QUALITY ASSESSMENT FORM

Title of the evaluation:

SYNTHESIS OF EX ANTE EVALUATIONS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES 2014 – 2020

DG/Unit: DG AGRI, Unit E4

- Official(s) managing the evaluation: Caroline RAES

Evaluator/contractor: Kantor

Assessment carried out by:

- Steering group with the participation of DG AGRI units E.1, E.3, F.4, G.1, H.1, H.2, H.3, H.4, H5, J.4, DG CLIMA unit A.2, DG EAC unit A.1, DG GROW unit D.3, DG ENV unit B.1, DG RTD unit F.3, SG unit C.1.

Date of the Quality Assessment: November 2015

(1) RELEVANCE

Does the evaluation respond to information needs, in particular as expressed in the terms of references?

SCORING	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
				X	

Arguments for scoring:

The evaluation report provides a comprehensive overview of the ex ante evaluations of all rural development programmes. In addition to the ex ante evaluation reports, other relevant information sources (Strategic Environmental Assessment reports, rural development programmes, Partnership Agreements) were screened in view of covering the information needs as referred to in the terms of reference.

The report provides an in-depth analysis of the process of the ex ante evaluations, how these have assessed the intervention logic of the programmes and the internal and external coherence. Furthermore, via a range of case studies, six thematic clusters were investigated in order to explore specific new elements of this programming period, e.g. new risk management measures.

The scope of the evaluation (period of time, geographical coverage etc.) as specified in the terms of reference is well covered. The evaluation report provides useful hints for improving the programming, management, monitoring and evaluation of rural development programmes, both at Member States and Community level. Examples of good practices are identified throughout the report.

(2) APPROPRIATE DESIGN

Is the design of the evaluation adequate for obtaining the results needed to answer the evaluation questions?

SCORING	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
				X	

Arguments for scoring:

One of the major challenges of the synthesis was linked to the inherent complexity of dealing with a substantial number of information sources, with a varying level of quality and homogeneity. In this respect, the set of tools provided by the contractor to overcome this problem (e.g. analytical grids and templates for geographic experts, survey, case studies, etc.) is considered appropriate and coherent with the evaluation needs. The applied methods are clearly described, and the information sources and analytical tools that have been used, are adequate for covering the evaluation themes and topics.

(3) RELIABLE DATA

Are data collected adequate for their intended use and have their reliability been ascertained?

SCORING	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
			X		

Arguments for scoring:

The synthesis primarily used the ex ante evaluations of the rural development programmes as source data. These are often of variable quality and detail as regards their information on different aspects to be investigated. Where data gaps were identified, additional information was sourced in other documents (Strategic Environmental Assessment reports, rural development programmes, Partnership Agreements) and via a survey and interviews.

Overall, the evaluators have made an effort to collect and exploit the best available information sources.

(4) SOUND ANALYSIS

Are data systematically analysed to answer evaluation questions and cover other information needs in a valid manner?

SCORING	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
			X		

Arguments for scoring:

Given the specificities of this synthesis evaluation, this criterion has to be linked to the analysis of the evaluation themes and topics. In this respect, the analysis has been based on appropriate techniques that have permitted to extrapolate a comprehensive set of relevant findings.

Available data have been critically interpreted, and – where necessary – qualitative results from the survey have well supported the analysis. The analysis of the expected impacts of rural development programmes was negatively influenced by the detected weaknesses of the programmes in terms of identification of impacts.

Where findings were influenced by the delay in finalisation of the programmes (e.g. information that had not been available to the ex ante evaluators), this was clearly signalled in the report.

(5) CREDIBLE FINDINGS

Do findings follow logically from and are justified by, the data/information analysis and interpretations based on pre-established criteria and rational?

SCORING	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
			X		

Arguments for scoring:

The findings are credible, supported by adequate evidence, and follow logically from the analysis. Judgments are expressed in a prudent manner in those cases where the information basis was not sufficient for solidly underpinning them. As the ex ante reports used as source data are often of variable quality and detail as regards their information on particular topics, this fact is necessarily also reflected in the synthesis of the findings and can be a limiting factor to the overall quality of the findings. The contractor has included the appropriate caveats in the text of the report where necessary.

The final report provides a very broad range of useful findings with respect to the key aspects of programming, monitoring and evaluation of rural development programmes. Critical remarks about some aspects of the programming and evaluation systems are generally accompanied by examples of good practices; thus the report represents a useful tool for a critical reflection about the policy framework and its implementation, in view of their possible improvement both at EU and Member State level.

(6) VALID CONCLUSIONS

Are conclusions non-biased and fully based on findings?

SCORING	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
				X	

Arguments for scoring:

The conclusions are largely substantiated by evaluation findings, which in turn were drawn from the sound analysis. They are well structured under different headings. They address all evaluation questions and they are balanced and prudent.

(7) HELPFUL RECOMMENDATIONS

Are areas needing improvements identified in coherence with the conclusions? Are the suggested options realistic and impartial?

SCORING	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
			X		

Arguments for scoring:

The recommendations stem logically from the findings and the conclusions, are fair and unbiased, and provide plausible options for improvements. Recommendations are linked to the different aspects of programming and implementation of rural development programmes and are rooted in good practices identified regarding a range of different elements of rural development programming.

(8) CLARITY

Is the report well structured, balanced and written in an understandable manner?

SCORING	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
			X		

Arguments for scoring:

The report provides a large volume of information, is well structured and balanced, following the elements required by the terms of reference. The report is written in a sufficiently clear and understandable language.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

Overall, the quality of the report is assessed to be **good.**

Is the overall quality of the report adequate, in particular:

- Does the evaluation fulfil contractual conditions?

Yes.

- Are the findings and conclusions of the report reliable, and are there any specific limitations to their validity and completeness?

The findings and conclusions of the report are sufficiently reliable and clear; no major limitations to their validity and completeness have been detected.

- Is the information in the report potentially useful for designing intervention, setting priorities, allocating resources or improving interventions?

Yes. The evaluation provides a comprehensive insight into the programming process and useful directions for improvement on different aspects of rural development programming.