

Case Study: Launching the evaluation of a rural development programme

This case study draws upon the intermediate evaluation of an EC funded programme in the Burgundy Region (France)

For training purposes a number of simplifications and modifications have been made.

This document should not be used for any purpose other than training

1 - The programme

This EU funded rural development programme has to be evaluated at mid-term.

Territory

The programme allocates resources in favour of socio-economic development in four rural areas in Burgundy. Altogether, these four areas have experienced a population loss since the 1950s (between 10 and 20%). Although this decline has stabilised since the early 1980s, the territory is currently handicapped by its low density (20 inhabitants/km²) and its ageing population (more than a quarter of the population is over 65). The high level of unemployment (15%) is another matter of concern.

The economy remains heavily dependent on agriculture (a quarter of the working population) and particularly on extensive cattle and dairy farming. Industry and crafts are not specific assets but forestry and wood industry are dynamic sectors, as well as tourism. Over the past ten years some parts of the territory have experienced the advantages and disadvantages of the settlement of people working in neighbouring urban areas.

Programming

The programme was designed by the EC and partners at regional level. It was a follow up of a previous similar programme. Actors at regional level first presented an area-based development plan to the Commission, covering the four areas separately. The Commission requested that the Programme cover the four areas as a whole and be structured by categories of interventions. To a little extent, the selected approach still reflected the regional partners' wish to better integrate local development aid. However, the main options were in line with the Commission's request to introduce a common logic across areas at regional level.

The first steps of programme design involved the State representative in the region, the regional administration¹ and the services of the Commission. Once the process had been negotiated at this level, the draft programme was circulated and those who had not yet been involved in the process were given the opportunity to comment. Their feedback was taken into account during a short and tough negotiation period. Several regional actors had persistent reservations about the compromise coined with the Commission and these dissenting views continued to be expressed in the Monitoring Committee of the programme.

Strategy of the programme

The programming documents describe the main rural development challenges as follows:

- ◆ Structurally unbalanced rural population density resulting in a reduction in the supply of services
- ◆ Agriculture undergoing intense change, the base of traditional production being highly sensitive to the reform of the EC Common Agriculture Policy
- ◆ A low rate of replacement among farm managers for both contextual and structural reasons (very large, capital-intensive farms, obsolescence of farmsteads, remoteness, weakness of economic environment)
- ◆ Distance from major urban centres in a region with an uneven distribution of major road and rail transport infrastructure
- ◆ Rich and abundant cultural heritage and tourism assets which are under-exploited due to a weak capacity of local authorities to develop and to fund projects, to insufficient or diffuse investments, and to a considerable need for training in tourism

¹ French regions have an elected council, an elected executive and an autonomous administration

- ◆ A forest area with significant potential and highly diversified as regards tree species, which must, for forestry and industrial reasons, be exploited more intensely.

The aim of the programme, as stated in the programming documents, is to "stop the rural exodus" through four goals:

- ◆ To strengthen traditional economic actors
- ◆ To modernise and adapt business enterprises
- ◆ To enhance and/or promote development poles
- ◆ To manage and develop natural areas

The strategy adopted in drawing up the development plan and the operational programme takes into account the economic and human realities of the region and proposes both to support the dominant activities and to promote new ones.

- ◆ Supporting dominant activities: The programme, far from denying existing activities, promotes the development of agricultural structures and rural infrastructure. It recognises that farmers' income relies on traditional production of which the efficacy must be maintained, and also that rural infrastructure is increasingly important as the population declines. The arrival of young people settling in the region is determined as much by farming itself as by the environment.
- ◆ Promoting new activities: With regard to agriculture, this means stimulating interest and favouring numerous forms of diversification which offer alternatives, whether they concern new products for the region, value added to quality products on site, or the stimulation of activities which become profitable again in a context which is too restrictive for mass production.

With regard to the tourist industry, the strategy is to promote tourism activities focusing on the rich regional joining regional and local efforts.

As regards crafts and industry, the strategy consists primarily of enhancing the economic attractiveness of the rural territories.

All new activities must be supported by a significant training effort aimed simultaneously at meeting expectations and at accompanying the evolution of economic activities with the human resources engaged in these activities. Thus, on the basis of existing training facilities - which must in turn also follow economic changes - it should be possible to offer training suited to specific problems in each area targeted by the programme.

Components of the programme

Sub-programme 1 - Development and diversification of agriculture and forestry

The general aim of this sub-programme is to promote the development of all activities in rural areas in order to combat out-migration effectively.

More specifically with regard to agriculture, it consists of ensuring that the sector does not only contribute to the economic development of the rural areas but also plays its indispensable role in the occupation and upkeep of natural areas. This, in turn, favours the emergence of other rural activities such as agro-tourism. The sub-programme should focus specifically on the replacement of farm managers and the improvement of farmers' incomes.

As far as forests are concerned, the sub-programme strives to ensure and enhance their contribution to the economic development of the region, and simultaneously supports their social and ecological functions.

Sub-programme 2 - Development of industry, crafts and services

Few large businesses are established in the region although they employ a large proportion of the local workforce, making some area quite dependent on them. Most often, the future of these industries is at risk, which increases the precariousness of employment.

The objectives of the sub-programme are:

- ◆ To create a favourable environment and attractive conditions for businesses
- ◆ To promote the development of local firms in economically healthy sectors
- ◆ To facilitate the development of projects by local firms.

Sub-programme 3 - Tourism

The development of tourism assets has a double objective:

- ◆ To develop sites with cultural or natural potential in order to attract and retain tourists
- ◆ To improve and to expand tourist accommodation facilities in rural areas.

Sub-programme 4 - Human resources

Vocational training and the promotion of employment are an inherent part of this strategy and they condition, in part, its success. They should help to optimise the impact of the support provided through the three other components.

For this reason, the sub-programme should support training with the following aims:

- ◆ To enable agriculture, forestry, tourism, craft industries and services to adapt, modernise and diversify their activities and management methods
- ◆ To favour the setting up of young farmers, the transfer of farms and businesses, and the creation of new, viable enterprises
- ◆ To satisfy the demand for qualified manpower in the various sectors directly concerned by those development measures supported by the operational programme

- ◆ To promote the development of tourism by increasing the professionalism of all local actors.

Table1 – Programme, sub-programmes and measures

Sub-programmes Measures	Budget (%)	Stated goals in the programming document	Description of measures
1. Development of agriculture and forestry	46		
1.1 Rural infrastructure		Improving the land structure of farms and the roads serving them	Aid for land consolidation, collective agricultural water systems, irrigation, rural roads
1.2 Farm enterprises		Guarantee the survival of farms	Settling-in subsidies for young farmers, and for initiatives to diversify and adapt production
1.3 Forests		Promote and develop assets in the forest sector	Aid for plantations and for quality production and the organisation of marketing
2 - Industry and crafts	11		
2.1 Leadership		Improve economic information and applied research	Subsidies to business support agencies
2.2 Consulting		Encourage firms to use outside consultants to improve their management	Subsidies for consulting services
2.3 Investments		Promote the development of existing SMEs and attract external investors	Subsidies for productive investments
3. Tourism	35		
3.1 Studies		Enhance the relevance of tourist projects	Subsidies for surveys and studies
3.2 Canals		Increase tourist sailing	Rehabilitation of tourist facilities on canals
3.3 Accommodation		Adapt accommodation to suit demand	Aid for the creation and modernisation of accommodation
3.4 Infrastructures		Attract a new category of tourists	Support to infrastructure in relation to a private investment in a large holiday resort (Club Méditerranée)
3.5 Agro-tourism		Supplement farmers' earnings	Aid in the creation of accommodation on farms and in the promotion of the local heritage
4. Human resources	6	Adapt human resources to the modernisation and diversification of activities	Diverse support for training and training centres in different sectors (culture, agriculture, commerce, etc.)
The overall budget is 219.7 M€ of which 21% EU, 10% State, 24% Region and 45% private sector.			

Step 1 – Evaluation mandate

You have been asked by the President of the Programme Monitoring Committee to draft a mandate clarifying a few major points in order to start the evaluation on a sound ground. Please write a first version of this mandate.

2 – Expectations and fears with regards to the evaluation

A series of informal contacts with key informants allows to identify some important stakeholders (see Table 2) and to foresee their expectations and fears (see Table 3)

Table 2 – Presentation of some stakeholders

	Stakeholders	Institutional position	Position in relation to the programme	Interest in the evaluation
1	Representative of the State in the region	Co-ordinates National level services and funds	Privileged partner of the Commission. Chairs the Monitoring Committee of the programme.	Position affords an overall view of programming. Represents the State authorities who show increasing interest in evaluation.
2	Deputy chair person of the Region	The Region is a relatively young institution still unsure of its role and position	Legitimate territorial level for the European Commission to intervene in matters of regional development. Participates in the Monitoring committee of the programme.	Very little experience of regional programmes evaluation.
3	Administrative official of the Region			
4	Representative of European Commission	Desk officer in charge of rural development programmes.	Responsible for use of EU Funds. Participates in the Monitoring committee of the programme.	Firm requirements on the need to evaluate Structural Funds.
5	Chamber of agriculture	Traditional interlocutor of public authorities on agricultural matters. Strong links with farmers' unions.	Organisation which experiences difficulties in taking on board a rural development logic.	No evaluation experience.
6	Regional tourism board	State/regional authority partnership. Co-ordinates interventions for development of tourism.	Young organisation which seeks recognition as a key player in matters concerning tourism.	No evaluation experience.
7	Elected promoter of local development	Elected person at both regional and local level, with extensive experience in local development.	Strong voiced the need for integrated local development during the first phases of the process.	Supports evaluation.
8	Club Méditerranée	Private company.	Private partner of a major project in sub-programme 3	No evaluation experience.

Table 3 – Expectations and fears of the main stakeholders with regard to the evaluation

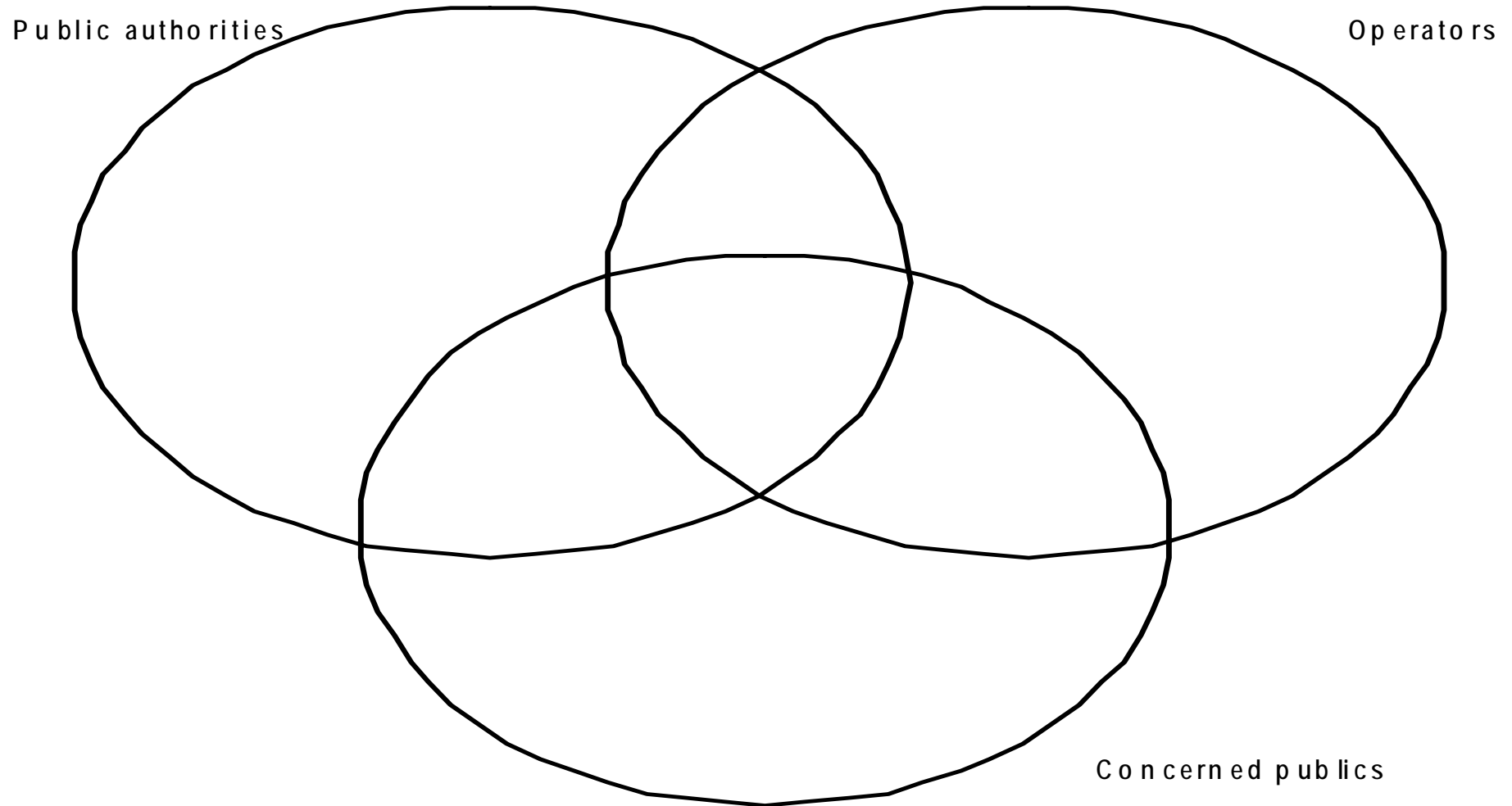
<p><u>Representative of the State in the region</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. specify the programme objectives 2. assist the implementation of an adequate monitoring system 3. measure the impact on the economy 4. measure effects in terms of rural development 5. fear of a Commission-Regional authority alliance in the context of the evaluation 6. promote the establishment of a centre for evaluation expertise 	<p><u>Administrative official of the Region</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. ensure that evaluation focuses as much on the contribution of the regional authority as on that of the State and the European Union 8. help to ensure the timely spending of funds 9. report on the progress of the programme during press conferences 10. rectify the image of the region which is suspected of favouring certain areas at the expenses of others 	<p><u>Representative of European Commission</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. have a synthetic understanding of the content of actions and the nature of interventions and their results 12. appreciate effects measure by measure and for each assisted zone 13. ensure that the principle of additionality is respected
<p><u>Chamber of Agriculture</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. reveal problems in the fund allocation system 15. ensure that the funds earmarked for agriculture are not used for infrastructure 	<p><u>Regional tourist board</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. validate the approach chosen for promoting the region as a tourist area <p><u>Elected representative, militant for local development</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. promote an integrated strategy by sub areas 	<p><u>Club Méditerranée</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 18. highlight the image of this firm as a promoter of local development

Task 2 – Reference group

All public authorities participate in a large Monitoring committee which meets twice a year and which is clearly not the appropriate body for supervising the evaluation process. It has been decided to gather an Evaluation Reference group. You have been asked by the President of the Programme Monitoring Committee to draft the membership list

- A – Proceed with an analysis of stakeholders by using the diagram below
- B – Considering the evaluation mandate, which stakeholders' views should be expressed in the reference group
- C – Whom do you suggest as members of the reference group?

Stakeholder analysis (use table 2 above and add other stakeholders as far as relevant)



3 – Preparing the evaluation (A)

Before commissioning the evaluation to an external team, it has been decided to hold a first meeting of the reference group with an aim to discuss the terms of reference and with special emphasis on two key issues:

- What is to be evaluated (the whole programme or just some components)?
- Which questions are to be addressed?

The agenda of the meeting is the following:

- Remainder of the evaluation mandate
- Introduction of members
- Presentation of the programme with diagrams
- Presentation of the evaluation process and role of reference group
- Discussion on what is to be evaluated
- Discussion on evaluation questions

Task 3 – Programme logic

You are preparing the meeting and you need to describe the logic of the programme in a simple way. You plan to do that through five diagrams covering the four sub-programmes, plus a synthesis diagram covering the whole programme. You have decided to start with the sub-programme 3 'Tourism'

- A – Identify the activities / outputs of this sub-programme and insert them in boxes in the left part of the logigram
- B – Identify the global objectives of the whole programme, convert them into impacts if necessary and insert them in boxes in the right part of the logigram
- C – Identify intermediate objectives / impacts, insert them in boxes in the middle of the diagram
- D – Connect boxes by arrows representing your cause-and-effect assumptions

Recommendations

1. Keep as close as possible to the programming documents (the first version of the logigram should be “faithful” to official documents)
2. Express impacts as precisely as possible in a form like “change A occurs”, “situation of group B improves”
3. Preferably no more than 25 boxes
4. Focus on the main arrows

Logigram (Sub programme 3 - Tourism)

Activities/outputs

results and impacts of the sub-programme

Overall intended impacts of the
whole programme

4 – Preparing the evaluation (B)

This rural development programme applies various measures / instruments. It is targeted at various publics (farmers, tourism professionals, SMEs, etc.). It aims to achieve various impacts. This is a complex programme in comparison to a simple one that would apply just one instrument to reach one target group with an aim to achieve a given impact. The more complex the programme, the longer the list of potential evaluation questions. In this example, it would be easy to draft a list of more than 100 evaluation questions.

A lesson from experience is that the users tend to retain just a few ideas from an evaluation report. This is in line with their limited capacity absorb information and the impossibility to properly disseminate too many conclusions arising from an evaluation. Another lesson from experience is that an evaluation team cannot answer too many questions with an acceptable quality. Some experts recommend not to ask more than three questions in an evaluation. A maximum of ten questions is sometimes quoted.

It may be relevant to propose more than ten questions to reference group members, and even to extend the list by adding questions suggested during the meeting. However all group members should bear in mind that the list of questions will have to be reduced at some point. A fair process should be put in place in order to select priority questions.

Task 4 – Evaluation questions

You want to provide the reference group members with an indicative list of questions as a starting point for their discussion. Since several members of the group are not familiar with evaluation, you plan to use your draft list as a means to explain differences between families of evaluation criteria.

A – Getting back to your analysis of the logic of the 3rd sub-programme (tourism), select a set of objectives (boxes) and assumptions (arrows) which you consider of particular importance for the evaluation. Write an evaluation question in relation to what you have selected. Your question should belong to the family of effectiveness.

B – Convert your question into several other questions belonging to different families

C – Get back to tables 2 and 3 and develop a few questions that are not derived from the intervention logic