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SYNTHESIS OF MID-TERM EVALUATIONS OF LEADER+ PROGRAMMES

**Subject: Quality grid based on the Final Report submitted by ÖIR –
Managementdienste GmbH, on 01/12/2006**

PRELIMINARY REMARK

This quality grid provides a global assessment on the above-mentioned evaluation study, and has been agreed by the steering group in charge of the following up of the contract.

The judgement is made on the methodological approach followed to answer the evaluation questions, not on the results, conclusions or recommendations reached by the contractor. It has to be pointed out that it is neither the opinion of the evaluators nor the content of their conclusions that are judged here, but only the methods used for obtaining them.

1. MEETING THE NEEDS: Does the evaluation adequately address the information needs of the commissioning body and fit the terms of reference?

The evaluation adequately summarises and analyses past and present experience with regard to the implementation and results of LEADER + programmes.

The analysis of the efficiency and of the effectiveness of LEADER + programmes has been to some extent hindered and limited by widespread delays in the starting of the programmes, and therefore by the limited implementation period at the mid-term stage (reference period: 2000 – 2003). However, the consultant has used the available information to the most possible extent.

The successful conditions for the application of the LEADER method as compared to traditional "top-down" programmes are carefully described, and examples of good practices are identified in this respect. The appropriateness of the current evaluation system is also adequately investigated.

Overall, the main task of providing answers to the evaluation questions included in the contract's terms of reference has been fulfilled, although some of the impact-related questions are answered with caution (and mainly basing on assumptions) due to the above-mentioned reasons.

Global assessment: **good**

2. RELEVANT SCOPE: Is the rationale of the policy examined and its set of outputs, results and outcomes/impacts examined fully, including both intended and unexpected policy interactions and consequences?

The rationale of the policy is examined in details and its set of outputs, results and outcomes/impacts fully and carefully described. In this respect the consultant has positively benefited from previous experiences of matters related to LEADER.

The presentation and description of the LEADER approach, of the specific features of the programme, and of the programme intervention logic are considered as very good.

Global assessment: **good**

3. DEFENSIBLE DESIGN: Is the evaluation design appropriate and adequate to ensure that the full set of findings, along with methodological limitations, is made accessible for answering the main evaluation questions?

The methodological approach proposed by the consultant is considered as reflecting well the needs of the evaluation in terms of gathering information and generating findings.

The case studies which have been carried out and the related interviews have permitted to overcome the methodological limitations linked with the varying quality of the mid-term evaluation reports, while the identification of a number of

"cardinal questions" in connection with the key issues of the programme intervention logic has permitted to reduce the overall complexity of the evaluation project without losing the necessary insight on the programmes implementation.

Global assessment: **good**

4. RELIABLE DATA: To what extent are the primary and secondary data selected adequate? Are they sufficiently reliable for their intended use?

The generally limited implementation period of most of the programmes, and the consequent shortage of information and data has been a major issue of this evaluation.

As for the national/regional reports to be summarized, the evaluator used all available material in a manner which took account of the methodological limits of these reports. Under the agreement of the steering group, the consultant has carried out interviews with managing authorities, evaluators and LAGs representatives with respect to a selection of programmes, with a special focus to address the information gaps as regards the further and "cardinal" evaluation questions.

As regards the use of the updated mid-term evaluations (finalised during the year 2005), one can regret that they have not been used extensively as additional data sources. However, it has to be noted that due to the broader temporal coverage of the updates, the extrapolation of the information related to the reference period (2000–2003) was not always possible.

Very few bibliography references are quoted; they mainly refer to previous evaluations carried out by the consultant in the same sector - or to EC legislation - and have been mainly used to for the description of the LEADER approach.

Global assessment: **satisfactory**

5. SOUND ANALYSIS: Is quantitative and qualitative information appropriately and systematically analysed according to the state of the art so that evaluation questions are answered in a valid way?

The completeness of the analysis has been negatively influenced by the poor use of indicators in the national/regional mid-term evaluation reports and more generally by the general lack of quantitative data within these reports. As a consequence, and also considering that little activity was carried out in the reference period due to the relatively short period of implementation of the programmes, the final report hardly refers to any quantified data to underpin the given answers to the evaluation questions.

Case studies have been used to address the shortage of quantitative information; the analysis of the related qualitative information is generally considered as following the state of the art, although the steering group considers that case studies could have provided a more significant input for the purposes of the European level synthesis. Where relevant, the limits of the findings based on this qualitative information are duly explained.

Generally, the identification of common trends at Community level is limited to the preparatory and structuring phases of programmes, but this is mainly considered to be due to the above-mentioned contextual constraints rather than to shortages in the analysis carried out.

Overall, taking into consideration these contextual constraints, the global assessment for this criterion is satisfactory.

Global assessment: **satisfactory**

6. CREDIBLE FINDINGS: Do findings follow logically from, and are they justified by, the data analysis and interpretations based on carefully described assumptions and rationale?

The findings generally do follow logically from the data analysis, and logical assumptions are justified and linked with the global rationale of the analysis.

When findings are based on the outcomes of interviews and case studies, and therefore tend to reflect the opinion of particular actors (LAG and managing authorities), they are presented with the necessary carefulness.

Global assessment: **satisfactory**

7. VALIDITY OF THE CONCLUSIONS: Does the report provide clear conclusions? Are conclusions based on credible results?

The conclusions of the analysis are structured and presented in a sufficiently clear way, and do reflect the findings presented in the text. They do not seem to be biased by pre-established assumptions or partisan considerations.

It was not possible to come up with generalised conclusions as regards the identification of common trends at European level (see point 5). However, the conclusions on how the specific features of the LEADER approach can be integrated in the preparation and implementation of the national/regional programmes, as well as the conclusions on the overall role of the LEADER programme in the context of rural development are considered good.

Global assessment: **satisfactory**

8. USEFULNESS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS: Are recommendations fair, unbiased by personal or stakeholders' views, and sufficiently detailed to be operationally applicable?

The numerous recommendations issued by the consultant are adequately balanced and detailed to be applicable. However, in a few cases they are formulated in a rather general way, or are weakly justified on the basis of the information provided in the text.

Their usefulness at Community level is sometimes limited, mainly due to the late start of the evaluation project (e.g. recommendations related to the conceptualisation of the 2007 – 2013 programming period). Recommendations related to some operational aspects of the preparation and implementation of the national/regional

programmes (e.g. selection process of LAG, preparation of the strategy, role of national networks etc.) are considered pertinent and useful at Member States level.

Global assessment: **satisfactory**

9. CLEAR REPORT: Does the report clearly describe the policy evaluated, including its context and purpose, together with the procedures and findings of the evaluation, so that information provided can easily be understood?

The report is written in a sufficiently clear language, although some formulations could have been further simplified to ease a broad understanding. In addition, the Steering Group considers that the executive summary could have gained further clarity from a more synthetic and concise presentation.

Overall, the information provided can be satisfactorily accessed and understood.

Global assessment: **satisfactory**

10. ASSESSMENT OF THE REPORT AS A WHOLE

Taking into consideration all the aspects discussed above, the overall judgement of this evaluation report is: **satisfactory**

Concerning these criteria, the evaluation report is:	Unacceptable	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent
1. Meeting the needs: Does the evaluation adequately address the information needs of the commissioning body and fit the terms of reference?				X	
2. Relevant scope: Is the rationale of the policy examined and its set of outputs, results and outcomes/impacts examined fully, including both intended and unexpected policy interactions and consequences?				X	
3. Defensible design: Is the evaluation design appropriate and adequate to ensure that the full set of findings, along with methodological limitations, is made accessible for answering the main evaluation questions?				X	
4. Reliable data: To what extent are the primary and secondary data selected adequate? Are they sufficiently reliable for their intended use?			X		
5. Sound analysis: Is quantitative and qualitative information appropriately and systematically analysed according to the state of the art so that evaluation questions are answered in a valid way?			X		
6. Credible findings: Do findings follow logically from, and are they justified by, the data analysis and interpretations based on carefully described assumptions and rationale?			X		
7. Validity of the conclusions: Does the report provide clear conclusions? Are conclusions based on credible results?			X		
8. Usefulness of the recommendations: Are recommendations fair, unbiased by personal or stakeholders' views, and sufficiently detailed to be operationally applicable?			X		
9. Clearly reported: Does the report clearly describe the policy being evaluated, including its context and purpose, together with the procedures and findings of the evaluation, so that information provided can easily be understood?			X		
Taking into account the contextual constraints on the evaluation, the overall quality rating of the report is considered			X		