



Title: Ex-post evaluation of LEADER +

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Synthetic Summary

Submitted by Metis GmbH with AEIDL and CEU
as subcontractors

Ex-post evaluation of LEADER+
Contract N° 30-CE-0321257/00-26



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The objectives of the ex post evaluation were to provide an overview of the utilisation of resources and the effectiveness and efficiency of the assistance and its impact in relation to eight themes. In order to answer the specific evaluation questions, substantial fieldwork was required. The fieldwork revolved around four main tools. These were: a survey of 10% of all Local Action Groups (LAGs); a survey of Managing Authorities (MAs); interviews with National Network Units (NNUs) and ten case studies. The results of the data analysis in relation to the evaluation questions and the ensuing recommendations are summarised below according to the themes.

Theme 1: Relevance and Community Added Value: LEADER+ addressed a large number of needs of rural areas. It has been an important complement to mainstream policies and agencies and has contributed to economic diversification, quality of life and preservation and enhancement of the natural and built environment of rural areas. In these fields of activity, flexibility, sensitivity to local needs, small scale have distinguished LEADER from other governmental structures and addressed needs and exploited potentials considered 'unreachable' by larger and more traditionally run organizations.

Recommendation:

- In recognition of the strength of the LEADER approach in promoting as well as harnessing diversity and diversification, it should be used as an instrument to foster the local development potential, i.e. for increasing the adaptive capacity and resilience of the area, rather than for boosting short term productivity and market success for local value chains.

Theme 2, Action 1: Integrated territorial rural development strategies of a pilot nature: The pilot nature of the strategies fostered innovation particularly by reconfiguring and enabling local actors to embark on new activities, by combining existing activities in new ways and by linking local competences to external sources of knowledge and technology.

Recommendations:

- LEADER should maintain its 'laboratory' character, with a strategic perspective.
- Meeting particular needs of minority groups, disadvantaged or marginalized people, not automatically catered for by the provisions of the LEADER approach, requires additional arrangements.

Theme 2, Action 2: Support for cooperation between rural territories: The LEADER+ programmes and LEADER+ type measures brought local actors together who would otherwise not have come together to pursue common goals. Whilst co-operation with LAGs from other countries brought inspiration, cooperation with neighbouring LAGs gave strong encouragement to joint projects. Co-operation activities principally channel information and ideas on better project management amongst peers within countries.

Recommendation

- Territorial co-operation should continue to be a keystone of the LEADER approach, for more experienced LAGs as well as for beginners.

Theme 2, Action 3: Networking: LAGs drew on both the national networks and the LEADER Observatory. Networking could be enhanced if benefits were clearly articulated and geared to solving common problems. NNUs had a strong role in both identifying such needs and working with partners in other countries to create appropriate fora to engage with interested LAGs.

Recommendation

- Targeted opportunities for peer learning for LAGs, whether within or between countries should be further developed.

Theme 3: The implementation of the LEADER method: The implementation of the LEADER method promoted multi-sectoral and integrated development and contributed to strengthening the local economy and the social capital in rural areas. Mobilisation of entrepreneurs was a key success factor.

Recommendations

- LEADER Programmes should continue to focus on multi-sectoral development of rural areas, enhancement of social capital and increased territorial competitiveness, and at the same time increasingly integrate local responses to global social and environmental concerns.
- The autonomy of LAGs should be further developed.

Theme 4: Impacts: LAGs promoted small scale and craft enterprises directly which contributed directly and indirectly to the creation and maintenance of employment.

Recommendation

- To achieve demographic balance, both the productive and the reproductive side of life, the creation of employment opportunities and income on one hand and the improvement of the rural environment on the other should be given due consideration.

Theme 5: Governance and rural citizenship: LEADER+ had significant positive effects on local governing capacities and through this considerably promoted territorially based forms of rural development and the participation of local actors. LEADER+-type measures significantly enhanced the capacities of rural communities in the NMS. Autonomy was considered an important aspect of the ability of LAGs to implement local development strategies effectively.

Recommendation

- The establishment of effective public-private partnerships with a clear allocation and understanding of the respective roles needs to be actively promoted and supported.

Theme 6: Managing, controlling and financing systems: The arrangements for administration and finance as part of the LEADER+ strategy appears to have worked well and to be a strong model. Elements of this have translated well into the new programme period; continuity of LAGs and staff and effective partnership between MAs and LAGs are key contributors to this.

Recommendation

- The administrative procedures for ensuring transparency and accountability must not impede LAGs from carrying out their development work nor exclude local actors with lesser administrative capacities from participating in the programme.

Theme 7: Monitoring and evaluation: European wide comparison and aggregation of LEADER+ monitoring data for the purposes of evaluation is very seriously compromised by systemic weaknesses. A substantial proportion of LAGs report that they had no established systems of structured observation and local development monitoring. Progress in developing evaluation capacity appears rather limited as is the basis of evidence.

Recommendations

- The capacity of LEADER to enhance social capital is central but steps need to be taken to adopt reliable approaches and methodologies to assess success or failure.
- The LAGs should develop and employ high quality and dynamic local territorial strategies which they actively monitor, update and improve through ongoing reflection and revision.
- Building evaluation capacity, awareness, structures, resources and commitment needs active management and real accountability at all levels.

Theme 8: Rural activity/excellence clusters: Although virtually no LAGs explicitly described their activities as being clustering, sustaining wide ranging networks that opened up new economic opportunities was a primary objective for over 75% of the LAGs in the survey.

Recommendation

- LEADER areas and LAGs need to link more effectively to the wider development context and to network with other actors and stakeholders.