

Guidance note L – Frequently Asked Questions

This guidance note presents the Frequently Asked Questions, relating to:

- Monitoring, output and result indicators
- Evaluation, including general approach; assessment of a measure's or programme's impact; ex-ante evaluation and SEA; and reporting
- Baseline indicators

1. FAQs CONCERNING MONITORING (OUTPUT AND RESULT INDICATORS)

Q: Problems to report on result indicators already in the first annual report covering the year 2007

A:

- The requirement to report on the result indicators in the annual progress report is embedded in Council Regulation EC N° 1698/2005. However, results should be reported on completion of projects, and for multiannual commitments at least in time for key evaluation exercises. In practice, this means that in the first year little or no data will be available.

Q: Subdivision 'age' of commitment in the fiches: what is meant by new – existing commitments?

A:

- Unless otherwise indicated, new commitments indicate the commitments that were closed in the year of reporting compared to the existing ones, which were made in a previous year of reporting.

Q: What is the difference between physical area – total area (measure agri-environment)?

A:

- Total area represents the sum of the area of all commitments while physical area is the area on farms which are under commitments (no double counting of the same area).

Q: Does the annual progress report refer to the calendar year?

A: Yes

Q: What is the status of information on collection method in the fiches?

A:

- The information in the fiches on data collection and responsible actors are considered as a good practice suggestion. Alternative collection methods are allowed.

2. FAQs CONCERNING EVALUATION

Theme 1: General approach

Q: What is "ongoing evaluation"?

A:

- "Ongoing evaluation" in the context of rural development means that evaluation activities are organised on an ongoing basis. This includes all the evaluation activities to be carried out during the whole programming period, comprising ex-ante, mid-term, and ex-post evaluation as well as any other evaluation-related activity the programme authority may find useful for improving their programme management. It includes the interaction between evaluation activities, the compilation and refinement of indicators, and data collection. The system of ongoing evaluation shall ensure capacity building early on and continuity of evaluation-related activities during the whole programming period.
- Evaluation activities at programme level will be supplemented by accompanying thematic studies as well as by the activities of the European evaluation network for rural development serving as a platform for exchange and capacity building for evaluation in the Member States.

Q: In the context of the ongoing evaluation, do Member States have to outsource all tasks related to evaluation to external evaluators?

A:

- Independent evaluators are needed for carrying out the tasks of ex-ante, mid-term and ex-post evaluations;
- The overall co-ordination of the ongoing evaluation system can be provided by public institutions that are independent from the implementation, management and/or financing bodies and competent in evaluation practices.

Q: Will the Commission provide further definitions for terms like "competitiveness", "sustainable land management" or "quality of life"?

A:

- No. These terms should be defined in the context of each single programme to be evaluated.

Q: Can the evaluators group the evaluation results in their report according to themes instead of listing them separately for each measure?

A:

- Yes, as long as all common evaluation questions are answered and the cross reference to the different single measures is done.

Q: Why are the evaluation questions now directly linked to the measures and not to chapters any more?

A:

- The evaluation questions are established in view of the hierarchy of objectives. As the hierarchy of objectives refers to the measures it is necessary to assess and evaluate the contribution of each single measure to the related objectives, sub-objectives etc. The objectives replace therefore the chapters utilised in the last programming period 2000 - 2006.

Q: Have all the common evaluation questions to be answered under evaluation reports?

A:

- All the common evaluations questions that relate to measures included in a given rural development programme have to be addressed in the evaluation reports.

Q: Do the horizontal evaluation questions apply to all axes, e.g. have the evaluators to look for environmental effects or employment effects of all measures applied?

A:

- The horizontal questions shall assess the contribution of the whole programme to the achievement of the overarching objectives. Therefore the horizontal questions apply to all axes and the evaluators have to look for effects of all measures applied including negative effects.

Q: Have national top-ups, which fall under Article 89 measures, to be evaluated or not?

A:

- As national funded measures will contribute to the achievement programme's objectives (and in some cases are an essential element), the Commission considers that they should be taken into account in the evaluation of the rural development programmes.

Q: Do the evaluators have to provide a specific intervention logic with specific indicators and objectives if a certain measure has an impact which is not included in the measure objectives (e.g. environmental effect of farm modernisation) or can this be dealt with as a "side-effect" which is not linked to a specific objective?

A:

- Evaluators have to identify specific intervention logics and to assess programme-specific additional indicators when a given measure corresponds to specific national/regional

objectives that Member States have introduced to address particular needs of the rural areas covered by the programme.

- Unintended effects of implementing measures have to be dealt with and duly described under the evaluation process.

Q: Is it possible to reduce the administrative burden deriving from monitoring and evaluation for those Member States for which the Community contribution is limited compared to the national one?

A:

- All measures which have been included in a rural development programme have to be monitored and evaluated in accordance with the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the reason of accountability of public expenditure and the legal requirement for evaluation.
- The Commission undertook major efforts to limit the administrative burden related to monitoring and evaluation of rural development programmes to the necessary. Within this agreed Common framework, it is the role of the Member States to implement rural development programmes in a most cost-effective way.

Q: Is it possible for Member States to set up and carry out a national evaluation network under the Community funding (e.g. in the case of Member States implementing regional rural development programmes)?

A:

- Yes, in the context of the establishment of their national rural development networks, Member States can include specific activities targeting evaluation.

Theme 2: Assessment of a measure's or programme's impact:

Q: How can the impacts of Community funded interventions be assessed with respect to broad parameters such as "labour productivity" and "sustainable land management"?

Q: How can the effects of Community interventions be isolated from other intervening factors?

A:

- Impacts will be identified as net-contributions of each single measure to achieving a programme's objectives. The focus should be on the bottom-up estimation of impact:
- In a first step, impact should be estimated at the level of direct and indirect beneficiaries by programme evaluator on the basis of output and result indicators, survey data and experience and evaluations from last programming periods (for calculation of double counting, deadweight, displacement and multiplier effects). This should be cross-checked against the counterfactual situation and contextual trends in programme area.
- In a second stage, the evaluator should make an estimation of the contribution to the general trend at programme area level (baseline trend), where feasible/statistically significant compared to other factors. Where this is not possible the evaluator should make a qualitative assessment in general terms.

Q: What is the role of indicators for the assessment of programmes' impact?

A:

- In general terms, indicators have to be considered as methodological tools supporting the assessment of an intervention in terms of its output, results or impacts.
- The programme's impact should be assessed against their objectives, and related target levels. The common impact indicators need to be complemented by additional indicators specific to the programmes which take into account the full range of objectives and sub-objectives at programme level, as well as national priorities.

Q: Some measures of one axis may have an impact on objectives of other axis. Shouldn't we evaluate the impact along other objectives?

(e.g.: measures of axis 1 have an impact on climate change; measures of axis 3 and axis 4 have an impact on labour productivity)

A:

- This is the approach adopted. The impact of the programme as a whole should be assessed against the 7 common impact indicators to take into account the full contribution of all axes of the programme.

Q: Do Member States have to measure regularly the evolution of impact indicators?

A:

- The assessment of impact of Rural Development programmes, and within this framework the measurement of impact indicators, falls within the scope of evaluation. The responsibility for the estimation and quantification of impact indicators remains with the evaluators. The responsibility of the Managing Authority is to ensure that the evaluators have sufficient data on general trends, outputs and results to carry out such an assessment.

Q: Is it necessary to quantify all impact indicators?

A:

- Article 85 of the Rural Development Regulation refers to "quantified targets, particularly in terms of impact in relation to the baseline situation". In line with this, evaluators have to make an effort to provide a quantitative assessment of the impact indicators to the extent possible.
- If a quantification of impact indicator is not possible, the evaluators should provide an estimation or a qualitative assessment.

Q: Could we replace some common impact indicators by new ones or complement them with additional indicators?

A:

- The selection of common indicators corresponds to the priorities defined in the EU strategic guidelines.
- All common impact indicators should be evaluated.
- The common impact indicators should be complemented by additional indicators specific to the programmes which take into account the full range of objectives and sub-objectives at programme level, as well as national priorities.
- Member States should ensure that, where the objectives of a measure are specifically identified in the Rural Development Community Strategic Guidelines or in their National Strategy, and such objectives are not covered by a common impact indicator, a corresponding additional impact indicator is defined.

Theme 3: Ex-ante evaluation and SEA

Q: Is the environmental assessment to be carried out under the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework sufficient to comply with the requirements of the Directive EC/2001/42?

A:

- Member States have to prepare an environmental report providing all the elements of information listed under Annex I of Directive 2001/42/EC which is applicable for the assessment of the current situation of the geographical area for environment and land management as foreseen by the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. Member States may complement this analysis with any other element of information they deem appropriate.

Q: Who are the responsible authorities for the "Strategic Environmental Assessment" of the programmes and what are the respective tasks for the programming authorities and the independent evaluators?

A:

- Programming Authorities are responsible for:
 - The overall quality of the environmental report,
 - The national and (if relevant) transboundary consultations
- Ex ante evaluators will:
 - Carry out the environmental assessment,
 - Prepare the environmental report,
 - Support programming authorities in carrying out the consultations on request.

Q: What is the role of indicators for the definition of the programme's strategy?

A:

- Baseline indicators are used in the context of the SWOT analysis, which aims at identifying the needs for a geographical area covered by the programme. Based on the outcome of the SWOT analysis, Member States will define their programmes strategies in the light of the disparities, priorities, and needs identified.

Theme 4: Reporting

Q: What kind of information is required in the annual evaluation reports?

A:

- The first report in 2008 will describe the provisions for the establishment of the evaluation system in the national/regional context (indicators, administrative arrangements, data collection provisions).
- In 2009 and from 2011 to 2014, the reports will describe the evaluation activities undertaken, among others capacity building and methodological work, data collection, and references to difficulties encountered.
- A full evaluation of measures and programmes has to take place in 2010 (mid-term evaluation) and in 2015 (ex-post evaluation).

Q: What is the difference between the reporting in 2008 on the evaluation system and the description of the evaluation system to be included in the programme?

A:

- For the programme, a description of the evaluation system has to be included.
- The evaluation report in 2008 has to describe how the setting-up of the evaluation system actually took place, what was already done, what remains to be done and what needs to be improved in this respect.

3. FAQs CONCERNING BASELINE INDICATORS

Q: What should we do if there is no annual periodicity of data in the source databases?

(e.g. indicators based on Farm Structure Surveys that take place every 2 or 3 years)

A:

- If no new data is available at national/regional level every year, the last available information should be used, until new information is available.
- No additional collection of data is required than what is available.

Q: What should we do if no data are available in community databases for common baseline indicators?

(e.g. no statistics for forestry sector or for biodiversity)

A:

- In the baseline analysis to draw National Strategy Plans, MS should present **at least** the lead baseline indicators.
- The baseline analysis to design programmes should reflect all common objective related baseline indicators and, in principle, all context related baseline indicators.
- In some cases data will not be available for common indicators. In these cases:
 - If an equivalent source of information exists at national/regional level, this source should be used (e.g. Value Added in forestry sector from detailed tables of National Economic Accounts rather than from Forestry Economic Accounts if they are not made),
 - If an alternative indicator exists based on national/regional information, MS can use it as an additional national/regional indicator,
- Where there is no alternative for a quantitative measurement, a qualitative assessment is acceptable.

Q: What should we do if no data are available in community databases for common baseline indicators because the programming area does not correspond to aggregates of NUTS2 or NUTS3?

A:

In some cases data will not be available for common indicators. In this cases:

- If an equivalent source of information exists at national/regional level, this source should be used (e.g. Value Added in forestry sector from detailed tables of National Economic Accounts rather than from Forestry Economic Accounts if they are not made),

- If an alternative indicator exists based on national/regional information, MS can use it as an additional national/regional indicator,
- Where there is no alternative for a quantitative measurement, a qualitative assessment is acceptable.

Q: Should we collect the indicators with a detailed regional breakdown (e.g. NUTS-3) when there is no national need for analysis at this level?

A:

- There is no obligation for MS to analyse at regional level. It is up to them to decide which regional breakdown is appropriate for each baseline indicator, based on their programs and the need for the evaluation.
- The purpose of DG AGRI when providing indicators data series at a regional level as detailed as possible was to illustrate the availability of data for the common baseline indicators proposed.

Q: What should we do if more recent information exists for our MS than in indicators data series delivered by DG AGRI?

A:

- The purpose of DG AGRI when delivering the data was twofold:
 - (1) To illustrate the availability of data for the common baseline indicators proposed,
 - (2) To give an overview of the situation at EU level.
- To give a reasonable picture of the situation at EU level, DG AGRI decided to provide the data for the most recent year for which data were available for the majority of MS. It means that for some MS, more recent data are available.
- It is up to MS to use the most recent data to provide the best information for their country.

Q: What should we do if more detailed information exists for our MS than in data series delivered by DG AGRI?

(e.g. Context related n°10 Natura 2000 area: a more detailed geographical breakdown can be available in some MS)

A:

- If more detailed information is available - in term of breakdown of the indicator (e.g. at geographical level, or category levels) – MS may use it if they consider it is useful.
- If the more detailed - and useful - information exists but in the form of a more specific indicator, it is up to MS to decide to use it as in the form of an additional national/regional indicator.

Q: What should we do if we consider that a more appropriate indicator exists at national/regional level?

(e.g. Objective related n°17: Biodiversity: Population of farmland birds: it would be more appropriate to use the information on the biodiversity on plants species.)

A:

- If other information exists at national/regional level that can provide better or additional information to the common indicator on one specific issue, MS may use this information as an additional indicator.
- In the case of “High Nature Value Farmland areas”, as the concept and the measurement is still under development, the Commission accepts national approaches as an alternative indicator.

Q: What should we do if we consider that the measurement of the common indicator is not satisfactory?

(e.g. Objective related n°31: Tourism infrastructure in rural areas: it would be better to measure the number of overnights stays instead of the number of beds)

A:

- If other information exists at national/regional level that can provide better or additional information to the common indicator on one specific issue, MS should use this information as an additional indicator.

Q: What should we do if we consider that the OECD methodology is not appropriate to delimitate rural areas in our country?

A:

- When MS consider that the OECD methodology is not appropriate to delimitate rural areas, they must propose and use an alternative delimitation. This definition should be used in context related baseline indicator n°1 "Designation of rural areas" and consistently for all related indicators.
- In particular, for context indicator n°2 "Importance of rural areas", MS should provide the data in relation to the delimitation of rural areas used for context related baseline indicator n°1 "Designation of rural areas". Where this is not possible, a qualitative estimate should be provided.

Q: What should we do for indicators of axis 3 where data corresponding to the delimitation of rural areas used for context related baseline indicator n°1 "Designation of rural areas" are not available?

A:

- Where data corresponding to the delimitation of rural areas used for context related baseline indicator n°1 "Designation of rural areas" are not available, a best approximation at a higher geographical level should be provided.

Q: What should we do if we have information for an objective for which there is no common baseline indicator?

(e.g. Value of agricultural production under recognized quality label/standard; Animal welfare)

A:

- If information exists at national/regional level for an objective for which there is no common baseline indicator, MS should use this information as an additional indicator.

Q: Who should provide the baseline data? DG AGRI or MS?

A:

- The responsibility for providing the baseline data rests with the managing authorities of MS.
- The Commission will seek to ensure, in collaboration with MS and other Community institutions, that data is available at national level for all common baseline indicators.

Q: Should we provide the baseline data yearly?

A:

- Baseline data should be established and provided at the beginning of the programming period on the basis of available data:
 - in the National Strategy Plans: the lead common baseline indicators + other baseline indicators (common or additional) used in the baseline analysis,
 - in the Programmes: all baseline indicators corresponding to objectives identified in the programme (in principle, all common baseline indicators should be used in the analysis of the situation).
- Baseline data should be updated and provided in the course of the programming period when new data become available.

Q: Should we provide common baseline indicators that are not relevant for our MS?

(e.g. Objective related n°32 Internet take-up in rural areas)

A:

- All ‘lead’ common baseline indicators have to be considered in the National Strategy Plans (and are therefore a priori supposed to be provided).
- The analysis of the situation in the programme area (SWOT analysis) should be based on common objective and context related baseline indicators.
- Member States should ensure that baseline indicators are available for all objectives identified in the programme to support the assessment of impact.

Q: Why some common baseline indicators seem not closely related to the RD measures and to the impacts to be evaluated?

(e.g. Objective related n°4: Training and education in agriculture: this variable is maybe at a too high level to be able to make a link with the impact of the measures; Objective related n°6: Labour productivity in agriculture: there is not always a link with the measure 111 - vocational training and information actions, etc.)

A:

- In general terms, it should be reminded that baseline indicators are linked to broader objectives to which different measures could contribute more or less.
- Member States may define an additional indicator if they consider the common indicator is not specific enough (e.g. concerning the type of training).
- More specifically, it is true that training can have other objectives and effects than the increase of the labour productivity. If relevant, Member States should use another (additional) indicator or assess the contribution to other impact indicators.