *Finland*, three key areas have been specified (“I Agriculture and forestry are practised in a way that is economically and ecologically sustainable as well as ethically acceptable in all parts of the country; II Actions favouring and furthering the competitiveness of businesses, new entrepreneurship, and networking among entrepreneurs to diversify rural economies and improve employment; III Strengthening local initiative to improve the viability and quality of life of the rural areas”). In *Latvia*, the National Strategy Plans defines the overall objective as prosperous people in sustainable populated countryside of Latvia (“Latvian Rural Development Strategy is focused on people as main priority whose welfare

augmentation is an overall development objective and whose potential lies in the basis of achievement of other priorities both in socioeconomic development of territories and environmental areas”).

The formulation of the objectives of the programmes is generally done in an unclear way, and the objectives are rarely translated into quantified target levels. In *Extremadura* for example, the ex ante evaluation does not specify the objectives of the respective rural development programme. In *Cantabria*, the logic of the intervention is not based on a description of the needs of the region and there is no SWOT.

There are some noticeable exceptions, such as *Scotland*, where the National Strategy Plans identifies the following 7 strategic outcomes for rural development in Scotland: “1. *Sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries competitive in markets and contributing to local economies*. 2. *Well treated and healthy domestic and farm animals*. 3. *Well maintained landscapes and biodiversity benefiting people and businesses*. 4. *Rivers, lochs and beaches free of unacceptable pollution*. 5. *Communities protected from flooding, climate change and other environmental hazards*. 6. *Rural development benefiting local communities*. 7. *Access to public services for people in rural areas*”. Starting from there, the Rural development programmes states that the strategic plan sets out 5 priorities: 1. *Improved business viability* 2. *Enhanced biodiversity and landscape* 3. *Improved water quality* 4. *Tackling climate change* 5. *Thriving rural communities*. Other good examples include *Sweden*, with objectives clearly presented as a mix between general aims (“*Promote economically, ecologically and socially sustainable development in rural areas*”) and more precise expected impacts (“*Negative environmental impact is kept to a minimum*”). *Flanders (BE)* also organises a set of 17 specific objectives into 3 general aims presented as expected impacts (example: “*agricultural entrepreneurs obtains a stronger position in the production chain for agro-products*”). In *Lithuania*, the expected impact is two-edged: the Rural development programmes should create economic growth, but could also create exclusion and unemployment for some people. In *Denmark* too, the objectives are well formulated in terms of expected impacts “*More entrepreneurs and local jobs in the rural areas; Stronger competitive force in the food and forestry sector; Varied landscapes, rich nature, and clean environment; Attractive conditions of life in the rural areas contributing to a strong cohesive force between rural areas and the cities*”. However, even in these cases, the formulation of objectives is not very precise in terms of target levels (for example, what is meant by “well treated” or “a minimum”?).

In the 3 Member States with a large number of regions, the establishment of a strategic framework at national level by the National Strategy Plans has limited the scope of objectives accessible to the regional programmes. In *Germany*, most programmes are framed into the national strategy, which seeks to achieve a better competitive capacity, growth and sustainability for agriculture and forestry. Four main topics are covered: the agrarian food industry, the environment, the rural economy and the population in a broader sense. In many

Spanish regions, the focus has been set on the agricultural sector by the National Strategy. This leaves a limited scope for specific objectives fitted to the needs of the region. In Italy, most programmes are organised along the axis of the Regulation, although in some cases (*Marche*) more precise (but not quantified) expected impacts are presented within the different Axis. In countries with a lower level of devolution of power such France or the UK, the weight of the national strategy is even higher. In *France* for example, the articulation between the national and regional levels is complex, and the French regions (*Martinique, Reunion*) follow the strategic objectives established at national level, although there are big variations at the level of individual measures.

In a dozen of Member States, the National Strategy Plans itself contained a very detailed development strategy for the country as a whole. It is the case in *Denmark*, where the Government has presented a strategy to future-orientate the Danish society through a number of reforms of the system for education and research and improvement of the general framework conditions for growth and innovation (Strategy for Denmark in the global economy, 2006). In addition, the Government wishes to secure more areas of high natural value and a cleaner aquatic environment. The rural development programme is designed to support this global strategy. In *Ireland*, the priorities set for the National Strategy Plans were designed to be consistent with the national ones, the Ireland's Agro Vision 2015 Action Plan, which is premised on a vision of a competitive, consumer-focused sector. Therefore, in agro-food the objective is to develop a competitive consumer-focused sector that will contribute to a vibrant rural economy, society and environment. In *Wales*, the Rural development programmes is seen as a tool contributing to a global strategic document named "Wales: A Better Country".

In a couple of Rural development programmes, the objectives are very much centred on the consistency with former strategies and existing procedures. It is the case in *Estonia*, where the continuity with SAPARD is very clear and in *Ireland*, where it is proposed to build the 2007 – 2013 on the success story of the 2000 – 2006 measures relating to agro-environment, forestry and less favoured areas.

Cluster specific findings

As could be seen in the main findings above, the majority of programmes followed very closely the objectives as listed in the regulation. There is no apparent distinction between the RD Programmes of the different clusters in this respect.

This brings along some concerns with respect to how far the Intervention Logic of RD Programmes has been applied and followed: Considering the heterogeneity of the identified needs in the different programme areas (see theme 1), the fact that these objectives are listed rather in a repetitive way comes somehow as a surprise. In fact, following the intervention logic of RD programmes, which draws the link between needs, overall programme objectives, specific

objectives and finally measures of programmes, we could have expected that cluster specific differentiations would have been possible also in the case of the objectives.

Critical points/innovations

The new approach to programming includes the elaboration by the Member States of strategies established at national level, the National Strategy Plans. These strategies have been very structuring for the Rural development programmes. These strategic documents are under the sole responsibility of the Member States (they are “communicated” to the Commission, not formally approved, although they are prepared in consultation with the Commission services) and are prepared before the Rural development programmes. The ex ante evaluation usually starts after the approval of the Strategies, at a stage where some structuring decisions have already been taken. We consider this as an important limitation of the role of the ex ante in the elaboration of the strategies of the Rural development programmes. The example of *Bulgaria* supports this conclusion: in this country the ex ante was completed in February 2007 and covered the National Strategy Plans; its analysis, conclusions and main recommendations served as a basis for the Rural development programmes adopted in December 2007. At the other extreme, in some cases there is little evidence of any connection between the National Strategy Plans and the Rural development programmes. In *Malta*, the overall vision stated in the NSRF (National Strategy Plans) is not mentioned neither in the Rural development programmes nor in the ex ante evaluation. In *Wallonia*, the ex ante makes almost no reference to the national/"Member State" level. The geographical expert's opinion is that this particular case is probably due to the specific political and institutional situation of Belgium where regions consider that they are "masters on board" in their fields of responsibility.

The level of methodological capacity in developing a programming document based on systematic intervention logic is very variable across the Member States and regions. The further refining of objectives into quantified targets is rarely presented, despite the fact that the ex-ante evaluator's task includes the provision of assistance to the programming authority in this respect.

We consider that in some 25 to 30% of cases the strategies of Rural development programmes are well developed and present a coherent connection between the needs established in the analysis and in the SWOT and the overall or specific objectives. In *Estonia* for example, the priorities are justified by the low competitiveness of the Estonian agricultural sector at European level and the relatively good status of the environment. In *Asturias*, the ex ante evaluation produced a matrix which shows the links between the intermediate (specific) objectives and the main needs and strengths. In *Castilla Y Leon*, the SWOT is very detailed and the connection with objectives is obvious (although not explicit). In *Slovenia*, the link with the SWOT is clearly established and supports a focus on preservation of forests. In *Valencia*, the rationale is described in terms of the driving forces and causes of rural disparities in the region – the imbalance caused by the advantages of the areas near the coast and the decline of agriculture.

In *Aragon*, the demographic decline and the reduction of productivity are seriously affecting the countryside. In *Murcia*, the ex-ante evaluation states that the strategy corresponds to the needs detected in the analysis and in the SWOT and demonstrate this by using two tables showing the links between the intermediate (specific) objectives and the main needs and strengths.

In more than half of the cases, we have observed a weak link between the objective and the SWOT. In *Poland* for example, the ex ante does not mention the rationale and the Rural development programmes does not refer to objectives but rather to priorities. In *La Rioja*, “the strategy focuses on stemming the decline of population and stimulating economic activity”, a very unspecific rationale. In *Andalusia*, the explicit rationale is not very developed in both the Rural development programmes and ex ante, although the specific features of Andalusia rural areas are put forward (huge size, high value of the natural areas, importance of family and food, importance of local actors). In the *Basque Country*, the main objective of the Rural development programmes is to promote economic sustainability by generating value added in the agro food chain (axis 1). This objective receives 60% of total public expenditure. The ex ante does not topic this, despite the fact that this region is largely affected by urban development. The best way to achieve environmental sustainability is supposed to be through profitable agro food firms: axis 2 receives only the 25% minimum stipulated in the Regulation.

A key point is the balance of budgetary allocations between the Axis and priorities. In some cases the lecture of the Rural development programmes leaves the impression that, the first step taken is the distribution of resources and not the identification of priority needs. In *England (UK)*, for example, the rationale is set in the National Strategy Plans which identifies that maximum added-value for the Rural development programmes in England can be achieved through a focus on improving the environment and countryside, therefore the overall strategy for England was to focus spend on Axis 2. However, any assessment of the consistency of the objectives and rationale of the proposed Measures with the Axis objectives and rationale is compromised by the absence of specific rationale and objectives for each Axis. As long as this reference is not clearly defined a comparison becomes impossible. This is linked to the approach taken by the SWOT (absence in the first drafts of the Rural development programmes, then “build-up” from already defined measures and priorities).

In many cases, there is little evidence that the ex ante evaluators have worked with the programming authorities to develop well articulated sets of objectives, which are adapted to the national or regional specific needs. This questions the role of the ex ante evaluator, and seems to indicate that there is still a lot of capacity building work to do in the evaluation community across Europe.

Completeness/Information gaps

There is no major information gap about this topic in the ex ante evaluations, although the quality of the information is sometime questionable. Objectives are presented in the three levels: National Strategy Plans, Rural development programmes and ex ante reports, although they might not always have the prominent place that is expected. The connections between the three levels are not always clearly established.

Conclusions

The new “Objective-led” approach to programming seems to have been adopted by the Members States, although there is still some progress to be made on the logical sequence (Analysis – SWOT – Priorities and Rationale – Objectives – Quantified expected results – Measures) and on the way objectives are expressed.

The general objectives of the EU rural development policy are taken up and followed in the different programmes, although this is generally done in an unspecific manner, i.e. with limited attempts to refine the general objectives as defined in Regulation 1698/2005 to better reflect the different national/regional specific contexts. However, examples of well-structured strategies based on – and meaningful linked with – the SWOT analysis have been identified and referred to (also see findings and conclusions of the next topic).

Another area where there is scope for improvement is the establishment of the National Strategies as a preliminary step before programming the Rural development programmes, and the links that this step has (or *could have*) with the ex ante evaluation. It certainly helps to have a good integration of these two policy-making levels, but the strategy should be established through the support of more sophisticated methodological requirements. The negative side of this two-stage process is the fact that the elaboration of the Rural development programmes is framed by National Strategy Plans established beforehand, not always with the support of an ex ante evaluators and without a formal approval by the European Commission. Concrete support by ex ante evaluators could certainly improve the soundness of the methodological basis for the development of the national strategies.

4.2.2 Topic 2.2 – General, specific and operational objectives and expected results identified by the Member States

Rationale

In its “Guidelines for the Ex Ante Evaluations” (Guidance note C of the CMEF), the Commission refers to Article 85 of Council Regulation 1698/2005 which requires the ex ante evaluation to “identify and appraise medium and long-term needs, the goals to be achieved, the results

expected”. The Guidance documents specifies that “in view of fulfilling these tasks, ex ante evaluation has to identify and examine the intervention logic of measures, from output to result and to impact, and to assess the extent to which the expected results of measures contribute to achieving the targets identified and to the overall objectives both at community and national level;”

Section 2.1 was looking at the coherence of objectives between the strategic level (National Strategy Plans) and the operational programmes. It also checked if this sequence was appropriate with regards to the needs identified in the SWOT.

In Section 2.2 we are looking at the intervention logic, which includes the definition of general objectives connected to the overall policy aims defined in the National Strategy Plans, but also the logical breakdown of general objectives into smaller components: specific and operational objectives. These should then be specified as expected results, which in turn will lead the choice of Measures and the allocation of resources between them. Section 3.3. will look later at the balance of Measures in view of reaching the objectives.

Key terms

Core objectives of rural development policy; need; objective; result; strategy; subsidiary principle; balance among measures

Main findings

In a large majority of programmes, the articulation between “general”, “specific” and “operational” objectives is included, although these concepts could have been interpreted in fairly different ways. The “intervention logic” is not always presented in a systematic way, which means that the information needed to reconstruct the “logic” of the strategy is dispersed in the programmes.

In *Sweden*, there is an extensive intervention logic, with well-defined sets of objectives and expected results. In *Galicia*, general objectives and specific objectives are defined in a way that is very close to the definitions used in Regulation (EC) 1698/2005. Operational objectives are described and expected impacts are presented with target values in a clear matrix. In *Extremadura* and in *Canarias*, the ex ante evaluation presents a table connecting the operational objectives with the output indicators and the specific objectives with the expected results. These tables provide values for both output and expected results. In *Hungary*, the intervention logic for the three first Axes is presented in details, although the ex-ante evaluator does not share the optimistic expectations of National Strategy Plans and Rural development programmes in terms of results. In *Slovenia*, the ex-ante evaluator made comments and proposals to improve the focus of the programmes objectives, which were taken on board in the

final Rural development programmes version. *France (Hexagon)* and *Luxembourg* present very complete intervention logics, although these need to be reconstructed by looking at different sections of different documents. In *Estonia*, the general logic of setting and structuring objectives was followed and a system of objective-hierarchy used; these were described at the level of each Measure, but also in addition for some horizontal or common objectives of the various measures of the Rural development programmes. In *Northern Ireland (UK)*, the intervention logic is fairly complete, although the ex ante evaluator comments on expected results, noting the lack of quantified targets for result indicators and that many of them reflect outputs rather than results. The *Corsica* Rural development programmes present a full breakdown of the intervention logic. *Slovakia* includes a very detailed intervention logic of a high quality. In *Bulgaria*, the evaluators concluded that all proposed linkages between the strategic objectives, the operational objectives and measures within them seem to be well structured and justified.

In a small number of programmes (*Portugal Continente, Hungary, Northern Ireland, etc.*), no intervention logic is proposed for Axis 4, as it is only considered as a delivery method for the objectives set under Axis 3. If intervention logic for Axis 4 is presented separately, it tends to be rather basic and sometimes reflects a lack of experience with the Leader approach. In *Açores*, the general objectives of Axis 3 and 4 are the same (“Revitalise socially and economically the rural areas”) although in the two axis different intervention logics can be applied to reach this objective.

In the large majority of programmes (*Molise, Marche, Lombardia, Latvia, Toscana, Greece, etc.*), it is necessary to look at the Measures section of the Rural development programmes to find the operational objectives and the associated result indicators, with their quantitative targets. This makes it difficult to apprehend the overall approach of the programme. In *Castilla y Leon*, the ex ante evaluator provides a table in which the general objectives (defined as it is done in Council Regulation 1698/2005) are connected to specific objectives, but then the programme goes straight to the level of Measures. Expected results are presented in a separate section, where values are proposed for all the Common Indicators (output and results). The connection of these elements within the intervention logic is not clear. In *Romania*, the specific objectives are presented together with the description of the measures, although the expected results are spelled out in a qualitative and general manner. The same remark applies to *Scotland*, where targets for 2013 are not quantified and are stated as follows: Axis 1 – Increase labour productivity, increase training and education; Axis 2 – Increase farmland birds, increase favourable conditions; Axis 3 – Increase access to services, increase start up rates of micro-enterprises.

In a small number of programmes, the intervention logic is incomplete. In *Malta*, the strategic objectives of the NSRF (National Strategy Plans) are not highlighted neither in the Rural development programmes nor in the ex ante evaluation; a list of “objectives of the programme”

in the ex ante evaluation creates confusion. No expected impact is presented. In *Poland*, there is no mention in the Rural development programmes of expected results, and this is criticised by the ex ante evaluator, but in the final version results are defined at measure level (for most measures). The ex ante evaluator stresses that both needs and objectives should be defined in quantifiable terms in the Rural development programmes, but this recommendation has not been taken into account. *Portugal (Continente)* presents an incomplete set of objectives. In *Cyprus*, there are many deficiencies in the strategy chapter of the programme, which makes no difference between specific and operational objectives. Specific objectives are not defined by the programme and there is no related chapter in the ex ante evaluation, although the annex of the ex ante evaluation includes the result indicators. In *Ireland*, we find expected results for Axis 1, but Axis 2, 3 and 4 only state measures and broader objectives. The distinction between specific and operational objectives is not always clear, and Axis 2 does not clearly link general objectives to specific measures. In *Calabria*, the ex-ante evaluation reconstructs a hierarchy of objectives which is only partly followed by the Rural development programmes (operational objectives are missing). In *Madrid*, 14 objectives are listed without making a distinction between general, specific and operational objectives. They are measured using a very simple scale of 1, 2 and 3 points (low importance, important and very important).

In around 20% of the programmes, the choice of terms for defining the objectives is not accurate, and the different levels of (operational, specific and global) objectives are not clearly distinguished, which makes it difficult to understand the overall rationale of the programme. The same applies in *Extremadura*, where specific, “intermediary” and operational objectives are confused. In the rural development programme of *Asturias*, the general objectives are called “strategic objectives” and operational objectives are called “final objectives”. Expected results are well defined, but confusion also arises between output, results and impact. In *Canarias*, the objectives are formulated in similar way as in Regulation (EC) 1698/2005. In the *Lithuanian* programme, a general objective is assembled using in one sentence a set of 5 different aims. It is followed by 4 general objectives, one for each Axis. In the programme of *Valencia*, the wording with which many of the objectives are described, the different terminology and the lack of operational objectives makes it difficult to reconstruct the intervention logic. The overall objective is divided into three so-called “lower level objectives”. The programme then refers to basic rather than specific objectives for each axis. There is no specific section on operational objectives, which are not mentioned explicitly within the measures. A similar problem appears in *Navarra*, where specific objectives become “programme priorities” and “axis objectives”, which in their turn are shared into “intermediate achievements”. The ex ante evaluation states that the result indicators for the environmental measures are difficult to quantify and that the relationship between outputs, results and impacts is very unclear. In *Austria*, the operational objectives mentioned in the National Strategy Plans are sometimes formulated as “actions” and sometimes as “objectives”. In *Murcia*, general objectives are called “strategic objectives”, whereas the specific objectives are referred to as intermediate objectives, and the operational objectives as final objectives (and their formulation follows the titles of each measure).

When they are included in the Rural development programmes, the “expected results” are general associated to the CMEF indicators (Martinique, Castilla, La Mancha etc.), but not always quantified. In the Czech Republic, the expected result of the Measures under Axis 3 is described as “development of conditions of living in rural areas and diversification of economic activities”, and the ones of the measures under Axis 4 as “the horizontal approach Leader shall enable objectives of competitiveness, environment, and quality of life, and diversification of rural economy to be unified. The integrated approach shall assist to protect and develop local natural and cultural heritage, to increase awareness on environmental protection, to support the production of specialities, tourism, renewable sources and energy”. In Madrid, there is a table in the Rural development programmes presenting the objectives of the Programme. These objectives are not justified by an economical, social or environmental analysis, but are simply listed with some indicators for which values are provided. These indicators seem to be baseline indicators, but they do not follow the list of Baseline indicators of CMEF.

As for the overall objectives (see topic 2.1), the influence of the National Strategy Plans is very strong, especially in countries with devolution of competencies. The German programmes tend to share the same intervention logic as it has been established nationally: the different levels of objectives and the expected impacts are defined in the National Strategy Plans, leaving little space for regional variations. In England (UK), the objectives of the programme were considered at the level of the UK National Strategy Plans. No expected results were identified in the National Strategy Plans or in the ex ante evaluation. In Wales, the objectives of the National Strategy Plans do not always correspond with the ones of the programme, in particular as regards Axis 2 and Axis 3. The ex ante evaluator states that the National Strategy Plans required reinterpretation to constitute a set of objectives below the strategic level (i.e. specific objective and operational objective), however, there are no measure-specific objectives set out in the programme. At the time of the ex-ante (September, 2007) final budgets had yet to be agreed. As a consequence, although expected results are made clear through the specification of indicators, these are not quantified. It is however noted that quantified targets will be set when the final budgets are agreed. In Martinique, the operational objectives are the same as in the National Strategy Plans, despite the fact that this region presents a very specific context.

Cluster specific findings

As in Topic 2.1 the majority of programmes have provided the necessary objectives and intervention logics – although with varying underlying definition. However, we have not found any cluster specific pattern with respect to the general, specific and operational objectives of the programmes. Therefore, the same considerations developed for the previous topic also apply here.

Critical points/innovations

A critical remark concerns the weak “culture” of programming in the Member States, i.e. the ability to linking together the different programming phases, starting from the elaboration of the National Strategy Plans up to the finalisation of the programmes. This can represent a serious shortcoming in an “objective-led” approach to programming. The Annex II to the Commission Regulation 1974/2006 presents the standard table of content for a Rural development programmes; however it does not require the full intervention logic to be presented, a fact that we criticise. The ex ante evaluation is supposed to reconstruct this logic, but sometimes does not achieve this either. In *Cataluña*, a fiche is provided in the ex ante showing the relevance of general objectives and sub-objectives for each axis, according to the needs of rural areas, but this is an exception. In *Denmark*, the evaluator made some critical remarks about the presentation of the objectives in the National Strategy Plans, which was regarded as a complex document with many different types of objectives at different levels. It was recommended to summarise in a diagram the hierarchy of objectives, and in the Rural development programmes an illustrated hierarchy of objectives was added to Chapter 4.

In some cases, the considerations above could be explained by the fact that the elaboration of those programmes has been done in the wrong order: negotiations on the repartition of the financial flows seem to have sometimes taken place before the elaboration of the detailed programmes. In those cases, the objectives defined in the Rural development programmes do not seem to result from analysis of the present situation and needs identified, but more from an attempt to fit into the “menu” of measures available in the EAFRD. In the same way, the “results” mentioned in the description of measures often do not make a reference to quantified needs, but rather seem to be added as justification for the amounts allocated to a given measure. In those countries where the ex-ante evaluations were carried out at an early stage (elaboration of the National Strategy Plans) they generally underline that the expected results are very dependent on budgetary allocations and have contributed to shape the programmes accordingly. This point will be developed again in Section 3.3.

The absence of objectives for Axis 4 in some programmes or the very general nature of these in many others, can probably be explained by the fact that Leader is now integrated into the mainstream programmes, which are handled by people who have limited experience of dealing with this approach (the managing authorities in charge of LEADER have often changed for the new programming period), thus lacking the capacity to formulate such objectives accordingly.

Completeness/Information gaps

There is no major information gap about this topic in the ex ante evaluations, as the majority of programmes have included “general”, “specific” and “operational” objectives. The information gap is consequently less a quantitative, than rather a qualitative one in terms of different interpretations of the respective terms. In most cases, the chapter on strategy in the Rural

development programmes does not include a full intervention logic and never goes down to the level of expected results. These are usually defined at the level of the individual Measures and summarised in an indicator table. It is sometimes confusing to look at National Strategy Plans, Rural development programmes and ex ante as these are not always very consistent.

Conclusions

Overall, the programming approach of RD programmes following an intervention logic has been taken on board by the Member States and followed duly.

However the “Objective-led” approach to programming is a complex task that requires good capacity in designing programmes. The role of ex ante evaluation herein is essential in helping the programming authorities to develop good intervention logics, which will guarantee an easier delivery of the programme and better monitoring of the results. There is still some progress to be made via the exchange of good practices between administrations and evaluators and via capacity-building actions.

When the methodology is well mastered, we can still point at a certain lack of imagination and creativity in using measures from different axis to reach general objectives well fitted to the needs of the rural areas covered by the programmes. There seems to be scope for improving the use of complementarity between the Measures, and capacity-building actions could strengthen this aspect.

Lastly, a lack of communication capacity is also noticeable. The use of a systematic vocabulary is not yet integrated by the Member States and we found many mechanical intervention logics fitted into the structure of the Regulation with little effort for adaptation to regional or national circumstances.

Again, the structuring effect of the National Strategy Plans is very strong, and it would be interesting to know the extent to which National Strategy Plans have been revised following the ex-ante of national or regional programmes. However, this question falls beyond the scope of this study.

4.2.3 Topic 2.3 – Overall level of coherence between programmes' objectives and the National Strategy Plans

Rationale

Regulation 1698/2005, Article 11, paragraph 2 states that “The national strategy plan shall ensure that Community aid for rural development is consistent with the Community strategic guidelines and that Community, national and regional priorities all coordinate. The national strategy plan shall be a reference tool for preparing EAFRD programming. It shall be implemented through the rural development programmes.”

The Handbook on CMEF, Guidance Note C, adds that the ex ante evaluation must “assess the extent to which rural development programmes contribute to achieving Community priorities and priorities for intervention defined under the National Strategy Plan, in particular with respect to growth, jobs and sustainability”.

It is therefore important that the ex ante evaluations assess whether the Rural development programmes contribute to the National Strategies adopted by the Member States, and therefore to the Community priorities as set in the Guidelines published in February 2006.

Key terms

Core objectives of rural development policy; national strategy plan (National Strategy Plans); intervention logic; need; objective; result; strategy; subsidiary principle

Main findings

The National Strategy Plans for Rural Development were developed at national level in the Member States after the publication of the Community Guidelines. They were adopted by the Member States after consultation with the European Commission, but, unlike the Rural development programmes, they are not *approved* by the Commission. The National Strategy Plans should be a wider framework in which the utilisation of the EAFRD is only one instrument, complemented by other forms of intervention such as legislation or other expenditure programmes, at European, national and regional level. However, it was not possible in the framework of this study to verify if all Member States had developed such wider plans or if they were only conceived with the EAFRD funding in mind. For example, in *The Netherlands*, the integrated National Strategy Plan covers more than the development of agriculture. It states that sustainable development is people, profit and planet. In line with the European guidelines it also concerns improvement of nature, landscape, soil, water, air, climate, heritage and living environment. The European budget available for rural development is only 6-7% of the total budget that the Dutch government has planned.

In a large majority of the cases, the ex ante evaluations states that there is a high level of coherence between the objectives of the Rural development programmes and those of the National Strategy Plans (Sweden, German programmes, Italian programmes, Flanders, Madeira, Azores, Malta, Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Portugal Continente, Slovenia, Valencia, La Rioja, Luxembourg, Northern Ireland, Finland national and Åland Islands, Austria, Czech Republic, Latvia, Romania, Denmark, etc.). There is often a large overlap of information between the documents of the National Strategy Plans, the ex ante evaluation and the Rural development programmes.

In Spain, the “horizontal measures” of the National Strategy Plans are of obligatory implementation in all Regions (they are as follows: – Improve the capacity of the existing human resources; – Improve the work and natural resources productivity; – Promote the innovation and technology in the agricultural and rural context; – Promote and assure the added value of the rural quality products; – Improve the defence capacity against fires and natural disasters; – Increase the value of environmental services in agricultural and rural areas with low incomes from the market; – Protect, preserve and valorise the systems with a high nature value). This creates grounds for a very good coherence, although in the ex ante evaluation there is comments on the fact that the National Strategy Plans imposed a strong focus on agriculture. In several Spanish ex-ante evaluations (La Rioja, Asturias, Extremadura, Canarias, Castilla-la-Mancha, Madrid, Murcia at least), there is a section on the coherence with the National Strategic Plan, where this stated coherence is justified through diagrams, tables or graphs showing how the specific objectives of the National Strategy Plans are related to the specific objectives of the programme. In Navarra, the Rural development programmes also uses the definitions, objectives and requirements of the measures as established in the national framework.

In Guyane and Martinique, the coherence between the two documents is explained and detailed in a complete table. For each of the national strategic objective, several precise regional operational priorities are listed and each of these priorities is connected to tangible actions to be implemented. This is presented as a very clear and complete tree structure developed during the writing of the Rural development programmes and has included comments by the evaluation team. This enabled to have a clear common tool explaining what was to be done and how and avoiding overlapping. This tool is considered as very innovative.

However, coherence does not mean that there are no differences. These can be identified at different levels:

- There can be a difference in level of priorities between the axes, which can be identified in the proposed distribution of funds. This is the case in most programmes established at regional level in the framework of a national strategy. It also reflects the fact that even if the EAFRD is the main source of funding, other policy instruments and funds are used to pursue the objective set in the National Strategy Plans. This is mentioned in several

German regions, but is not seen as a problem. In *Hessen*, the utilisation of Axis 4 has been limited, although the National Strategy Plans recommends that measures under Axis 3 could be implemented via an area-based approach. In *Andalucía*, the Rural development programmes is more detailed than the National Strategy Plans; it states that Andalucía shares many of the problems of the rest of the Spanish regions, on this basis justify the approach of following the strategy defined in the National Strategy Plans. This is particularly born out by the distribution of resources between axes although Andalucía goes towards the top end of the spectrum in terms of the percentage of expenditure on axis 1 (54,59%, whilst the national bracket was between 40% and 65%). We find a similar comment in the *Basque Country*. In *Corsica*, the level of coherence is very high in terms of content because of the way the regional Rural development programmes has been built (using the elements of the National Strategy Plans, notably for what concerns the objectives and the impacts). Differences can be noted concerning the balance of the financial ratio of each measure. For instance, on the 31 measures (not taking into account technical assistance) measures 211 and 212 use nearly 50% of the total envelope in order to compensate natural handicaps of the area.

- The difference can also be seen in the level of information available. National Strategy Plans are established at national level and are drawn out before the Rural development programmes. In *England*, the ex ante points at the fact that the evidence bases for the National Strategy Plans and Rural development programmes were developed separately and therefore do not fully correlate or cohere. The National Strategy Plans is considered not including SMART objectives or targets, and the Rural development programmes objectives are developed consistently with this general framework. The ex ante evaluators advised that a common evidence base should be used to help ensuring coherence and consistency. In *Scotland*, the ex ante evaluator regrets that some of the priorities being dictated by former commitments (this point is developed in section 3.3), the lack of monitoring results from previous Rural development programmes make it difficult to comment on the coherence of ongoing commitments with National Strategy Plans.

Sometimes we could not find solid evidence basis to demonstrate the stated coherence. In *France*, reference is made quite often in the ex ante to the national strategic plan in terms of objectives. Yet, there is no real analysis on how the technical and operational definition of the measures meets the objectives of the National Strategy Plans or is coherent with these objectives. This part could/should have been developed in order to see if the 'tools' developed were the right ones regarding the National Strategy Plans.

The coherence is sometimes limited or difficult to establish. In *Ireland*, the ex ante evaluators feel that a Strategy and Plan with a wider vision of rural development needs to be produced to outline the totality of Government's proposed interventions. This should be contained in the

National Development Plan launched in January 2007, and entitled *Transforming Ireland – A Better Quality of Life for All*. The NDP addresses a much wider set of issues, including identified priorities and problems in rural areas, but it was not available at the time of the ex-ante evaluation. There is also a National Strategy Plans specific for rural development. The Rural development programmes response to the ex ante recommendation for summary of broader interventions is that it is "taken on board", but this does not appear to have been done. In *Cyprus*, the Rural development programmes SWOT states, that there is a great need for diversification of the rural economy, but the programme actually does not finance such actions, transferring the fulfilment of this objective to the Operational Programme co-funded by the ERDF. In *Wales*, in the view of the ex-ante evaluators the Rural development programmes is coherent with the contents of the Wales Annex of the UK National Strategy Plans. However, it states also that instances can be found in which the priorities given in the National Strategy Plans are not taken up directly in the Rural development programmes, and where measures are proposed in the Rural development programmes that do not have an obvious antecedent in the National Strategy Plans. In *La Reunion*, a table in the ex ante summarises the way in which the priorities of the National Strategy Plans have been taken into account by the Rural development programmes (axis 2 & 3) and shows that some priorities are well taken into account by the measures and some are less taken into account. Yet, the analysis does not explain why axis 1 is not mentioned in this table. In *Cantabria*, the evaluation team states that there is not a defined strategy according to the objectives of the Programme, that these were defined from the description of the main measures in financial terms. Therefore, the coherence of the Programme with the National Strategy Plans and the EU objectives is difficult to check since the strategy of the Programme is not sufficiently developed.

The question of coherence also raises the issue of demarcation lines between Rural development programmes and other Community instruments such as Cohesion and Structural Funds. This complex question is treated under section 5.3. of this report, but must be mentioned here, as it is at the level of the strategy that the principles should be established. In *Lithuania*, the complementarity and conformity is spelled out both on the National Strategy Plans and in the Rural development programmes. The demarcation lines in particular have been described at a detailed level. The demarcation principles applied are relatively simple and manageable thereby minimising the potential overlap in terms of content and types of projects.

Critical points/innovations

The validity of ex-ante statements regarding the coherence of programmes is sometimes rather difficult to prove.

Cluster specific findings:

Again – as in the vast majority of programmes there seem to be a high degree of coherence between the programmes' objectives and the National Strategic Plan, there are no cluster specific findings to be expected.

The only cluster, which shows somehow special findings are the “*Traditionalists*”, where in many cases reference is made in the EAs to the national strategic plans in terms of objectives. Yet, there is no real analysis on how the technical and operational definition of the measures meets the objectives of the National Strategy Plans or is coherent with these objectives. This part could/should have been developed in order to see if the 'tools' developed were the right ones regarding the National Strategy Plans.

Completeness/Information gaps

All ex ante reports address this topic.

Conclusions

National Strategic Plans are finalised in consultation with the Commission services, but they are not formally “approved” by the EC, despite the fact that they are very structuring for the next steps of programming. The later development of the Rural development programmes, with the help of the ex ante, is very much “framed” by the orientations given by the National Strategy Plans.

A second conclusion is that the sequence National Strategy Plans-Rural development programmes is maybe more adapted to Member States with a high level of devolution of competences. There it allows a good coherence between national objectives and programmes implemented regionally, taking fully into account specific features at the regional level.

The coherence between the different levels of programming seems well established as it is checked by the ex ante evaluator. Yet, the strategy is sometimes based on an assessment of the needs (SWOT) undertaken for the National Strategy Plans. The main recommendation would be to improve on the timeline in which the strategy and the programme are developed. The ex ante should be applied to the strategy level in order to improve the consistency. A revision of the National Strategy Plans at the light of the ex-ante would certainly be useful; this is actually foreseen by the Handbook to the CMEF, although we did not check the extent to which this possible revision has been carried out in concrete, being this task out the scope of this evaluation.

In some Member States like in *Ireland*, a higher level of strategy is present, integrating a larger set of policies into a coherent development strategy. This is very useful for improving the

coherence of different interventions and ensuring good synergies. However, some difficulties may arise when the timeline for the development of these broader strategies is not compatible with the constraints of programming Rural Development interventions, as it was the case in *Ireland*, where the NDP was not available at the time the ex-ante was undertaken.

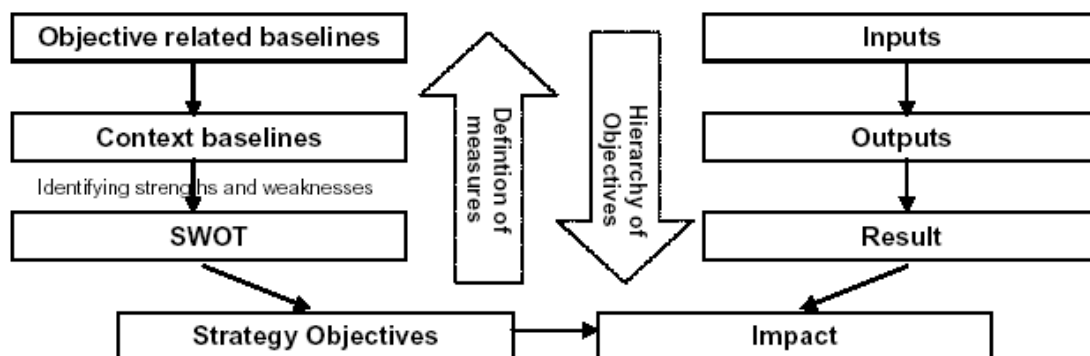
4.2.4 Topic 2.4 – Baseline and Impact Indicators

Rationale

Baselines (objective and context related)²² and impact indicators²³ are part of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF). “Baseline analysis is used as the basis for the programme SWOT and is therefore part of the analytical justification for the programme objectives and choice of priorities. Baselines reflect the situation in the programme area and are an essential element in the definition of the programme strategy.”²⁴ The impact indicators refer to the benefits of the programme both at the level of the intervention but also more generally in the programme area. They are linked to the wider objectives of the programme. The relationship between programme impacts and baseline trends is “that the baseline indicators are an important reference point for the evaluation of impacts of single measures and programmes as a whole.”²⁵

Figure 8

Intervention logic of rural development programmes



Source: Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development (2006): Handbook on Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. Rural Development 2007-2013. Guidance document September 2006. page 7.

²² CMEF Guidance note N – Glossary of terms, page 1
²³ CMEF Guidance note N – Glossary of terms, page 8
²⁴ CMEF Guidance note A – Choice and use of indicators, page 4.
²⁵ CMEF Guidance note B – Evaluation guidelines, page 5.

The CMEF foresees 36 objective-related baseline indicators and 23 context-related baseline indicators.²⁶ The Member States should include in the National Strategy Plans at least 19 baseline indicators called "lead indicators" in relation to the national context. Member States can also add in the National Strategy Plans additional programme-specific indicators, if appropriate.²⁷ However the CMEF pointed out, that the managing authorities should carry out an analysis of the situation in the programme area reflecting, "all common objective related baseline indicators and, in principle, all context related baseline indicators, as it forms the basis for the setting of objectives established in the regulation and the Community Strategic Guidelines. In particular, as regards the EU priorities identified in the Strategic Guidelines and the National Strategies, a clear justification of the choice not to take up an EU priority should be provided."²⁸

Regarding the impact indicators the CMEF foresees "seven common impact indicators relating to growth, jobs, productivity, biodiversity, high nature value areas, water and climate change which reflect explicitly objectives established by the European Council and the Strategic Guidelines for rural development."²⁹

Concerning additional baseline and impact indicators the CMEF specified that Member States should provide additional indicators:

- "When a common baseline indicator does not cover the specific characteristics of the programme area.
- When an additional objective or national priority defined in the National Strategy Plan or the programme is not covered by an impact indicator;
- When common impact indicators are not detailed or specific enough to reflect the wider benefits of a measure, or where a common impact indicator does not exist for a measure. This is particularly important where measures are highly site-specific, for example in agri-environment. Appropriate measure-specific impact indicators should be developed."³⁰

Key terms

Baseline indicator, input indicator, output indicator, result indicator, impact indicator

²⁶ CMEF Guidance note F – Common indicator list.

²⁷ CMEF Guidance note A – Choice and use of indicators, page 6.

²⁸ CMEF Guidance note A – Choice and use of indicators, page 3

²⁹ CMEF Guidance note A – Choice and use of indicators, page 4

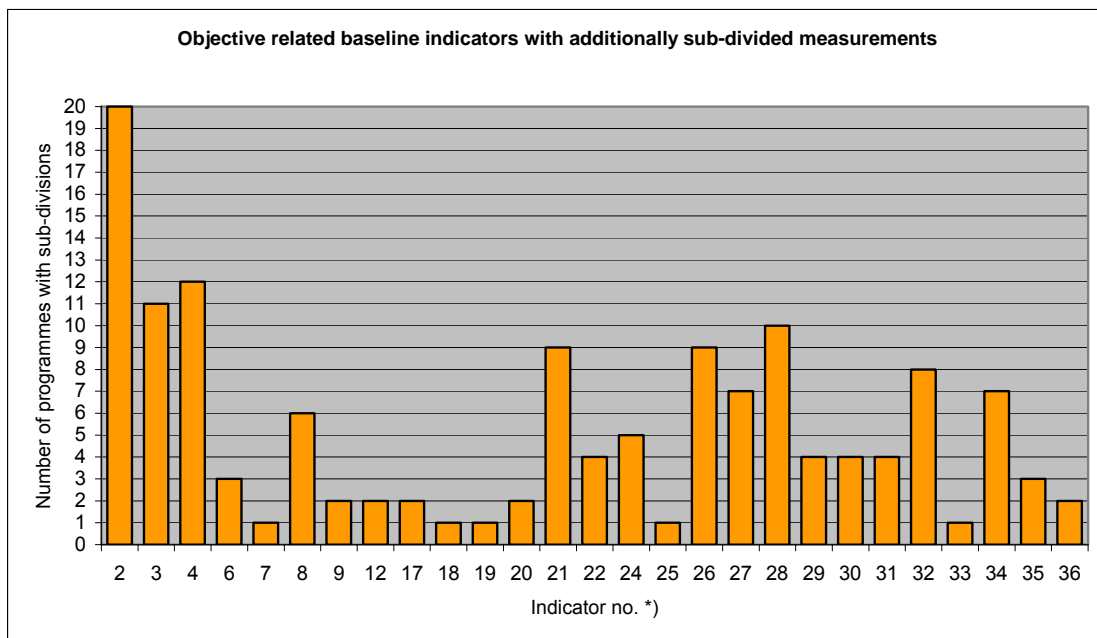
³⁰ CMEF Guidance note A – Choice and use of indicators, page 2

Main findings: Objective related baseline indicators

Regarding objective related baseline indicators, indicator no. 2 (employment rate) shows by large the highest number of programmes which additionally consider gender and age aspects (e.g. BE-Flanders, CY-National, DE Baden-Württemberg, ES Aragón, MT-National), The same aspects are considered by some programmes (e.g. BE Flanders, DE Baden-Württemberg, DE Hessen, ES Navarra, ES Extremadura) in the divisions used for the measurement of indicator no. 3 (unemployment). As for indicator no. 4 (training and education in agriculture), some programmes differentiate further between 'full education' and 'basic education' (e.g. BE-Flanders, BE-Wallonia) and other programmes specify the information at NUTS II or NUTS III level (e.g. ES-Andalucía, ES-Aragón, NL-National).

Figure 9

Objective related baseline indicators with additionally sub-divided measurements



*) the number of indicator in the graph corresponds to the number in the list above

a. Objective related baseline indicators

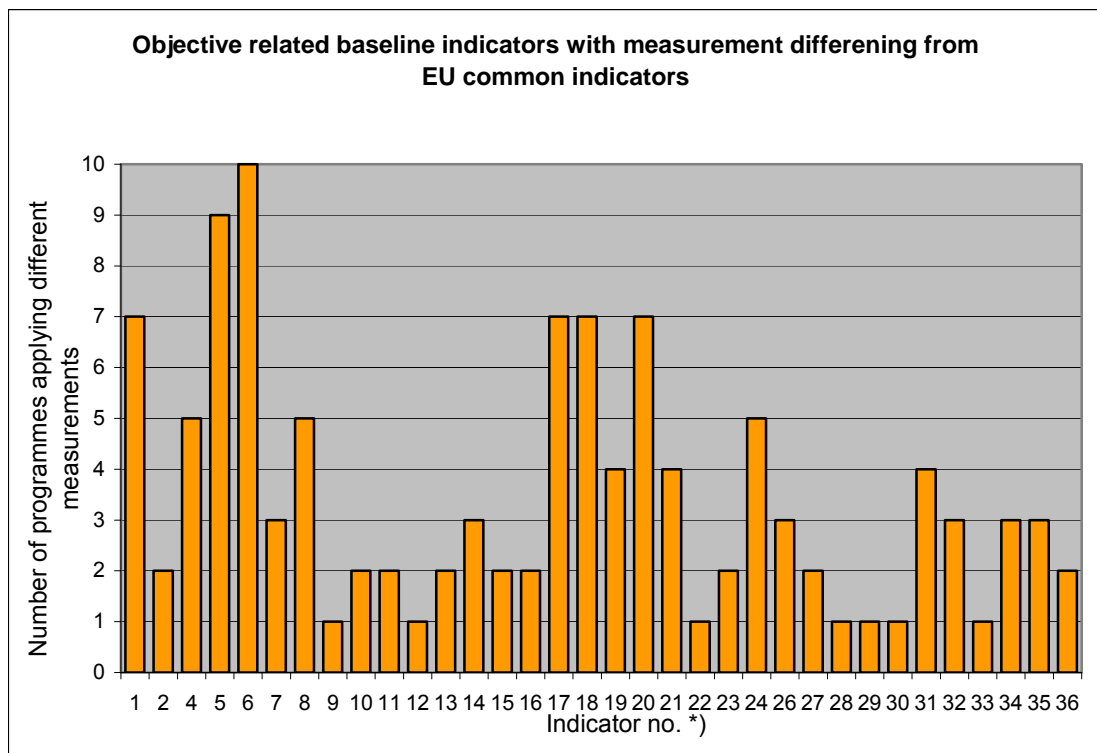
AXIS		Indicator	Measurement
Horizontal	*	1 Economic development	GDP/capita (EU-25 = 100)
	*	2 Employment rate	Employed persons as a share of total population of the same age class
	*	3 Unemployment	Rate of unemployment (% active population)
AXIS 1, Competitiveness	*	4 Training and education in agriculture	% farmers with basic and full education attained
	*	5 Age structure in agriculture	Ratio : farmers < 35 / >= 55 years old
	*	6 Labour productivity in agriculture	GVA / AWU - total and by sector.
	*	7 Gross fixed capital formation in agriculture	GFCF in agriculture
	*	8 Employment development of primary sector	Employment in primary sector
	*	9 Economic development of primary sector	GVA in primary sector
	*	10 Labour productivity in food industry	GVA / people employed in food industry
	*	11 Gross fixed capital formation in food industry	GFCF in food industry
	*	12 Employment development in food industry	Employment in food industry
	*	13 Economic development of food industry	GVA in food industry
AXIS 2, Environment	*	14 Labour productivity in forestry	GVA / people employed in forestry
	*	15 Gross fixed capital formation in forestry	GFCF in forestry
	*	16 Importance of semi-subsistence farming in NMS	Number of farms < 1 ESU
	*	17 Biodiversity: Population of farmland birds	Trends of index of population of farmland birds
	*	18 Biodiversity: High Nature Value farmland and forestry	UAA of High Nature Value Farmland
	*	19 Biodiversity: Tree species composition	Distribution of species group by area of FOWL (% coniferous/% broadleaved/%mixed)
	*	20 Water quality: Gross Nutrient Balances	Surplus of nitrogen in kg/ha Surplus of phosphorus in kg/ha
	*	21 Water quality: Pollution by nitrates and pesticides	Annual trends in the concentrations of nitrate in ground and surface waters Annual trends in the concentrations of pesticides in ground and surface waters
	*	22 Soil: Areas at risk of soil erosion	Areas at risk of soil erosion (T/ha/year)
	*	23 Soil: Organic farming	UAA under organic farming
AXIS 3, Wider rural development	*	24 Climate change: Production of renewable energy from agriculture and forestry	Production of renewable energy from agriculture (ktoe) Production of renewable energy from forestry (ktoe)
	*	25 Climate change: UAA devoted to renewable energy	UAA devoted to energy and biomass crops
	*	26 Climate change/air quality: gas emissions from agriculture	Emissions of greenhouse gases and ammonia from agriculture
	*	27 Farmers with other gainful activity	% holders with other gainful activity
	*	28 Employment development of non-agricultural sector	Employment in secondary and tertiary sectors
	*	29 Economic development of non-agricultural sector	GVA in secondary and tertiary sectors
	*	30 Self-employment development	Self-employed persons
AXIS 4, LEADER	*	31 Tourism infrastructure in rural area	Number of bedplaces (in hotels, campings, holiday dwellings, etc)
	*	32 Internet take-up in rural areas	% population having subscribed to DSL internet
	*	33 Development of services sector	% GVA in services
	*	34 Net migration	Net migration rate
	*	35 Life-long learning in rural areas	% of population of adults participating in education and training
AXIS 4, LEADER	*	36 Development of Local Action Groups	Share of population covered by Local Action Groups

More precise information is also given with indicator no. 28 (employment development of non-agricultural sector) concerning specific sectors (e.g. DE-Schleswig-Holstein, ES-Asturias, ES-Castilla La Mancha) but also with regard to gender and age aspects (e.g. DE-Baden-Württemberg, ES-Castilla y León, ES-Castilla La Mancha). The additional subdivision in 'ground water' and 'surface water' (e.g. ES-Castilla y León, ES-Castilla La Mancha, IT-Piemonte, IT-Liguria, IT-Lombardia) concerning indicator no. 21 (water quality: pollution by nitrates and pesticides) provides more details as well as the subdivision in 'ammonia gases' and 'greenhouse gases' (e.g. IT-Piemonte, IT-Liguria, PT-Continente, SE-National, SI-National) as for indicator no. 26 (climate change/air quality: gas emissions from agriculture).

With regard to objective related baseline indicators (see figure 10) some programmes provide different measurements like ‘operating income for each manpower in agriculture’ (DE-Baden-Württemberg), ‘euro per hectare’ (DE-Bayern) or only sector specific measurements (e.g. FR-Guadeloupe, IT-Sicilia) for indicator no. 6 (labour productivity in agriculture).

Figure 10

Objective related baseline indicators with measurements differing from EU common indicators



*) the number of indicator in the graph corresponds to the number in the list above

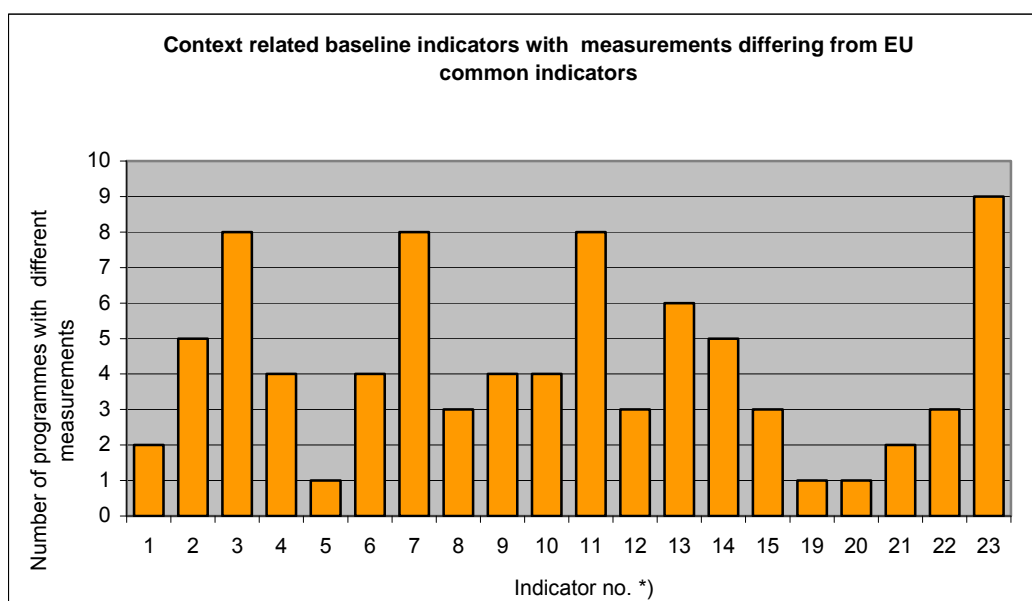
In some cases, indicators with alternative measurements are applied in addition to EU common indicator no. 6 (e.g. DE-Baden-Württemberg, DE-Bayern). Concerning indicator no. 5 (age structure in agriculture), the measurement is altered by some programmes in terms of differing age classes (e.g. ES-Navarra, ES-Ileas Balears). Alternative measurements, that are put in place for indicator no. 1 (economic development) offer values for the Gross Domestic Product per capita without relation to EU25 (e.g. ES-Castilla La Mancha, IT-Lombardia, IT-Sicilia). The measurements of indicator no. 17 (biodiversity: population of farmland birds) refer mostly to other bird species than farmland birds (e.g. BE-Flanders, ES-Aragón). The measurements alternatively used for indicator no. 18 (biodiversity: high nature value farmland and forestry) relate for instance to the Utilized Agricultural Area (e.g. ES-Extremadura) or NATURA 2000 area (e.g. ES-La Rioja). Alternative measurements for indicator no. 20 (water quality: gross nutrient balance) consider mostly other nutrients than nitrogen and phosphorus (ES-Valencia),

'solids in suspension' (ES-Ileas Balears, ES-Murcia, ES-Castilla La Mancha) or the 'excess of nitrogen and phosphorus' (ES-Cantabria) and the 'surplus of nitrogen' (IT-Campania, LV-National).

Main findings: Context related baseline indicators

By far, indicator no. 2 (importance of rural areas) shows the highest number of programmes, which apply further sub-divisions in their measurement (see figure 11). More specific information is collected due to subcategories such as 'mainly rural' or 'mainly urban' and 'partially rural' or 'partially urban' (e.g. DE-Bremen, DE-National Strategy, DE-Niedersachsen, DE-Nordrhein-Westfalen) also the terms 'predominantly' and 'intermediate' are used by some programmes (e.g. DK-National, ES-Andalucía, GR-National, IT-Molise). Sub-divisions in the measurement that are established for indicator no. 20 (structure of employment) consider in addition gender and age aspects (DE-Thüringen, ES-Murcia, ES-Pais Vasco, RO-National). The measurement of indicator no. 6 (forest productivity) specifies further forest classes like coniferous and deciduous (e.g. ES-Castilla La Mancha, ES-Asturias, IT-Umbria, IT-Veneto). As for indicator no. 21 (long-term unemployment), more details are collected concerning gender and age (e.g. BE-Flanders, ES-Castilla La Mancha, ES-Pais Vasco). This applies also to indicator no. 22 (educational attainment, e.g. BE-Flanders, ES-Castilla La Mancha, ES-Pais Vasco). Sub-divisions in the measurement of indicator no. 23 (internet infrastructure) concern mostly further information with regard to rural and urban areas (e.g. DE-Rheinland-Pfalz, GR-National, IT-Basilicata).

Figure 11
Context related baseline indicators with measurements differing from EU common indicators



*) the number of indicator in the graph corresponds to the number in the list below

b. Context related baseline indicators

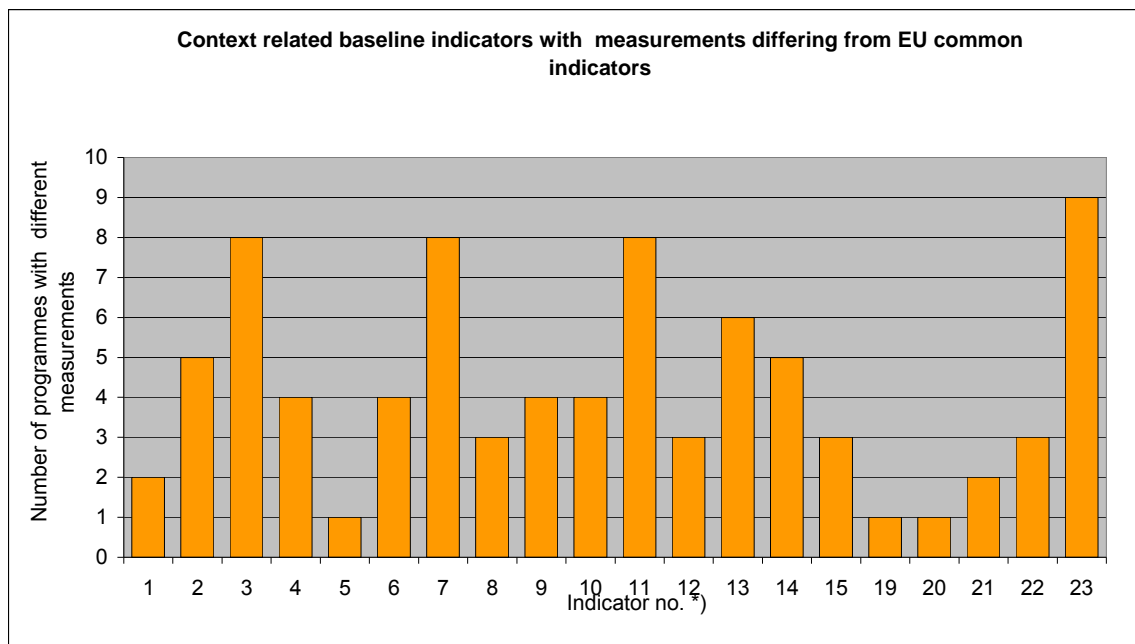
AXIS		Indicator	Measurement
Horizontal	1	Designation of rural areas	Designation of rural areas with OECD methodology
	2	Importance of rural areas	% territory in rural areas % population in rural areas % Gross Value Added in rural areas % employment in rural areas
AXIS 1, Competitiveness	3	Agricultural land use	% arable area / permanent grass / permanent crops
	4	Farm structure	Number of farms Utilized Agricultural Area Average area farm size and distribution Average economic farm size and distribution Labour Force
	5	Forestry structure	Area of forest available for wood supply (FAWS) Ownership (% area of FAWS under "eligible" ownership) Average size of private holding (FOWL)
	6	Forest productivity	Average net annual volume increment (FAWS)
AXIS 2, Environment	7	Land cover	% area in agricultural / forest / natural / artificial classes
	8	Less Favoured Areas	% UAA in non LFA / LFA mountain / other LFA / LFA with specific handicaps
	9	Areas of extensive agriculture	% UAA for extensive arable crops
	10	Natura 2000 area	% UAA for extensive grazing % territory under Natura 2000 % UAA under Natura 2000 % forest area under Natura 2000
	11	Biodiversity: Protected forest	% FOWL protected to conserve biodiversity, landscapes and specific natural elements (MCPFE 4.9, classes 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 & 2)
	12	Development of forest area	Average annual increase of forest and other wooded land areas
	13	Forest ecosystem health	% trees / conifers / broadleaved in defoliation classes 2-4
	14	Water quality	% territory designated as Nitrate Vulnerable Zone
	15	Water use	% irrigated UAA
	16	Protective forests concerning primarily soil and water	FOWL area managed primarily for soil & water protection (MCPFE 5.1 class 3.1)
AXIS 3, Wider rural development	17	Population density	Population density
	18	Age structure	% people aged (0-14) y.o. / (15-64) y.o. / >=65 y.o. in total population
	19	Structure of the Economy	% GVA by branch (Primary / Secondary / Tertiary sector)
	20	Structure of Employment	% employment by branch (Primary / Secondary / Tertiary sector)
	21	Long-term unemployment	% long-term unemployment (as a share of active population)
	22	Educational attainment	% adults (25_64) with Medium & High educational attainment
	23	Internet infrastructure	DSL coverage

As for indicator no. 23 (internet infrastructure), some programmes provide information about internet connection instead of broadband internet connection (e.g. ES-Canarias, ES-Murcia, ES-La Rioja) and/or information related to companies or municipalities (e.g. ES-Canarias, ES-Aragón, ES-Extremadura), see figure 12. In some cases, these alternative measurements are applied in addition to those proposed for the EU common indicator (e.g. ES-Canarias, ES-La Rioja). Alternative measurements for indicator no. 3 (agricultural land use) consider other land use types (e.g. DK-National, ES-Aragón, ES-Murcia, ES-Canarias) or differ with regard to absolute values that are available instead of relative values (BE-Flanders, DE-Thüringen). The latter concerns also alternative measurements for indicator no. 7 (land cover). Some programmes consider also other land cover types (e.g. ES-Murcia, ES-Castilla La Mancha, NL-National, SE-National). Alternative measurements have been applied for indicator no. 11

(biodiversity: protected forest) showing absolute values (e.g. SE-National, SI-National) or values according to classes of protected forest that differ from the foreseen measurement (e.g. DE-Hamburg, DK-National). The latter concerns also indicator no. 13 and the measurement of the 'forest ecosystem health' (e.g. DE-Bremen, DE-Hessen, DE-Niedersachsen).

Figure 12

Context related baseline indicators with measurements differing from EU common indicators



*) the number of indicator in the graph corresponds to the number in the list above

Main findings: Programme-specific baseline indicators

A part of the programmes provide programme-specific baseline indicators. Figure 13 gives an overview about all programmes in this context according to the axes for which the programmes apply programme-specific baseline indicators. Nearly all programmes present indicators for Axis I and Axis II. Half of the programmes approximately present indicators for the Horizontal Axis and Axis III. One fourth of the programmes consider Axis IV.

Figure 13

Programmes providing programme-specific baseline indicators according to axes

Programmes	Horizontal	Axis I	Axis II	Axis III	Axis IV
BE Wallonia	X	X	X	X	
DE Schleswig-Hollstein					X
ES Andalucía	X	X	X	X	
ES Cantabria	X		X		
ES Extremadura	X	X	X		
ES Aragón		X	X	X	
ES Castilla y León			X		
ES Galicia		X	X		
ES La Rioja		X	X		
FR Corsica	X				
FR National		X			
HU National	X	X	X	X	
IT Emilia-Romagna	X	X	X	X	
IT Lazio		X			
IT Liguria	X				
IT Marche	X	X	X	X	
IT Molise	X	X	X		
IT Sicilia			X		
IT Umbria	X	X	X	X	
IT Veneto		X			
LT National		X	X	X	X
LU National		X	X	X	X
LV National		X	X	X	
MT National		X		X	X
SI National		X	X	X	X
RO National		X			X

Cluster specific findings

As pointed out in the description of methodology of clustering (see Chapter 2 Methodology), the building of clusters followed the idea of building groups of programming areas along their baseline conditions, depicting the territorial specifics and problems/deficits as well as the strengths.

Thus the clusters themselves represent the “cluster specific findings” of the baseline indicators, as the clustering has been based upon indicators represented in the set of baseline indicators. However – as has been pointed out – there have been limitations to this approach, as the completeness and overall comparability of the baseline indicators as represented in the RD Programmes has reduced the number of indicators applicable considerably. In addition, within

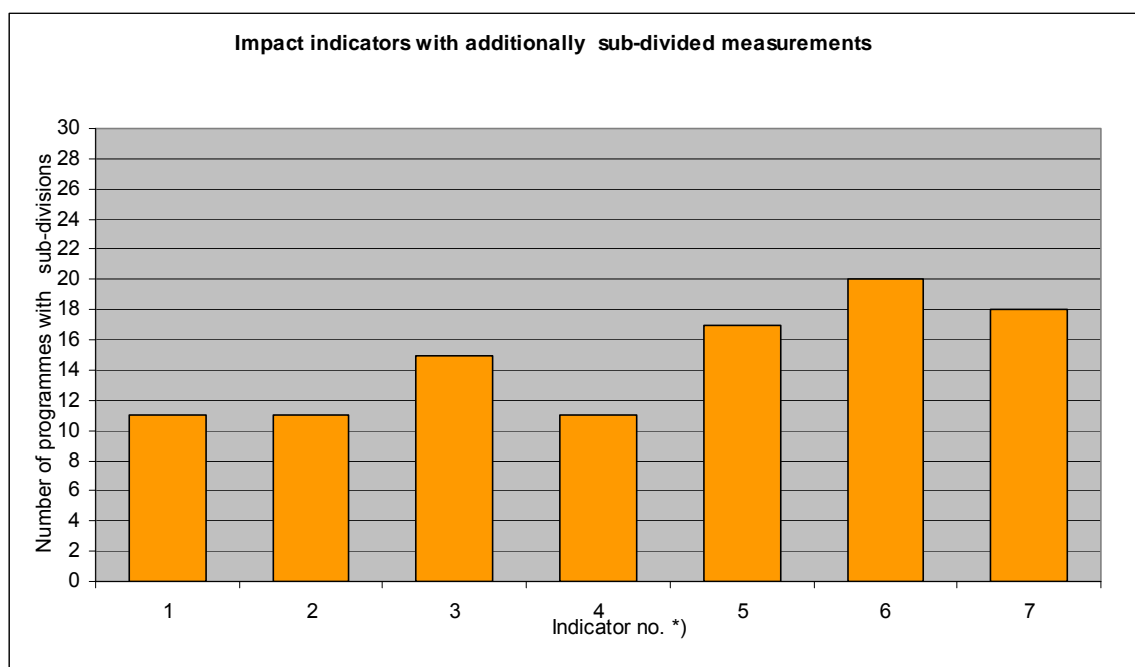
our methodology for the clustering analysis baseline indicators have not been always applied following the precise definition of the CMEF (see Chapter 2 Methodology).

Main findings: Impact indicators

Regarding the EU common impact indicators, most of the programmes apply additional sub-divisions of measurement. This applies in particular to the indicators no. 6 (improvement in water quality) and no. 7 (contribution to combating climate change), see figure 14.

Figure 14

Impact indicators with additionally sub-divided measurements



*) the number of indicator in the graph corresponds to the number in the list below

Table 5

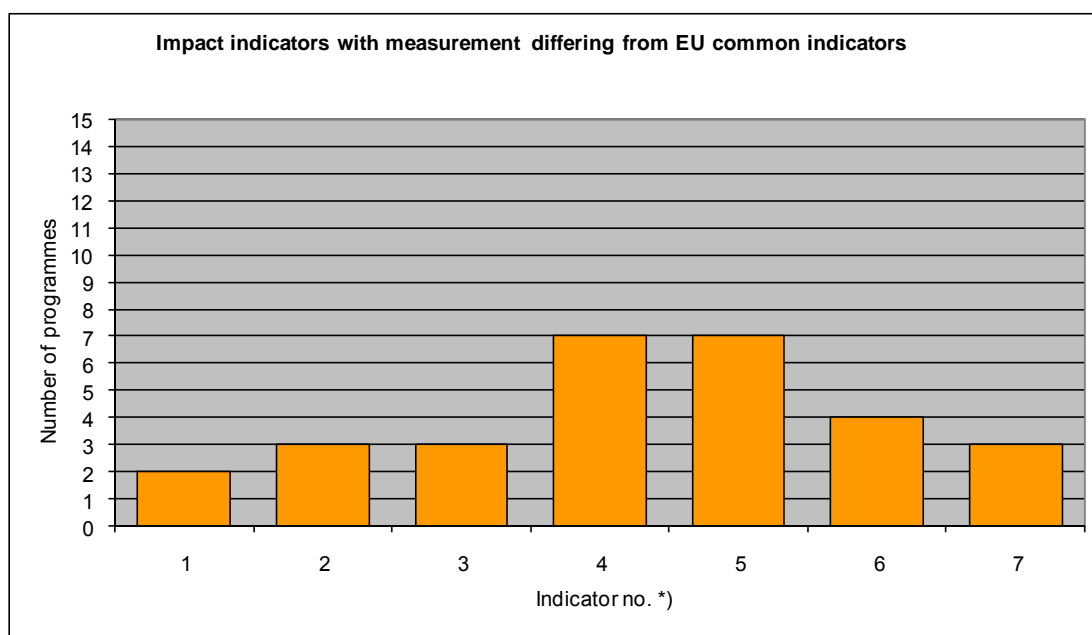
Indicators and measurement

	Indicator	Measurement
1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS
2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created
3	Labour productivity	Change in Gross Value Added per full-time equivalent (GVA/FTE)
4	Reversing Biodiversity decline	Change in trend in biodiversity decline as measured by farmland bird species population
5	Maintenance of high nature value farmland and forestry	Changes in high nature value farmland and forestry
6	Improvement in water quality	Changes in gross nutrient balance
7	Contribution to combating climate change	Increase in production of renewable energy.

Beside the further sub-divided measurements a number of programmes apply also different measurements, than those proposed for the EU common indicators: E.g. for indicator no. 4 (reversing biodiversity decline) and no. 5 (maintenance of high nature value farmland and forestry) a high number of programmes apply different measurements, see figure 15. Regarding indicator no. 4, alternative measurements vary from ‘surface covered by agro-environmental measures’ (FR-Guyane) and ‘natural zones with a regulated protection’ (FR-Martinique) to ‘number of vegetal species’ (IT-Puglia) and other bird species suggested (PT-Acores). Alternatively applied measurements concerning indicator no. 5 vary also largely and consider aspects like ‘tree types’ (GR-National), ‘wooden zones’ (FR-Guadeloupe, FR-Martinique) or ‘soil erosion’ (IT-Puglia). Indicator no. 6 shows also large variations as for the different measurements. Measurements are existent like ‘electric conductivity to 25°C in surface waters’ (ES-Extremadura), ‘average nitrogen contribution per hectare of usable surface’ (FR-Réunion) or ‘number of protected water collectings’ (FR-Réunion). Alternative measurements for indicator no. 3 specify labour productivity with regard to sectors (SE-National, SI-National). The measurement for indicator no. 2 (employment creation) differs for instance in terms of age aspects that are specified (DE-Bayern, SE-National). With regard to indicator no. 7 alternative measurements vary from ‘share of renewable energies in the final consumption of energy’ (FR-Martinique) to ‘reduction of annual gas emission from agriculture’ (IT-Sardegna).

Figure 15

Impact indicators with measurement differing from EU common indicators



*) the number of indicator in the graph corresponds to the number in the list above

Programme-specific impact indicators

More than half of the programmes (51 programmes) apply programme-specific impact indicators. Figure 16 shows the number of indicators of the specific programmes related to the EU common impact indicators. These programmes provide indicators that refer to the EU common indicators by presenting a different measurement to these indicators, but also indicators that reveal no reference to these indicators at all (see column 'others'). In this regard, 28 programmes out of 51 programmes establish programme-specific indicators without any relation to the EU common impact indicators, i.e. without presenting a different measurement related to EU common impact indicators. These 28 programmes provide, accordingly, programme-specific indicators that offer new aspects or present another focus related to the Axis. 16 programmes out of those 28 programmes, for instance, establish also indicators that refer to the wider rural development, i.e. Axis 3. In this regard, aspects such as life quality, rural tourism, life-long learning is mentioned most often by the programmes. Two programmes refer to Axis 4. Most of all 51 programmes provide programme-specific indicators mainly addressing job creation and development, but also environmental aspects focussing aspects of Axis 1 and Axis 2.

Figure 16

Programmes providing programme-specific impact indicators

Programmes	no. of EU common impact indicator								Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	other	
BE Flanders								16	16
BE Wallonia	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		7
DE Hessen								3	3
DE Mecklenburg Vorpommern								5	5
DE Niedersachsen and Bremen								10	10
DE Rheinland-Pfalz								3	3
DE Saarland								9	9
DE Sachsen								27	27
DE Sachsen-Anhalt								9	9
DE Thüringen								8	8
DE Schleswig Holstein								1	1
DE Bayern								21	21
DE Hamburg	3	3	3	2	5	3	3	1	23
DK National	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8
EE National								8	8
ES Castilla y León								16	16
ES Aragon								6	6
ES Pais Vasco								7	7
ES Cataluna	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11	18
ES Asturias	1	1	1	1	1	1			6
ES Canarias								4	4
ES Ileas Balears								14	14
ES Cantabria								105	105
ES Castilla La Mancha	2		2	1	1	1	2	2	11
ES Extremadura								6	6
ES Asturias	1								1
ES Galicia								7	7
FI Mainland	1							1	2
FR Corsica	7	8	3			1	2		21
FR Guadeloupe	4	6	3						13
FR Martinique	3	6	4						13
FR National	1	6	1						8
FR Réunion								5	5
IT Molise				2	4	3	4		13
IT Basilicata	4	6				3			13
IT Emilia Romagna	4	4	3	1	1	5	1	9	28

Programmes	no. of EU common impact indicator								Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	other	
IT Marche								4	4
IT Veneto	4	3	3		2	8	1	8	29
IT Bolzano	14	6	10	2	4	3	4		43
IT Calabria	1			1	1	1	1	26	31
IT Lazio	2	1	1			2	1		7
IT Sardegna								6	6
IT Sicilia		1			1	2			4
IT Umbria	2	2	2			3	1		10
LV National		1	3	2				5	11
NL National								8	8
SE National								8	8
SI National								2	2
UK England								7	7
UK Northern Ireland								9	9
UK Scotland								6	6

Conclusions

Most of the national and regional Rural Development Programmes have applied the common baseline and impact indicators foreseen in the CMEF, although with a varying level of completeness and homogeneity. Some programmes have omitted to provide information for some indicators or for some subcategories that are foreseen by the EU common measurement. Qualitative data has been provided in a number of cases instead of quantified values; this concerns impact indicators in particular. Moreover, some indicators have been quantified by measurements that differ from EU common measurement. Overall, the main differences concern the measurement of indicators.

The measurement of EU common indicators has been varied by a part of the programmes in so far that the established indicators provide additional or alternative information. As for a part of the indicators, some programmes have established sub-divisions in the measurements that were not foreseen. This has led in some cases to additional, more specific information. Apart from such further specifications of EU common indicators due to sub-divisions in the measurement, differences are also existent where programmes apply completely different measurements than those proposed for the EU common indicators.

Thematic Conclusion Theme 2: POLICY OBJECTIVES

Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Main policy objectives in terms of expected impacts identified by the Member States (including objectives reflecting national priorities); – Main general, specific and operational objectives and expected results identified by the Member States; – Overall level of coherence between programmes' objectives and the National Strategy Plans; – Main baseline and impact indicators (common and programme specific) proposed for measuring the programmes' success and overall assessment of their application.
What was expected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evidence on the second step of the RD programming cycle – the setting of objectives along their hierarchy (general to specific). – Evidence on how these objectives have then been “translated” into results and impacts and specified in terms of target levels for each of the RD programmes (i.e. common and programme specific impact indicators). – Evidence on the status of data collection and specification of the baseline conditions of the programming areas with respect to the common baseline indicators as well as the development of programme specific ones.
What has worked well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The large majority of RD programmes defined programme objectives in accordance with the regulation. – The intervention logics and hierarchy of objectives have been followed by the programming authorities. – The new approach to programming includes the elaboration by the Member States of Strategies established at national level, the National Strategy Plans. These strategies have been very structuring for the Rural development programmes. – In a large majority of the cases, the ex ante evaluations state that there is a high level of coherence between the objectives of the Rural development programmes and those of the National Strategy Plans. – Most of the national and regional Rural Development Programmes comply (at least partially) with the EU requirements for the establishment of common baseline and impact indicators.
What did not work and why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – In many cases the objectives of RD programmes refer to the ones listed in Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005 in a rather general way– thus remaining relatively unspecific with respect to the different national/regional contexts, which has made it difficult to break them down into operational target levels. – In more than half of the programmes we consider that the link between objectives and the SWOT analysis as source for the underlying needs is only weakly established. – The formulation of the objectives of the rural development programmes is often not presented in a very clear way, and these objectives are generally not translated into quantified target levels. – A key point is the balance between budgetary allocations among the Axis and identified priorities. In some cases the lecture of the Rural development programmes leaves the impression that these allocations are not primarily driven by the identified priority needs. – A key problem seems to be the lack of common culture of programming and the fact that the inclusion of a clear intervention logic into the programmes is not requested. In fact, Annex II to the Commission Regulation 1974/2006 presents the standard table of content for a Rural development programmes; however it does not require the full intervention logic to be presented in the Rural development programmes. The ex ante evaluation is supposed to reconstruct this logic, but sometimes does not achieve this.
Elements to be further improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The new “Objective-led” approach to programming seems to have been adopted by the Members States, although there is still some progress to be made on the logical sequence (Analysis – SWOT – Priorities and Rationale – Objectives – Quantified expected results – Measures) and on the way objectives are expressed. – The establishment (and finalisation) of the National Strategies as a preliminary step <u>before</u> the programming the Rural development programmes starts should to become standard procedure. – The methodology for establishing and applying common and programme specific indicators (baseline as well as impact) should be improved, and their benefits for the MS in terms of quality self-control should be further clarified.

Thematic Conclusion Theme 2: POLICY OBJECTIVES

- Recommendations
- Better guidance for the programming process should be provided – especially in relation to the sequence National Strategy Plans – Rural development programmes first draft – ex-ante evaluation – Rural development programmes final draft. In this respect we believe that the ex ante evaluation could play a more important role.
 - Accordingly, the timeline in which the strategies and the programmes are developed could be refined in a way to involve the ex ante evaluators already in the phase of carrying out the SWOT analysis within the National Strategy Plans.
 - For the next programming period we suggest to base the discussion on common indicators on a broader basis, by duly taking into account the lessons learnt from the current period (e.g. evaluation results, discussions carried out within the evaluation community in the context of the European Network for Rural Development etc.).
-

4.3 Theme 3 – Measures

4.3.1 Topic 3.1 – Ways and extent to which lessons learned from previous programming periods have been taken into account in designing the programmes³¹

Rationale

The logic behind these topics is quite straightforward. Firstly, programmers and evaluators are requested to go one step beyond analysing the results and impacts of previous programmes and to work on identifying the reasons why certain measures and actions worked – while others did not. Secondly, these positive “lessons” should be transformed into improvements in the new programming period. Equally important, steps should be taken to avoid the mistakes of the past. Evidence should be provided of both types of change. As a final check, the country experts were also asked to look for evidence of lessons, which were not incorporated.

This means that the information in the EA concerning topic 3.1 can be approached following the same sequence.

Firstly, it will be important to see how far the designers of the Rural development programmes and EA evaluators do identify the nature of the lessons from the previous programmes (design, implementation, measures, budget and so on). It will be interesting to see whether certain lessons are mentioned more frequently in the EAs, as a whole, and in particular clusters.

Secondly, it should be possible to analyse the extent to which the Rural development programmes and evaluators do provide evidence of the way in which these lessons are incorporated in the new programming period. Once again there may be interesting trends in the methods used in the different clusters.

Thirdly, it will be useful to check whether any important lessons have been left out, whether any significant reasons are provided and whether there are also any important trends

Key terms

Lessons (learning effect), programming period, strengths, and weaknesses

³¹ Guidance note C of the CMEF the question is phrased as: Lessons learned and evidence taken into account in designing the draft programme. In theory this could be wider than the lessons from the programming periods themselves.

Findings

A number of subjects are mentioned quite frequently across the clusters:

The need for improved policy coherence and complementarity of efforts was a key lesson for many regions since good work in rural development can be outweighed by the negative consequences of other policy decisions. This encompasses: improving coordination between different levels of government; ensuring complementarity between different policies in rural areas; and coordinating efforts with neighbouring areas (e.g. Hamburg, Extremadura, Canarias, Cantabria).

Taking a horizontal and transversal approach to rural development was a lesson learnt across clusters. For example, many regions realised that isolated efforts (e.g. restoration projects in Malta and Wallonia) would not, on their own, achieve significant development results overall. It is also necessary to engage with broader policies (Extremadura), which can impact on rural development, including urbanisation (e.g. Réunion).

Similarly, the need for setting clearer strategic priorities was identified by many reports, which presented variations of the themes of: increasing effectiveness by spreading resources less thinly (e.g. Veneto, Galicia); focusing funding on priority target groups or areas (e.g. Niedersachsen Bremen, La Rioja); and accompanying funding to specific groups with associated itineraries of advice and support (e.g. to young farmers in Liguria, Martinique) so that 'funding' becomes 'investment'.

Increasing flexibility of funding was another recurring theme. This applied both, to reducing and simplifying bureaucratic procedures, to reduce transaction costs and increase accessibility to finance (e.g. Bulgaria, Navarra), and also to ensuring programmes are adaptable enough to be relevant in different local situations (e.g. Campania).

The bottom-up approach as promoted through initiatives such as the LEADER programme was a source of learning (but also on-going challenges) for many regions, with particular interest for less favoured areas (e.g. Sardinia, Valencia, Extremadura, Canarias)

Another major lesson for numerous areas was the value of developing effective mechanisms for monitoring and assessment of programmes and initiatives. Important issues including leaving sufficient time for evaluation (e.g. Estonia), establishing an evidence baseline (e.g. Northern Ireland), improving indicators (e.g. La Rioja) and setting up periodic and simple assessments (e.g. Friuli Venezia Giulia).

Several programmes point to an increase in funding in certain measures (e.g. agro-environment, quality foods, reforestation) and reduction in others (irrigation, agro food – Murcia). There is greater attention to equal opportunities and the environment (Cantabria)

Some of the lessons that are mentioned as not being incorporated by the ex-ante evaluation include: the need to overcome the fragmentation of measures and achieve more integration (Molise, Flanders); defining “territorial focal points for the better targeting of measures (Schleswig-Holstein); better technical support linked to certain measures like young farmers ; the fact that the budget for the protection of water quality is not sufficient to achieve its objectives (France); too much priority for under used measures (AE measures – Martinique) the need for better targeting (Ireland); and strengthening the LEADER approach (Mecklenburg, Brandenburg,).

One region (Wallonia BE), for example, mentions the fact that the recommendations about the renovation of villages and the LEADER axis have not been incorporated into the new programme. There is said to be more need for autonomy for the LEADER groups so that they become genuine “one stop shops” for cooperation between sectors and administrative procedures. Village renewal should focus more on collective rather than individual actions.

Evidence is more plentiful on the ways in which the lessons have been incorporated into the Rural development programmes. For example, Basilicata provides a matrix showing each lesson learned and the way in which it has been incorporated (or not) in the Rural development programmes. Friuli-Venezia provides a detailed account of each measure and the way in which the lessons from previous periods have been taken into account. Nevertheless, in general, the EAs give this issue less priority than other topics in the evaluation.

Finally, the issue of identifying the main lessons of past periods receives far more attention. In many cases this takes the form of a list of key lessons. Some EAs remark on the quality of the evidence in the Rural development programmes (Calabria, Friuli-Venezia, Castilla-Leon, Niedersachsen-Bremen). Castilla-Leon not only provides information on the specific lessons but also a series of good practices to illustrate how things could be done better.

On the other hand, some programmes and EAs still provide very little or no information on this topic (Greece, Poland) and the quality of much of the information is questionable. For example, many programmes devote a lot of space to an account of the take up and results of previous programmes but there is little analysis of why certain measures fared better than others.

Critical points/innovations

In general, there is quite a lot of relevant information on the lessons learned, far less on the way in which these have been incorporated into the current programming period and even less on the lessons that have been not taken into account.

Completeness/Information gaps

Whereas the issues of lessons learned from previous programming periods is overall covered in the ex ante evaluations, only 17 of the EAs and Rural development programmes make an explicit reference to lessons that have *not* been taken into account.

Cluster-specific findings

A recurring lesson in the “diversifiers” (DIVs) cluster is the need to improve support for young farmers, including through training and advisory services (e.g. Liguria, Aaland Islands). Extending schemes for quality products and achieving greater integration in the food chain, notably in marginalised rural areas was also mentioned in several regions, particularly in Italy. One of the most positive lessons learned from the previous programming period has been the importance of the Leader approach. The LEADER groups are seen as ideally suited to many rural areas (e.g. Finland).

The cluster showed many successful examples of implementing past lessons, including a greater priority to investments directed at diversification (Liguria), the use of axis 2 to improve the links between competitiveness and the environment (Trento). On the other hand, initiatives to promote rural development through other structural funds have not always been as successful as hoped (e.g. Finland) and the development of bottom-up approaches is still a challenge in many cases (e.g. Liguria).

Given the concern in the “Ecoruralist” group (ECORUR) for organic farming and measures to valorise the environment it is not surprising that many of the evaluations in this cluster mentioned the need for strengthening environmental considerations and the multi-functionality of agriculture especially in less favoured areas (e.g. Sardegna). LEADER is seen as having an important role to play here.

The Italian regions in this cluster tended to point to the need to improve governance and administrative procedures, for example to deal with the needs of specific territorial needs (e.g. Campania) and with projects with a high degree of innovation.

There are few examples of how these kinds of lessons have been taken into account. Certain regions are said to have reorganised their administrative and financial circuits to ensure a better definition of roles and functions (e.g. Sardegna). Others have adopted integrated supply chain approaches as well as better-integrated packages of measures for young people (e.g. Piemonte). There are no references to recommendations that were not taken into account.

Among the “Drained Traditionalist” (DTRs), a lot of focus was given to the need to develop the bottom-up approach as demonstrated by LEADER (e.g. Saxonia) and the need for coordination between objectives and between programme authorities (e.g. Saxonia Anhalt). This can be

seen also in the witnessed need for integrated, interdisciplinary and participation-oriented development strategies (e.g. Berlin)

In terms of implementation, some challenges were identified in improving the use of financial aid in axis 3 (LEADER, rural inheritance and diversification aid) to co-ordinate an integrated rural development (e.g. Berlin Brandenburg) and in developing fully the bottom-up strategies (e.g. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern).

Among the “intensives” (INTENSs), most of the programmes only describe the previous programme and their main measures. However, the recommendations made in the mid term evaluation have been followed by most regions in the cluster and there is some evidence of measures to overcome problems identified in the past (e.g. development of support for farmers to comply with legislation in Malta).

Although many learned lessons do not have a description of the ways and extent that they are taken into consideration, Wallonia made an excellent matrix relating the 2000- 2006 measures, the main learned lessons, the way there taken into consideration and which lessons were not taken into consideration in the new Rural development programmes.

Remaining challenges include on-going fragmentation of the different measures in each axis, despite past learning on this theme.

Several central and eastern countries among the “rural areas endangered” (RAEs) highlight learning from SAPARD. These include lessons on the need for: restructuring and modernisation (Hungary); transparency in costing, project selection and evaluations (Bulgaria); and the development of administrative systems for the implementation of EU legislation and environmental measures (e.g. Estonia, Slovakia),

Many Spanish regions provide long descriptions of the learned lessons from each evaluation. (e.g. Galicia, Castilla y León), including the need for more employment opportunities for women and young people (e.g. Galicia, Asturias) and developing complementarities between the environment and other economic activities (e.g. Castilla y Leon). However, others tend to focus more on quantitative data from the previous programme than in the description of the learned lessons (e.g. Poland, Greece).

Although some new measures are described, there was a tendency to state that learning had been implemented without providing evidence on how this was happening in practice (e.g. Galicia, Portugal, Poland, Latvia) and only one region (Asturias) mentions the different budget allocation between the previous programmed measures and the new ones. Learning cannot always be taken forward when measures would be too unpopular (e.g. taxes on received payments in Slovakia).

In most of these Spanish regions in the “rural areas under pressure” (RAPs), the lessons learned section is very long specifying the recommendations of a series of evaluations (e.g. La Rioja, Andalucía). Some regions list their learned lessons in relation to their need (e.g. flexibility in the selection and grants criteria in Valencia), whilst others classify them by axis (e.g. Ireland).

All the programmes in this cluster are said to have taken into consideration the lessons learned, mentioning points like simplifying administrative procedures (e.g. Valencia) or adopting a gender approach (e.g. La Rioja). However, many make generic statements about taking learning into account without providing clear evidence on what was actually done (e.g. Aragón) or elaborating the extent of lesson learning (e.g. Ireland).

Whilst few regions specifically described lessons not taken into account, there was some recognition of on-going weaknesses, for example in establishing good indicators or clearly dividing responsibilities (e.g. La Rioja). Others question whether implementation of some lessons, such as the increasing of farm sizes is possible (e.g. Ireland).

In the E-HIGH-PERF cluster, lessons learnt are generally broken down by Axis and refer to mention the need for better definition of targets and objectives (Bremen, Luxembourg). This includes: environmental and economic criteria (Bremen); more precise objectives for modernising agriculture and agri-food; and target values for increased surface for biodiversity and environmentally sensitive areas (Axis 2, Lux.).

Hamburg and Bremen both mention adjustments in their funding due to lessons learnt, for example, more weight is to be given to education in agriculture, forestry and food industries (Hamburg, Lux.). And, Hamburg points to increased funding for Axis 3 and a reduction of funds for flood protection. Finally, while Hamburg indicates the need for better coordination with neighbouring federal states Bremen points to the fact that it is developing common positions between the Managing Authorities of all funds (EAFRDF, ERDF, ESF).

Among the “strong” tourist regions and islands, lessons learnt vary considerably – the only overlap being between the Canaries and Valle D’Aosta on the need for a more integrated approach to designing and managing measures, as well as for better visibility and information on them. The Canaries also believed that the operational organisation of the programme should be simplified and that funds should be concentrated on a limited number of measures. They do not, however, provide clear evidence of how these lessons have been integrated into the Programme.

The Canaries also point to the successes of combining different funds (EARDF, ERDF, ESF) and the LEADER approach to rural development. They say there is an opportunity for improving on past experience by increasing the representativeness of the LAGs.

The Azores mention the need to reinforce product diversification and innovation especially when taking into consideration the sustainability of the regional productive system and the likely future evolution of the market and of subsidies. They also recommend more support to young farmers through land restructuring, modernisation and early retirement measures, and that part-time farmers should also be eligible for funding.

Conclusions

The ex-ante evaluations refer to many useful lessons from previous programming periods. However, more space is often given to descriptions of past results compared to drawing the lesson about what worked, what did not work and why.

When the lessons are identified it is often hard to assess the extent and way in which they have been incorporated into the programmes, which does not allow for the reverse conclusion, i.e. they that have not been taken into account

There is very little information about the lessons that have not been incorporated although there are some notable exceptions.

4.3.2 Topic 3.2 – Main measures applied to in view of achieving the programmes' objectives

Rationale

The new rural development regulation claims to be significantly simpler, more strategic and last but not least objective rather than measure led. Among others, this is ensured by the introduction of a single funding system, the modification of programming, financial management, and control framework for rural development programmes, the definition of three core objectives and of sub-objectives at axes and measures level (following the so called "hierarchy of objectives"). The three core objectives are the following:

- Improving the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry by support for restructuring, development and innovation;
- Improving the environment and the countryside by supporting land management;
- Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of economic activity;

A thematic axis³² corresponds to each core objective, around which rural development programmes have been built. A fourth horizontal and methodological axis is dedicated to the mainstreaming of the LEADER approach.

Findings for Axis 1: Improving the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry by means of support for restructuring, development and innovation

Axis one has the following three sub-objectives:

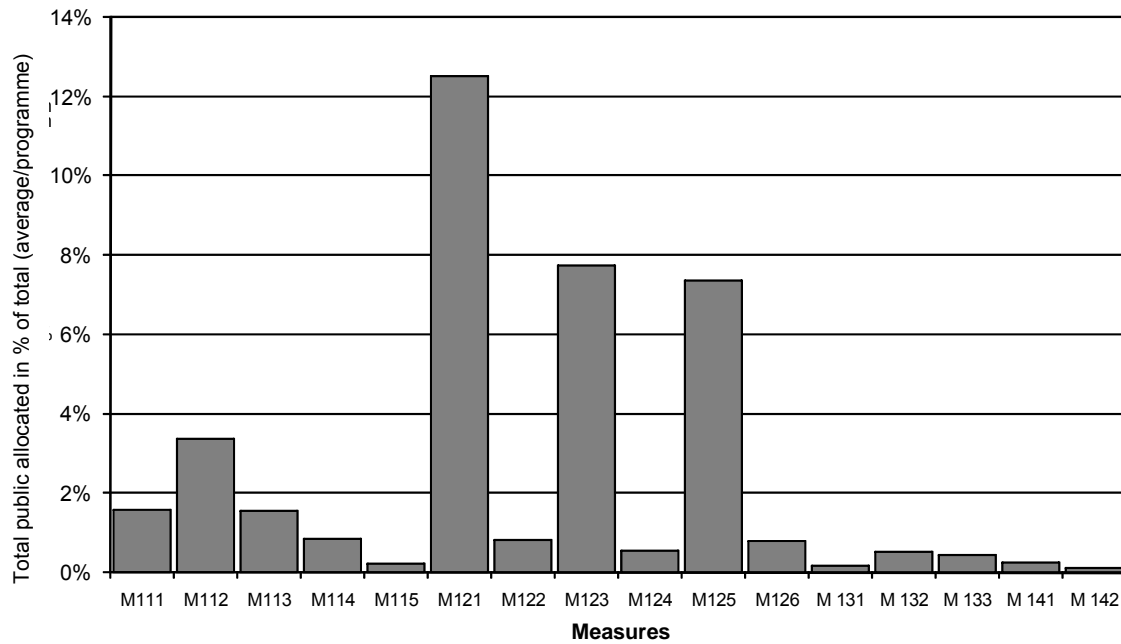
- To promote knowledge and improve human potential
- To restructure and develop physical potential and promote innovation
- To improve the quality of agricultural production and products

For addressing the sub-objectives, 16 measures are foreseen to be possibly included in the RD programmes. The analysis of the average allocations for this set of 16 measures shows the following picture – expressed in the average allocation of total public in % of programme total (excl. Technical Assistance):

³² An 'axis' is a coherent group of measures with specific goals resulting directly from their implementation and contributing to one or more of the objectives set out in Article 4 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005.

Figure 17

Main measures applied for Axis 1 (EU)



Under axis 1, the measures for which programmes allocated the highest shares of total public allocations are

- a) measure 121 (farm modernisation):
- b) measure 123 (adding value to agricultural and forestry products)
- c) measure 125 (improving and developing infrastructure related to the development and adaptation of agriculture and forestry)

Programmes allocated on average more than 12% of their total public funding on measure 121, while for measure 123 this average is close to 8%, followed by measure 125 with little more than 7%.

With regard to those measures under axis 1, which in single RD programmes achieved a very high share of total public funding (calculated in % of the respective programme's total) the picture is as follows:

Figure 18

List of 20 programmes with the highest relative shares of public funding in axis 1

Country	Programme	Code	Measure	Total public (in EUR)	total public in % of total (excluding TA)
BE	Flanders	121	farm modernisation	282.737.973,33	42,9%
FR	Réunion	125	improving and developing infrastructure related to t	180.933.333,00	35,3%
PT	Madeira	125	improving and developing infrastructure related to t	76.450.000,00	35,2%
IT	Liguria	121	farm modernisation	90.797.121,00	33,7%
HU	National	121	farm modernisation	1.559.443.283,00	31,5%
ES	Canarias	121	farm modernisation	101.839.446,00	31,2%
ES	Navarra	123	adding value to agricultural and forestry products	145.202.713,00	28,9%
ES	Valencia	123	adding value to agricultural and forestry products	135.000.000,00	27,9%
LU	National	121	use by farmers and forest holders of advisory servi	98.270.600,00	26,7%
FR	Guadeloupe	125	improving and developing infrastructure related to t	47.169.811,00	24,9%
LV	National	121	farm modernisation	318.583.227,00	24,4%
DE	Hamburg - HH	125	improving and developing infrastructure related to t	10.910.000,00	22,6%
IT	Marche	121	farm modernisation	98.150.000,00	22,2%
ES	La Rioja	125	improving and developing infrastructure related to t	49.900.060,00	21,9%
FR	Martinique	121	farm modernisation	30.800.000,00	21,6%
EE	National	121	farm modernisation	189.741.867,00	21,4%
ES	Madrid	125	improving and developing infrastructure related to t	49.287.777,00	21,3%
CY	National	121	farm modernisation	65.971.676,00	20,7%
ES	Murcia	125	improving and developing infrastructure related to t	90.300.000,00	20,6%
BE	Wallonia	121	farm modernisation	96.000.000,00	20,6%

At the level of individual programmes, the allocations for the single measures under axis achieve much higher shares than in the average picture. Again, also here the following measures are dominant: measure 121 (farm modernisation), measure 125 (improving and developing infrastructure related to the development and adaptation of agriculture and forestry) and measure 123 (adding value to agriculture and forestry products).

Measure 121 achieves more than 30% of the total public funding in the programmes of ES Canarias (31.2%), HU National (31.5%), IT Liguria (33.7%) and BE Flanders (42.9%). Measure 125 has its highest relative importance in FR Réunion (35.3%), followed by PT Madeira (35.2%) and FR Guadeloupe (24.9%). Measure 123 is most prominent in ES Navarra and ES Valencia with 28.9 and 27.9%.

Cluster-specific findings for sub-objective "knowledge and human potential"

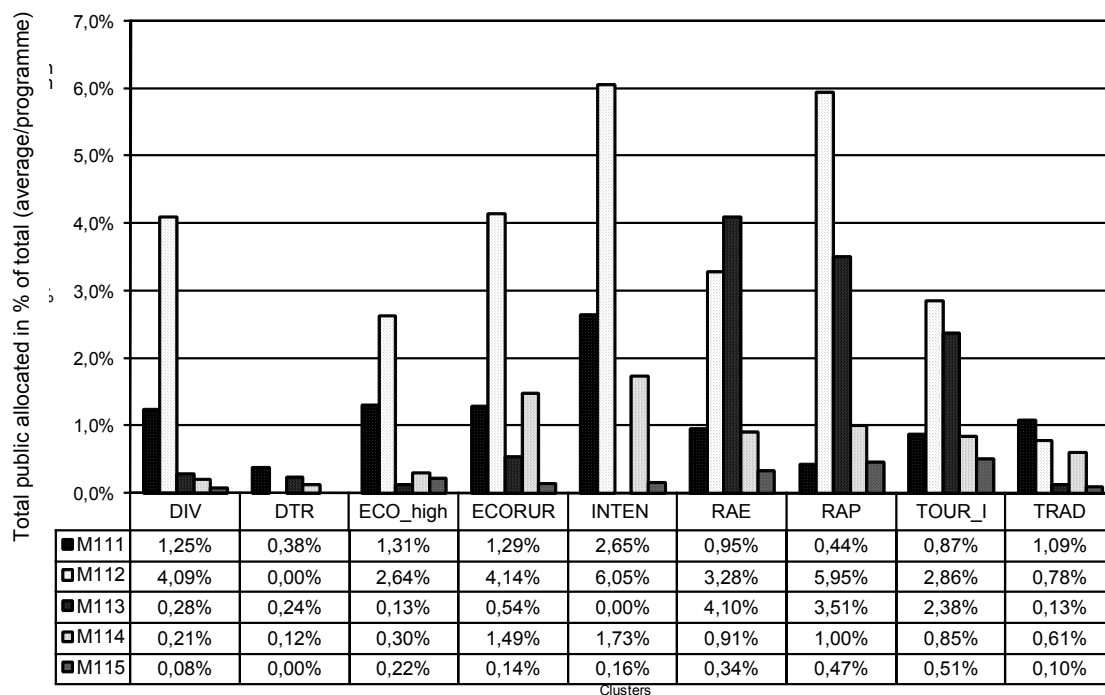
For addressing the sub-objectives, 5 measures are foreseen to be possibly included in the RD programmes.

- 111 vocational training, information actions, including diffusion of scientific knowledge and innovative practices for persons engaged in the agricultural, food and forestry sectors
- 112 setting up of young farmers
- 113 early retirement of farmers and farm workers

- 114 use by farmers and forest holders of advisory services
- 115 setting up of farm management, farm relief and farm advisory services, as well as forestry advisory services

Figure 19

Main measures applied for Axis 1/Sub-objective 'knowledge and human potential'



The analysis shows, that out of these measures, on average measure 112 achieves the highest allocations in the RD Programmes, in particular in the “Intensives” cluster (6.05%), and in the “Rural areas under pressure” (5.95%) cluster. Measure 113 for the “early retirement of farmers and farm workers” is most dominant in the cluster of the “Rural areas endangered” and “rural areas under pressure”.

Cluster-specific findings for sub-objective “restructuring and developing physical potential and innovation”

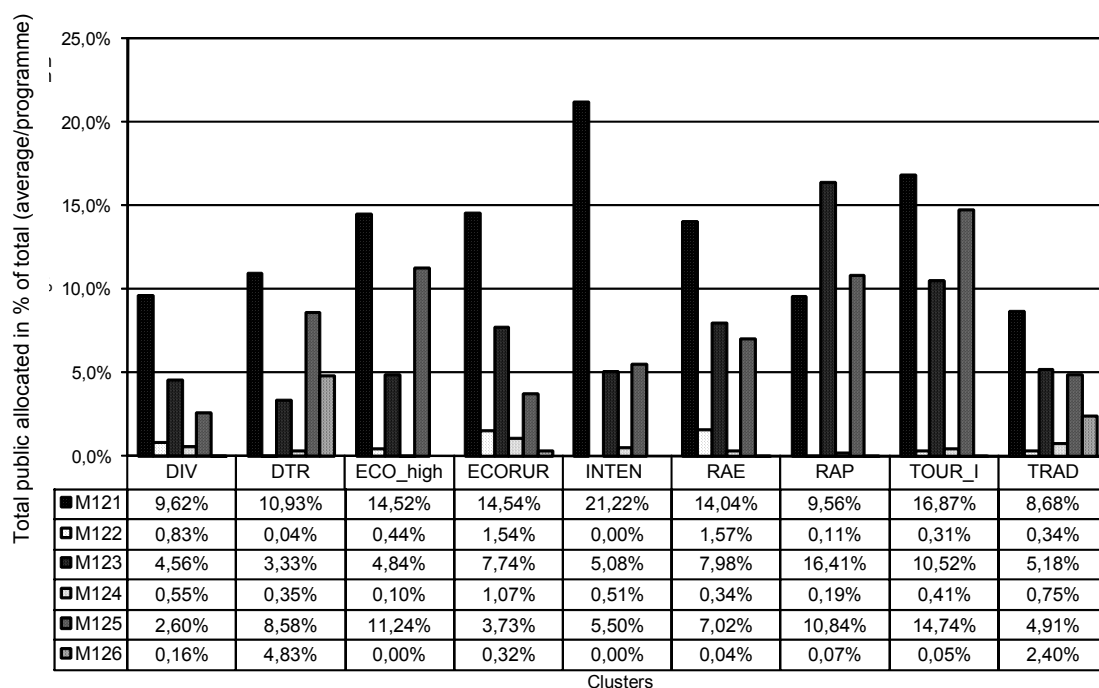
For addressing the sub-objectives, 6 measures are foreseen to be possibly included in the RD programmes:

- 121 farm modernisation
- 122 improving the economic value of the forest
- 123 adding value to agricultural and forestry products

- 124 cooperation for development of new products, processes and technologies in the agricultural and food sector
- 125 improving and developing infrastructure related to the development and adaptation of agriculture and forestry
- 126 restoring agricultural production potential damaged by natural disasters and introducing appropriate prevention actions

Figure 20

Main measures applied for Axis 1/Sub-objective 'restructure and develop physical potential and promote innovation'



The analysis shows, that out of these measures, on average measure 121 (farm modernisation) achieves the highest allocations in the RD Programmes: An average of 13% of the programmes' total public funding is allocated to this measure. The measure is particularly strong in the "intensive" cluster (21.2%) and in the "strong" tourist regions and islands (16.9%), while it is far less applied in the Traditionalists cluster (8.7%).

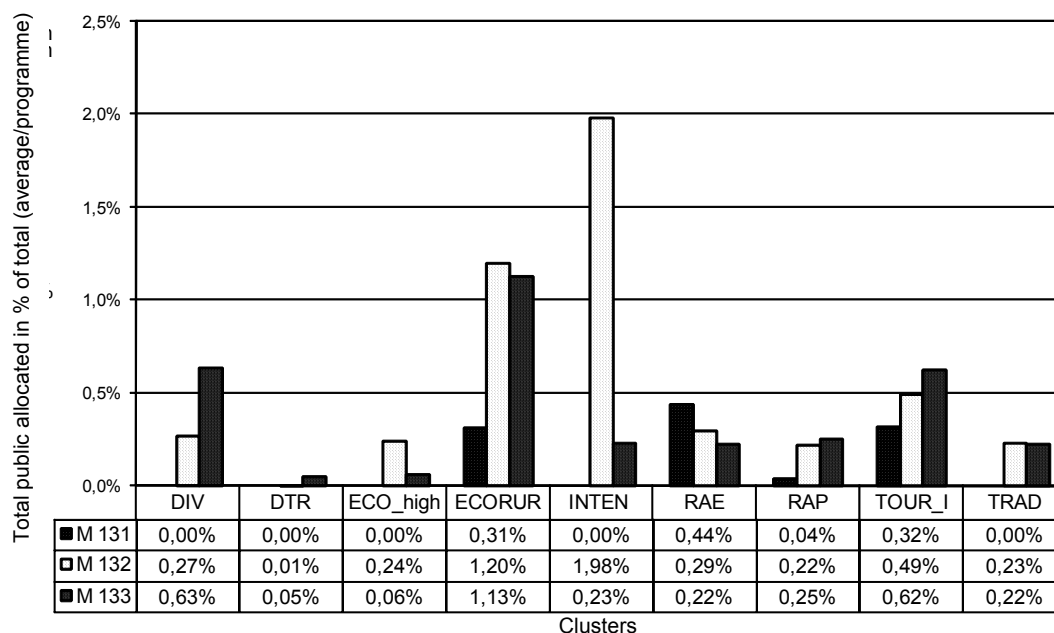
Cluster-specific findings for sub-objective “quality of agricultural production and products”

For addressing the sub-objectives, 3 measures are foreseen to be possibly included in the RD programmes:

- 131 helping farmers to adapt to demanding standards based on Community legislation
- 132 supporting farmers who participate in food quality schemes
- 133 supporting producer groups for information and promotion activities for products under food quality schemes

Figure 21

Main measures applied for Axis 1/Sub-objective 'Improve quality of agricultural production and products'



Among the three measures, “supporting farmers who participate in food quality schemes” (measure 132) is the most dominant, though at a rather low level. The measure reaches its highest average allocation in the “intensives cluster” and in the “Ecoruralists cluster”.

Cluster-specific findings for sub-objective “To facilitate transition in New Member States”

For addressing this sub-objective, 2 measures are foreseen to be possibly included in the RD programmes:

- 141 supporting semi-subsistence farms undergoing restructuring

142 setting up of producer groups

Overall the two measures are applied at equal levels in the three cluster groups including New Member States (i.e. "Rural areas endangered", "Intensives ", and "Strong tourist regions and islands"). However, measure 141 is only applied in the "Rural areas endangered cluster", while measure 142 is evenly distributed between the Intensive Cluster, the "Rural areas endangered cluster" and the "strong tourist regions and islands" cluster. On average, both measures are applied at a rather modest level.

What becomes quite apparent from the cluster specific findings is, that Axis 1 is clearly supporting the "strong agricultural" programming areas (e.g. the "Intensives") – thus depicting their aim to support agriculture as highest priority.

Findings for Axis 2: To improve the environment and the countryside by means of support for land management

Axis two has the following sub-objectives:

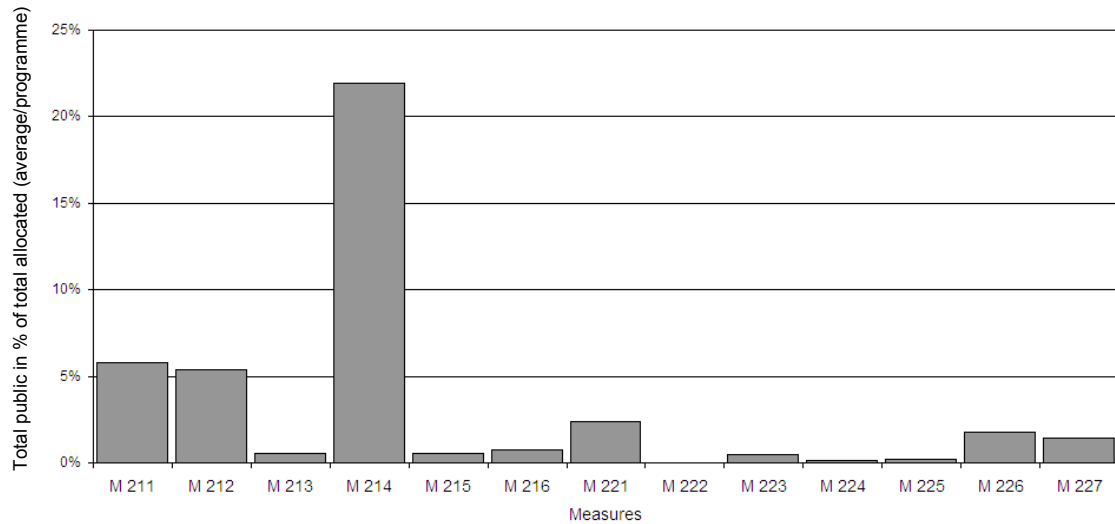
- To increase sustainable management of agricultural land by encouraging farmers and forest holders to employ methods of land use compatible with the need to preserve the natural environment and landscape and protect and improve natural resources through the protection of biodiversity, Natura 2000 site management, the protection of water and soil, climate change mitigation including the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, the reduction of ammonia emissions and the sustainable use of pesticides

For addressing the objective and sub-objectives, 13 measures are foreseen to be possibly included in the RD programmes:

- 211 natural handicap payments to farmers in mountain areas
- 212 payments to farmers in areas with handicaps, other than mountain areas
- 213 Natura 2000 payments and payments linked to Directive 2000/60/EC
- 214 agri-environmental payments
- 215 animal welfare payments
- 216 support for non-productive investments
- 221 first afforestation of agricultural land
- 222 first establishment of agroforestry systems on agricultural land
- 223 first afforestation of non-agricultural land
- 224 Natura 2000 payments

- 225 forest environment payments
- 226 restoring forestry potential and introducing prevention actions
- 227 support for non-productive investments

Figure 22
Main measures applied for Axis 2 (EU)



Programmes allocated on an average approx. 22% of the programme’s total public expenditure on measure 214, while the next important measures (212 and 211) achieve only an average allocation of approx. 6% of the programme’s’ total public expenditure.

With regard to those measures under axis 2, which in single RD programmes achieved a very high share of total public funding (calculated in % of the respective programme’s total), the main measure applied is measure 214 (agro-environmental payments), which achieves the highest relative share of funding in UK England (66.6%), Sweden (54.7%), FI Aland Islands (49.6%), Ireland (48.7%), DE Baden-Württemberg (48.1%), Austria (46.5%) and Denmark (45.8%). Furthermore, “natural handicap payments to farmers in mountain areas” (measure 211) are significant in FR Corsica and IT Valle d’Aosta, with a share of 45.0% in the first programme and with 38.6% in the second programme.

Figure 23

List of programmes with the 20 highest relative shares of public funding in axis 2

Country	Programme	Code	Measure	Total public (in EUR)	total public in % of total (excluding TA)
UK	England	214	agri-environmental payments	3.454.261.359,00	66,6%
SE	National	214	agri-environmental payments	2.106.303.129,00	54,7%
FI	Åland Islands RDP	214	agri-environmental payments	27.645.857,00	49,6%
IE	National	214	agri-environmental payments	2.089.298.800,00	48,7%
DE	Baden-Württemberg - BW	214	agri-environmental payments	603.448.936,00	48,1%
AT	National	214	agri-environmental payments	3.564.390.000,00	46,5%
DK	National	214	agri-environmental payments	372.150.548,00	45,8%
FR	Corsica	211	natural handicap payments to farmers in mountain	70.287.220,00	45,0%
DE	Nordrhein-Westfalen - NRW	214	agri-environmental payments	329.275.045,00	41,7%
UK	Northern Ireland	214	agri-environmental payments	134.670.471,00	41,7%
UK	Wales	214	agri-environmental payments	404.971.245,00	41,2%
IT	Bolzano	214	agri-environmental payments	128.488.157,00	39,4%
IT	Valle d'Aosta	211	natural handicap payments to farmers in mountain	44.697.562,00	38,6%
DE	Saarland - S	214	agri-environmental payments	19.789.652,00	35,6%
FI	Finland - Continental - RDP	214	agri-environmental payments	2.322.469.754,00	35,3%
IT	Basilicata	214	agri-environmental payments	209.725.383,00	33,5%
BE	Wallonia	214	agri-environmental payments	146.114.000,00	31,3%
IT	Piemonte	214	agri-environmental payments	267.790.910,00	30,9%
DE	Hessen - HS	214	agri-environmental payments	128.600.000,00	29,8%
IT	Emilia Romagna	214	agri-environmental payments	272.587.500,00	29,5%

The cluster specific-analysis for the whole of axis 2 shows that measure 214 achieves its highest average allocation in the TRAD cluster (32.1%), followed by the “Diversifiers” cluster (30,7%). Its lowest values are in the “strong tourist regions and islands” cluster (13.4%) as well as in the “Rural areas under pressure cluster (15.6%)”.

Measure 212 is the second important measure, which achieves its highest relative values in the “Traditionalists” cluster (9.8%) and the “Economic high-performers” cluster (7.8%) and the “Diversifiers” cluster (7.3%). Measure 211 has a significant dominance in the “Diversifiers” cluster: showing a peak of 17.8% compared to an average of 5.5%

Findings for Axis 3: To improve quality of life in rural areas and encourage the diversification of economic activities

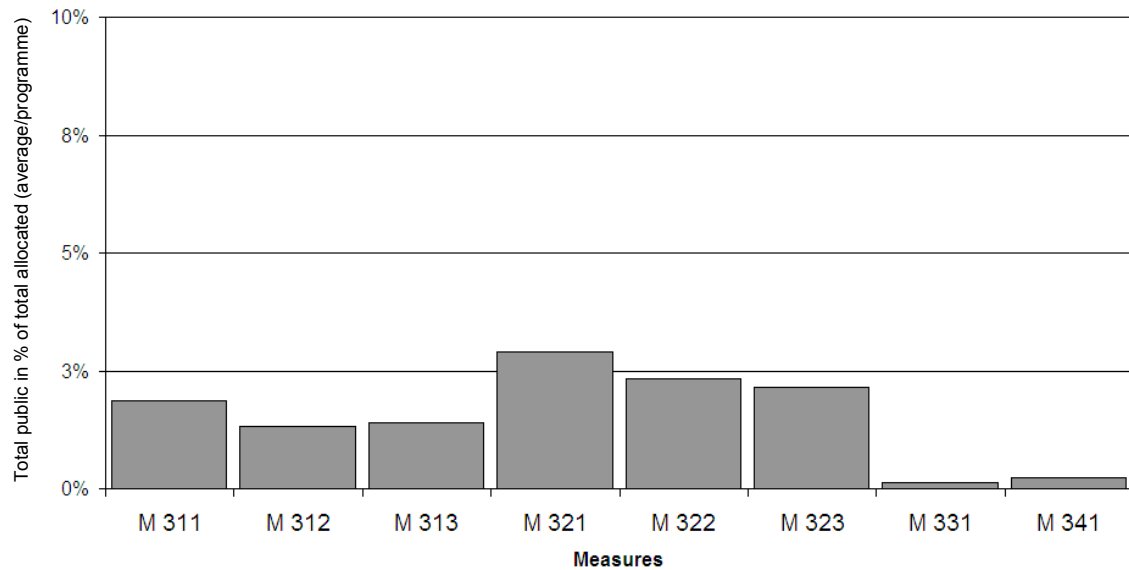
Axis three has the following sub-objectives:

- To diversify the rural economy
- To improve the quality of life in rural areas
- To reinforce territorial coherence and synergies

Programmes allocated on average more than 3 % of their total public funding on measure 321, followed by measure 322 and measure 323 with an average allocation of slightly below 3 %.

Figure 24

Main measures applied for Axis 3 (EU)



With regard to those measures under axis 3, which in single RD programmes achieved a very high share of total public funding (calculated in % of the respective programme’s total), „basic services for the economy and rural population“ (measure 321) achieves the highest values (up to 30.8% of the total public funding) in FR Guayne, ES Cantabria (23.6%) and Malta (21.8%). “Village renewal and development” (measure 322) achieves up to 21.5% in DE Sachsen and RO National. The third important measure is “conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage” (measure 323) which achieves its highest share in DE Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (15.0%) and DE Schleswig-Holstein (14.6%).

Figure 25

List of 20 programmes with the highest relative shares of public funding in axis 3

Country	Programme	Code	Measure	Total public (in EUR)	total public in % of total (excluding TA)
FR	Guyane	321	basic services for the economy and rural population	29.411.764,00	30,8%
ES	Cantabria	321	basic services for the economy and rural population	60.501.524,00	23,6%
MT	National	321	basic services for the economy and rural population	21.000.000,00	21,8%
DE	Sachsen - SN	322	village renewal and development	254.924.228,00	21,5%
RO	National	322	village renewal and development	1.546.087.425,00	17,2%
DE	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, I	323	conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage	171.408.000,00	15,0%
DE	Schleswig-Holstein - SH	323	conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage	66.019.318,00	14,6%
DE	Sachsen-Anhalt - SA	321	basic services for the economy and rural population	143.881.000,00	14,1%
BG	National	321	basic services for the economy and rural population	412.503.341	14,0%
DE	Thüringen - TH	322	village renewal and development	121.059.024,00	13,7%
DE	Hamburg - HH	323	conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage	6.586.000,00	13,6%
MT	National	313	encouragement of tourism activities	11.536.667,00	12,0%
DE	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, I	321	basic services for the economy and rural population	133.028.000,00	11,6%
DE	Niedersachsen und Bremen	322	village renewal and development	159.006.711,00	11,3%
DE	Sachsen - SN	321	basic services for the economy and rural population	127.818.667,00	10,8%
IT	Toscana	311	diversification into non-agricultural activities	88.106.818,00	10,6%
DE	Sachsen-Anhalt - SA	323	conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage	103.585.979,00	10,1%
DE	Berlin-Brandenburg - BB	323	conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage	135.548.267,00	10,0%
DE	Niedersachsen und Bremen	323	conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage	141.857.468,00	10,0%
NL	National	313	encouragement of tourism activities	94.820.000,00	9,8%

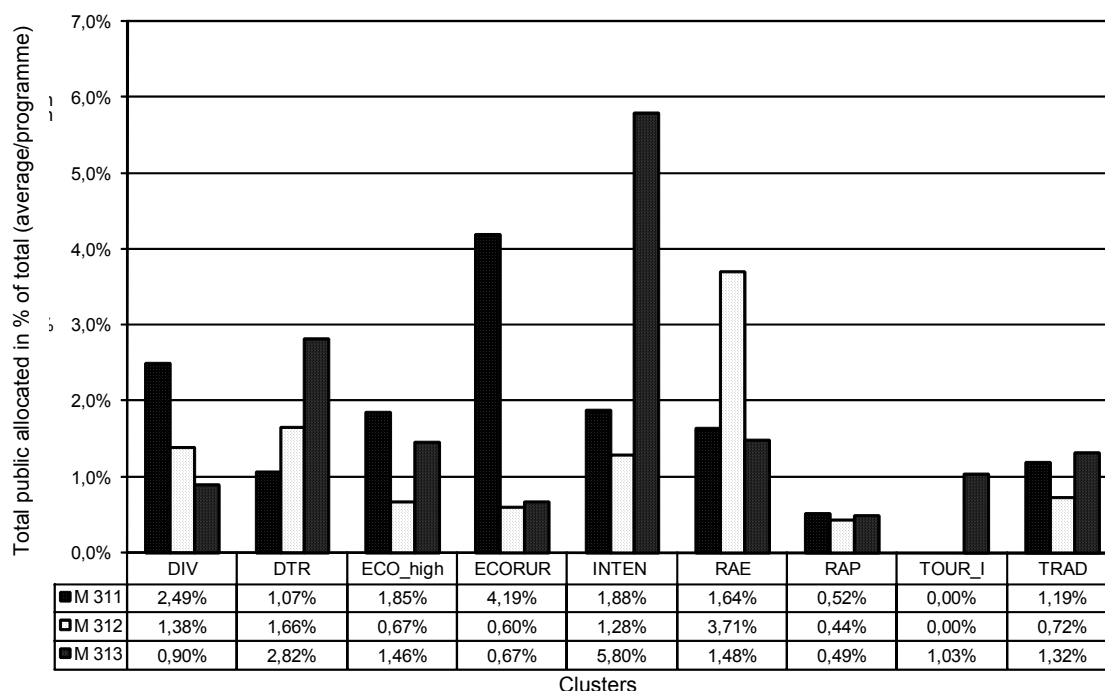
Cluster-specific findings for the sub-objective diversify the rural economy

For addressing this sub-objective, 3 measures are foreseen to be possibly included in the RD programmes:

- 311 diversification into non-agricultural activities
- 312 support for the creation and development of micro-enterprises
- 313 encouragement of tourism activities

Figure 26

Main measures applied for Axis 3/Sub-objective 'To diversify the rural economy'



For achieving the first sub-objective of axis 3 measure 311 and 313 are at the same, rather moderate level (average of approx. 1.7% of the total public funding allocated per programme. The highest peak can be found in the intensive cluster, where the average in measure 313 reaches 5.8%, while measure 311 has its peak in the Ecoruralists cluster 4.9%).

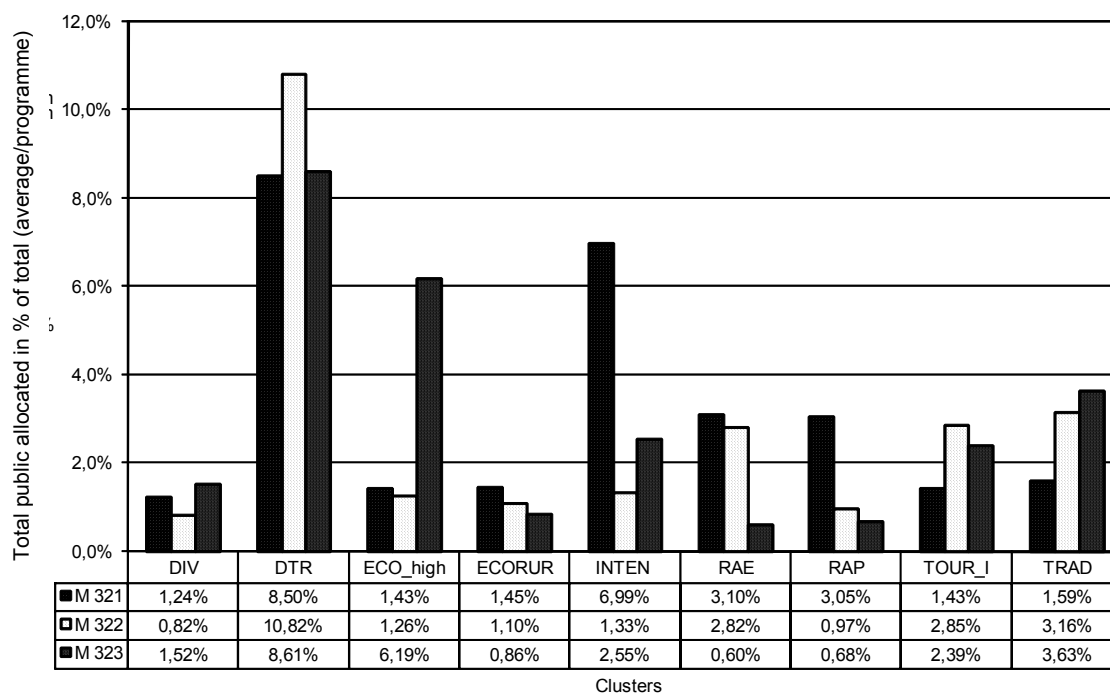
Cluster-specific findings for the sub-objective to improve the quality of life in rural areas

For addressing this sub-objective, 3 measures are foreseen to be possibly included in the RD programmes:

- 321 basic services for the economy and rural population
- 322 village renewal and development

Figure 27

Main measures applied for Axis 3/Sub-objective 'To improve the quality of life in rural areas'



The quantitative analysis of the sub-objective to improve the quality of life in rural areas under axis 3 shows, that overall the RD programmes have evenly used the predefined 3 measures for addressing the sub-objective: the average allocations per measure range from 2.8% to 3.0%. However, within the clusters there are some significant variations: For measure 321 (basic services for the economy and rural population), there is a significant higher value for the “Drained Traditionalists cluster” (8.5%) and for “Intensives” cluster (7%). For measure 322 (village renewal and development) there is a significant peak in the Drained Traditionalists cluster and for measure 323 (conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage) both the programmes in the “Drained Traditionalists” cluster and in the “Economic high-performers cluster” have allocated much higher amounts to these measures.

Cluster-specific findings for the sub-objective to reinforce territorial coherence and synergies

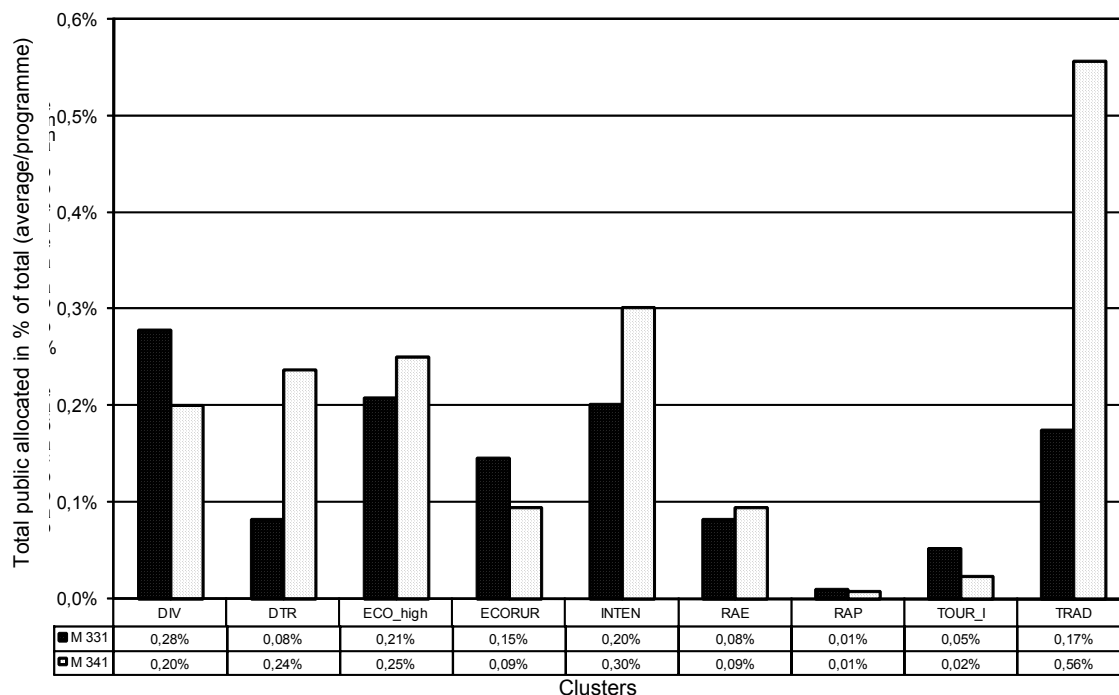
For addressing this sub-objective, 2 measures are foreseen to be possibly included in the RD programmes:

331 training and information for economic actors operating in the fields covered by Axis 3

341 skills acquisition and animation with a view to preparing and implementing a local development strategy

Figure 28

Main measures applied for Axis 3/Sub-objective 'To reinforce territorial coherence and synergies'



While the overall allocations for addressing this objective are rather moderate (below 0.2%), there is some variant within the clusters. While the “Rural Areas under Pressure” cluster shows the lowest allocation in absolute, the average allocations for measure 341 are nearly double as high (0.6%) in the “Traditionalists” cluster than in any other cluster.

Findings for Axis 4: Leader

The fourth axis has the following sub-objective:

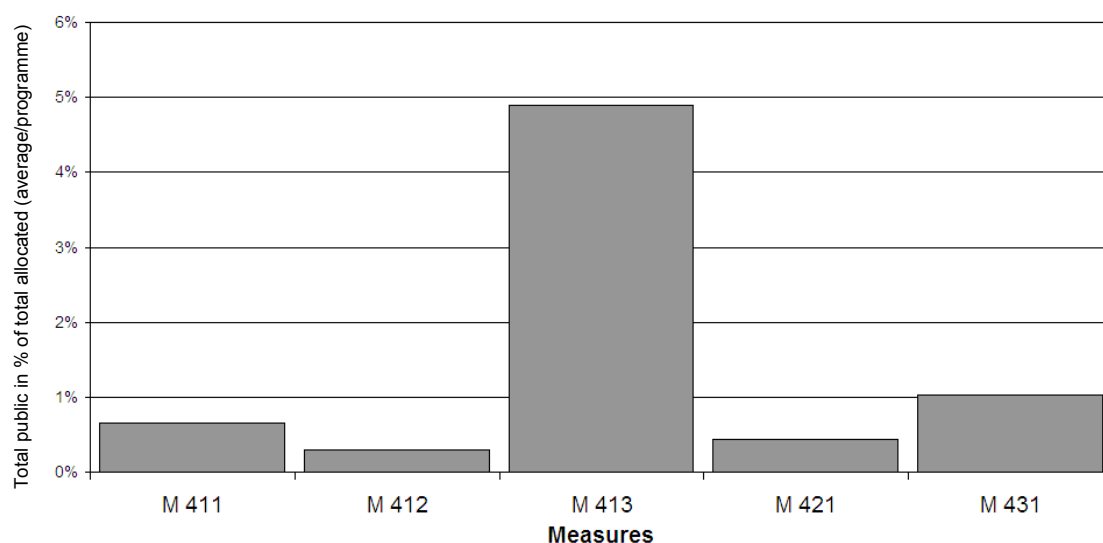
- To implement the Leader approach in mainstream rural development programming

For addressing this sub-objective, 5 measures are foreseen to be possibly included in the RD programmes:

- 411 competitiveness
- 412 environment/land management
- 413 quality of life/diversification
- 421 transnational and inter-regional cooperation
- 431 running the local action group, skills acquisition, animation

Figure 29

Main measures applied for Axis 4 (EU)



Programmes allocated on average approx. 5 % of their total public funding on measure 413, while for the second important measure 431 the average allocation is only 1%. With regard to those measures under axis 4, which in single RD programmes achieved a very high share of total public funding (calculated in % of the respective programme's total), measure 413 (quality of life/diversification) is the dominant measure. It achieves its highest share (29.4%) in UK Northern Ireland, while it plays also an important role (between 10 and 15%) in IT Puglia, ES Asturias, IT Sardegna, DE Schleswig-Holstein and ES Valencia. With exception of this measure, which is the only one in the top 20, the second important measure is measure 411 (competitiveness) which achieves its highest relative share in FR Guyane with only 5.6% and IT Liguria with 5.3%

Figure 30

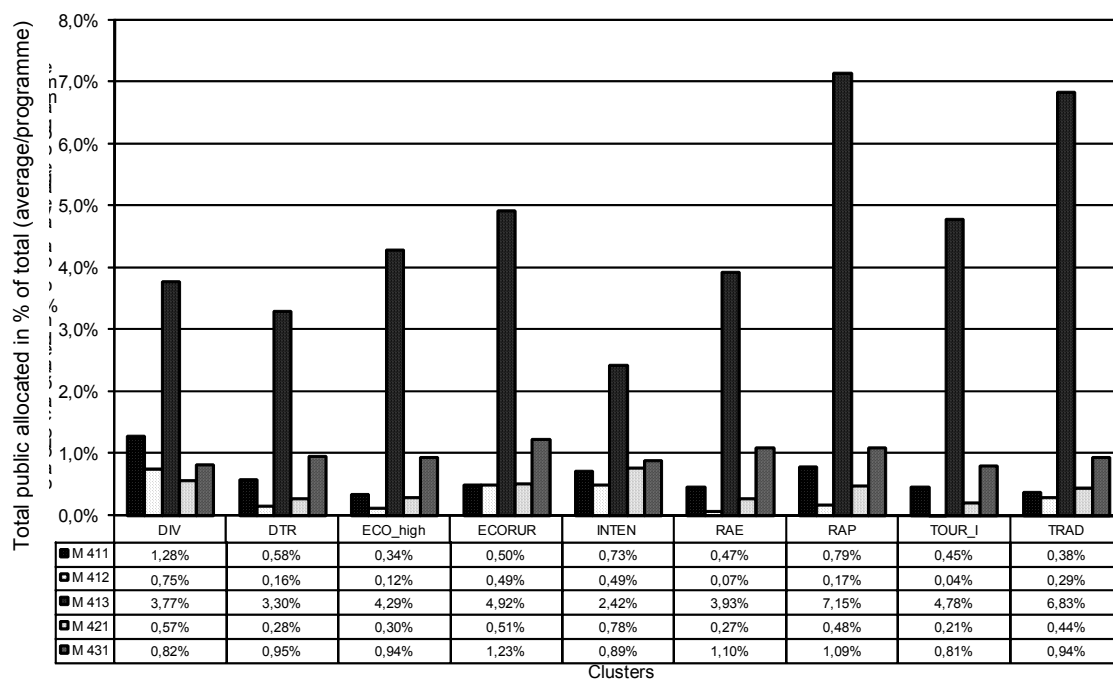
List of 20 measures with highest relative shares of public funding in axis 4

Country	Programme	Code	Measure	Total public (in EUR)	total public in % of total (excluding TA)
UK	Northern Ireland	413	quality of life/diversification	94.923.932,00	29,4%
IT	Puglia	413	quality of life/diversification	213.000.000,00	14,8%
ES	Asturias	413	quality of life/diversification	81.061.000,00	11,9%
IT	Sardegna	413	quality of life/diversification	144.926.136,00	11,7%
DE	Schleswig-Holstein - SH	413	quality of life/diversification	50.181.818,00	11,1%
ES	Valencia	413	quality of life/diversification	49.000.000,00	10,1%
IE	National	413	quality of life/diversification	425.455.000,00	9,9%
PT	Madeira	413	quality of life/diversification	19.650.000,00	9,1%
ES	Madrid	413	quality of life/diversification	21.000.000,00	9,1%
DE	Saarland - S	413	quality of life/diversification	4.950.286,00	8,9%
ES	Cantabria	413	quality of life/diversification	22.380.700,00	8,7%
DE	Hessen - HS	413	quality of life/diversification	37.300.000,00	8,7%
PT	Continente	413	quality of life/diversification	352.953.725,00	8,2%
ES	Castilla y León	413	quality of life/diversification	175.600.000,00	8,2%
ES	Pais Vasco	413	quality of life/diversification	22.090.672,00	7,9%
ES	Extremadura	413	quality of life/diversification	93.336.520,00	7,9%
IT	Toscana	413	quality of life/diversification	63.688.828,00	7,7%
ES	Aragón	413	quality of life/diversification	83.748.000,00	7,7%
ES	Andalucía	413	quality of life/diversification	283.500.000,00	7,6%
IT	Veneto	413	quality of life/diversification	65.291.400,00	7,4%

Cluster-specific findings for LEADER

Figure 31

Main measures applied for Axis 4/Sub-objective 'To implement the Leader approach in mainstream rural development programming'



The analysis of the Leader axis shows, that measure 413 (running the local action group, skills acquisition, animation) is by far the most dominant one (4.6% allocation) compared to the other measures under the same axis whose average allocation varies between 0.3% and 1%. Measure 413 (quality of life/diversification) is particularly important in "Rural areas under pressure" cluster (7.2%) and the "Traditionalists" cluster (6,9%), whereas it is less important in the "Intensives" cluster (2.4%). The highest average allocation for measure 421 (transnational and inter-regional cooperation) are achieved in the "Intensives" cluster (0.8%).

Conclusions

The analysis of the main measures applied for achieving the objectives has shown, that measures have been chosen and shared among the different axis as described under the findings. Under axis 1: Improving the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry by means of support for restructuring, development and innovation the measures for which the single programmes allocated the highest shares of total public funding are measure 121 (farm modernisation), measure 123 (adding value to agricultural and forestry products) and measure 125 (improving and developing infrastructure related to the development and adaptation of agriculture and forestry).

For Axis 2 – To improve the environment and the countryside by means of support for land management – programmes allocated on an average approx. 22% of the programme's total public expenditure on measure 214 (agri-environment payments) , while the next important measures (212 – payments to farmers in areas with handicaps, other than mountain areas and 211 – natural handicap payments to farmers in mountain areas) achieved an average allocation of approx. 6% of the programme's' total public expenditure.

For Axis 3 – To improve quality of life in rural areas and encourage the diversification of economic activities – Programmes allocated on average more than 3 % of their total public funding on measure 321 (basic services for the economy and rural population) , followed by measure 322 (village renewal and development) and measure 323 (conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage) with an average allocation of slightly below 3 %.

For Axis 4 – Leader – Programmes allocated on average approx. 5 % of their total public funding on measure 413 (Implementing local development strategies), while for the second important measure 431 (running the local action group, acquiring skills and animating the territory) the average allocation is only 1%.

Overall there has been a significant trend towards the importance of single measures over all programmes and clusters, although the variation within these trends is considerable. The balance among the measures applied and the objectives pursued is assessed under the next topic.

4.3.3 Topic 3.3 – Overall assessment of the balance among the measures applied in view of objectives pursued

Rationale

Regulation 1698/2005: Article 17 presents the rule to be applied for the balance between axis (but not Measures). A minimum percentage must be applied to each as follows.

Axis 1: Improving competitiveness of farming and forestry 10%

Axis 2: Environment and land management 25%

Axis 3: Improving quality of life and diversification 10%

LEADER axis: 5% (a phasing in period is foreseen for the new Members States)

Beyond these minimum requirements, the Member States are free to distribute the money between the Axis and the Measures as they wish. This distribution is usually undertaken at the level of the National Strategy Plans, with decentralised Member States defining ranges of funding for each axis (Axis 1 in Spain must receive between 40% and 65% for example), which are finalised in the regional programmes according to the needs and the strategy.

The guidance document C of the CMEF requires the ex ante evaluator to “assess the internal coherence of programmes by verifying the balance between the operational objectives of the different measures, with a view to verify the existence of mutually reinforcing interactions and the absence of possible conflicts and contradictions between them”.

Main findings

Around 50% of the ex ante evaluations state that the overall balance between the Measures is appropriate with regard to the needs identified and the objectives defined and that there are no contradictions. The intervention logic goes down to the level of Measures and justifies their relative weight. This is the case in *Hungary, Lithuania, Rheinland Pfalz, Niedersachsen, Baden-Württemberg, Saxonia, Saxonia-Anhalt, Madeira, Bulgaria, Asturias, Castilla y León, La Rioja, France, Finland, Åland Islands, Wallonia, Guadeloupe, Guyane, Latvia, Liguria, Lazio, Trento, Sicilia, Campania, Veneto, Piemonte, Puglia, Umbria, ...* In *Marche*, the ex ante states that clear regional choices are made concerning modernisation of farms, transformation of agricultural and forest products, agro-environmental actions and diversification of agricultural activities. These choices are made in coherence with the context analysis. In *Emilia Romagna*, the ex ante evaluator states that the Measures provide a sufficiently rich and balanced programmatic picture able to answer to diversified and heterogeneous potentialities and problems resulting from context analysis and to favour, through the integrated approach, complementarity among different forms of support.

In the ex ante evaluation, there is sometimes a confusion between the “balance” amongst priority Axis and the “balance” between Measures. We feel that this topic must be

addressed at both levels, where the balance between axes gives the general orientation of the programme, whilst the balance between Measures refers more to the needs identified. The ex ante evaluation usually presents a table where this correspondence is analysed.

Around 20% of the ex ante evaluations criticise the balance between Measures. In *Mecklenburg-Vorpommern*, a few Measures are deemed not in line with the Intention of linking needs of the programming area with the measures pursued in the RD Programme. In *Molise*, according to the ex ante evaluator, there is unbalancing among the degree of priority attributed to some intervention sectors. Yet, some support (training, infrastructure) will come from other financial sources (ERDF, ESF), which justifies the low budgetary allocation. In *The Netherlands*, a major part of the budget has been allocated (30%) to Axis 3, which is considered as not justified by the analysis, as few rural areas have this type of needs (as laid down in the SWOT analysis of the RD Programme). In *Portugal (Continente)*, the ex ante points at a contradiction between high amounts allocated to agricultural measures having a negative environmental impact and relatively low amounts allocated to Axis 2 measures. In *Northern Ireland*, the ex ante finds that the 80% allocation to Axis 2 is not consistent with the identified objectives, which are largely socio economic. In *England*, within the Axes the weighting of the Measures is found to be largely consistent with the rationale. There are however repeated concerns expressed by the ex ante evaluators concerning the radical allocation of resources to Axis 2 (80%). In *Slovakia*, the ex ante evaluators would suggest that balance between different aspects of restructuring in the agricultural forestry and food processing sectors could be altered in favour of more measures targeting the improvement of the skills and knowledge of the workforce and the level of product and technological innovation.

In another 20% of the programmes, we consider that the choice of measures reflects a clear strategic choice. This strategic choice is in our eyes not always clearly connected to the needs identified.

Some programmes choose to have a clear and strong focus on agriculture. In Flanders, the objectives proposed in the Flemish Rural development programmes strongly favour the agricultural sector compared to other rural actors and rural development in general. In this perspective, the measures applied, directed primarily to the agricultural sector, are in line with the objectives that are proposed. However, as a whole the measures still appear to be rather fragmented and lack synergy and integration. In Galicia, axis 1 represents nearly 50% of the total, which is said in the ex ante evaluation to be the logical consequence of the Rural development programmes objectives. In Bayern, although the SWOT presents a broad and diversified range of disparities, the Rural development programmes concentrates predominantly on structural challenges in agriculture (Axis 1 and 2) and allocates only about 12% of the funding to Axis 3. In Greece, Axis 1 measures absorb some 46% of the programme budget, although the balance between measures is considered satisfactory by the ex ante evaluator.

Other programmes have a clear and strong focus on environment. In *Ireland*, the evaluators accept the logic of allocating the predominant amount of funding to environmental measures given the centrality of farmers and farming to the maintenance of the rural environment and the success of environmental measures under previous rural development programmes. In *Saarland*, axis 1 receives a relatively low share of the funds (17%), whilst Axis 2 and 3 are fairly high (and Axis 4 is the highest in Germany with 15%). In *Northern Ireland*, the ex ante finds that the balance of funding across the programme with the 80% allocation to Axis 2 is not consistent with the identified objectives which are largely socio economic. In *England*, there are repeated concerns expressed by the ex ante evaluators over the deficiencies in the evidence base, analysis and rationale supporting the intervention logic and radical (80%) allocation of resources to Axis 2. In *Austria*, Axis 2 takes 72% of the programme's volume and is therefore the main priority in the Austrian Rural development programmes. The Ex-ante-report describes but does not actually assess the balance of the measures in relation to the objectives.

In *Toscana*, the programme includes 38 measures, but 9 do not have any budget, 18 receive only 2% and 8 receive between 2% and 8%. The most important measures are 121 (Modernisation of agricultural holdings), 214 (Agro-environment payments) and 311 (Diversification into non-agricultural activities). This reflects a strong effort on diversification, but less importance is given to other rural measures which are also very important according to the ex-ante evaluator.

Some programmes refer to a specific situation to justify the balance of funding. In *Martinique*, the evaluator says that, in view of the very specific situation of the island, the amounts allocated to some measures are not always compatible with the aims and objectives. For example, the priority linked to forest is very important, but rather marginal in terms of financial resources. The same applies to the measures under to axis 3, where a low level of funding shows that rural diversification is not an important priority for the programme. In *Hamburg*, Axis 3 receives 25% of the funding), but this relatively high amount is justified as it reflects the special situation of a rural area within an agglomeration.

In limited number of the ex ante evaluations, we noted the balance among the measures is not assessed. In *Malta*, a justification of the priorities chosen in the Rural development programmes is present without any linkage to the objectives to be pursued. In *Estonia* and *Slovenia*, the ex ante evaluations do not include any general assessment of the balance but focuses on the content of the single measures, and thus only specific suggestions are made. . Several Spanish regions (*Extremadura, Baleares Islands, Canarias, Cantabria, Castilla la Mancha, Madrid, Murcia*) include a table showing the connections between the objectives and the measures, but do not comment on the relative weight of each measure in regard of the needs. The same is reported in *Corsica, La Réunion, the Czech Republic, Romania and Denmark*.

In Valencia, the ex ante considers that the proposed measures are coherent with the detected needs and the objectives of the programme. However, they point to the limited resources of the programme given the needs detected. They produce 2 tables showing the output indicators of beneficiaries covered compared to the total potential number in each field. This shows that the coverage is very low in certain measure, reaching for example, 3.8% of young farmers or only 4% of irrigated area. The resources devoted to axis 2 and 3 are seen to be particularly limited in relation to the problems with the exception of the measures for tourism in axis 3. In *Scotland*, mapping of all existing rural development schemes shows that there is no shortage of existing schemes across the different axes. There is no need to create new schemes to meet the minimum funding requirements.

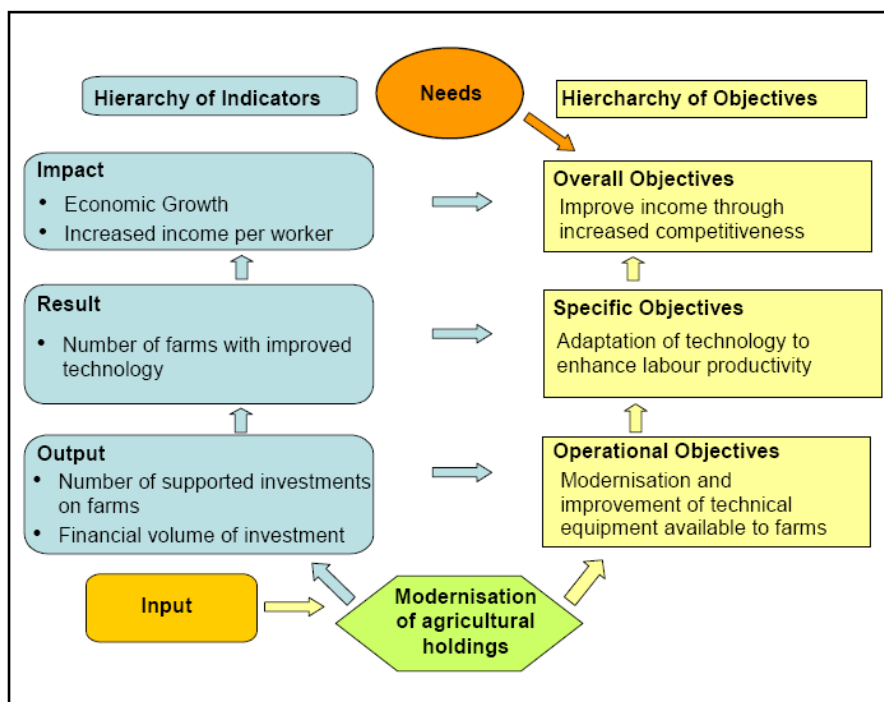
Main findings from quantitative analysis

In order to underline these findings from the analysis of ex-ante evaluations we will try to answer the core research question of this Synthesis of ex-ante evaluations of RD Programmes – i.e. “The extent to which the needs of European rural areas have been matched by appropriate measures”, by adding a quantitative analysis, which tries in a second best approach to cross check the points raised above.

The CMEF points out (see CMEF Guidance Note B, p. 4f) that the key tool for evaluating is the “intervention logic”, which establishes the causal chain from the budgetary input, via the output and the results of measures, to their impact. Thus, the intervention logic guides the consecutive assessment of a measure’s contribution to achieving its objectives.

Figure 32

The intervention logic of RD measures



“The intervention logic starts from the needs, which describe the socio-economic or environmental requirements to which the programme and/or measure should respond.

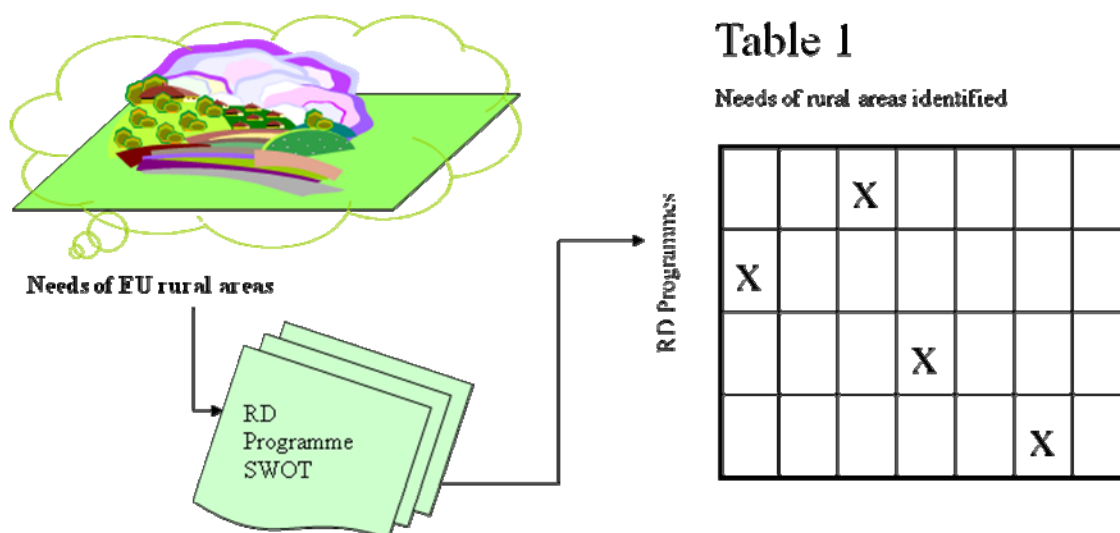
The policy response is developed through a “hierarchy of objectives”, representing the break down from the overall objective, via more specific objectives, to operational objectives. For the purpose of evaluation, the “hierarchy of objectives” is matched by a “hierarchy of indicators” which reflect the different elements of the intervention logic of a measure.”

By following this line of thought we may establish a methodology to link the needs of rural areas with the measures taken by the single RD programmes and thus cross tabulate the respective data for the EU in total. We are aware of the fact that the intervention logic as stipulated for each measure (see Handbook on the CMEF Guidance Note E: Measure Fiches) only foresees the link between the measure as such and the hierarchy of objectives per Axis of the RD programmes. However the “Overall Objectives” find a high degree of correspondence with the list of needs as laid down in the SWOT analyses of the RD programmes (see Theme 1 above).

The methodology follows a four-step approach:

Step 1: Linking needs of rural areas with the RD Programmes:

The first analytical step has simply been to depict the needs of rural areas – as provided in the SWOT analyses of the RD programmes in a table format by RD programme – thus arriving at an overall list of needs of rural areas all over Europe. The following graph provides an overview of this procedure:



Some remarks concerning the results of this exercise: as mentioned in the analysis of Theme 1 of this Synthesis, some of the needs of rural areas are not really needs but a mixture of measures and stocks/situations. – I.e. the essential component of a need, which basically is “the absence of something”, is missing. Thus the first flaw in this analysis is the lack of a proper representation of needs in the programming areas. A second problem is how needs are represented in the programmes and their respective SWOTs.

Still all in all, the list of needs as presented in Theme 1 above seems to represent fairly well the general trends all over Europe and is supported by several studies conducted in this field:

- ESPON 3.2. Spatial scenarios in relation to the ESDP and EU Cohesion Policy (DG Regio)
- ESPON 2.4.2. Integrated analysis of transnational and national territories (DG Regio)
- SCENAR 2020 – Scenario study on agriculture and the rural world (DG Agri)
- Rural Development in the European Union – Statistical and Economic Information – Report 2006 (DG Agri)

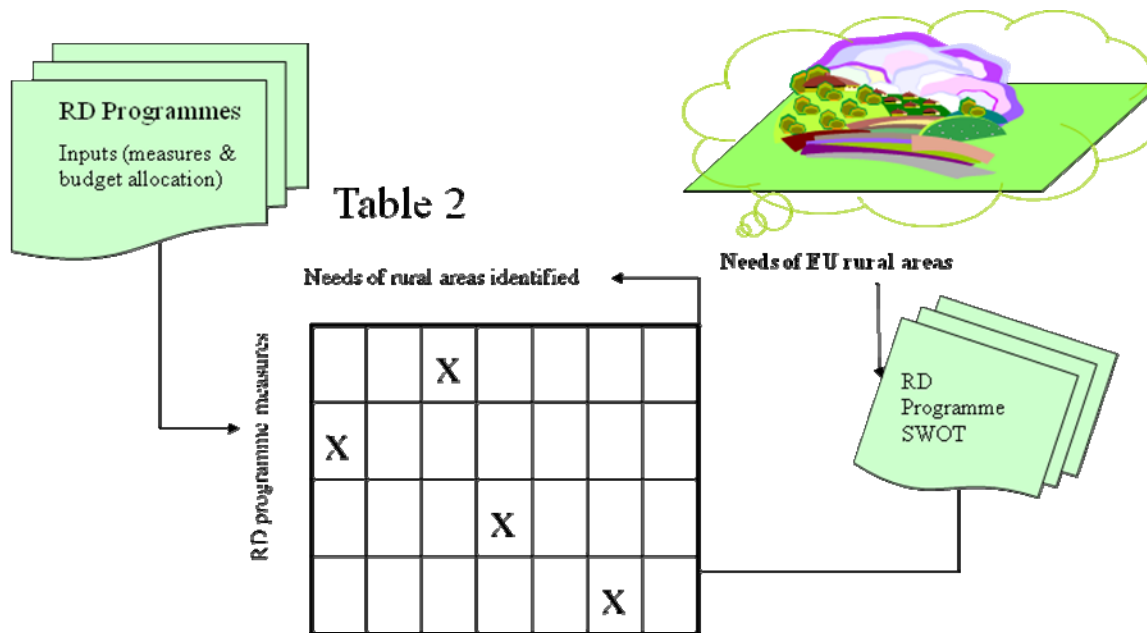
- Sixth Periodic Report on the Social and Economic Situation and Development of Regions in the European Union 1999 (DG Regio)

They mention in principle similar needs of rural areas in EU Member States.

Step 2: Linking the measures of RD programmes with the identified needs of rural areas:

In a second step – following the idea of the intervention logic as specified in the CMEF, we linked the measures – as “answers to specific needs” with the list of needs as identified in the RD Programmes. The general approach has been to look measure per measure for the overall objective of each of them (as specified in the single measure fiche of the CMEF – Guidance Note E). This general objective is – as mentioned above a fairly well representation of one or several needs of rural areas. This step is based upon the expert judgement of the evaluators but strongly embedded in the intervention logic of each measure of RD programmes. Thus we arrived at a table depicting the needs of rural areas – as “stimulus” – and their respective measures – as “response”. A methodological bias in this analysis shows for the measures under Axis 4 (LEADER), which do – prima facie – not correspond to any need. This is generally true – taking into consideration that LEADER is rather a methodology than a measure – thus making it hard to attribute these measures to concrete needs. In other words we did not attribute the LEADER measures to any need – or all of them as LEADER is to be seen as cross cutting method serving a better delivery of the programmes.

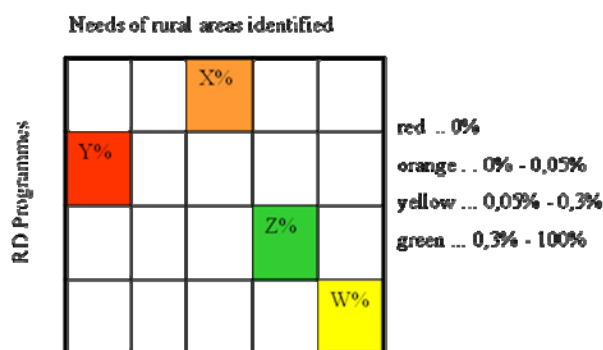
The following graph shows the analytical process:



Step 3: cross tabulation linking programmes with the extent to which needs identified have been actually addressed by measures in the RD programmes:

Finally the results of the first two analytical steps have been cross tabulated – thus producing a table, which provides an overview of the needs addressed in the single RD programmes and the respective answers per RD programme as expressed by the share of budget allocation (as sum of all the measures attributed to this need) – (more precisely share of EU contribution to the single RD programme). Sure enough this approach is a second best one, as the budget allocation per measure is only an approximation to the true weights put on the single objective pursued in the RD programmes. However it provides a fairly good representation of the “political weight” on the single measure. The following graph shows the general idea:

Cross Tabulation 1



This means we calculated in this step the budget contribution per need identified. In other words we detected the extent to which programmes have addressed their identified needs by measure – thus answering the core research question of this synthesis exercise, how far the measures applied in the RD programmes responded to the objectives pursued and the needs identified in the programming area. The extent has been highlighted by a “traffic light” system distinguishing between four degrees of need fulfilment (see graph above). The thresholds for these classes have been set rather low in order to take into consideration the multitude of measures and needs, which has led to a significant split up of budgets – thus reducing the weight on the single measure.

The results

In principle the findings of the quantitative analysis underline the findings from the analysis of the ex-ante evaluations – i.e. that all in all the RD programmes tried to establish a balanced way of addressing objectives pursued. Still some remarkable observations may be stated with respect to the details within each Axis.

While all three Axes seem to be addressed by the RD programmes – thus reflecting a balance between the Axes. There seems to be a rather clear emphasis of RD programmes on two needs within the single Axes with respect to their budget allocations:

- “*Structural adjustments & modernisation (productivity deficits, fragmentation, capital, dependency)*” The share of budget allocated to these needs ranges from 10% (Austria, Finland) up to 60% (Navarra, ESP). When looking up to the needs identified in the EU RD programming areas it has been exactly this need, which has been emphasised most all over Europe. This means, that apparently the programmes reacted quite accurately upon the needs identified.
- “*Sustainable practices (in land/forest management), awareness*”. This need is as clearly addressed and the range of budget allocation shows pretty much the same span – from 10% (Guadeloupe FR, Malta) up to 70% (United Kingdom). Although this need is also represented in the “top ten” of EU rural area needs, it is not among the first four.

While these two needs seem to be well covered by the budgets of RD programmes, there is a number of needs, which are not targeted at directly by the programme measures:

- Unemployment/disparities/create job-offers/income alternatives
- Physical infrastructures (creation, adaption access)
- Open new markets, use market potentials, export-orientation, market local products
- Biodiversity, ecologic structures, habitats
- Renewable energies/energy consumption/reduce emissions/climate change

These findings are underlined by Topic 3.2. “Main Measures applied”, where this concentration of RD programmes on a limited number of measures have been highlighted.

However some of these needs are ranking quite high in the EU needs of rural areas. Still it seems quite interesting why they are not addressed by interventions. One possible explanation may be that some of these needs may only be addressed indirectly (unemployment, biodiversity) through the support of other measures – such as the improvement of sustainable practices in forestry and farming. In other cases (such as physical infrastructure, renewable energy) RD programmes are not seen as the primary vehicles to address these problems³³ but other Community Programmes (such as Structural Funds).

³³ As has been pointed out in the findings from the ex-ante evaluations above.

After all there seem to be some “white spots” for needs, which have been rarely mentioned in the SWOTs of the RD programmes and in due course not addressed adequately by budget allocations:

- Capital, qualification, training, capacity building
- Integration of policies, participation, local partnership, cooperation
- Quality productions, sustainable production methods; quality systems
- Land use conflicts/land consumption/land pressure

We consider these needs as rather crucial and from a European perspective high on the agenda (especially integration of policies, participation, local partnership, cooperation) still the programmes do not seem to consider them as important for the coming programming period.

With respect to the clusters identified within this synthesis exercise – there show no cluster specific patterns – i.e. those programming areas showing specific characteristics do not show a similar pattern of addressing these needs.

Step 4: cross tabulation linking programmes with those measures, which address needs not identified in the SWOT:

The last analytical step has been a cross tabulation of measures of RD programmes, which have been budgeted – thus representing a specific aim of the programme, but which are targeting at needs, which are not at all identified in the respective programme. The following graph shows the general concept:

The table shows those measures in budget share of EU contribution, which do not address any need identified for the respective RD programme (i.e. not listed in its SWOT analysis or ex-ante evaluation). The general intention of this analytical step was to cross check upon the understanding and effectiveness of the measures taken and the needs identified. In other words it has been rather a robustness analysis of the budget allocation of the programmes.

Cross Tabulation 2

RD programme measures

		X%		
Y%				
			Z%	
				W%

RD Programmes

The results

All in all the programmes seem to have paid close attention to addressing the needs identified – i.e. although there are some measures to be identified per programme not addressing any need, the overall budget allocation to those measures seem to be relatively low. In other words the RD programmes all over Europe have targeted their measures at objectives corresponding to the regional needs of rural areas, but have done so with a strong emphasis on a limited number of measures.

Methodological limitations of the quantitative analysis

The quantitative analysis has been conducted with the aim to deepen the analysis on the key research question of this synthesis ex-ante evaluations of RD programmes – i.e. to assess the level of correspondence between measures applied by the RD programmes and identified needs of European rural areas. This analysis is meant to complement the screening of the ex ante evaluations as carried out in the previous sections of this report. In addition to what has been already reported, we found it useful to carry out an additional comparison between the “measures” (in terms of their financial allocations) and the “needs” (as they have been assessed under theme 1), in light of the low level of comparability at European level of some of the information included in the different programmes and ex ante evaluations (e.g. in terms of quantified target levels, impact indicators etc.). In other words, this analysis has to be seen in close relationship with the findings related to the previous sections of this reports, it represents an attempt to “going beyond” the findings included in there. However, the following methodological limitations have to be considered when looking at this analysis:

- The link between measures and needs – although based upon the intervention logics of each measure – have in its final step been based upon the expert judgement of the analysts. As the intervention logic of the measures (as specified in the single measure fiches in the CMEF – see Guidance Note E) only refer to the objectives and end with the overall objectives per Axis, the final analytical step between these objectives and

the needs (as listed in the SWOT analyses of the RD programmes) had to be conducted by the analysts themselves. We mended this bias by doing two analytical calculations in each step of the quantitative analysis, allowing for ...

- only one need to be addressed per measure (following strictly the intervention logic).
- several needs, which were logically connected, to be addressed per measure, without weighting the logical links among each other.

- The use of budget allocation per measure as equivalent for policy preferences (aka weights) could certainly be contested (the problem of historical budgetary obligations, the different amounts necessary for the different purposes [e.g. hardware investments vs. services] are aspects, which may produce biases). On the other hand the budget allocations are the only “revealed preferences”³⁴ from RD programmes, which are available in an acceptable and computable form. It has to be pointed out once more, that the intention of this analytical step was a cross-check on the findings of the ex-ante reports. Therefore the use of the primary information on the research question as provided in the EA reports was not possible.
- The systemic borders of the possible effects of measures: the findings – as pointed out above – show a clear concentration of means/measures on a limited number of needs, which is caused by the concentration of RD programme budgets on a limited number of measures per Axis (as described under Topic 3.2. above). This does of course not mean that there will be no effects on other needs at all. The individual effect of measures onto needs – not directly addressed – could not be depicted by our analysis to the full extent. This means, that it is to be assumed that, although needs (like “biodiversity loss” or “brain drain from rural areas”) are not directly tackled by RD programmes (as depicted in the quantitative analysis), there are certainly indirect effects of the measures applied on those needs.

Critical points/innovations

A point for discussion is to understand how the “balance” was established. The Region *Abruzzo* has used the following criteria of division of the resources: coherence with the global objectives and the proposed measures; learning from programme 2000-2006; number of potential beneficiaries; average costs of the investments to be realised. In *Thüringen*, the ex-ante considered that the process to develop the priority list was transparent and meaningful. In particular the joint and national political development objectives, current evaluation results and financial policy basic conditions were considered appropriate. In *Poland*, the ex-ante report states that the balance between axes is generally correct, although the early versions of the

³⁴ To be understood as judgement on the relative importance of the means in order to pursue a given objective/need

programmes (on which the ex ante was applied) had lower amounts allocated to diversification and micro-enterprise measures than in the final version.

At which level should the “balance” be established? Is it just a menu of Measures, assessed together with financial allocations, or is it to be established at the level of the Axis? In Hamburg, the assessment of the balance was done between the measures and not between the axes. On the contrary, in Navarra, the analysis of the capacity of the different measures to affect the needs and driving forces identified and the proportion of resources devoted to these measures is developed in details. All measures in the Rural development programmes are said to be justified as they are all related to the needs detected in the Regional diagnosis and in the SWOT analysis. An interesting section on the relationship between resources, needs and beneficiaries, says however that the financial allocation of resources does not correspond with the importance of the measures in affecting needs. In Cataluña and in Aragon, the ex ante provides a table showing the coherence between the measures and identified needs per axis, and establishing the relationship between them. In Andalucía, we found no information on whether the importance given to each measure corresponds to the size of the problems analysed. The same comment is made on the programme of the Basque Country.

What is a “balance”? How to assess “mutually reinforcing interactions”? In *Sweden*, the evaluator points out that there are at least three different ways to describe the balance. The allocation of funds between the axis and Measures could be led more by how the allocation should be due to external constraints, or it could be judged from the possibilities the measures have to meet problems identified; the balance could also be discussed from a geographical point of view, some measures could be more effective when directed to the areas where they are the most needed.

This leads to a key discussion on the opposition between “funding driven” and “needs led” approaches to the allocation of resources, which correspond to the opposition between the former “measure led” approach and the new “objective led” approach to rural development which is put forward by the Regulation and the CMEF. We consider that this new approach is not yet fully appropriated by all the Member States, nor by all the evaluators (*Northern Ireland, Galicia, Cyprus*). Despite the methodological recommendations, it seems that in some cases the programming process is still primarily driven by the allocation of funds among a pre-established list of measures, the choice of the latter not being based on clear strategic priorities. There are several examples of this opposition:

- In *Northern Ireland*, the ex ante finds that the balance of funding across the programme with the 80% allocation to Axis 2 is not consistent with the identified objectives which are largely socio economic. The ex ante expresses concerns based on evaluation evidence that the proposed programme is funding driven rather than needs led and that this drives the allocation to Axis 2 and the associated schemes proposed.

- In *Galicia*, the evaluator claims that, given the overall objective of creating strong and sustainable rural areas and the maintenance of the population, it is hard to see how such a high proportion of expenditure (50%) in axis 1 can be justified.
- In *Cyprus*, the ex-ante evaluation considers that the distribution of sources meets the objectives of the programme. However, this does not seem justified since Axis 1 (44,0%) and Axis 2 (44,2%) are concentrating a very high proportion of the resources. This weight is not justified neither in the analysis of the current situation, nor in the strategy of the programme, although this point is not picked up by the ex ante.

Contrasting with this view are Rural development programmes that highlight the fact that the financial allocation to Measures in the Rural development programmes is only a partial way of assessing if the needs are properly covered. Other instruments will be used to reach the aims of the National Strategy Plans and these are not accounted for here. In *Hessen*, for example, national funding will provide another 25 MEUR of resources, and a separate programme for flood prevention will also contribute to the aims of the strategy.

Another important issue to be considered is the role that financial commitments that were made under the former programming period play in the choice of measures. This is particular evident with respect to measures such as early retirement, afforestation measures, and agro-environmental measures.

For example, in *Lombardia*, agro-environmental payments and first afforestation of agricultural lands receive 38% of the total funding for the programme, which can be attributed the continuation of the respective schemes started in the previous programming period. A similar situation can be found in *Nordrhein-Westfalen*, with respect to Axis 2 measures (in particular agro-environmental measures and nature conservation schemes). In *Wales*, only 17% of total EU funding is not already taken up by existing commitments. In *Scotland*, the ex ante explains that the implementation of the new Scottish Rural development programmes is largely governed by the need to fit the spending to the axes and the need to meet ongoing commitments.

As an example of innovative approach to assessing the balance of the measures, in *Calabria* the ex-ante provides a very detailed and remarkable assessment of each measure, discussing degree of operational and technical complexity; capacity to reach out to target groups; consistency with expected results and outcome, and judging the validity of the causal chain linking interventions to expected results

Completeness/Information gaps

With a few exception (*Flanders, Poland, Malta, the Netherlands, Estonia*, etc.), this topic is treated in all the ex ante evaluations. The National Strategy Plans and Rural development programmes were used to identify the needs and strategic objectives.

Conclusions

In general, the ex ante evaluations conclude that the balance between Measures is well fitted with the objectives. Some imbalances are justified by clear strategic choices made in favour of the agriculture or the environment, although in some cases these choices are criticised by the ex ante evaluators.

In terms of programming “culture” the findings point at the fact, that overall a “funding driven” approach in programming prevails. The shift to an Objective-led approach to programming will still require capacity-building actions directed towards the programming authorities and the evaluation community in the Member States. Still it has to be accounted for that the new CMEF and strategic approach of RD policy introduces some new elements, for which a smooth transition is ongoing. An abrupt change from one approach to the other is therefore hardly possible.

The overall correspondence between needs and measures is to be observed in a satisfactory way. Still some critical remarks have to be taken into consideration:

The findings in terms of concentration of budget allocations to measures as well as the quantitative cross-check as for the level of coherence between measures applied and objectives pursued and needs addressed shed some doubts on the reliability of the overall positive findings of the ex-ante evaluation reports. Future evaluations will have to prove the real level of correspondence between measures applied and identified needs in rural areas.

Thematic Conclusion Theme 3: Measures

Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Ways and extent to which lessons learned from previous programming periods have been taken into account in designing the programmes;– Main measures applied to in view of achieving the programmes' objectives;– Overall assessment of the balance among the measure applied in view of objectives pursued.
What was expected	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Evidence that programming authorities have used experiences of previous programming periods constructively when setting up their programmes.– Evidence of the balance of the measures applied with respect to the objectives pursued.
What has worked well	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Lessons from the previous funding periods were taken into account (although to a varying extent) and are generally reported in a highly detailed way.– Overall, in terms of measures applied, the MS took the opportunity of designing tailor made RD programmes for achieving their needs/objectives. All four Axes of RD programmes have been addressed.– Thus the balance between measures is well fitted with the objectives. Some imbalances are justified by clear strategic choices made in favour of the agriculture or the environment.– RD programmes all over Europe have targeted their measures at objectives corresponding to the regional needs of rural areas, but have tended to do so with a strong emphasis on a limited number of measures.
What did not work and why	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The way in which lessons learned have been integrated into the programmes is not always thoroughly developed, even less so the description of those lessons that have <i>not</i> been considered.– A relatively high concentration of budget allocation on a limited number of measures has been observed. In our eyes this is not always justified in terms of the respective strategies of the programmes and objectives to be pursued.– We consider that the new, objective-led approach is not yet fully appropriated by all the Members States, and by all the evaluators. However, this can be seen as a result of the new approach to programming introduced for the current period, whose new elements still need to be fully appropriated by programming authorities and evaluators.
Elements to be further improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– In many cases, programmers concentrate on what they can achieve with the programme rather than on needs, driving forces and causes of disparities that fall outside the scope of agriculture/forestry (i.e. needs which follow the idea of "Rural Development" in a wider sense – e.g. integrated economic development in rural areas).– Especially the objective of RD programmes "Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of economic activity" (as underlying Axis 3) would imply a cross cutting approach in rural development, which to our mind is to be detected in the relative under representation of Axis 3 and 4 in the budget allocation of the RD programmes
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Measures of axes 3 & 4 should play a greater role in the allocation of funds among measures.

4.4 Theme 4 – Impacts

4.4.1 Topic 4.1 – Main expected impacts at EU level of the measures to be applied (social, economic and environmental)

Rationale

Article 16 (b) of Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 specifies that each rural development programme *shall include a justification of the priorities chosen having regard to the Community strategic guidelines and the national strategy plan, as well as the expected impact according to the ex ante evaluation.* Article 85 of the same Regulation requires the ex ante evaluations *to identify and appraise [...] the quantified targets particularly in terms of impact in relation to the baseline situation.*

The CMEF foresees seven Common Impact Indicators to assess the contribution of RD programmes to the EU priorities for Rural Development: Economic growth, Employment creation, Labour productivity, Reversing Biodiversity decline, Maintenance of high nature value farmland and forestry, Improvement in water quality and Contribution to combating climate change.

The Handbook on the CMEF specifies that ex ante evaluation has to *assess expected impacts of measures against baselines; in this respect ex-ante evaluation should pay particular attention to the verifiability of the impacts of the measures concerned* (– Guidance document C: ex evaluation guidelines including SEA).

In this section, we are going to assess the expected impacts of delivering EARDF support in rural areas, as they are presented in the ex ante evaluations, with respect to social, economic and environmental parameters.

Key terms

Baseline indicators; ex ante evaluation; impact indicators; learning effect; multiplier effect; result

Main findings

Impacts are usually described in terms of effects on rural areas, including infrastructure, cultural heritage, transport, services (culture, tourism, health), employment, biodiversity, land, water, climate. Social, economic and environmental aspects are embodied in these amenities. In some cases, impacts are expressed in terms of rural population, looking at demographic trends, either by reducing outward migration and attracting more inhabitants (*France, Finland, Asturias*) or by dealing with inward migrations from urban areas (*Basque country*).

Social impacts are expected to be positive under Axis 3, mostly through job creation outside agriculture, with a high intensity of positive impacts under measure 311 and 312³⁵ (*Malta, Hamburg, Poland*), although sometimes compromised by the scale of budget allocation (*England*). Rural development programmes measures under Axis 1 are expected to maintain agricultural employment with a moderate impact on growth. The positive impact on social capital is highlighted in *Finland, Slovakia* and *Czech Republic* and on quality of life in several Rural development programmes (*Sweden, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Saxonia Anhalt, Calabria*), although some ex ante evaluations acknowledge the difficulty of setting impact targets on quality of life issues (*Ireland*).

Economic impacts are very prudently expressed, mostly in niche markets (high quality products) or through the increase of labour productivity – although there are great differences to be found according to regions (for *Estonia* and *Lithuania*, EARDF represents a significant contribution to their rural economy, “*the non-application of the Rural development programmes measures would be catastrophic to the countryside*”). Impacts of Rural development programmes measures on regional economies will be reduced by the decrease of agriculture³⁶ (*Galicia*), and the overall effect is likely to be small (*Navarra*).

Environmental impacts are clearly expressed, either in SEA reports or in ex ante evaluations, with positive repercussions on biodiversity and water quality, less clearly on land use and climate.

Some expected impacts are crosscutting social, economic and environmental impacts. These are for example:

- Forestry is considered either as an economic asset (bio-energy) or as an environmental asset (low carbon).
- Agro-environmental measures under Axis 2 bring along controversial expectations. By increasing rural amenities' ecological value, the Community goals of economic growth and higher occupation become secondary. However, some Rural development programmes clearly mention that these measures can prevent loss of farm income by protecting environmental assets, stabilise farm income (in LFA it might even increase it), and develop services related to the environment such as eco-tourism (*Poland, Slovenia, Cataluña*).
- Organic farming is expected to have positive social, economic and environmental impacts but this only appears in some Rural development programmes (*Italy, Lithuania, Pais Vasco, Rheinland-Pfalz, Schleswig-Holstein*).

³⁵ 311: Encouragement of tourism activities; 312: Support for the creation and development of micro-enterprises

³⁶ To be understood as reduction of the number of beneficiaries in the area.

Some ex ante evaluations adopt different types of input-output models of analysis in order to quantify impacts on the rural economy, providing precise figures in terms of expected growth in labour, economic sector or issues such as water management or greenhouse gas emissions (*all Italian and Spanish Rural development programmes, some German Rural development programmes, Wallonie, Czech Republic, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia, Malta, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Northern Ireland*) (see the tables for examples from Italy in annex to topic 4.1 below).

Critical points/innovations

Impacts should be seen in relation with programmes' strategy objectives (i.e. the extent to which the programme is expected to reach its strategy objectives). The treatment of evaluation topics under Theme 4 should be closely linked, if not merged, with the treatment of evaluation topics under Theme 2 (Objectives).

Most of the funding is allocated to the safeguard or improvement of labour productivity in the farming and forestry sectors.

The seven impact indicators are supposed to "*reflect explicitly objectives established by the European Council and the Strategic Guidelines for rural development. The impact of the programme as a whole should be assessed against these seven indicators to take into account the full contribution of all axes of the programme.*"³⁷ However, when looking at the ex ante evaluation reports, we can observe that the effects of the different measures are not always translated into clearly quantified impacts at programme level. Thus, target levels for the impact indicators are rarely quantified. This can be due to the difficulty to sum up the multiple effects of the single measures into overall impacts at programme level, and/or to the problems linked with possible diverging effects of some measures with respect to different types of impacts (e.g. trade off between environmental and economic impacts). In addition, impacts are generally not explicitly identified in relation to the social, economic and environmental domains, and therefore this attribution has to be indirectly inferred.

Most ex ante evaluations provide only a qualitative estimate of expected impacts at programme level, although quantitative values for output and result indicators are provided under each measure of the Rural development programmes. In several cases (*Niedersachsen-Bremen, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Hamburg, Hessen, Valencia, Navarra, La Rioja, Cataluña, Abruzzo, Portugal, Slovenia*), there is confusion between social, economic and environmental impacts.

³⁷ Guidance Note A of the Handbook on the CMEF, p.4.

Completeness/gaps

Gender equality is generally not mentioned as an expected impact, except for *Finland, Bulgaria and Pais Vasco*, although equal opportunities are generally considered to have been ensured (see topic 5.2).

The inclusion of a quantification of target levels ranges from very precise definition (all Italian regions) to total absence (e.g. *Estonia*, where we find a good set of target values for the expected results, but none on the expected impact, due to the lack of baseline measures). In most cases, quantitative values for output and result indicators are provided under each measure in the Rural development programmes, but no quantification of impact is found.

Cluster-specific findings

It is not possible to identify cluster-specific findings for topics under theme 4.

Conclusions

Overall, positive environmental, social, and economic impacts are expected to be obtained at programme level through the implementation of rural development measures. Environmental effects are the most clearly expressed (in both the ex ante reports and in the SEA reports), with particular emphasis on biodiversity and water quality issues. Positive social impacts are mostly expected in relation to the implementation of axis 3 measures, whereas economic results are more prudently expressed, and expected to appear mostly in niche markets (high quality products) or through the increase of labour productivity.

Expected impacts are considered as targeted to the specific regional needs in terms of, for example, restoring, preserving or developing quality of life, labour productivity, employment opportunities and a sustainable use of the resources of the countryside.

Target levels related to impacts at programme level are rarely quantified (with notably exceptions, e.g. Italian regions), whereas most of the ex ante evaluations provide a qualitative assessment of expected impacts. In addition, in those cases where impact indicators are quantified, their comparability at European level is limited by the different methodological approaches followed for their quantification.

Annex to Topic 4.1

Impact indicator economic growth for selected Italian programmes

Country CODE	Programme	No	Common Impact Indicator	Measurement	Target value
IT	Molise	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS	12.95
IT	Basilicata	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS (euro)	1,020,000.00
IT	Emilia Romagna	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS	83.70
IT	Campania	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS	248.00
IT	Valle dAosta	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS	16.41
IT	Marche	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS	10.00
IT	Trento	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS (meuro)	728.70
IT	Piemonte	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS	27.90
IT	Veneto	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS (Meuro)	126.40
IT	Abruzzo	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS	268.90
IT	Puglia	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS	94.26
IT	Bolzano	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS (Me)	1.20
IT	Calabria	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS (euro)	61,773,249.00
IT	Friuli V.G.	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS (euro)	66.90
IT	Toscana	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS	1.8%
IT	Lazio	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS	81,119,148.00
IT	Liguria	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS	31.00
IT	Lombardia	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS	n.a.
IT	Sardegna	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS	49,213,650.00
IT	Sicilia	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS	309,247,602.00
IT	Umbria	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS	1,088.50
IT	Veneto	1	Economic growth	Net additional value added expressed in PPS (meuro)	126.40

Impact indicator employment creation for selected Italian programmes

Country CODE	Programme	No	Common Impact Indicator	Measurement	Target value
IT	Molise	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	264.00
IT	Basilicata	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	19,500.00
IT	Emilia Romagna	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	1905.00
IT	Campania	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	15778.00
IT	Valle d'Aosta	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	411.20
IT	Marche	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	7500.00
IT	Trento	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	50.00
IT	Piemonte	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	2251.00
IT	Veneto	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	2246.00
IT	Abruzzo	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	-2100.00
IT	Puglia	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	1908.00
IT	Bolzano	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	0
IT	Calabria	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	1747.00
IT	Friuli V.G.	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	440.00 (+1,368.00)
IT	Toscana	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	n.a.
IT	Lazio	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	1,565.00
IT	Liguria	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	180.00
IT	Lombardia	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	n,a,
IT	Sardegna	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	1,466.00
IT	Sicilia	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	3,457.00
IT	Umbria	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	31.30
IT	Veneto	2	Employment creation	Net additional full-time equivalent jobs created	2,246.00

4.4.2 Topic 4.2 – Other possible impacts and/or unintended effects

Rationale

This topic does not explicitly reflect any specific task of the ex ante evaluation as referred to in Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005. However, a reference to this topic is included into the CMEF Guidance document on ex ante evaluation³⁸. This requirement can be seen as a standard task for ex ante evaluators, who should critically look at the overall balance between the different expected impacts of the programmes, including possible impacts not directly mentioned in the programming documents, unintended effects and/or possible conflicts between different impacts. Therefore the outcomes of this topic have to be read in close relation with those of topic 4.1.

Key terms

Baseline indicators; strategic environmental assessment (SEA); impact indicators; learning effect; multiplier effect; result

Main findings

The most recurrent observation of ex ante evaluators is that farming support under Axis 1 may have unintended effects on the preservation of biodiversity as supported under Axis 2, and *vice versa*. For instance, the construction of wind farms and hydropower schemes is quoted with negative impacts in the *Scottish SEA*. The reduction of nitrate surplus could decrease the unitary return of productivity for agricultural land (*Emilia-Romagna*).

Other recurrent issues include the following:

- Employment: the potential negative effects of occupational safety of the farming sector may prevent employment growth (more job preservation than job creation).
- Economy: rural diversification may critically increase transport and traffic, creating new negative effects on the environment (*Northern Ireland*). The increase of commercial transactions (investments, machinery, services) might as well have positive impacts on other sectors of the economy, beyond the concerned area (*Austria*).
- Environment: support to the tourist sector may engender negative impacts on nature conservation.

³⁸ Guidance note C – ex ante evaluation guidelines including SEA, indicative outline of an ex ante evaluation report, page 12.

Specific issues are highlighted by some Rural development programmes and ex ante evaluations:

- *Northern Ireland and Slovakia*: support for large scale food processors may increase imports instead of securing local productivity;
- *Ireland*: controversy on the effectiveness of early retirement and installation aid schemes;
- *France*: the training measure may not reach the expected impact as there is no income compensation for attending courses;
- *France*: measures aiming at compensating natural handicaps in non-mountainous areas may prove to be inefficient.

Critical points/innovations

*"Impacts should contribute to reaching the overall objectives of the programme"*³⁹. Despite this clear statement, some confusion between expected impacts (including unintended impacts and potential conflicts between them) and policy objectives (including national priorities, operational goals and coherence between them) makes the consolidation and synthesis of comments made by our geographical experts quite difficult. The treatment of evaluation topics under Theme 4 should be closely linked with the treatment of evaluation topics under Theme 2 (Objectives).

Completeness/gaps

Around 60% of the ex ante evaluations make reference to the topic, although this was not a formal requirement of Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005.

Cluster-specific findings

It is not possible to identify cluster-specific findings for topics under theme 4.

Conclusions

Overall, other impacts and unintended effects of rural development programmes are seen as irrelevant by the ex ante evaluators, although there is a general concern that farming support under Axis 1 may have unintended effects on the preservation of biodiversity as supported under Axis 2, and *vice versa*.

³⁹ Handbook on CMEF, chapter 1.2

4.4.3 Topic 4.3 – Potential conflicts between different impacts

Rationale

This topic does not explicitly reflect any specific task of the ex ante evaluation as referred to in Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005. However, a reference to this topic is included into the CMEF Guidance document on ex ante evaluation⁴⁰. This requirement can be seen as a standard task for ex ante evaluators, who should critically look at the overall balance between the different expected impacts of the programmes, including possible impacts not directly mentioned in the programming documents, unintended effects and/or possible conflicts between different impacts. Therefore the outcomes of this topic have to be read in close relation with those of topic 4.1

Key terms

Impact indicators; result

Main findings

In line with the considerations developed within the previous topic, , potential conflicts between environmental preservation and economic growth seem to represent the major concern for ex ante evaluators, although many Ex ante evaluations suggest that strategic adjustments and corrective actions can be found for each situation. Many ex ante evaluations worry about the fact that measures supporting the increase of competitiveness and productivity could have negative impact on environment and landscape. For example, this could be the case of water quality vs. irrigation measures, soil protection vs. agro-forestry measures, tourism development vs. environment preservation. In *Austria*, the Rural development programmes underlines that support for environmentally friendly farming models may cause higher costs and diminish the competitiveness of enterprises.

Some specific concerns are expressed in the Rural development programmes:

- *Ireland*: potential conflict between the early retirement scheme and the forestry programme;
- *Baden Württemberg* and *Northern Ireland*: conflict between the concentration of investment-related measures and support to less favoured areas or agro-environmental measures;
- *Northern Ireland*: support to existing farmers displacing new entrants;
- *Czech Republic*: the lack of financial resources are feared to be a major barrier for small farms and villages to make use of the programme;

⁴⁰ Guidance note C – ex ante evaluation guidelines including SEA, indicative outline of an ex ante evaluation report, page 12.

- *Latvia*: area payments may be capitalised in land prices thus reducing competitiveness of agricultural businesses;
- *Slovakia*: increasing regional disparities.

Critical points/innovations

Potential conflicts between environmental preservation and economic growth are mentioned.

Completeness/gaps

Around 60% of ex ante evaluations or Rural development programmes address this topic, although this was not a formal requirement of Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005.

Cluster-specific findings

It is not possible to identify cluster-specific findings for topics under theme 4.

Conclusions

Coherence between the various impacts induced by the Rural development programmes seems to be perceived as satisfactory, apart from the general worry about potential conflicts between environmental and economic goals.

4.4.4 Topic 4.4 – Main categories of stakeholders who are (positively or negatively) affected by the programmes

Rationale

There is no particular mention of “stakeholder” in Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, nor in Regulation 1974/2006. The Glossary of the Handbook on the CMEF does not mention “stakeholder” either. The term is only mentioned in the guidance Note C on ex ante evaluation, in particular in the section presenting the indicative outline of the ex ante evaluation reports. We have therefore interpreted this topic by considering that stakeholders are embodied in the partnership dimension of delivering rural development policy.

Three articles in Regulation 1698/2005 refer to the partnership:

- Article 6, which refers to the partnership between the Commission and the Member State for the programming exercise. It includes all the authorities and bodies designated by the Member States under national rules and practices, including public authorities, the economic and social partners and any other appropriate non-governmental organisations. This partnership must be involved in the preparation and monitoring of

the national strategy plan and in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the rural development programmes.

- Article 16, which requires that each rural development programme shall include the designation of the partners referred to in Article 6 and the results of the consultations of the partners.
- Article 62, which defines the local partnership in charge of the Leader approach, which must include representatives of partners from the various locally, based socio-economic sectors in the territory concerned.

On the basis of the above, we have considered the term "stakeholder" as referring to each of the above-mentioned identified categories of "stakeholders". In the following chapters we have therefore assessed the positive and/or negative effects of RD programmes on these "stakeholders", as depicted in the ex ante evaluation reports.

Key terms

Balanced representation of local interests; impact indicators; integrated approach; LEADER; partnership approach; stakeholder

Main findings

Reviewing the findings of ex ante evaluations, there seems to be a variety of interpretations on what the term "stakeholder" means. This is mostly due to the fact that the term is not mentioned in the Regulations, leading managing authorities and evaluators to extrapolate in two ways:

- Stakeholders are understood as the beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries. In most of the programming documents, there is no specific distinction between stakeholders and beneficiaries, which makes this evaluation topic somehow redundant with Theme 1.5: "Possible other problems/beneficiaries not addressed by the implementation of the programmes". In this case, the topic is addressing the needs on the demand side (benefiting from public policy).
- Stakeholders refer to the partnership as per Article 6 of EC Reg. 1698/2005, whereby EAFRD assistance shall be implemented through close consultations with appropriate partners. The same partners are also taking part in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the rural development programmes. In this case, the topic is addressing the representation of local interests on the supply side (delivering public policy). This interpretation is retained in a few programme areas (*Poland, Cyprus, France, Latvia, Romania, England*).

The National Rural Network is sometimes mentioned as the stakeholders' support structure, although it is probably referring more to the "beneficiaries" interpretation (*Netherlands, Estonia, Hungary, Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, England*).

The sole categories mentioned as being negatively affected are County administrative boards, consultants, government agencies, higher education institutions, voluntary stakeholders (*Sweden*), and new entrants to farming (*Northern Ireland*).

Critical points/innovations

The difficulty in interpreting the term “stakeholder” might be related to a lack of tradition of managing support schemes with other (mostly funding) partners, as RD programmes are in most of the cases stand alone territorial programmes with hardly any strategic links to parallel existing funding in the same region (e.g. structural funds).

The programming exercise should be undertaken through consultations with stakeholders at different stages (SWOT analysis, definition of the main objectives, realisation of the Strategic Environmental Assessment, etc.). However, there is little reference to these consultations in the synthesis received from our geographical experts, although this might be due to a misinterpretation of the topic.

Completeness/gaps

The lack of consistency in interpreting the evaluation topic leads to a lot of repetitive comments, closely related to the needs of beneficiaries (Themes 1.4 and 1.5).

Cluster-specific findings

It is not possible to identify cluster-specific findings for topics under theme 4.

Conclusions

Stakeholders are interpreted as either on the demand side (beneficiaries) or the supply side (delivering public policy). This raises the question about a clear definition of the roles to be played by a balanced representation of local interests for an efficient implementation of the programmes. Consultation of stakeholders is not covered by the synthesis, although it certainly took place.

Overall, relevant negative effects on certain categories of stakeholders do not seem to appear in the majority of the programmes, although these are sporadically mentioned in some regions.

Thematic Conclusion Theme 4: Impacts

Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Main expected impacts at EU level of the measures to be applied– Other possible impacts and/or unintended effects– Potential conflicts between different impacts– Main categories of stakeholders who are affected by the programmes
What was expected	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– All programmes should justify their priorities with regard to the national strategies and to the Community strategic guidelines and set quantified targets for impact indicators to be measured against the baseline situation.
What has worked well	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Overall, expected impacts of the Rural development programmes are reported to be overall positive with respect to environmental, social, and (in a less prominent way) economic achievements. Ex ante evaluations have identified impact targets for restoring, preserving or developing quality of life, labour productivity, employment opportunities and a sustainable use of the combined resources of the countryside, and have considered these impacts as coherent with the rural development problems specific to each Member States or region. The Rural development programmes. Combined effects, e.g. on biodiversity or the rural area's social capital, are frequently mentioned. A majority of ex ante evaluations have also addressed topics not explicitly required by Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, such as exploring unintended effects and potential conflicts between impacts.
What did not work and why	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– As the impact indicators relate to the programme as a whole, but are separately attributed to the intervention logics of each axis, problems in attributing impacts to specific measures and in dealing with possible trade-offs between the impacts of different measures (of different axes) have appeared. Moreover, the fragmentary quantification of target levels does not allow for a European-wide aggregation.– The impact on specific stakeholders was dealt with in inhomogeneous ways, due to the lack of a clear common understanding of this term.
Elements to be further improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Most probably it will not be possible to aggregate and compare quantitative targets for Rural development programmes impacts at European level. Commonly shared qualitative approaches to impact assessment (and for the assessment of possible trade-offs between impacts of specific measures) could represent a valid approach for overcoming this problem. The term "stakeholders" should also be better specified.
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– As part of the development of the Handbook on the CMEF, the common European approach to the assessment of impacts as developed in Guidance document A – Choice and use of indicators – should be further clarified, taking into account the diversity of national/regional contexts. The promotion of a few common mainly qualitative indicators could also be envisaged.

4.5 Theme 5 – Added Value of Community Involvement

4.5.1 Topic 5.1 – Overall assessment of the extent to which subsidiarity and proportionality have been taken into account in the programmes

Rationale

In its “Guidelines for the Ex Ante Evaluations” (Guidance note C of the Handbook to the CMEF) the Commission refers to Article 85 of Council Regulation 1698/2005 requiring “*to identify and appraise the Community value-added*” of the programme. The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality refer to Article 5 of the Treaty establishing the European Community and are established in Protocole 30 (1997) annexed to the Treaty. The two principles are closely bound together.

- The principle of proportionality regulates the exercise of powers by the European Union, seeking to set within specified bounds the action taken by its institutions. Under this rule, their involvement must be limited to what is necessary to achieve the objectives of the Treaties. In other words, the extent of the action must be in keeping with the aim pursued. When various forms of intervention are available to the Union, it must, where the effect is the same, opt for the approach which leaves the greatest freedom to the Member States and individuals.
- The principle of subsidiarity is intended to ensure that decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen and that constant checks are made as to whether action at Community level is justified in the light of the possibilities available at national, regional or local level.

Strongly linked to those principles is the principle of additionality (according to Art. 15 of the General Regulation for the Structural Funds, EC 1083/2006), which means that the funds of the European Community should not replace, but be an addition to national regional policy funds.

Key terms

Additionality principle, bottom-up approach, proportionality principle, subsidiarity principle, vertical partnership.

Main findings

The treatment of this question varies from copiously espousing the principles at an abstract level, without delivering the detailed information (*Bulgaria, Madeira*) until describing the interrelationships between the involved authorities, the decision criteria and the coordination mechanisms in detail, without explicitly mentioning the subsidiarity challenge (*Abruzzo*).

In rare cases the evaluators expand their immediate subject, the national or regional programme, and make observations on the European programme architecture as a whole. The *Swedish* evaluators admonish that member states and regions should have more freedom to determine the allocation of funds in accordance with each country's needs.

The *Finnish* evaluators regard the delegation of tasks to local and regional entities as an opportunity to comply with the principles, as the financing decisions are taken more closely to the final beneficiaries. Previous experiences of task delegation to the small scale (e.g. mountain communities in Italian regions) have reportedly shown that programme delivery used to be easier and quicker than in the opposite case. However plausible that is, the evaluators seek evidence by describing the specific set up of the decentralised service delivery. However, in a few cases this evidence is missing (*Poland*), or, more frequently, the mechanisms of delivery do not seem to be sufficiently operationalised (*Andalucía, País Vasco, Molise, Sicilia, England*).

There are examples of thoroughly described task distribution and delegation (*Hessen, Niedersachsen-Bremen, Rheinland-Pfalz, Schleswig-Holstein, Thüringen, Asturias, Martinique, Emilia-Romagna, Lombardia, Sardegna, Wales*). In quite a number of regions, the responsibilities for implementation are widespread: in *Murcia*, programme implementation is entrusted to four General Directorates, in *Castilla La Mancha* even to seven different government bodies plus the LAGs. This programme is said to be carried out on the basis of a large consensus within the region, although it would be too early to imply a causal interrelationship between the two findings.

Small states or regions (*Madrid*) have a "natural" advantage in fine-tuning the programme delivery due to short feedback cycles – provided there is a culture of feedback (*Åland*).

Subsidiarity needs vertical (central-regional-local) coordination. Corresponding mechanisms are reported from *Campania* and *Scotland* where a "network of project assessment committees is set up". Vertical coordination mechanisms are complemented by horizontal coordination mechanisms at local level (e.g. the "Regionalmanagement" agencies in *Austria*), with the LAGs playing a growing part herein (*Austria, Denmark, Basilicata, Lazio, Slovakia*). There are expectations that the LAGs may "tailor" axis 3 measures to the territorial needs.

Some evaluators claim that communication plays an important role in bringing the principles to life (which has been taken into account in *Piemonte*). The same goes for capacity building: institutional actors have to be prepared, sensibilized and trained in order to cope with public finance.

The rural development networks integrate the principles in various ways. The network unit in *Germany* represents a solution of central steerance, whereas *Italy* deconcentrates some of the tasks to "regional task forces" which are composed of national network employees and regional or provincial officers.

A few evaluators expand their perception of proportionality and subsidiarity from the institutional realm to the civil society. The *Czech* programme has involved private and civic actors at all levels of decision making in the programming phase.

The EU added value of funding is specifically appreciated, where “*the support of rural areas would be extremely difficult*” (*Greece*). In contrast to this, the ex ante evaluation in *Murcia* analyses subsidiarity in terms of the European financial contribution to the regional budget, coming to the conclusion that it is low.

In *Northern Ireland*, there will be new regional governance arrangements from 2009 on. In *Estonia*, there is a decentralisation process going on which brings along a stepwise increase of practised subsidiarity from one period to another. In *Hungary*, local and regional development organisations are set up at micro-regional level for implementing Axis 3 measures, and Local Action Groups are formed according to socio-economic criteria for implementing Axis 4. The principles are also more emphasized in governance environments in which stakeholder participation has a long standing tradition (*Denmark, Netherlands*), and less so, where this is not so much the case (*Romania*). Some of the above-mentioned member states use the opportunity for experimenting new ways of decentralised policy making, although the majority seeks to insert the required mechanisms into the existing device of multi-level governance.

Critical points/innovations

Smaller states or regions seem to pay less attention at emphasizing these aspects explicitly (*Cyprus, Saarland, La Rioja, Valencia, Corse, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovenia*), in contrast to larger member states (*France*) and regions in member states promoting an already high (*Italy*) or still expanding (*UK*) degree of regional autonomy. Governments in smaller regions regard the fact that they are managing the programme as “subsidiarity in action” (*Bolzano*).

In many states (regions) with marked federalist traditions, the arrangements seem quite complex or are not easily understandable for the external observer (*Vlaanderen*), and there are also signs of centralism at regional level⁴¹ (*Bayern, Baden-Württemberg*). Evaluators of German regions state that the more levels are involved in co-financing, the more difficult it becomes to assess the principle of additionality.

There is a need to better distinguish de-concentration from decentralisation and devolution. Sometimes the term decentralisation is used to pinpoint governance arrangements which could better be tagged as de-concentration. De-concentration means delegation of administrative (executive) powers (e.g. *Liguria*), but it does not mean the delegation of decision making power to sub-entities (which is called decentralisation). On the other hand, devolution involves the transfer of power to non-public actors in the context of regional governance (e.g. *Denmark*,

⁴¹ To be understood as subordination of regional arrangements under the federal regulations.

Castilla La Mancha, Lazio and Slovakia, where essential decision powers are delegated to LAGs).

Completeness/Information gaps

In general, the ex ante evaluations handled these principles less thoroughly than other aspects related to EU policies, such as the coherence with EU policies and objectives and the complementarities with other funds. The ex ante evaluations do not provide the full picture of how these aspects are covered in the national programming system. This can only be assessed while reading the ex ante evaluations and the Rural development programmes.

Cluster-specific findings

It is not possible to identify cluster-specific findings for topics under theme 5.

Conclusions

In general the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality are considered as respected, with subsidiarity more often referred to than proportionality. However in many cases the declared conformity is not underpinned by a thorough description of task distribution and coordination mechanisms. The diversity of governance environments in the EU27 makes it difficult to communicate this complex matter in concise reports.

In countries, which put decentralisation, deconcentration or devolution on the political agenda, the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity are more thoroughly looked upon than in others.

In general, the quality of reflection upon the two principles (proportionality and subsidiarity) doesn't seem to be sufficiently evolved in the ex ante evaluations.

The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality can be analysed with respect to three main aspects:

4.5.2 Topic 5.2 – Overall assessment of the coherence of the programmes with respect to Community objectives

Rationale

In its “Guidelines for the Ex Ante Evaluations” (Guidance note C of the Handbook to the CMEF) the Commission refers to Article 85 of Council Regulation 1698/2005 which requires “to identify and appraise the extent to which the Community’s priorities have been taken into account”. This mainly refers to the so-called Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas. The Community Strategic Guidelines (CSG) on Rural Development integrate these agendas into rural development policy, in particular in terms of:

- Knowledge transfer/Modernisation and innovation in the food chain/Priority sectors for investment in physical and human capital;
- Biodiversity and preservation of high nature value farming and forestry systems/Water/Climate change;
- Creation of employment opportunities;
- Governance/endogenous development potential.

However, account should also be taken of the overall balance between the first and second pillar of the CAP, as well as of other EU level strategies, such as the EU Organic Farming Action Plan (2004), the EU Strategy for Biofuels (2006), the EU Forestry Strategy (1998) and Action Plan (2006, updated 2007), the sixth Environmental Action Programme (2002-2012), and the horizontal objectives “equal opportunities” and “non-discrimination”, as well as economic, social and territorial cohesion.

Key terms

Complementarity and synergy of Structural Funds programmes, coherence, core objectives of rural development policy, strategy.

Main findings

In nearly all the EA, Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas seem to be duly taken into account, and are frequently referred to. Among the two, the Gothenburg agenda is addressed more often and more directly – given the relative weight of axis 2 – than the Lisbon agenda, as examples from *Czech Republic, Greece, Canarias, Extremadura and Netherlands* illustrate. The ex ante evaluation in *Sweden* considers some of the environmental goals even as quite ambitious. *Schleswig-Holstein* reportedly reinforced its environmental orientation since the last programming period.

The link between environmental quality and economic performance is sometimes well worked out (*Wales*). In *Austria*, the two objectives appear as one integrated set of goals, as well as the

ex ante evaluation in *Toscana* ascribes a double dividend (with regard to both the Lisbon and the Gothenburg agenda) to investments in product quality and safer work conditions.

As can be found in many programmes, but also in the ex ante evaluation of the Italian Network for rural development, the strongest link to the Lisbon agenda is realised in the domain of food chain and in vocational training, knowledge transfer and innovation, farmers being the primary, sometimes exclusive target audience. *Abruzzo* features a combination of support to young farmers and early retirement to foster innovation in agriculture. Together with *Extremadura* and *Slovenia* it puts ITC in the forefront for enhancing competitiveness and growth. *Lombardia* puts high weight on innovation, Research and Development investments and entrepreneurial development. Luxembourg pays much attention to job creation.

Especially concerning the Lisbon agenda, complementarity with Structural Funds programmes plays a major role. In *Friuli-Venezia-Giulia*, the Rural development programmes measures are complemented by training and technical support measures of Structural Funds programmes. In many countries (e.g. *Romania*), the energy theme is shared with Structural Funds programmes, in the attempt to create complementarities in combating climate change.

The coherence with community objectives is sometimes ascertained with a global statement (*Bulgaria, Estonia, Andalucía, Valencia, Portugal*). Where the ex ante evaluation goes more in depth, coherence is assessed either at the level of axes (*Wallonie, Sachsen*), or at the level of measures, using matrix tables (*Austria, Greece, Aosta, Basilicata, Calabria, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Sardegna and Trento*). In many ex ante evaluations and/or Rural development programmes there are matrix tables putting the measures in relation to the different Community priorities (*Aragón, Castilla-León, Galicia and La Rioja*). However, such tables need to be well explained and underpinned by evidence, which doesn't seem to be always the case (*England*).

Many programmes feature an assiduous and comprehensive, but often also quite mechanical reference to the equity and non-discrimination goals (e.g. in Germany). However, some German programmes address gender issues more thoroughly, emphasizing vocational training, information activities and diversification (Axes 1, 3 and 4) as instruments.

Territorial cohesion is addressed through investments in infrastructure and in public and private services (*Niedersachsen-Bremen*). The *Berlin-Brandenburg* programme addresses territorial cohesion by emphasizing the necessity to strengthen regional growth centres for mitigating demographic loss.

Luxembourg strongly refers to the “*European agricultural model*” which is otherwise seldom stressed. The coherence with the EU organic farming action plan is referred to in a number of programmes, such as *Vlaanderen*.

Critical points/innovations

In those cases where the assertion of overall coherence with broader Community objectives is not accompanied by further explanations, it is difficult to gauge the degree of this coherence. In some countries, where the same evaluator has carried out the ex ante evaluations of different programmes (e.g. of German Länder and Spanish regions), we have found that the issue is treated in a rather similar way, by recurring to “standard” and general assertions of coherence..

In the eyes of evaluators in *Cyprus* and *Asturias*, the rather limited budgetary endowment of critical Rural development programmes measures contradicts the assertion of coherence to Community objectives. The ex ante evaluation of *Nordrhein-Westfalen* states that its strong focus on targeted payments (Axis 2) would not really support employment in rural areas. Also, the continuation (with respect to previous programming period) of RD measures with a strong focus on farmers’ incomes and on their organisational structures (such as agricultural chambers) has sometimes been criticised as being insufficient in respect to the declared objectives, e.g. the quality of life and improved working conditions for the farming people (*France*). References to innovation and new technologies are sometimes deemed as insufficient (*Greece*) or vague (*Cyprus*).

The reference to Community goals in overseas territories raises doubts when the Community policy referred to is not implemented in the respective area. For example, there are no Natura 2000 areas in Guyane. Similar doubts concern the afforestation measure in this country whose UAA only covers 0,5% of the surface.

The *Irish* ex ante evaluation states that many measures proposed in Axis 2 have a counter-productive effect on Community objectives. Instead of reducing the intensity of production, the farmers would try to achieve margin profits on the markets. Thus the programme would fail to contribute to the Kyoto targets. In other words, there is indication that for some measures within RD programmes there might be a counterproductive effect in terms of overall impacts (especially in the field of environmental impacts).

Most of the gaps appear in respect to the territorial dimension (Axis 3). The evaluators in *Abruzzo* deplore the absence of references to important sectors, such as transport and health. Social cohesion is seldom stressed, with the exception of some positive examples such as *País Vasco*. However, in these cases, it can be expected that interventions in these sectors are ensured through other Community funds (an issue which has not been checked in the present synthesis). Therefore, what it is stated at the level of single programmes does not necessarily reflect the overall situation at territorial level.

In *Wallonie*, the ex ante evaluation admonishes the lack of emphasis on the governance aspect in axis 4, which should be made more coherent and be better integrated into the programme as whole.

Completeness/Information gaps

The coverage of this aspect in the ex ante evaluations seems good. However, it is difficult to assess the contribution of rural policy to social and territorial cohesion by just looking on the Rural development programmes and the related ex ante evaluations, since many measures (e.g. Axis 3) are complemented by ESF and ERDF measures. Only an in-depth analysis of the relevant documentation related to *all* the Community funds (ex ante evaluation, Rural development programmes, National Strategy Plans and SF programmes) could provide the real picture.

Cluster-specific findings

It is not possible to identify cluster-specific findings for topics under theme 5.

Conclusions

Overall, the issue of coherence with broader Community objectives has been considered by both programming authorities and ex ante evaluators, and it is generally seen by the ex ante evaluators as having been ensured.

The weight of measures lies on the environmental and sustainability goals of the Gothenburg agenda (most notably axis 2 measures), although both, the Lisbon and the Gothenburg agenda have been taken into account by the Rural development programmes programming authorities and by the ex ante evaluators to a high extent.

In some cases, the stated level of coherence does not seem to be sufficiently substantiated and qualified, which makes it difficult to assess the actual level of programmes coherence.

Besides the Lisbon and Gothenburg agenda, the other priorities of the EU have been taken into account to a variable extent, from general assertions of compliance (e.g. equal opportunities) to strong and thoroughly reflected references (Natura 2000 or the European agricultural model).

4.5.3 Topic 5.3 – Overall assessment of the level of complementarity, synergy and coherence of the programmes with other Community interventions (e.g. structural funds)

Rationale

In its “Guidelines for the Ex Ante Evaluations” (Guidance note C of the Handbook to the CMEF) the Commission refers to Article 85 of Council Regulation 1698/2005 which requires “to identify and appraise the Community value-added” of the programme. The “Indicative Outline of an Ex-Ante Evaluation Report” (point 7 of these guidelines) asks for the two issues of complementarities and synergies with other interventions to be analysed.

The two terms complementarity and synergy are vaguely synonymous, the first one emphasizing the boundaries (demarcation) and the mutual compatibleness of programmes, whereas the latter rather emphasizes the additional added value which derives from the coincident implementation of two or more programmes in one region (often expressed by the formula: “1+1=3”).

Key terms

Complementarity between actors/complementarity of actions, complementarity and synergy of structural funds programmes, demarcation, integrated approach.

Main findings

All in all, complementarities are emphasized more often than synergies. In some ex ante evaluations the term „(external) coherence“ is used synonymously (*Niedersachsen-Bremen*, *Açores*). Whereas complementarities are assessed by rather analytical approaches, synergies often appear in normative statements, as desirable outcomes of good governance.

In many programmes and ex ante evaluations, the concept of complementarity does not seem to have been concretely operationalized. In contrast with that, the ex ante evaluation of *Calabria* and *Toscana* stipulate that synergies and complementarities should be addressed in three dimensions: objectives, areas and beneficiaries. Consequently they provide an analysis according to these dimensions. The ex ante evaluations in *Canarias* and *Extremadura* analyse complementarities at the level of expected added value of Rural development programmes and other funds intervening in the region (1st pillar of CAP, EFF, Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund). *Castilla La Mancha* includes the national reform goals into the analysis. *Cantabria* analyses synergies between measures, valuing possible positive or negative effects of interactions.

Complementarity can also be assessed at different levels of decision making. *Veneto* analyses complementarity at national and regional level, looking closely at the National Strategy Plans as well as the Rural development programmes and the corresponding coordination instruments.

Some ex ante evaluations conceptualize the complementarity challenge as the double imperative to achieve a high level of integration in respect to the overarching objectives, and a far reaching complementarity between the different programmes at the same time. This requires a flexible management of interfaces and boundaries. Promising solutions for this balancing act are reported from a few programmes (*Hessen, Greece, Lombardia*).

Hence, at strategic level complementarity seems to be ensured (sometimes asserted by global statements of “total coherence”, such as in *Portugal*), apart from a few negative examples (EARDF and ERDF concerning axis 3 of the RDP in *Gouadeloupe*). However, the demarcation needs to be better defined at operational level in order to prevent double financing (*Bayern, Castilla-León, La Rioja, Navarra, Valencia, Ireland, Sweden*).

In general the ex ante evaluations make explicit reference to and demarcation from other EU programmes (and national schemes), sometimes with the help of a matrix table (*Austria*). Often this demarcation pattern is already embedded in the National Strategy Plans (*Hungary, Luxembourg*). Complementarities and synergies are referred to in respect to

- the contribution to overarching objectives (e.g. climate change in *Sachsen*; renewable energy promotion in *Marche*; NATURA 2000 and the LIFE programme in *Czech Republic, Andalucía* and *Netherlands*; diversification in *Cyprus*; rural-urban relationships in *Rheinland-Pfalz* and urban regeneration in *Murcia*);
- to the ambit of the Rural development programmes as compared to structural funds programmes.

Demarcation is critical in the realm of micro-enterprises. Sometimes the start-up assistance is attributed to the Rural development programmes, sometimes to the ESF (*Berlin-Brandenburg, Molise*). Another field of possible overlap is tourism. It can be difficult to distinguish between measures directed towards business start-ups in general and tourism in particular (*Mecklenburg-Vorpommern*). Criteria for demarcation can be: the type of beneficiaries (EAFRD is often restricted to farmers, e.g. *Cyprus*); the type of projects (EAFRD is often restricted to the food sector, e.g. *Hamburg*); and the size (investment volume) of projects. EAFRD funding is often restricted to the micro-scale (*Hamburg*).

Complementarity and demarcation seem to be better developed (to descending degree) with pillar 1 of the CAP, the Cohesion Fund and the ERDF than with the ESF (*Madeira* and *Açores*). On the other hand, the human resource orientation of the ESF is considered a key factor to prop up the activities funded by the EAFRD measures (*Valencia, Marche*). In Spanish regions, ERDF and ESF are supposed to fill the gap left by curtailed EAFRD funds. In *Nordrhein-Westfalen*, the EAFRD is designed as the “last resort” if a project promoter can not be served by any other one.

Horizontal themes, such as sustainable development, environment, mobility, risk prevention, community services, ICT and knowledge transfer are the main areas in which synergies are expected (*Bolzano*), less frequently value added chains (food sector in *Sicilia*).

Coordination mechanisms need to be strengthened (*Sweden*), as well as the monitoring of coordination (*Sachsen-Anhalt*). Among the mentioned coordination mechanisms, we find

- intensive inter-service discussions between managing authorities in the early phases of programming (*Hamburg* and *Schleswig-Holstein*);
- Joint Programme Authorities: in *Lombardia*, ESF, EFRD and EAFRD are under one umbrella;
- Interministerial Coordination Groups (*Czech Republic*) or Joint Committees for programme coordination (*Canarias* and *Galicia*) and project approval (*Mecklenburg-Vorpommern*), established at both national and regional level in the same logic (*Finland*), as well as regional coordination partnerships (*Scotland*);
- cross-representation in steering committees (*Hamburg* and *Sachsen-Anhalt*);
- a coherent regional framework of policies (*Liguria* and *Umbria*); “measure packages”, such as in Axis 4 of the Rural development programmes in *Lombardia*, or through “merging” six EU-co-funded and regional programmes into one coherent framework in *Hessen*;
- common monitoring (in FR for EAFRD, ERDF and ESF) in terms of methodology (software) as well as of the supervising structure (common monitoring committee); also the Finnish Rural development programmes is accompanied by a broad national MC;
- establishing intensive information flows facilitated by a general orientation towards e-government and local responsibility (*Estonia*);
- timely coordination of planning, certainly a big help for ensuring manageable interfaces (*Guyane*).

In *Molise* and *Wales*, the ex ante evaluation was used to integrate improvements in the final phase of programming. Less frequently, the ex ante evaluation concerns were not taken into consideration (*England*).

LEADER partnerships are sometimes mentioned as local anchor points and implementing bodies (*Scotland*), not only for Axis 4, but also for European Territorial Cooperation (*Rheinland-Pfalz*, *Corse*). Coordination through local partnerships, represented by LAGs, “*Regionalmanagement*” agencies, Territorial Pacts etc. constitute a central pillar in the Austrian strategy.

Critical points/innovations

- Funding gaps or overlaps and coordination mechanisms are frequently reported from ex ante evaluations. Defaults from the earlier planning phases proved to be difficult to get repaired in later stages (*Poland*). , According to the respective ex ante evaluations,

Latvia, Romania and *Slovakia* do not feature any consistent approach to complementarity.

- Coordination is sometimes hampered by the incongruity between funding periods of different programmes, such as with LIFE (*Niedersachsen-Bremen*).
- Synergies are often asserted, and rarely tracked. In *Marche*, the evaluator even provided percentage levels for the extent of synergies between the different axes of the Rural development programmes (e.g. 79% for axis 4 with all other axes) However, these indications scarcely materialize in concrete examples or evident tracks (*Hamburg, Calabria*).
- The prevailing approach is “negative coordination”, the avoidance of confusion through overlaps and double-funding. Due to the focus on demarcation rather than synergies, the probability of funding gaps will be higher than that of overlaps – possibly at the expense of the most disadvantaged rural areas and actors.
- An interesting response to the mono-fund principle can be found in *Basilicata*, where the Rural development programmes foresees the possibility of “*multi-fund integrated projects*” – the participation of up to three funds in an “*integrated project*” (featuring corresponding sub-projects).

Completeness/Information gaps

Almost all programmes mention the principles of complementarities, synergies and coherence. There seems to be sufficient information on complementarities and synergies with other Community interventions. The question is rather, how the words will be translated into practice.

Cluster-specific findings

It is not possible to identify cluster-specific findings for topics under theme 5.

Conclusions

Complementarity is generally interpreted in the sense of defining a set of clear criteria for demarcation and avoidance of overlaps between different funds. In this respect, synergies are less looked for.

However, synergies can be expected with respect to horizontal themes, such as sustainable development, environment, mobility, risk prevention, community services, ICT and knowledge transfer, and – less frequently – with respect to value added chains.

To ensure complementarity at programme level in respect to at least four dimensions (objectives, areas, beneficiaries, added value) is a very complex task, if we consider that the

decisions made upstream (national ministries, General Directorates of the European Commission) and downstream (sectoral government departments and service structures, with fragmented competencies at local level) can not be directly influenced. It is therefore logic to concentrate on the avoidance of double funding and of superposing funding schemes with competing eligibility criteria.

However, there are attempts at the level of regions or smaller member states to set up coherent frameworks in order to ensure synergies at the level of beneficiaries.

The main mechanisms for achieving internal and external coherence are intensive inter-service consultations and discussions in the early phases of programming (even prior to the Rural development programmes, when preparing the National Strategy Plans), adequate steering structures (coordination committees, cross-representation of different funds in steering bodies), standardised and user-friendly information flows (soft-ware supported communication, shared monitoring systems), and the empowerment of local implementation bodies (e.g. LAGs) which customize the different support schemes to the specific needs of the beneficiaries. The late integration of criteria and mechanisms for ensuring external coherence and complementarity with other programmes can be considered as less developed.

To descending degrees, complementarity is taken into consideration with pillar 1 of the CAP, the Cohesion Fund, the ERDF and the ESF.

Attempts to ensure complementarities with other support schemes (LIFE, national schemes) turn out to be more difficult because of different time frames and delivery mechanisms. Local development partnerships and agencies, among those a growing number of LEADER groups, are increasingly challenged to integrate the various support schemes for the local people and institutions. Local “pluri-funds” partnerships are frequently reported as catalysts for synergetic effects at local level, provided they have the mandate, the capacities and the resources to act as such.

Thematic Conclusion Theme 5: Added Value of Community Involvement

Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Overall assessment of the extent to which subsidiarity and proportionality have been taken into account– Overall assessment of the coherence of the programmes with respect to Community objectives– Overall assessment of the level of complementarity, synergy and coherence of the programmes with other Community interventions (e.g. structural funds)
What was expected	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Article 85 of Council Regulation 1685/2005 requires to identify and appraise the Community value-added of the programmes as represented by the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality, coherence with the overall Community goals (Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas), complementarity and synergy.
What has worked well	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Principles of subsidiarity and proportionality have generally been followed, with special emphasis in those member states which are currently experiencing a process of deconcentration, decentralisation or devolution. From the Community goals, the environmental and sustainability goals of the Gothenburg agenda generally play a more visible role in the definition of the programmes, although the Lisbon goals are generally considered, especially in axis 1 measures. Complementarity is generally understood rather in the sense of clear demarcation between programmes and the avoidance of overlaps. Synergies are more likely to emerge in regional or smaller states' programmes, in particular in areas such as sustainable development, environment, mobility, risk prevention, community services, ICT and knowledge transfer. Joint programme authorities, interministerial consultation bodies and similar governance arrangements help ensuring coordination.
What did not work and why	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Rural development programmes, The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality are often stated in Rural development programmes and ex ante evaluations without providing more extensive information on how these concepts are expected to concretely put in practice. The monofund principle does not make it easy to consider complementarities already in the early stages of programming, which would be the most useful way to do it. Synergies between different interventions are less likely to be actively pursued, as the emphasis in programming generally lay on the demarcation aspects of complementarity.
Elements to be further improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The subsidiarity principle works better in governance contexts favouring the territorial approach with a corresponding empowering of the LEADER partnerships and other decentralised/de-concentrated bodies. In more centralised, sector-driven governance contexts there is the risk that axis 4 gets reduced to an annex of axis 3.
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Concerning subsidiarity, the role and performance of the governance arrangements set up for LEADER and for the LAGs should be specifically monitored.– In evaluations, the possible cross effects of measures (e.g. between axis 1 and 2) with respect to overall Community objectives should be specifically taken into consideration. Although the local implementing agencies can proficiently create synergies for the local beneficiaries, if they are entitled to operate on different funding schemes, the creation of synergies should be made easier already from the top level, e.g. through cross-financing between European funds.

4.6 Theme 6 – Monitoring and Evaluation

4.6.1 Topic 6.1 – Proposed ways of implementing the monitoring and evaluation system

Rationale

The detailed requirements for the monitoring and implementation system are defined in Title VII, Chapter I (Monitoring) and II (Evaluation) of Council Regulation No 1698/2005. For the definition of the monitoring the Monitoring Committee (Art. 77-79) and the Annual Progress Reports (Art. 82) are further specified: “For each rural development programme a Monitoring Committee shall be set up within a maximum of three months following the decision approving the programme. Each Monitoring Committee shall be chaired by a representative of the Member State or by the Managing Authority. Its composition shall be decided by the Member State and shall include the partners referred to in Article 6(1)” (Art. 77 Council Regulation 1698/2005). The responsibilities are defined in Article 78 and 79. The Monitoring Committee together with the managing authority should ensure the quality of programme implementation and should carry out the monitoring of each rural development programme by means of financial, output and result indicators. The annual progress report is the main reporting instrument for the documentation of these tasks: “Monitoring shall be made mainly through the annual progress reports to be submitted to the Commission annually by the 30 of June.”⁴²

The detailed requirements of the evaluation system are defined in Articles 84 to 87: “Rural development programmes shall be subject to ex ante, mid-term and ex post evaluations in accordance with Articles 85, 86 and 87” (Art. 84 Council Regulation 1698/2005). These three evaluations shall be carried out by independent evaluators and be based on a system of ongoing evaluation. The CMEF underlines these requirements through its guidelines especially the Guidance document⁴³ and e.g. Annex 1 Guidance note B – Evaluation Guidelines or Annex 1 Guidance note C – Ex ante Evaluation Guidelines including SEA: “The organisation of evaluation activities on an ongoing basis will ensure better preparation for formal mid-term and ex post evaluation notably through improved data collection.”⁴⁴ It is also stated, that the evaluations must be carried out by “independent evaluators from bodies without direct involvement in the implementation, management and financing of the programmes.

⁴² Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development (2006): Rural Development 2007-2013. HANDBOOK ON COMMON MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK. Guidance document. September 2006. P. 10.

⁴³ Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development (2006): Rural Development 2007-2013. HANDBOOK ON COMMON MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK. Guidance document. September 2006.

⁴⁴ Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development (2006): Rural Development 2007-2013. HANDBOOK ON COMMON MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK. Guidance document. September 2006. P. 5.

This ongoing system shall be used by the managing authorities and the Monitoring Committee to: “(a) examine the progress of the programme in relation to its goals by means of result and, where appropriate, impact indicators; (b) improve the quality of programmes and their implementation; (c) examine proposals for substantive changes to programmes; (d) prepare for mid-term and ex post evaluation” (Art 86 Council Regulation 1698/2005).

Key terms

Monitoring, (ongoing) evaluation, Managing Authorities, annual report, Monitoring Committee, ex ante evaluation, mid-term evaluation, ex post evaluation, CMEF

Main findings

Regarding the quality of monitoring and evaluation descriptions one can distinguish between the following groups:

- In one group of the analysed reports the requirements of the monitoring and evaluation system (including annual reports, mid-term and ex post evaluation) are described in a general way (directly mentioned in 62 cases). It is stated that the system will take the EU-requirements into account (BE-National, FI-National, FR-Corsica, nearly all IT-Rural development programmes); in other cases the ex ante evaluator points out that the common system for monitoring and evaluation should be correctly applied or that a further quantification of the indicators or additional programme-specific indicators would be needed (e.g. SE-National; directly mentioned in 9 cases).
- In a second group of programmes, the monitoring and evaluation system was still on discussion (e.g. PT-Madeira, PT-Acores) or the information about the planned system was not available/not final when the ex ante evaluation has been finalised (e.g. DE-Rheinland-Pfalz, UK-England; directly mentioned in 7 cases).
- In some cases, the description of the monitoring and evaluation system was missing (directly mentioned in 7 cases) or only the members of the Steering Committee were listed (ES-Cantabria, ES-Madrid).
- Regarding the monitoring system some innovative approaches were identified:
 - Some regions want to build up on existing regional information systems (e.g. IT-Lombardia; directly mentioned in 6 cases) or want to combine existing monitoring necessities: including the WFD monitoring programmes, FFH report obligations (every six years), Air Quality Directive 96/62/EG (IPPC-RL) (report obligation every three years) (DE-Saarland).
 - In FR-Reunion a multi-funds approach was developed: This special structure (AGILE) was initiated by a partnership between national, regional and departmental

level. AGILE accompanies the implementation of the programmes and brings technical assistance and training where needed. This multi-funds approach was built up to ensure a maximum of coherence and synergies and to optimise the participation of all partners (FR-Corsica, FR-Guyane, FR-Martinique).

- In FR-Hexagone the monitoring system will be organised on four levels: monitoring of the national rural development strategic plan, monitoring of the Rural development programmes Hexagone, monitoring of the regional parts, monitoring of the EU policies at regional level. At each of these levels, a specific monitoring committee is planned.
- An outstanding difference to the normal way of implementing a Monitoring Committee is provided by HU-National: The evaluator stated that the committee has almost 80 members,. The other extreme is LU-National, where only representatives of ministries are members of the Monitoring Committee.

Critical points/innovations

As already mentioned in Chapter 3 (Approaches of ex ante evaluations) there are not always descriptions of the established monitoring and evaluation systems in the reports, or the task is only mentioned to a small extend (CY-National, DE-Hamburg), or in a general way just repeating the EU-requirements (MT-National). In many cases, the reports and programmes only mention that monitoring and evaluation will be carried out, but there is no further information about how the system will function.

Problems were caused by the fact that the CMEF-requirements (monitoring tables, indicators) were not fully finalised and translated in every Community language at the time when the Rural development programmes development and the ex ante evaluation processes started (EE-National) (⇒ for more details see topic 7)

Some innovative approaches were identified as mentioned in previous chapters

Completeness/Information gaps

The coverage of this topic in the ex ante evaluations is assessed between good and very good.

Conclusions

The analysis of the programming documents shows different stages of progress concerning the establishment of the evaluation and monitoring systems. The latter are generally developed to the extent necessary to reflect the requirements of the EU framework for the monitoring and evaluation of rural development programmes. However, few examples were found of more innovative approaches where systems are developed in a way to exploit synergies with already

existing regional information systems, or to cover efficiently monitoring requirements of different funds and/or of different intervention levels (national, regional etc.).

For the planning of the programme it is necessary that EU-requirements (CMEF, guidelines and monitoring tables) are fully developed already when the programming process is being started. The availability of guidance document in all Community languages is wishful.

In future Rural development programmes the monitoring and evaluation system should be described and assessed by the ex ante evaluators.

4.6.2 Topic 6.2 – Proposed indicators for the measurement of inputs, outputs, results and impacts

Rationale

Article 81 of Council Regulation 1698/2005 establishes that: *“1. The progress, efficiency and effectiveness of rural development programmes in relation to their objectives shall be measured by means of indicators relating to the baseline situation as well as to the financial execution, outputs, results and impact of the programmes. 2. Each rural development programme shall specify a limited number of additional indicators specific to that programme. 3. Where the nature of the assistance so permits, the data relating to the indicators shall be broken down by sex and age of the beneficiaries.”*

The list of common indicators for the measurement of the programmes' progresses is depicted in detailed in a number of indicator fiches included in the Handbook for the CMEF (CMEF Guidance notes F to K).

The focus of this chapter will be on the question if the common output and result indicators (as listed in the CMEF) were used and, if so, to what extent. Regarding the output and result indicators, the following requirements are defined by the CMEF: *“On the basis of the common result indicators outlined in annex 1, the programme should provide the indicators foreseen in Article 16 (c) of Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005. – Additional result indicators should be chosen to reflect all objectives related to chosen measures, particularly where these correspond to national priorities. – Additional output indicators should be chosen to reflect all measure activities. – Indicators and quantification may be completed by external experts, within the framework of the ex ante evaluation and ongoing evaluation activity.”*⁴⁵

Key terms

input, output, result and impact indicators

⁴⁵ CMEF: Guidance note A – Choice and use of indicators, p. 5f.

Main findings

In general the CMEF output and result indicators were implemented in close line to the requirements of the guidance documents (directly mentioned in 78 cases). In some cases, tables were provided describing the availability of the output and result indicators by measure (e.g. ES-Castilla y León, DE-Rheinland-Pfalz; directly mentioned in 19 cases). Differences from the CMEF can be distinguished into the following three types:

- First, adding programme (measure) specific indicators (e.g. SE-National, ES-Extremadura, FI-National, DE-Berlin Brandenburg, IT-Molise, UK-Northern Ireland; directly mentioned in 34 cases). E.g. in PT-Continente 17 new result indicators for Axis 1; 35 new result indicators for Axis 2, 4 new result indicators for Axis 3 and 6 new result indicators for Axis 4 were defined
- Second, replacement of CMEF-indicators through programme-specific ones, reflecting the specific measure and/or the regional circumstances (DE-Hamburg, ES-Cataluña regarding Axis 2 and 3; directly mentioned in 16 cases).
All common indicators were replaced by programme-specific indicators in DE-National Network as in the opinion of the ex ante evaluator the CMEF-indicators did not fit the special circumstances of the national network.
- Third: Implementing the indicators in general but without the recommended specifications as stated in the CMEF (e.g. sex and age of the beneficiaries) (IT-Abruzzo).

Critical points/innovations

- The assessment of the extent to which indicators were used, added or skipped was not always easy because of the general lack of structured presentations of indicator lists (e.g. in form of tables or annexes) in the ex ante evaluation reports and/or Rural development programmes. A good solution is shown in ES-Castilla y León providing a detailed analysis of environmental indicators including values (ES-Castilla y León).
- Beside methodological problems, more general aspects related to the CMEF were mentioned (roughly 50%). First, that the common indicators are not always suitable for the measurement of the contribution to the programmes' objectives and to the EU priorities for Rural Development. The evaluators question the appropriateness of these indicators and stated that the logical chains are often very tenuous (ES-Cataluña). Secondly, the commitment of personnel and administrative resources demanded by the implementation of the CMEF are perceived as a burden (in particular mentioned by the managing authorities).

Completeness/Information gaps

The coverage of this topic in the ex ante evaluations is assessed between good and very good.

Conclusions

Beside the general necessity to introduce the EU-requirements in time, the inclusion in the programs and/or the EA of tables documenting all used, skipped and added indicators (common, program specific, baseline, output, result, impact) would be very helpful for the identification and assessment of the implemented indicator system.

The simplification of the monitoring and evaluation function in administrative terms and processes has to be further explored also at the programme level.

4.6.3 Topic 6.3 Proposed systems for collecting, storing and processing monitoring data

Rationale

The responsibilities for the data provision are described in the Guidance Document of the CMEF: "The managing authority will be responsible for the collection and transmission of data regarding financial monitoring and output indicators. As regards result indicators, Member States may wish to make use of the ongoing evaluation arrangements to facilitate data collection. The managing authority will also be responsible for providing the data on baseline indicators. Additional work can be undertaken within the framework of the ex ante evaluation and ongoing evaluation activities. The estimation of impact, including interpretation/adaptation of baseline indicators, ad hoc surveys, calculation of deadweight, displacement etc. will be the responsibility of programme evaluators"⁴⁶.

Key terms

Data, monitoring, managing authority, paying authority

Main findings

The analysed ex ante evaluations tend to show little information beyond the obligatory requirements. Similarly to topic 6.1 (see above) there is one large group of reports where the requirements of the data system is stated in a general way (directly mentioned in 17 cases). In

⁴⁶ Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development (2006): Rural Development 2007-2013. Handbook on Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. Guidance document. September 2006. P. 15.

particular, in the Rural development programmes it is generally stated that the system will take the EU-requirements into account, whereas the ex ante evaluators generally point out that the system should be correctly applied (e.g. MT-National, NL-National, DE-Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, IE-National).

The quality of the described systems for collecting, storing and processing monitoring data can be distinguished similar to the above-mentioned monitoring and evaluation descriptions:

- In a first group of programmes the evaluator gives recommendations concerning the quality or the processes of data collection (e.g. UK-Northern Ireland; directly mentioned in 55 cases).
- In a second group of programmes, the proposed systems for collecting, storing and processing monitoring data was still on discussion (e.g. IT-Liguria, DE-Sachsen) or the information about the planned system was not available/not final when the ex ante was carried out (e.g. IT-Abruzzo, DE-Hessen, ES-Galicia, SI-National) (directly mentioned in 12 cases).
- In a third group the proposed system is not mentioned (e.g. ES-La Rioja, ES-Navarra, UK-England, BE-Flanders) or it was only mentioned that the system will be described in the first annual report 2008 (GR-National) (directly mentioned in 20 cases).

Almost all analysed documents contain quotations of the EU-requirements, although only a few of them provide more comprehensive descriptions of the established systems. Example:

- IT-Piemonte: the management of the monitoring system is stated as innovative and better than in 2000-06, for the following reasons: 1) integration of GIS resources, 2) valorisation of information and 3) information shared among public bodies, diffusion on web.

In most cases all data related to the financial and physical monitoring will be collected by the data processing units (aggregated on measure, axis and programme level). The Managing Authority is responsible for verifying the quality, storing and processing of data. Periodically, data will be sent to national data processing systems and then to EU. The main data sources are statistical information, data from the paying agency, the Managing Authority including their delegated implementing agencies and data collected from the beneficiaries by questionnaires (LT-National, HU-National, PL National; directly mentioned in 36 cases). SE-National distinguishes the following categories: simple statistical processing, supplementary meta-data and supplementary assumptions/technical coefficients.

The technical solutions for the CMEF system are developed with the help of IT-systems such as: OSIRIS (FR-Hexagone, FR-Guadeloupe), software-interface and/or web-based application to fit the „Rural Development Information System“ (RDIS) (e.g. DE-Baden Württemberg) but also for extracting data from existing registers (SE-National) (directly mentioned in 21 cases). The computer tools contain security mechanisms: verification, codification, identification and

modification (ES- Castilla y León). In few cases a proven and established execution data-system already exists but should guarantee that the data seized with this system can also be used in the EFRE and ESF context, for which another data system (efREporter) is used (DE-Sachsen Anhalt).

Critical points/innovations

In those cases where no details are given in the programmes/ex ante reports concerning the systems for collecting, storing and processing data, it is not clear whether sufficient attention (if any) has been devoted to this issue.

The description of the systems of two German regional programmes (Rheinland-Pfalz and Hessen) having been evaluated by the same ex ante evaluator is exactly the same

Completeness/Information gaps

The coverage of this topic in the ex ante evaluations is assessed as good.

Conclusions

Since the description of the systems for collecting, storing and processing data is treated within the ex ante evaluations and programmes in very general terms – and usually just repeating the general EU requirements for Rural development programmes – it is difficult to draw conclusions on the quality of those systems.

The established systems for data collection, storing and processing should be described in the Rural development programmes in a more detailed way, in order to ease the assessment of these systems by the ex ante evaluators.

Thematic Conclusion Theme 6: Monitoring and Evaluation

Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Proposed ways of implementing the monitoring and evaluation system– Proposed indicators for the measurement of inputs, outputs results and impacts– Proposed systems for collecting, storing and processing monitoring data
What was expected	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– To assess the envisaged programme's provisions for monitoring and evaluation with a focus to ensure the achievement of the programmes' objectives. i.e. in particular in relation to the set up of the monitoring and evaluation arrangement in terms of general responsibilities, data provisions, structures for monitoring and evaluation.– Assessment of the CMEF – indicators
What has worked well	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The EU-requirements were taken into account and implemented by the Member States.
What did not work and why	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The synthesis work of this study was influenced by the early stage of implementation of the monitoring and evaluation systems in the Member States and to the limited information given in the ex ante reports as well as the Rural development programmes: as the information and descriptions needed to get a full picture about the addressed topics were not formally required as part of the analysed reports/documents.– In some cases it was not possible to get an overview of the planned systems (indicators used, data collecting systems etc.) because the planned system were not described at all, or only to a limited extent.
Elements to be further improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Only few examples were found going beyond implementing EU-requirements. These identified approaches especially the use or combination of existing information systems show, that there are possibilities to improve the EU-required monitoring and evaluation system in an intelligent way.
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– In future Rural development programmes the monitoring and evaluation system should be more thoroughly described in the programmes. Similar to the rules of procedure for the Monitoring Committee this could be documented by a draft version of the terms of reference for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation system.– To get a full picture about the indicators used, added or skipped (common and programme specific) tables in the annex of the ex ante reports would be very useful.

4.7 Theme 7 – Ongoing evaluation system

In contrast to the other themes covered in this report, there was no requirement to provide information on the ongoing evaluation in the Rural development programmes or the Ex Ante Evaluations. As a result the information for this theme was collected by means of interviews and a questionnaire (of managing authorities, evaluators)⁴⁷. The questionnaire covered three main issues:

- The needs of the Managing Authorities with respect to the implementation of the ongoing evaluation system;
- Their expectations and requirements with regards to the services to be provided by the European Evaluation Network;
- Their suggestions for revisions of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.

In fact, at the time of the survey, the Managing Authorities were still at a very early stage in the implementation of the ongoing evaluation system and were mostly unaware of the role of the European Evaluation Network. As a result, the findings presented in this chapter are less detailed than those in the rest of this report. However, the results do provide some useful orientations for a broader discussion.

4.7.1 Topic 7.1 – Possible future needs of Member States in relation to the implementation of the ongoing evaluation system

Rationale

According to Article 86 of Regulation (EC) 1698/2005, the Member States are required to set up an ongoing evaluation system. This system shall be used by the Managing Authorities and the Monitoring Committee to: “(a) examine the progress of the programme in relation to its goals by means of result and, where appropriate, impact indicators; (b) improve the quality of programmes and their implementation; (c) examine proposals for substantive changes to programmes; (d) prepare for mid-term and ex post evaluation” (Art. 86 (2) of Regulation (EC) 1698/2005). Thus, the ongoing evaluation is meant to ensure capacity building early on in the programme and continuity of evaluation-related activities during the whole programming period. The ongoing evaluation system is also expected to prepare the formal mid-term and ex-post evaluations of RD programmes in a timely and effectively way.

⁴⁷ roughly 280 interviews with evaluators and managing authorities in all 94 programmes

The ongoing evaluation shall be organised on the initiative of the Managing Authorities in cooperation with the Commission. It shall be organised on a multiannual basis and cover the period 2007-2015 (Article 86 (5) of Regulation (EC) 1698/2005). In 2010 and 2015 the ongoing evaluation shall take the form of separate mid-term and ex post evaluation reports respectively (Article. 86 (4) and (5) of Regulation (EC) 1698/2005). Ex ante, mid-term and ex-post evaluations shall be carried out by independent evaluators and the results shall be made available to the public (Art. 84 (4) Regulation (EC) 1698/2005).

Key terms

(Ongoing) evaluation, Managing Authorities, Monitoring Committee, ex ante evaluation, mid-term evaluation, ex post evaluation.

Main findings

The concept of ongoing evaluation is generally welcomed. However, the costs of such a resource intensive system are generally considered justified only if the system provides programme specific information in time for the steering process. BE-Flanders have tried to meet this challenge by developing a user-friendly monitoring system and guidelines for gathering and interpreting monitoring data, which is based on the CMEF, but also responds to the availability of data and the needs of the projects in the Flemish Rural development programmes.

The interviewees mentioned their general need for support in order to meet EU requirements for the monitoring and evaluation system (particularly in relation to data collection and processing). Managing Authorities mentioned two points in this area:

the need to be more efficient and to avoid duplication through improving the coordination between EU policies (EU Structural Funds, Flora-Fauna-Habitat Directive, NATURA 2000) and the wish that continuity and consistency of monitoring and evaluation systems are ensured with respect to previous and future programming periods.

The interviews also referred to the need for methodological support on the definition and, particularly, on the quantification of indicators (DE-Sachsen). Examples include:

- In the case of Axis 2 indicators, there is said to be a need for support to develop a monitoring system capable of collecting data on the population of farmland bird species, trends in water quality, the development of High Nature Value areas, changes in the production of renewable energy from agriculture and forestry and so on (SK-National).
- In the case of indicators for Axis 2 and Axis 3, there needs to be a clearer definition of the terms and the indicators for “landscape” and “quality of life”. This refers rather to the attribution gap between the wide concepts of these aspects of evaluation and the narrower scope of the common impact and result indicators. However, even though the

Member States realized their obligation to add programme specific indicators in these fields the criticism focuses rather on the additional costs caused by this approach which may differ considerably from programme to programme.

- Managing Authorities also argue for a common approach to the evaluation of cross-cutting topics (such as the effects on climate change, growth, employment, equal opportunities and, in particular, sustainability). In addition, the evaluation of sustainability should not only be based on environmental concerns but also take into account economic and social aspects (UK-England, DE-Thüringen).
- Data collection is regarded as a real challenge (e.g. ES-Canarias, IT-Trento). The availability of unified data sources are considered to be a pre-requisite for EU-wide comparisons (e.g. the same census, periods etc.; DE-National, DE-Thüringen).

Managing Authorities recommend that the requirements for the monitoring and evaluation of RD programmes and all supporting documents (including monitoring) should be finalised with more time before the beginning of the programming phase and the start of the ex ante evaluation (although the legal "requirements" were defined in regulation 1698/2005, which was available some 2 years before the beginning of the programming period).

Critical points/innovations

As described above, one important critical point refers to the poor quality of data sources – particularly the lack of information on certain indicators and the difficulties of quantifying them (general problem for all Member States)

Managing Authorities complain that the ongoing evaluation system requires a heavy investment of resources at a very early stage of the implementation of the programme. They refer to the time consuming nature and say that the requirements of the system were not made clear until very late (despite the fact that the legal "requirements" were defined some two years in advance, as mentioned above).

MA's only rarely refer to the fact that the ongoing evaluation can be more than indicator exercise and can actually be used to improve the steering of the programme (BE-Flanders, Rural development programmes Netherlands, IT Toscana, ES-Valencia, Ireland, EE-National).

Conclusions

The setting up of an ongoing evaluation system is generally welcomed. In fact, some MAs have made substantial efforts to put the system into practice. Examples show that there is the possibility to adapt EU-required systems to the regional context. But the answers from the questionnaires show that the Member States have not fully understood this possibility (and that, therefore, they focus on the resource implications). As a result, further efforts should be made to

explain the potential of the ongoing evaluation system. The European Evaluation Network is expected to play an essential role in this respect.

Although the CMEF Handbook covers a broad scope in terms of the subjects treated and provides a good basis for the monitoring and evaluation system, there is still a need for more practical methodological advice and more detailed guidelines for implementing specific parts of the ongoing evaluation system (e.g. indicators in Axis 2 and 3 as well as a common evaluation approach for cross-cutting priorities as mentioned see above).

4.7.2 Topic 7.2 – Possible ways of supporting the Member States in the implementation of the future ongoing evaluation system through the European Evaluation Network.

Rationale

As part of technical assistance for rural development, Article 67 of Regulation (EC) 1698/2005 makes a commitment to “*set up and run expert networks with a view to facilitating an exchange of expertise and supporting implementation and evaluation of the rural development policy*” (Art 67,e). Accordingly, a European Evaluation Network has been set-up to fulfil the evaluation related functions foreseen in this article. The European Evaluation Network is part of the broader European Network for Rural Development, but works independently from it.

Article 67 of Council Regulation defines the role, the tasks and the organisation of the European Evaluation Network. The main objectives of the European Evaluation Network are described as “*to establish good practice and capacity building in evaluation, thereby increasing the utility of monitoring and evaluation as tools for programme management. Cooperation and exchange of best practice, as well as ongoing development of methods and tools will be supported*”⁴⁸.

Thus the European Evaluation Network represents one of the main instruments for supporting the Member States in the implementation of their systems for ongoing evaluation. Below we examine the expectations of the Managing Authorities of the Rural Development Programmes as regards the supporting activities to be carried out by the Network.

Key terms

European Evaluation Network, ongoing evaluation, evaluator, managing authorities, stakeholder

⁴⁸ CMEF Guidance note M – The Rural Development Evaluation network, p. 1

Main findings

The main tasks expected from the Evaluation Network are networking, the provision of information, training and methodological support. MA's state that it is essential that the network provides practical support which addresses operational realities (UK-Wales). The European Evaluation Network should support the exchange of knowledge and experience about the evaluation system (NL-National). The network should also provide a voice for the evaluators themselves and reaffirm the importance of their independent status.

In the field of training and networking, MAs suggested that the network should encourage exchanges and the transfer of knowledge to spread and improve common standards of evaluation (e.g. by organising and financing EU-wide workshops for Managing authorities and the evaluators or by providing a web-based platform for exchanges of best practices).

The expectations concerning the work of the national networks are higher than those for the European Evaluation Network (UK-Northern Ireland, IT-Trento, DE-Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, DE-Sachsen). However, MAs expect a high level of coordination between the national networks and the European Network, for example, through the coordination of the working programmes (e.g. MT-National, DE-NRW, CR-National, IT-Piemonte). In addition, they argue that the European Evaluation Network should respect and not dominate the national networks: national topics and needs should be the basis for the work of the European Evaluation Network.

The following main expectations were expressed by the different target groups of the European Evaluation Network:

- Evaluators: Initiation and support for (thematic) working groups or sub-networks to help knowledge transfer. The organisation of thematic workshops and conferences.
- Managing authorities: The organisation of a continuous exchange between the Managing Authorities and their respective evaluators on the methods and requirements of the evaluation system (for example, to decide a task of the national networks). Supporting the Managing Authorities in the preparation of technical specifications for the tenders for the mid-term and ex-post evaluations (IT-Veneto).
- Other Stakeholders (e.g. economic and social partners from the Monitoring Committee): The organisation of (regional) conferences for stakeholders and actors in the field of evaluation; also to extend the European Evaluation Network to include a broader range of stakeholders.

Another task expected of the European Evaluation Network is to provide methodological support including, for example, an improvement and standardisation of the evaluation system as well as support for target groups in terms of data accessibility (EUROSTAT, FADN) and the harmonization of data sources (e.g. DE-National, DE-Thüringen). This could include:

- Setting up uniform guidelines/defining criteria for the collection of good practice in evaluation and defining good practices with participation of the related managing bodies and evaluators.
- Coordinating EU-wide evaluations and carrying out independent evaluations (HU-National) or case studies concerning specific measures such as organic farming and tourism in order to harmonise the evaluation practices of the measures. Other possible topics for EU-studies could include: the investigation of the transaction costs in beneficiary areas, the interdependencies between the first and second pillars of the Common Agriculture Policy, the implementation of the LEADER approach, the use of EAFRD for the implementation of NATURA 2000 and the Water Framework Directive. However the borderline expected between the Rural development Network and the European Network on RD evaluation will determine which of these topics are conducted under which umbrella,
- Exchanges of experience about how to overcome the limits of certain key methods for example. the measurement of net-effects, analysing the direct and indirect effects of certain measures or examining cross-cutting influences (DE-Baden-Württemberg, DE-Nordrhein-Westfalen, ES-Murcia)

Another important point often mentioned is support by the provision of information. This includes the creation of an Internet-based instrument for collecting evaluation reports, abstracts of the programmes, good practices and for the exchange of experiences. This Internet tool should be part of an evaluation helpdesk containing:

1. A database with contact details of all involved evaluators at EU level and their portfolio (RO-National, BE-Flanders)
2. Online access to tools and free software for ongoing evaluation and data processing (LU-National) in combination with a telephone hotline for the clarification of (detailed) questions (IT-Network) and
3. a section for "FAQ" (IT-Molise, FI-National).

In addition a video conference system for overseas regions is mentioned (FR-Reunion).

Critical points/innovations

In general, the interviewees (managing authorities as well as evaluators) welcome the creation of a European Evaluation Network and recognize that it could fulfill a series of concrete needs,

although the tasks and responsibilities of the European Evaluation Network (and of the national networks) were not always known or clear.

In this context, the expectations and desires expressed by the interviewees for the tasks and support to be provided by the European Evaluation Network are both high and quite diverse. Many of the points they mentioned cannot be considered as specific tasks of the European Evaluation Network, but rather as tasks for RD Network, national networks, for Managing Authorities or for the evaluators themselves (e.g. bringing together the national Managing Authorities and their evaluators) or even for the Commission. However, the main tasks that the authorities and evaluators mention, do already seem to be covered by the European Evaluation Network (e.g. collection and dissemination of good practices, methodological support etc.).

Conclusions

Most tasks expected of the European Evaluation Network are in line with its general objectives: training and networking, methodological support and support through the provision of information. However, as in the case of the ongoing evaluation system, further efforts should be made to communicate the tasks and responsibilities of the European Evaluation Network to the Member States and their evaluators.

There needs to be good coordination between the annual work programmes of the European Evaluation Network and the National Networks.

Possible methods for supporting the Member States include: the establishment of a helpdesk providing methodological support based on an internet-tool and a telephone hotline as well as workshops and conferences directed at specific target groups (AT-National).

4.7.3 Topic 7.3 – Suggestions for possible revisions of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

Rationale

Article 80 of Regulation 1698/2005 defines the CMEF in terms of: "a limited number of indicators applicable to each programme". The CMEF was developed for the funding period 2007-2013 and is now being implemented for the first time. A Handbook on the CMEF was provided by the Commission to support its implementation. This chapter provides a first impression of the views in the Member States for future revisions of the monitoring and evaluation system (both the CMEF and the Handbook on the CMEF). However, it should be remembered that implementation was at an early stage when asking the Member States these questions.

Key terms

CMEF, baseline indicators, evaluation, monitoring

Main findings

In general the CMEF is regarded as a substantial improvement on the system that existed in the previous funding period. This refers especially to the guidance documents, which are generally considered as very helpful for the implementation of the CMEF, and to the new steering and evaluation approach as a whole (BE-Flanders, IT-Sardegna, SI-National).

Since the Member States are at an early stage of implementation of the CMEF, the feedback received from the people interviewed is mainly limited to those aspects of the framework which have been put into practice so far (mainly the establishment and application of common indicators during the programming phase and the implementation of the ex ante evaluations). More substantial input for a possible revision of the framework can be expected during the next phases of the programmes' implementation (BE-Flanders).

The interviewees recommended that the linkages between the CMEF, the guidance documents and in some cases between the guidance documents and the monitoring tables have to be improved – but without specifying how this should be done. One concrete demand is for the all EU documents concerning monitoring and evaluation requirements (e.g. common indicator fiches) to be provided in all the Community languages (BE-Flanders, IT-Toscana, IT-Sardegna, SK-National, DE-National, DE-Baden-Württemberg, ES-Canarias).

Another general recommendation from the interviewees is to narrow the scope of the entire evaluation system by focusing on a limited number of measures – for example on the most important measures in terms of the size of budgets and priorities (LU-National). In line with this is the request for a simplification of the whole monitoring and evaluation system (e.g. ES-Asturias, PL-National, IT-Molise, ES-Galicia, NL-National) with concentration on a limited number of revisable baseline, result and impact indicators (IT-Bolzano, DE-Sachsen Anhalt). Concrete suggestions were not made by interviewees.

The aggregation of data in the monitoring tables of individual Rural development programmes to national and EU levels is regarded to be very complex and only meaningful if the quantification and the measurement is made uniform by the guidelines. It is also necessary to harmonize the time periods for data collection (e.g. calendar year, EU-budget year) (DE-Sachsen Anhalt). IT-Abruzzo mentioned that the implementation of the CMEF should be supported not only by written guidelines, but also by technical support (providing IT-Tools for data collection and processing).

Critical points/innovations

The answers given by the interviewees were in most cases very general, not always focused on the topic and in some cases not usable.

In many cases the CMEF is perceived as an additional administrative burden with no clear value for the programme itself (AT-National). Instead of having an EU-wide unique system of indicators for all regions in Europe, a more specific approach is proposed by some interviewees: the EU could run a direct and problem orientated EU-wide evaluation while the Member States set up their own systems (BE-Wallonie, DE-Thüringen). The fact that the CMEF is a part of a new steering approach, and therefore more than a simple indicator or data collection exercise, is seldom mentioned.

Conclusions

In general the CMEF is regarded as a substantial improvement on the previous funding period. Nevertheless the comments mentioned above reflect a (generalized) demand for a simplification of the EU-requirements: downsizing the whole system by using less common indicators and giving more room to Member States specific needs.

In some of the regions dealing with small budgets (MT-National, LU-National), the people interviewed expressed doubts about the viability of implementing the whole CMEF-framework for programmes. They suggest that perhaps sizing the evaluation activities in relation to the allocated budget might be a solution.

There is a need for communication about the opportunities provided by the and the new evaluation approach as a whole. Clearer and more user friendly documents with a navigation guide and technical tools incorporated are required for supporting the implementation (UK-Wales).

Thematic Conclusion Theme 7: Ongoing Evaluation System

Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Possible future needs of Member States for implementing the ongoing evaluation system– Possible ways of supporting the Member States in the implementation of the ongoing evaluation system through the European Evaluation Network– Suggestions for possible revisions of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
What was expected	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Although the implementation of the ongoing evaluation system was at a very early stage and Managing Authorities were not really aware of the tasks of the European Evaluation Network they were able to provide a preliminary account of their needs and suggestions for improvements to the ongoing evaluation system.
What has worked well	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The concept of "ongoing evaluation" is generally welcomed. Quite substantial efforts have already been made to implement the monitoring and evaluation systems. Examples show that there is the possibility to adapt EU-requirements to the regional contexts. But the answers from the Member States have also shown that this possibility has not yet been fully understood (for example, leading to complaints about the costs of implementation).– In this context, the expectations and desires expressed by the interviewees for the tasks and support to be provided by the European Evaluation Network are both high and quite diverse. However, the main tasks that the authorities and evaluators mention do already seem to be covered by the European Evaluation Network (e.g. collection and dissemination of good practices, methodological support, building up an evaluation network).
What did not work and why	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Due to the early stage of implementation, the answers provided by the interviewees were in most cases very general, not always focused on the topic and in some cases not usable. In addition, as the CMEF (and its Handbook) is being put into practice for the first time, interviewees focused on the resources required to meet EU-requirements. The implementation of the CMEF tends to be regarded as a technical exercise. There are few references to the opportunities for making the CMEF more useful and friendly for programmers.
Elements to be further improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– As a result, further efforts have to be made to explain the opportunities presented by the ongoing evaluation system. The European Evaluation Network is expected to play an essential role in this respect.– Although the Handbook on the CMEF is generally considered to be a broad and helpful document which is an improvement on previous period, there is still need for more practical methodological advice and more detailed guidelines for implementing specific parts of the ongoing evaluation system (for example Indicators in Axis 2 and 3 as well as the common evaluation approach for cross-cutting questions).
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– There is a need for further communication about the opportunities offered by the CMEF and the new approach to evaluation. This communication should focus on:– The opportunities and examples of good practice in using the ongoing evaluation system, as well as the tasks and responsibilities of the European Evaluation Network in relation to both the Member States and to the evaluators.– Clearer and more user friendly documents with a navigation guide and technical tools incorporated for supporting the implementation of the CMEF– The European Evaluation Network should support the implementation of the CMEF through the provision of methodological support based on an internet-tool and a telephone hotline as well as workshops and conferences directed at specific target groups.– There needs to be good coordination between the annual work-programmes of the European Evaluation Network and the National Networks

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this synthesis of ex-ante evaluations of RD programmes has been to summarize and analyse the ex ante evaluations with a focus on the expected results and impacts of Rural Development Programmes for the period 2007 – 2013. In particular, the synthesis investigates into the extent to which the Rural Development strategies and measures established by Member States correspond to the needs of European rural areas. The synthesis analyses identified needs and corresponding objectives by referring as much as possible to baselines and quantifications of objectives and target levels.

Synthesis over themes

The synthesis is structured around seven evaluation themes:

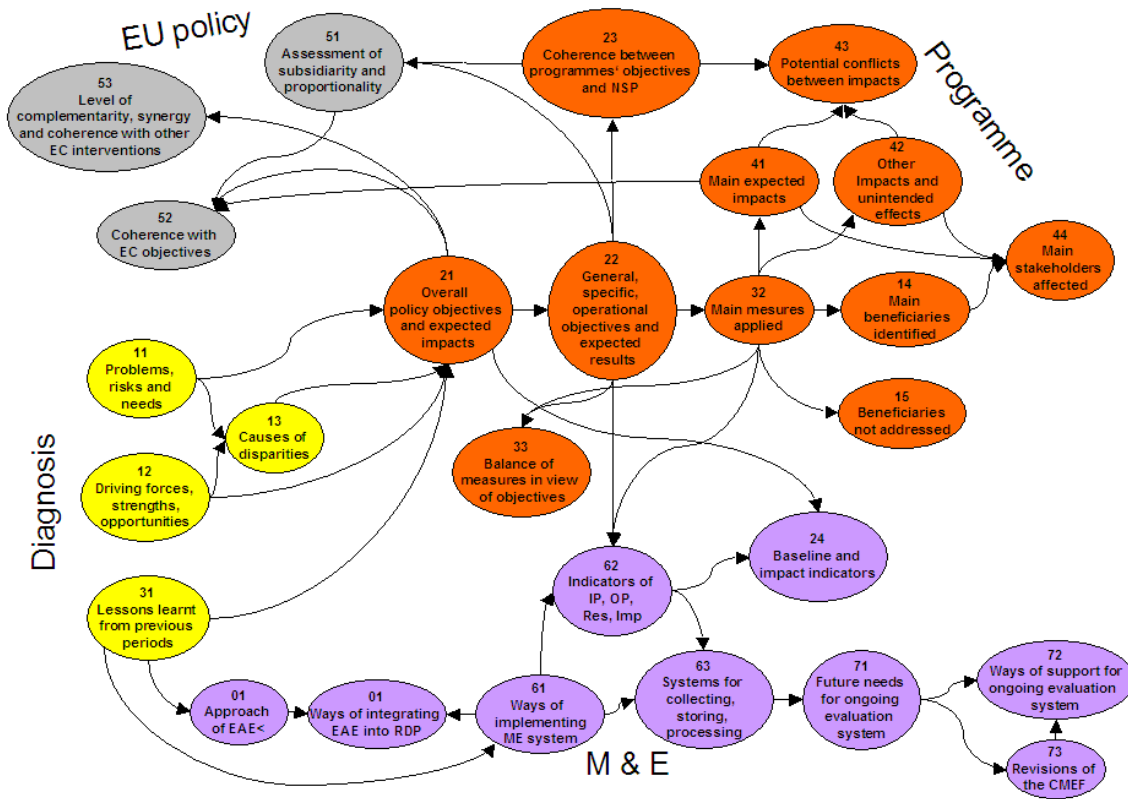
- SWOT analysis and assessment of needs
- Policy objectives
- Measures
- Impacts
- Added value of Community involvement
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Ongoing evaluation system

The themes 1 to 6 mirror the “indicative outline of an ex ante evaluation report” included in the Commission guidelines for ex ante evaluations. The seventh theme is specific to the European synthesis.

Each theme covers specific evaluation topics. Our attempt to model the interrelationships between these 27 evaluation topics resulted in the following causal loop diagram. It reveals that the topics (evaluation topics) can be aggregated to clusters, but these clusters are not identical with the evaluation themes.

Figure 33

Interrelationship between the 27 evaluation topics



In the graph above, the figures attached to each topic represent the theme (first figure) and the topic (second figure).

We deemed it useful to organise the topics into the four categories which we call

- Diagnosis
- EU Policy
- Programme
- Monitoring and Evaluation

Whereas each topic or theme has been dealt with in detail in chapter 4, we organise the synthetic reflection in this chapter along the categories depicted in the causal loop diagram. The main findings and conclusions by category are put down in the following sub-chapters 1 to 4.

Diagnosis

Rationale

This section covers all the themes related to the diagnosis of the main problems, risks and needs of rural areas; the driving forces, strengths and opportunities; the main causes of disparities; and the extent to which the lessons from previous periods have been taken into account in designing the programmes. This initial diagnosis is the founding stone upon which the rest of the programme strategy depends. Only if it is carried out correctly, will it be possible to analyse whether the priorities given to the objectives and measures in the programme correspond to the situation in the programme area. This is essential for ensuring that the resources devoted to rural development are effectively targeted to concrete needs.

Conclusions on the diagnosis

Member States have devoted considerable efforts to the development of their strategies, which are based on a thorough assessment of the needs of their respective territory, based on the establishment of baseline indicators and SWOT-analysis methods. The analyses carried out have permitted to identify a variety of needs that are generally considered by the ante evaluators as consistent with the different contexts of the respective programme areas. Our synthesis around cluster groups, each one composed by programme areas with similar characteristics, tends to confirm this conclusion. The main needs identified range from structural adjustments of rural areas and modernisation (productivity deficits, fragmentation, capital...) to biodiversity, loss and lack of specialization, diversification, de-concentration, or the quality of the agricultural products.

The diagnosis of the programme area, the SWOT analysis and the common baseline indicators have encouraged programmers to think "out of the box" and to look at their area in far broader and deeper perspectives than they would have done without these tools. The exercises create the basis for comparing both the situation between different programme areas and the strategies that have been adopted. In most cases, the ex ante evaluation reports do not provide an explicit assessment of the diagnosis carried out in the Rural Development Programmes. Rather, they provide a summary or simply refer back to it as being satisfactory, with an explicit or implicit reference to the fact that their comments were taken into account during the programming process.

In many programmes there is no explicit reference to needs, driving forces or underlying causes of disparities, leaving these rather to be deduced from the SWOT analysis that is always provided. All three concepts – needs, driving forces and underlying causes, are most often presented in deficit terms, linked primarily to the weaknesses and threats as part of the SWOT analysis. In theory, however, all three can also be linked to the strengths and

opportunities. There is a risk that this tendency locks rural areas into responding to problems rather than actively seeking out new opportunities.

Generally there is a high coherence between the picture drawn by the baseline indicators (presenting the context related and objective related conditions of the programming areas) and the weaknesses, threats, strengths and opportunities as elaborated in the SWOTs. The SWOT analysis is usually not presented in a structured way (e.g. in the form of logical diagrams). Thus, assessing the importance devoted to individual priorities (following the predominant needs in the region) in the programme area can be difficult.

In some programmes, existing weaknesses (or strengths) are put in the same category as future threats (or opportunities) – making it difficult to distinguish between the actual situation and predicted future outcomes.

The ex ante evaluations make frequent references to lessons learnt from previous programming periods. The main recurrent ones include the need for greater policy integration and complementarity, the need for focussing on fewer strategic priorities, more procedural flexibility and simplicity, the importance of the bottom up approach and the need for better monitoring and evaluation. However, besides notable exceptions, it is often difficult to see how these and other lessons have been incorporated in concrete terms in the current period. Much more attention is devoted to studying the take-up and results of past programmes, while there is less analysis of why certain measures worked better than others.

A small number of programmes explicitly point to lessons that have not been incorporated in the current programming period. In general, these reflect the same issues as mentioned above, e.g. the fragmentation of measures, the need for better targeting, the low correspondence between needs-objectives and resources.

EU Policy

Rationale

Article 85 of Council Regulation 1698/2005 stipulates that *“ex ante evaluation shall identify and appraise the Community value-added and the extent to which the Community’s priorities have been taken into account, as well as the quality of the procedures for implementation, monitoring, evaluation and financial management”*. In the terms of reference for this synthesis of ex ante evaluations, the Commission operationalizes the theme into the following topics:

- Overall assessment of the extent to which subsidiarity and proportionality have been taken into account in the programmes;

- Overall assessment of the coherence of the programmes with respect to Community objectives;
- Overall assessment of the level of complementarity, synergy and coherence of the programmes with other Community interventions (e.g. structural funds).

As the graph at the beginning of this chapter shows, the evaluation theme “added value of Community involvement” represents those parts of the programme specifics that are most relevant for European rural policy, covering three dimensions:

- The political dimension: the distribution of roles and tasks and the exertion of influence at different levels of decision making (multi-level governance);
- The strategic dimension: the alignment of co-funded programmes with the overarching goals of the Community;
- The instrumental dimension: the governance arrangements and administrative skills by which the funding instruments and steering mechanisms are combined in order to achieve tangible effects with the lowest possible transaction costs.

Conclusions on the EU Policy

The coverage of the topics related to the Community added value is reportedly good. The instrumental dimension (complementarities) and the strategic dimension (Community objectives) are more completely covered than the political dimension (subsidiarity). If these topics are not dealt with in the ex ante evaluations, they are mostly covered in the Rural Development Programmes, and to a minor extent (the strategic dimension) in the National Strategy Plans. The mode of handling these issues varies, from general statements over assessments by axis to a detailed tabulation of cross-relationships for each single measure.

The evocation of the Community added value (related e.g. to environment, innovation) signalizes that the principle has been taken into account, but detailed descriptions of the governance structures and practical procedures for applying it are found to a lesser extent.

The Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies are well covered in most Rural Development Programmes, with an even stronger emphasis on the Gothenburg agenda, notably through axis 2 and its relative weight in the programmes. Emphasis on the Gothenburg goals is generally given in the Strategic Environmental Assessment reports attached to the ex ante evaluations. Often, the term “sustainable” is attributed to environmental goals, while a few programmes try to point out the mutual stimulation between environmental and economic measures, for example in the quality food chain (organic farming) and the energy sector. The Lisbon Agenda is mainly addressed through capacity building, vocational training and knowledge transfer, followed by investments in research, innovation, new production technologies and ICT.

Other priorities of the EU have been taken into account in most variable ways. Many references to coherence can be found in respect to environmental goals, which is understandable due to the link between Axis 2, NATURA 2000 and the Water Framework Directive. Different time frames are disadvantageous for harmonisation (e.g. the 6th Environment Action Programme). Gender issues are frequently mentioned, but the ex ante evaluations describe tangible measures for concretely tackling them only in a small number of cases.

Complementarities and synergies are evocated in respect to four interlinked dimensions: area of intervention, beneficiaries addressed, objectives and expected added value.

- As for the intervention area, the delimitation of the eligible rural areas follows pragmatic considerations. Specifically in federal states, EARDF and structural funds are handled as communicating vessels. In areas where ERDF and ESF contributions have been cut back in relation to the previous period, Axis 3 measures of the EARDF are used to fill the gap (micro-enterprises, tourism, social infrastructures etc.) or vice-versa. Unsurprisingly, the ex-ante evaluations of Rural Development Programmes take better account of complementarities with pillar 1 of the CAP than with the Structural Funds, but there are clear examples of successful engineering in combining EARDF, ERDF and ESF measures, above all in regions of federal states.
- As for the beneficiaries, farmers largely remain the primary addressees of the Rural Development Programmes.
- As for the objectives, the horizontal Community themes, such as sustainable development, environment (NATURA 2000), renewable energies and climate change are the ones mainly addressed in the search for complementarity and synergies.
- The search for complementarities plays a minor role in different programmes, but in most cases where it is addressed, the food chain is concerned.

In a number of ex ante evaluations and Rural Development Programmes, the affirmative compliance with the Community principles is not underpinned by evidence – which does not automatically mean that corresponding provisions have not been made. On the other hand, some ex ante evaluations do not refer to the principles as such, but do describe the structures and processes aiming at better harmonisation with Community goals and between funds. At the level of regions or smaller Member States, there are interesting examples of coherent frameworks for the interconnection of programmes for the sake of synergetic effects for the beneficiaries.

The mechanisms designed to ensure vertical coordination (subsidiarity and proportionality), horizontal coordination (complementarities and synergies) and policy integration with regard to Community priorities (Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas, equal opportunities) can be categorized under two types: 1) Personal and institutional as well as 2) procedural coordination

mechanisms. Among the personal/institutional mechanisms, there are joint programme authorities, inter-ministerial coordination committees and inter-fund coordination committees, inter-service platforms and negotiations, as well as mutual representation in monitoring committees. As procedural mechanisms we find regional programme frameworks, the bundling of measures under one responsibility, the transformation of region-based measures into locally-based development strategies and projects (notably through Axis 4), as well as joint monitoring and unified information systems.

In general, complementarities and synergies are better defined and operationalised, if the coordination was done already in the early phases of programming (of both National Strategy Plans and Rural Development Programmes). Mechanism created after the actual planning processes are considered as much less effective.

Programme

Rationale

This section covers all the themes related to programming the rural development interventions. It starts from the overall policy objectives and expected impacts as presented in the National Strategy Plans, covers the full development of the intervention logic (general, specific, operational objectives and expected results), looking also at the balance of measures in view of those objectives. The review proposes also a synthesis of the expected (and unexpected) impacts, including potential conflicts between these. It finally looks at the main beneficiaries identified and not addressed, as well as to the main stakeholders affected by the programmes.

Overall Conclusions

Links between National Strategy Plans and Rural Development Programmes: In many cases the objectives of the Rural Development Programmes tend to reflect the ones of (EC) Regulation 1698/2005 in a rather unspecific manner, i.e. with limited efforts to adapt those general objectives to the different national or regional contexts. Still, a set of programmes includes specific aims and goals that respect those established at European level, and are also expressed in a more elaborated way. Many Rural Development Programmes present a coherent connection between the needs established in the SWOT analysis and the overall or specific objectives. However, in some cases, this link is weak or even does not exist. The new approach to programming includes the elaboration of strategies established at national level, the National Strategy Plans, which have been drafted before the Rural Development Programmes. These strategic documents, which mainly remain under the sole responsibility of the Member States, have structured the Rural Development Programmes. The ex ante evaluation usually started after the approval of the strategies, at a stage where most basic

decisions had already been taken. This has limited the role of the ex ante evaluations in the elaboration of the Rural Development Programmes.

Intervention logic: In most programmes, the different levels of objectives are included, although they might follow different definitions. In some cases information related to the “intervention logic” is dispersed through the programmes. Frequently, the chapters on measures of the Rural Development Programmes comprise operational objectives and associated result indicators, with quantitative indications of targets. The choice of terms is not systematic, and the different levels of objectives are sometimes not clearly distinguished, which makes the rationale of some programmes difficult to understand. The “expected results” are in general presented using the indicators from the CMEF, but in some cases they are more qualitative. A key issue seems to be the limited common approach to programming, and the perceived insufficiency of the existing guidelines in specifying an “objective-led” approach in more detail.

The National Strategy Plans provide a wider framework in which the utilisation of the EAFRD constitutes only one instrument that is complemented by other forms of intervention, such as legislation or other expenditure programmes at European, national and regional level. In general, the ex ante evaluations state that there is a high level of coherence between the objectives of the Rural Development Programmes and those of the National Strategy Plans. However, differences can be identified at the level of priorities between the axis or in the proposed distribution of funds between measures.

Many ex ante evaluations find that the overall balance between the measures is appropriate and coherent with regard to the needs identified and the objectives defined. The intervention logic refers to the measure level and justifies their relative weight. Some programmes show an imbalance, which reflects a clear strategic choice, although we consider it as not always connected to the needs identified: some programmes have a clear and strong focus on agriculture, others on environment.

Programming authorities cannot allocate the funding only with respect to the identified needs. They have to take into account the (sometimes large) financial commitments that were made under the former programming period and that are still binding in this new phase. For example, the strategic reorientation of agriculture towards a more diversified model or the support for agro-environmental measures cannot be completely and suddenly revised at the end of the programming period, as this would lead to problems for beneficiaries.

With respect to other programmes it seems that the programming process is still primarily driven by the allocation of funds among a pre-established list of measures (the former “measure-led approach”), where the choice of the latter is not based on clear strategic priorities.

Impacts are usually described as effects of the programmes on rural areas, including infrastructure, cultural heritage, transport, services (culture, tourism, health), employment, biodiversity, land, water, and climate. In some cases, impacts are described in terms of effects on the rural population, looking at demographic trends. Positive social impacts are expected to be promoted by Axis 3 measures, mostly through job creation outside agriculture. Economic impacts are very prudently expressed, mostly related to niche markets (high quality products) or through the increase of labour productivity. Environmental impacts are clearly expressed, either in the Strategic Environmental Assessment reports or in ex ante evaluations, where positive repercussions on biodiversity and water quality are identified. Some expected impacts cut across social, economic and environmental impacts.

Potential conflicts between environmental preservation and economic growth seem to be the major unintended impact that can arise, although many Rural Development Programmes suggest that strategic adjustments and corrective actions can be found for each situation. In many cases this is the result of taking on board the recommendations made in the Strategic Environmental Assessment exercise.

Reviewing the findings of ex ante evaluations, there seems to be a variety of interpretations on what the notion of “stakeholders” means. This is mostly due to the fact that the term is not mentioned in the regulations, leading managing authorities and evaluators to interpret this in two ways: stakeholders are sometimes understood as the beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, and sometimes as the partnership as defined in Article 6 of Regulation (EC) 1698/2005, whereby EAFRD assistance shall be implemented through close consultations with appropriate partners.

Generally we could assume that there is obviously more programming experience in the old Member States than in the new ones, although the perception on this seems to be stronger than the actual evidence in the respective documents would suggest. For many programming authorities, axis 3 and 4 are fairly new anyway, as they are in general more experienced in dealing with agricultural issues.

Obviously the new “objective-led” approach to programming has been adopted by the Member States, although there is still some progress to be made on the logical sequence of “SWOT – rationale – objectives trees – measures” and on the way objectives are described. Another field for improvement is the establishment of the national strategies as a preliminary step before programming the Rural Development Programmes.

The “objective-led” approach to programming is a complex task that requires good capacity in programming and evaluation. The role of ex ante evaluation is essential in helping the programming authorities to develop meaningful intervention logics, which will guarantee an easier programme delivery and better result monitoring. National Strategic Plans are not

formally approved by the EC, although they are very structuring for the next steps of programming. The later development of the Rural Development Programmes, with the help of the ex ante evaluations, is very much “framed” by the orientations given by the National Strategy Plans. We consider that the sequence National Strategy Plans – Rural Development Programmes is particularly well adapted to Member States with a high level of devolution of competences. In those cases, it allows a good coherence between national objectives and programmes implemented regionally, taking fully into account specific features at the regional level.

In general, the ex ante evaluations suggest that the balance between measures is well fitted with the objectives. Where imbalances exist, they are justified by clear strategic choices made in favour of agriculture or the environment. In some cases, however, imbalances are not justified by the ex ante evaluation, or a critical judgement by the ex ante analysis has not been taken into account in the final version of the Rural Development Programmes. The full shift to an objective-led approach to programming does not yet seem fully appropriated by the programming authorities and evaluators in all the Member States. We therefore consider that capacity-building actions directed towards both the programming authorities and the evaluation community in the Member States would be appropriate.

Impacts are generally not explicitly split into social, economic and environmental categories, and therefore those have to be indirectly inferred. However, in many cases, a lack of clear distinction between expected impacts (including unintended impacts and potential conflicts between them) and policy objectives (including national priorities, and operational goals) complicates such a categorisation. Despite these limitations, our analysis has permitted to identify a clear set of expected social, economic, and environmental impacts, and to arrange them around the established cluster groups.

Cohesion between the various impacts induced by the Rural Development Programmes seems to be perceived as satisfactory and there is no major unresolved conflict, despite a general worry about potential frictions between environmental preservation and economic growth.

Stakeholders are generally identified either on the demand side (beneficiaries) or the supply side (delivering public policy), depending upon the interpretation given to this terminology. Consultation of stakeholders is generally not mentioned in the ex ante evaluations, although it certainly took place.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Rationale

The topic on monitoring and evaluation covers the approaches to ex-ante evaluation and theme 6 and 7. Theme 6 deals with the actual situation of implementing the monitoring and evaluation system in the Rural Development Programmes including the overall system (evaluation topic 6.1), the indicators used (evaluation topic 6.2) and the methods and systems for collecting the relevant data (evaluation topic 6.3). The approaches to ex ante evaluation refer to the interaction between ex-ante evaluators and programming authorities and the methods used for assessing the programmes (Chapter 3.2). Theme 7 covers the future needs and expectations of the three main elements of the European evaluation framework. Whereas topic 7.1 discusses the needs concerning the ongoing evaluation system and topic 7.3 includes the aspects concerning the future development of the CMEF, topic 7.2 relates to the European Evaluation Network as one major instrument on EU level for the implementation of the defined requirements (ongoing evaluation, CMEF).

Conclusions on Monitoring and Evaluation

Ex ante evaluations have been carried out in an iterative and interactive way. This has permitted regular integration of their inputs and recommendations into the programmes, and has generally led to an improvement of the quality of the reports.

Member States experienced in monitoring and evaluation (mainly the “old” Member States) have less problems with the monitoring and evaluation requirements. The smaller Member States need to invest more resources in relation to their budget allocated. Although the necessity of a monitoring and evaluation system is accepted, a lot of questions concerning the high input of resources for implementation and execution were often raised.

The monitoring and evaluation system is generally regarded as a technical exercise, whereas the usefulness of evaluation as a management tool for improving the quality of the programmes seem to have been understood to a lesser extent . This leads to the fact that most of the ex ante reports and programmes tend to mention that monitoring and evaluation will be carried out, but often they do not provide specific information on how the system will work. The focus lies more on describing reports and tasks required by the EU-regulations (e.g. *“there will be annual progress reports, strategic monitoring, evaluation”*, etc.).

Common monitoring indicators have generally been applied, although with a varying level of quality and completeness, and programme-specific indicators have been added. The requested breakdown into subcategories (e.g. gender, age) has not always been provided. In most cases the measurement of these indicators has not followed the standard measurement units indicated by the EC Guidelines, which leads to problems for their aggregation at European level.

The European Evaluation Network is considered as a useful supporting tool, although its scope in terms of expected tasks is not well known by the potential stakeholders in the Member States. The high anticipated expectations from this Network are generally in line with its expected tasks (collection and dissemination of good practices, methodological support, thematic studies, etc.)

Methodological problems are mainly mentioned in the area of quantification and measurement especially of the impact and baseline indicators, in the measurement of the results and impacts regarding Axis 2 and 3, as well as in the way of addressing cross-cutting evaluation questions.

Overall Conclusions

The switch from a “measure-led” approach to the new “objective-led” approach of programming has proved to be challenging for both programme authorities and evaluators. Generally, the objective-led approach has been adopted by the Member States – however the need for further improvements has become clear in some areas. At the same time, the findings from the Member States offer an ample set of good practices, which represent a good reference for further use.

The synthesis provides a useful tool for a critical reflection about the rationale of the new Community Framework and the implementation of its different elements at programme level. Thus it will serve its purpose of providing a reference point for the results of the upcoming mid-term evaluations of the Rural Development Programmes in 2010.

The planned activities of the European Evaluation Network together with the results of these mid-term evaluations will help to overcome the identified shortcomings in the Rural Development Programmes.

Recommendations

Recommendations relate to the 7 themes and can be summarized as follows:

Theme 1: SWOT analysis and assessment of needs

- Needs or “requirements” should be defined explicitly rather than having to be deduced from the weaknesses, threats and problems arising in the diagnosis and SWOT analysis. The programmes and evaluations should also *explicitly* consider the “requirements” for responding to *the opportunities* for rural development rather than just the deficits.
- These should also explicitly be prioritised and ranked using techniques like stakeholder analysis, problems trees etc.
- The SWOT analysis and assessment of needs should refer to the entire programme area and not just those parts that the programming measures can affect.
- Based on clear definitions, the Programmes and ex ante evaluations should explicitly devote a separate section to the identification of needs, driving forces and causes.
- They should also provide more evidence of the priority given to different target groups taking into account a better definition of their needs and factors such as location (in or out of cities of a certain size), the size of firms, the sectoral distribution, gender, age etc.
- The entire process requires careful and continuous monitoring – not only for the purposes of control – but in order to create a genuine learning snowball effect. This is one of the potential areas in which the new European Evaluation Network could encourage very useful exchanges between evaluators from different programmes and countries involved in similar thematic studies, as recommended by the CMEF.

Theme 2: Policy objectives

- The CMEF should provide better guidance for the programming procedure – especially concerning the rationale of the logical sequence of National Strategy Plans – First draft of Rural Development Programmes – ex-ante evaluation – Final draft of Rural Development Programmes.
- Further clarification about the use, definitions and limitations of the common baseline and impact indicators should be provided to the Managing Authorities and the evaluators.

Theme 3: Measures

- The balance between different axes could be reviewed at the time of the mid-term evaluation, with particular emphasis on the resources allocated to axis 3 and 4.

Theme 4: Impacts

- As part of the further development of the Handbook on the CMEF, the common European approach to the assessment of impacts as developed in Guidance document A (Choice and use of indicators) should be further clarified, taking into account the diversity of national/regional contexts. The promotion of a few common mainly qualitative indicators could also be envisaged

Theme 5: Added value of Community involvement

- Concerning subsidiarity, the role and performance of the governance arrangements set up for LEADER and for the LAGs should be specifically monitored.
- Ways of creating synergies between different funds (e.g. through local implementing agencies) should be better explored by the Member States.

Theme 6: Monitoring and evaluation

- Monitoring and evaluation system should be more thoroughly described in the Rural Development Programmes. Similar to the rules of procedure for the Monitoring Committee this could be documented by a draft version of the terms of reference for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation system.
- To get a full picture about the indicators used, added or skipped (common and programme specific) tables in the annex of the ex ante reports would be very useful.

Theme 7: Ongoing evaluation system

There is a need for further communication about the opportunities offered by the CMEF and the new approach to evaluation. This communication should focus on:

- The opportunities and examples of good practice in using the ongoing evaluation system, as well as the tasks and responsibilities of the European Evaluation Network in relation to both the Member States and to the evaluators.
- Clearer and more user friendly documents with a navigation guide and technical tools incorporated for supporting the implementation of the CMEF.

- Still some progress in developing intervention logics for better programme delivery and result monitoring can be made via the exchange of good practices between administrations and evaluators and via capacity-building actions.
- The European Evaluation Network should support the implementation of the CMEF through the provision of methodological support based on an internet-tool and a telephone hotline as well as workshops directed at specific target groups.
- There needs to be good coordination between the European Evaluation Network and the National Networks