

EUROPEAN
EVALUATION
HELPDESK
FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT



THEMATIC WORKING GROUP EVALUATION OF LEADER/CLLD

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT
FOR THE 5TH MEETING OF THE
EU RURAL NETWORKS' STEERING GROUP

BRUSSELS, 16 JUNE 2016

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The Evaluation Helpdesk is responsible for the evaluation function within the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) by providing guidance on the evaluation of RDPs and policies falling under the remit and guidance of DG AGRI's Unit E.4 'Evaluation and studies' of the European Commission (EC). In order to improve the evaluation of EU rural development policy the Evaluation Helpdesk supports all evaluation stakeholders, in particular DG AGRI, national authorities, RDP managing authorities and evaluators, through the development and dissemination of appropriate methodologies and tools; the collection and exchange of good practices; capacity building, and communicating with network members on evaluation related topics.

Additional information about the activities of European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development is available on the Internet through the Europa server (<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu>).

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1. INTRODUCTION

The **3rd Thematic Working Group** of the Evaluation Helpdesk has been kicked-off in March 2016 and aims to develop “Guidelines on the Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD” by early 2017.

As a first step, the Evaluation Helpdesk presented and discussed this outline of the guidelines with the members of the Expert Group on Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP 2014-2020 during their 9th meeting on 24 May 2016.

During their 5th Meeting on 16 June 2016, **members of the Rural Network’s Steering Group** will additionally have the opportunity to express their opinions and comments with regard to the guidelines. Discussion will focus on the following questions:

- a) To what extent does the outline of the guidelines cover what Member States need to know about the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD?
- b) Which parts of the guidelines are most important and shall be elaborated in depth?
- c) Are there any interesting evaluation practices that you would like to highlight as good examples?

In order to **prepare for the interactive discussion** during the 5th meeting of the Rural Network’s Steering Group the members are kindly requested to

- read this background document;
- reflect on the outline of the guidelines (see chapter 4 of the present document).

Any questions in relation to the Thematic Working Group can be addressed to Jela Tvrdonova (jela@ruralevaluation.eu, Tel. 00 32 2 7375131).

2. WHY TO DEVELOP GUIDELINES ON THE EVALUATION OF LEADER/CLLD?

LEADER/CLLD as a rural policy instrument and subject of evaluation

The **LEADER approach**¹ was first introduced in the EU's rural development policy as a Community initiative in 1991. Since then LEADER has evolved from a rural development laboratory into a mainstreamed and widely used policy instrument to support the development of rural and fishery areas across the EU².

Acting as a **bottom up, multi-sector, partnership and area-based tool**, LEADER has empowered rural territories through local development strategies, prepared and implemented by local public-private partnerships called "local action groups" (LAG). Over the decades LEADER has proven to be a valuable instrument contributing to the maintenance of the rural countryside and its population, enhancement of cultural and natural heritage, and the generation of business and employment opportunities based on local resources. Positive experiences gained during the past programming periods have led to the expansion of the LEADER approach to urban and peri-urban territories, enlarging the scope of supported activities and funding possibilities under the newly established instrument - **Community-led Local Development (CLLD)**.

CLLD is one of two instruments³ to encourage integrated approaches in supporting territorial development⁴ in the programming period 2014-2020. As such, CLLD is the primary tool to reinforce the coordination and integration of ESI funds and achieve synergies at sub-regional/local level in supporting the Europe 2020 Strategy. In this respect, CLLD must be implemented in rural areas as LEADER local development (hereafter LEADER/CLLD), supported by the EAFRD. CLLD may also be supported by ERDF, ESF, and EMFF in rural, urban and fishery areas⁵.

The **CLLD principles** set up in the legal framework follow the LEADER principles applied in previous programming periods. In accordance with the legal framework CLLD shall be⁶:

- Focused on specific sub-regional rural areas,
- Led by local action groups, composed of representatives of public and private local socio-economic interest, of which none will represent more than 49% of the voting rights in making decisions,
- Carried out through integrated, multi-sector and area-based strategies, which take into consideration local needs and potentials, and shall include innovative features, networking and cooperation.

LEADER/CLLD **has to be evaluated** as any other intervention supported with the EAFRD to:

- ensure the transparency and accountability of funds spent vis-à-vis the stakeholders involved;

¹ The acronym 'LEADER' derives from the French words " Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale " which means, 'Links between the rural economy and development actions', http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-static/LEADER/LEADER/LEADER-tool-kit/the-LEADER-approach/en/the-LEADER-approach_en.html

² The LEADER approach has started as Community initiative LEADER I in 1991 – 1993 and has continued as LEADER II in 1994-1999, when it was supported with several EU funds – ESF, ERDF and EAGGF (guidance section). In 2000 LEADER has continued as LEADER + Community Initiative financed only from the EAGGF (guidance section). In the programming period 2007 – 2013 the LEADER approach was mainstreamed and became an integral part of the RDP as Axis 4. The number of LAGs applying the LEADER approach has increased significantly between 1991 and 2013: from 217 (1991-1993) to 2402 (2007-2013). In the programming period 2007-2013 the LEADER approach was also adopted in the EU fishery areas and funded from the EFF. Over 300 fishery local action groups (FLAGs) have been created.

³ Second policy instrument to support the integrate approaches to territorial development is integrated territorial investment, Regulation (EU) no 1303/2013, Art. 36

⁴ Elements of Common strategic framework 2014-2020, Commission staff working document, Part I, 2012, http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/working/strategic_framework/csf_part1_en.pdf

⁵ Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 32.1

⁶ Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art. 32.2

- demonstrate achievements of LEADER/CLLD towards the rural policy objectives at EU, national, regional and local level;
- learn valuable lessons in order to implement LEADER/CLLD better in the future.

What needs to be evaluated in LEADER/CLLD?

The evaluation of LEADER/CLLD is a **complex** task and concerns several aspects which are further specified in the **basic and implementing acts**. These aspects comprise the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD at the national/regional level, and the sub-regional/local/LAG level, where the main focus is given to local action groups and CLLD strategies.

The **mandatory evaluation** tasks to be taken into consideration according to the basic and implementing acts include:

National/regional level:

- The **CLLD strategies' contribution** to the rural development objectives⁷ and Union priorities for rural development and respective focus areas⁸. In this context, LEADER/CLLD is seen as the measure programmed under focus area 6B, however contributing to several other focus areas under which the RDP operations are also implemented via CLLD strategies⁹,
- The LEADER/CLLD contribution to the thematic objectives and to the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth¹⁰, mainly with respect to:
 - headline targets for increasing the employment rate of the population age 20-64 including greater integration of women, older workers and migrants to the work force and reducing the national poverty lines under the 25%,
 - thematic objective no 9: "Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination"¹¹,
 - thematic objective no 3: enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs of the agriculture sector (for the EAFRD)¹² and fishery and aquaculture sector (for the EMFF)¹³,
 - thematic objective no 8: promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility¹⁴,
- The progress made in ensuring an integrated approach to use the EAFRD and other Union financial instruments in supporting territorial development of rural areas through local development strategies¹⁵ and the complementarity with other ESI Funds,
- The support foreseen for evaluations at LAG level¹⁶.

Sub-regional/local/LAG level:

- The CLLD strategy should set up the hierarchy of objectives and measurable targets for outputs and results (in relation to the latter, targets may be expressed in quantitative or qualitative terms) in the local development strategy¹⁷.
- The monitoring arrangements and specific arrangements for evaluation described in the local development strategy¹⁸.

⁷ Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art.4

⁸ Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art.5

⁹ Commission implementation regulation (EU) no 808/2014, Annex I, Part I, point 9.3 a)

¹⁰ Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art.9 and 54, and Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth

¹¹ Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013, Art.5.9 and Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013, Art.3.1b) and Regulation (EU) No 508/2014, whereas 56, Art.5 and 6

¹² Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013,

¹³ Regulation (EU) No 508/2014,

¹⁴ Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013,

¹⁵ Commission implementation regulation (EU) no 808/2014, Annex VII, point 9

¹⁶ Commission implementation regulation (EU) no 808/2014, Annex I, Part I, point 9.3 b)

¹⁷ Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art.33.1.c)

¹⁸ Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art.33.1.f)

- The monitoring of the implementation of the CLLD strategy and supported operations ensured by local action groups¹⁹.
- The LAG's running costs, which also include costs linked to monitoring and evaluation of the CLLD strategy²⁰.

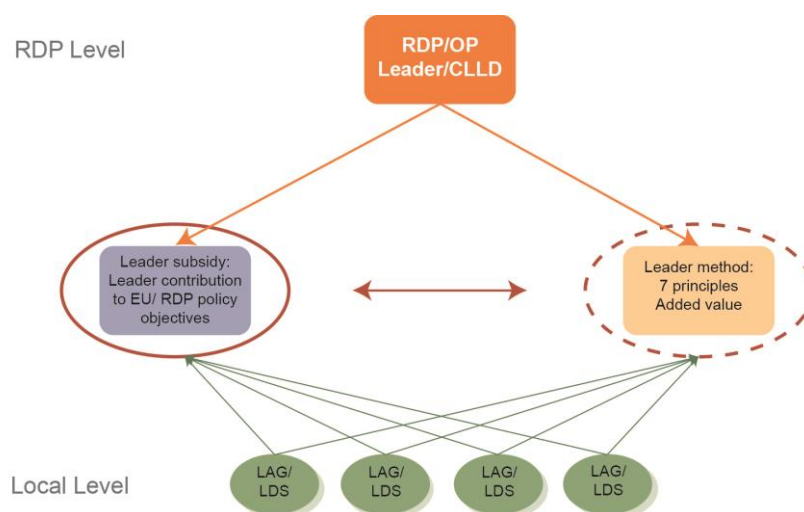
Apart from the mandatory evaluation requirements of LEADER/CLLD there are several related topics, whose assessment is considered to be a **good practice** and provides essential input for policy learning on LEADER²¹.

Examples of **non-mandatory evaluation topics** include:

- Application of LEADER/CLLD principles (at National/regional/local levels), e.g.:
 - local participation and utilisation of local resources;
 - cooperation and networking among LAGs in rural areas;
 - contribution of LEADER/CLLD to cooperation inside of the LAG, among LAGs, and at the RDP level (participation in operational groups);
 - innovation in CLLD strategies and projects and contributions of CLLD strategies towards the cross cutting RDP priority on innovation;
 - etc.;
- Implications of LEADER/CLLD delivery mechanisms on the application of the 7 principles (national/regional/local level), including the setup of financial mechanisms and project implementation;
- Added value of LEADER/CLLD (e.g. effects of LEADER/CLLD on local governance, and building social capital in the LAG's area, etc.);
- Building the institutional capacity of the LAG.

The following figure illustrates the different levels of evaluation in LEADER/CLLD as well as the mandatory and optional aspects to be assessed.

Figure 1. Complexity of LEADER/CLLD evaluation



Source: European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development, 2016

¹⁹ Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art.34.3.g),

²⁰ Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Art.35.1.d),

²¹ Assessment of proposed non-compulsory topics also addresses several issues highlighted in the report of CoA: Implementation of LEADER approach in rural development, European Court of Auditors, Brussels, 2010, http://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR10_05/SR10_05_EN.PDF

What are the challenges of LEADER/CLLD evaluation to be addressed by the Thematic Working Group?

The evaluation of LEADER/CLLD is complex and evokes several issues which require further elaboration:

Managing and running the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD:

- How does one consider the multi-funded character of LEADER/CLLD and coordinate the evaluation among several types of involved stakeholders?
- Who does what at each of level in LEADER/CLLD governance and evaluation – RDP and LAG level?
- How to develop RDP specific indicators to measure various types of RDP specific LEADER/CLLD effects?
- How to link LEADER/CLLD evaluation at different levels and how to link to the optional LAG self-assessment?
- How should monitoring and evaluation data be collected – what should be collected at national and what at local level?
- How to support LAGs in setting up the LAG operations database?
- How to support LAGs in evaluation?
- How to support LAGs in setting up the resources for M&E at the LAG level?
- How to support the MA and LAGs in the application of simplified cost options and using the umbrella projects in the implementation of the CLLD strategy?
- How to involve the NRN in the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD and in disseminating evaluation findings?

Addressing methodological challenges in the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD:

- How to assess the contributions from the interventions of the CLLD strategy which affect the three levels of objectives: CLLD strategy, RDP and EU2020 (Methodological challenges linked to the assessment of those contributions),
- How to assess the LEADER contributions to RDP objectives in the situations when LEADER measures are programmed under Focus area 6B, but contribute to many other FAs at the same time?
- How to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of LEADER/CLLD implementation at the RDP and LAG levels?
- How to assess the success and failure factors in the implementation of LEADER/CLLD?
- How to assess the synergy of various funds in accomplishing CLLD objectives?
- How to develop LEADER/CLLD specific evaluation elements (e.g. evaluation questions and indicators at RDP and LAG level)?
- How to assess if LEADER principles have been followed at RDP and LAG level?
- How to ensure the evidence for evaluation of LEADER/CLLD (selection of the right methods and collection of data/information)?

What elements do we have to carry out the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD?

The **Common monitoring and evaluation system** (CMES) for rural development provides a minimum set of evaluation elements: common evaluation questions and indicators for the evaluation of

LEADER/CLLD at the national and regional levels²². It also provides some guidance on the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD in a series of publications by the Evaluation Helpdesk (Guidelines for the ex ante evaluation of 2014-2020 RDPs, Guidelines: Establishing and implementing the evaluation plan of 2014-2020 RDPs)²³, as well as the guidance published by the Evaluation Helpdesk in the period 2007-2013²⁴.

The CMES evaluation elements and existing guidance from both programming periods neither provide enough guidance to address the above challenges, nor sufficiently tackle the LEADER/CLLD evaluation as required by the basic and implementing acts. Stakeholders in Member States will have to complete the set of common CMES elements and discuss a broad range of issues linked to the LEADER/CLLD evaluation, e.g. selection of the evaluation approach, evaluation methods, data needs (availability and collection), etc.

Taking into consideration the complexity of LEADER/CLLD evaluation, related challenges and the limitations of existing guidance, the Evaluation Helpdesk has decided to carry out the Thematic Working Group on the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD with the following main objectives:

- Examine and address the major challenges in the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD,
- Build up and capitalise on existing experiences in the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD,
- Identify and design effective solutions and approaches for the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD at the national/regional and local levels,
- Develop guidelines for preparing and implementing the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD at the national/regional and local levels.

3. HOW ARE THE GUIDELINES DEVELOPED?

The Evaluation Helpdesk is coordinating the Thematic Working Group in close collaboration with Unit E4 of DG AGRI. The Thematic Working Group consists of a group of selected rural development evaluation experts and additionally integrates the views of peer reviewers and sounding board members.

The work for developing the guidelines is carried out through a series of workshops, desk-research, drafting and editing exercises. Draft documents will be shared with several groups of stakeholders, such as DG AGRI services, Rural Networks' Steering Group members, LEADER sub-group members and members of the Expert Group on Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP. This will cover:

- Informative presentations during the 3rd meeting of the permanent sub-group on LEADER/CLLD of the Rural Networks (February 2016);
- Discussion on the outline of the guidelines for the LEADER/CLLD evaluation at the 9th meeting of the Expert Group on Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP (May 2016);

²² LEADER/CLLD related measures are programmed under the focus area 6B, where the CMES' common evaluation question is: "To what extent have RDP interventions supported local development in rural areas?" and the common target indicator R23 "jobs created in supported projects (LEADER)" can be used in evaluation of LEADER/CLLD. Since the operations implemented via local development strategies can show predominant and additional contributions to other focus areas than focus area 6B, related common evaluation questions and linked common result indicators should be used as well in the assessment of LEADER/CLLD interventions.

²³ http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-static/evaluation/library/evaluation-helpdesk-publications/en/evaluation-helpdesk-publications_en.html and <https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en/evaluation-helpdesks-publications>

²⁴ Other related guidelines published by the Evaluation Helpdesk in 2007-2013 are: Guidelines for the ex post evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs, Working Paper on Capturing impacts of LEADER and of measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas, Working paper on Approaches for assessing the impacts of the Rural Development Programmes in the context of multiple intervening factors, to be found on http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-static/evaluation/library/evaluation-helpdesk-publications/en/evaluation-helpdesk-publications_en.html

- Informative presentations during the 5th meeting of the Rural Networks' Steering Group (16 June 2016);
- Discussion of the draft guidelines with the Sounding board, which will be composed of DG AGRI services, members of the Rural Networks' Steering Group, LEADER sub-group members and members of the Expert Group on Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP (October 2016);
- Discussion of the guidelines during the 10th and 11th meetings of the Expert Group on Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP;
- Regular information exchange with the members of the Rural Networks' Steering Group and the permanent sub-group on LEADER/CLLD of the Rural Networks during their meetings.

4. OUTLINE OF THE GUIDELINES ON EVALUATION OF LEADER/CLLD

Part I - Introduction

Chapter	Content
Foreword	
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State of the art • Overview of LEADER/CLLD evaluation with special reference to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Court of Auditors' report, ○ Practices in the last programming period (based on screening of examples of LAG evaluations)
Purpose of LEADER/CLLD evaluation and the legal framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do we evaluate LEADER/CLLD? • What is the legal framework and what are good practices? • What is the role of the CMES and its elements in LEADER/CLLD evaluation? • How to address the multi-fund aspects in LEADER/CLLD evaluation? What is mandatory and what is good practice?
Concept of LEADER evaluation – the bigger picture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links to the policy (briefly) • Dimensions of LEADER/CLLD evaluation (overall picture and explanations) • Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD at RDP level (briefly) • Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD at LAG level (briefly) • Linkages between RDP level & LAG level <p>This includes the graphs</p>
Stakeholders involved in LEADER/CLLD evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role and involvement of stakeholders in LEADER/CLLD evaluation at both the RDP and LAG levels • The overview table
Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What should be achieved with these guidelines? • What is the content of the guidelines? • Who are the target groups?

Part II - Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD at RDP level

Chapter	Content
Introducing LEADER/CLLD evaluation	Concept of the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD at the RDP level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation of what is the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD at the RDP level • Figure (process graph) • Explanation – more detailed • Framing the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD at the RDP level (linkage to FAs and EQ(s)) • Linkages with LAG level evaluation
Focus of LEADER/CLLD evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance • Effectiveness and efficiency • Results and impacts • Factors of success and failure • Delivery of the LEADER method at the RDP level This includes graphs
Stakeholders in LEADER/CLLD evaluation	The role and involvement of stakeholders in LEADER/CLLD evaluation
Evaluation cycle of LEADER/CLLD	<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short explanation • Process graph <hr/> <p>Planning the LEADER/CLLD evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation Plan (and other evaluation planning documents) and LEADER/CLLD evaluation • LEADER as a stand-alone evaluation topic <hr/> <p>Preparing the LEADER/CLLD evaluation</p> <p>Specific challenges in preparing the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD</p> <p>Steps in preparing for the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisiting LEADER/CLLD intervention logic (including primary and secondary contributions of LEADER to FA) • Evaluation questions and indicators used in LEADER/CLLD evaluation • Data collection arrangements for monitoring and evaluation of LEADER/CLLD (including links between the RDP evaluation and LAG level evaluation) <hr/> <p>Conducting the LEADER/CLLD evaluation</p> <p>Specific challenges in conducting the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD</p> <p>Phases in conducting the evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structuring: review of LEADER/CLLD intervention logic, evaluation questions, indicators, and deciding on the evaluation approach • Observing: collecting data and information, • Analysing: assessing collected information (table of methods, quantitative, qualitative, mixed – description, strengths, weaknesses, usage, etc.), • Judging: answering evaluation questions, formulating conclusions and recommendations. <hr/> <p>Reporting/ Dissemination/Follow up of the evaluation findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting on LEADER/CLLD evaluation • Quality control of the evaluation report • Dissemination and communication of the evaluation findings • Follow up of the evaluation findings

Part III - Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD at LAG level

Chapter	Content
Introducing LEADER/CLLD evaluation	<p>Concept of evaluation of LEADER/CLLD at LAG level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation of what is the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD at the LAG level • Figure (process graph) • Explanation – more detailed • Framing the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD at the LAG level with the EQ • Linkages with the RDP evaluation
Focus of LEADER/CLLD evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, results and impacts of the CLLD strategy (taking into consideration the external and internal coherence) • Delivery of the LEADER method at the local level • Local action groups as an institution in the territory <p>This includes graphs</p>
Stakeholders in LEADER/CLLD evaluation	The role and involvement of stakeholders in LEADER/CLLD evaluation
Evaluation and self-assessment in LEADER/CLLD	Links between the evaluation and self-assessment; (→ LEADER toolkit and the self-assessment guidelines)
Evaluation cycle of LEADER/CLLD	<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short explanation • Process graph
	<p>Planning the LEADER/CLLD evaluation</p> <p>Planning the monitoring and evaluation of arrangements at the LAG level (including the evaluation plan as a good practice) for the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLLD strategy • Evaluation of the application of the LEADER method and its delivery • Evaluation of the partnership
	<p>Preparing the LEADER/CLLD evaluation</p> <p>Specific challenges in preparing the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD</p> <p>Preparing the evaluation for the CLLD strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check of the internal consistency and external consistency of the CLLD strategy's intervention logic to all funds (multi-fund aspect; highlighting where other funds should pay particular attention) <p>Preparing the evaluation of the CLLD strategy, method/delivery and partnership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up the evaluation questions and indicators • Ensuring the data and information accessibility and collection <p>Designing the evaluation approach</p>
	<p>Conducting the LEADER/CLLD evaluation</p> <p>Specific challenges in conducting the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD</p> <p>Phases in conducting the evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structuring: review of the evaluation questions, indicators, and deciding on the evaluation approach, • Observing: collecting data and information, • Analysing: assessing the collected information (table of methods, quantitative, qualitative, mixed, description, strengths, weakness, usage etc.), • Judging: answering the evaluation questions, formulating conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter	Content
	<p>Reporting at the LAG level/ Dissemination/Follow up of evaluation findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting on the LEADER/CLLD evaluation • Quality control of the evaluation report • Dissemination and communication of the evaluation findings • Follow up of the evaluation findings

PART IV – Annexes

Glossary

Examples of the ToR for the LEADER/CLLD evaluation:

- as a stand-alone evaluation topic at the RDP level
- at the local level

Evaluation report:

- Outline of an evaluation report for the LEADER/CLLD evaluation at the LAG level
- Quality assessment grid for the evaluation report at the LAG level

Evaluation questions and indicators

- Examples of LEADER/CLLD programme specific evaluation questions and indicators at the RDP level
- Examples of evaluation questions and indicators for the evaluation at the local level

Example of the operations LAG data base

Links to relevant literature (guidelines, manuals, evaluation reports, research reports, etc.)

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