



MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, AGRI-FOOD AND FORESTS

CONTRACT DGPE 2015-029

**EX POST EVALUATION OF THE HEXAGONAL RURAL
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (HRDP),
EAFRD PROGRAMMING 2007/2013**

Synthesis of final report

March 2017



Évaluer les Politiques et Innover
pour les Citoyens et les Espaces



In collaboration with



Synthesis

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Purpose and context of the evaluation

This report concerns the *ex post* evaluation of the Hexagonal Rural Development Programme (HRDP) 2007/2013. It is the outcome of the ongoing evaluation process introduced by Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005. The evaluation was mandatory and was carried out at the request of the Ministry of Agriculture, Agri-Food and Forestry in its capacity as the Managing Authority of the programme.

The HRDP is the main programme for the implementation of Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 in respect of support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). France has chosen to implement a Hexagonal Rural Development Programme (HRDP) for metropolitan France apart from Corsica, plus five regional Rural Development Programmes for Corsica and the French overseas departments. Only the HRDP is the subject of this evaluation. It is composed of a common national base of six measures applicable in all 21 regions of the hexagon (setting up of young farmers, compensatory allowances for natural handicaps, "Plan Chablis" [wind throw plan], forest access roads/paths, investments in forests, grassland premium and rotational agri-environmental measures) and 21 specific regional sub-programmes, including some or all of the other measures planned in France¹. It should be noted that the French programming through the HRDP uses 31 of the 40 measures proposed in Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005.

The original HRDP budget amounted to €5.7 billion of EAFRD credits, to which was added €5.1 billion for national counterparts and almost €3 billion of additional national funding (not co-financed by the EAFRD), that is a total of nearly €14 billion of total public expenditure. This budget was increased by about €1.5 billion during the CAP health check (2008), so that this programme was finally financed with €6.8 billion of EU funding (EAFRD) and about €15.5 billion of total public expenditure over the period 2007-2013. National co-financing is provided by public funds from the State, local authorities or other bodies.

Final programme expenditure amounted to €12.2 billion - including reserves (carried over from the previous programme) but not all additional national funding (that is, not provided by the monitoring system). The expenditures specific to this programme (i.e. excluding reserves) were distributed as follows between the five axes of the programme:

- Axis 1 "Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors": 28%;
- Axis 2 "Improvement of the environment and rural areas": 57%;
- Axis 3 "Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy": 9%;
- Axis 4 "LEADER », a cross-cutting methodological axis of the HRDP": 5%;
- Axis 5 "Technical assistance": 1%.

These expenditures impacted on about 200,000 agricultural beneficiaries, about 10,000 beneficiaries in the forestry sector, about 1,600 beneficiaries in the agro-food industry and more than 11,000 other beneficiaries in the field of rural development (craftsmen, communities, rural tourism actors, etc.).

The purpose of the *ex post* evaluation is to "examine the degree of utilisation of resources, the effectiveness and efficiency of the programming of the EAFRD, its socio-economic impact and its impact on Community priorities. [The evaluation activities] cover the goals of the programme and aim to draw lessons concerning the rural development policy. They shall identify the factors which contributed to the success or failure of the programmes' implementation, including as regards sustainability, and identify best practice."²

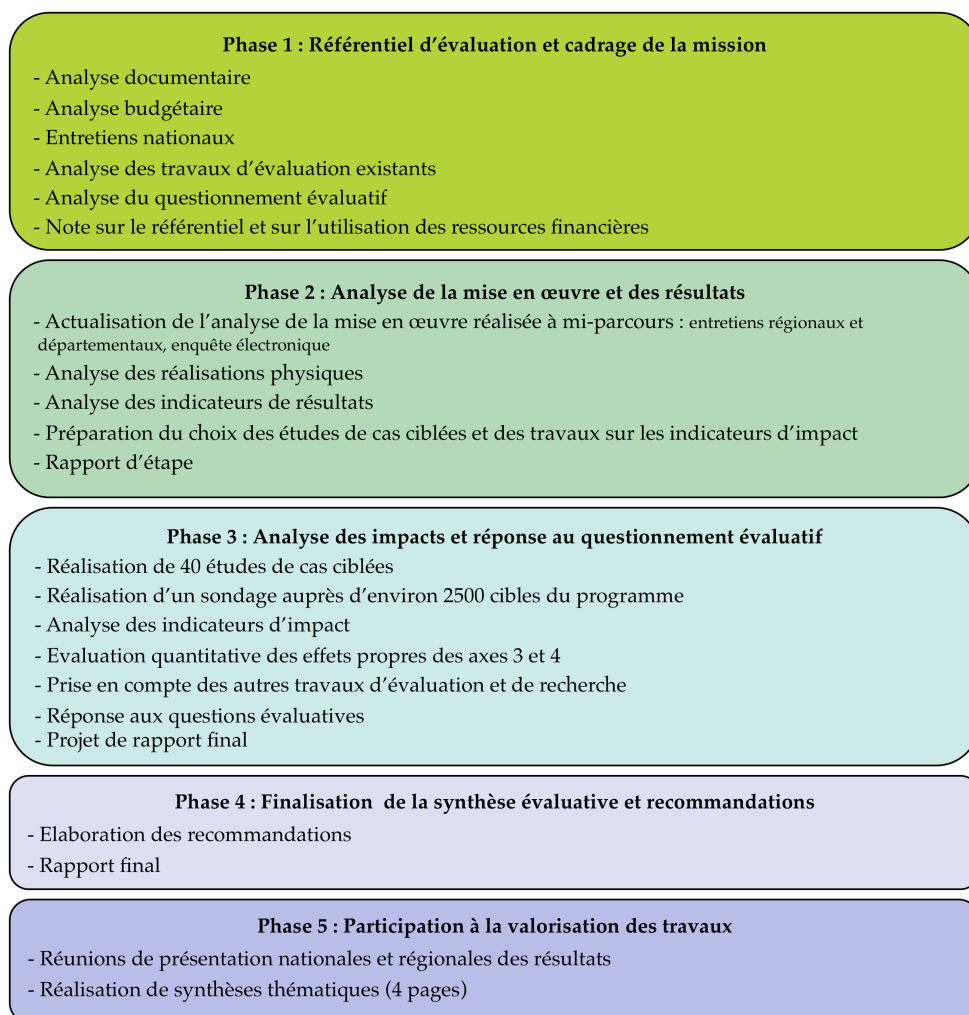
¹ The regional programming is translated into regional rural development documents (RRDD).

² Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, Article 86.

The evaluation was structured in accordance with the guidelines of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) (EC 1974/2006 and reviewed guidelines of June 2014) including, on the one hand, cross-cutting evaluation questions concerning the overall impact of the programme, and on the other hand, common evaluation questions concerning each of the measures set out in axes. The Evaluation Steering Committee also formulated six specific cross-cutting evaluation questions in addition to the common evaluation questions.

Evaluation process and methodology

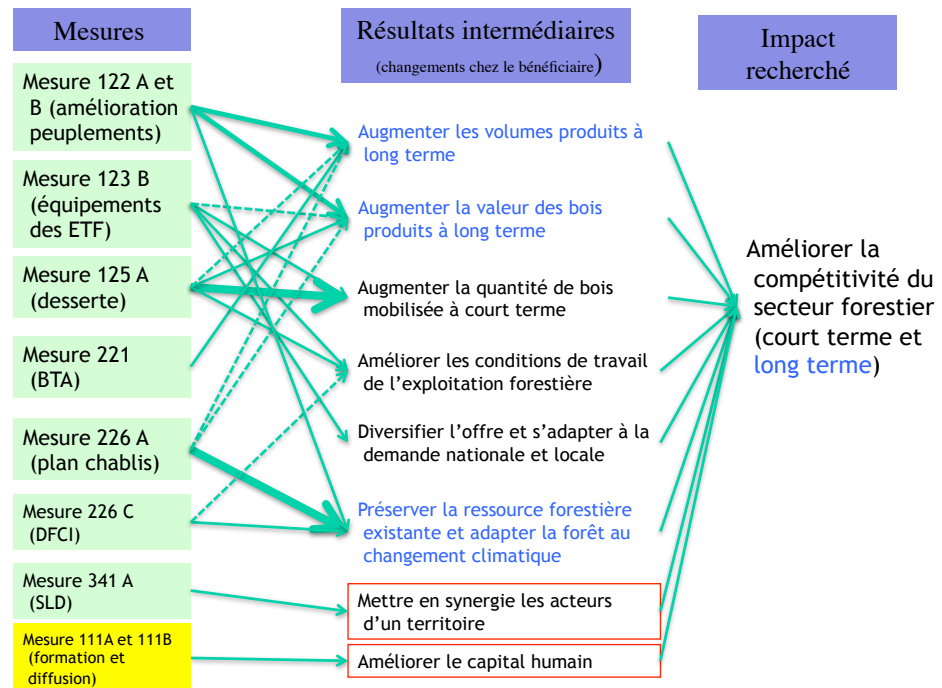
The *ex post* evaluation took place in five phases, described in the diagram below. Each of these phases was presented to the Steering Committee following preparation by a preliminary meeting of the four Thematic Working Groups set up within the framework of the evaluation.



The **strengths of the methodology used** are based on:

- structuring of the evaluation based on the production of Impact Flow Diagrams (IFD) allowing an analysis of the expected contribution of the programme to the various outcomes pursued. Given that (1) the evaluation questions were largely oriented on the programme's contribution to the various expected outcomes, and (2) the intervention logic presented in the programme did not take into account all the results of the various measures and arrangements, it was necessary to analyse the programme's contribution by formalizing the links between the programme measures and the different expected outcomes. Thus, for each of the main expected outcomes (i.e. improving the competitiveness of the agricultural sector, improving the environment, rural quality of life, etc.), apart from the more cross-cutting issues (e.g. employment), the IFD was developed by the evaluator, discussed in the Thematic Working Groups and presented for validation to the Steering Committee. These IFDs then structured the whole of the evaluative analysis (design of survey questionnaires and interview guides, scope of the statistical analyses, and the analysis and interpretation of the results) ;

IFD example: expected results from the programme on the competitiveness of the forest sector



- very high involvement of programme target groups through a dozen online surveys among the various programme beneficiaries (about 10,000 beneficiaries approached for about 1,300 questionnaire returns) and four telephone surveys with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries (2,400 respondents in total) ;

- implementation of several statistical analyses based on the counterfactual approach: (1) for investment aid on cattle raising farms (PMBE³) using FADN data (method: propensity score matching and calculation of the double difference between beneficiary and non-beneficiary "twin" samples), (2) for aid in support of grassland maintenance through comparison of territories with variable aid intensity, and (3) for the totality of measures from axes 3 and 4 based on municipal data (employment, residential attractiveness, access to services, etc.) with also some propensity score matching and calculation of double difference between beneficiary municipalities and non-beneficiary "twin" municipalities .

The **main limitations** encountered were :

- delayed or inadequate provision of certain items of monitoring data which reduced the scope for profiling certain beneficiaries or projects ;

- absence or insufficient data to describe changes in certain areas of impact (biodiversity, greenhouse gas emissions, cultural heritage, diversification of the rural economy, territorial governance, high-nature-value agriculture, etc.) ;

- insufficient anticipation of the research required to evaluate certain impacts (delayed launching of so-called "satellite" studies), which led to (1) problems of access to beneficiaries (mail or telephone contact details), and (2) the impossibility of handling in a robust manner certain issues requiring the use of macroeconomic models ;

- the timing of the evaluation, which took place almost two years after the launch of a new programming cycle (memory loss on the part of actors, administrative turn-over, possible confusion with the new programming).

³ Modernization scheme for livestock buildings (*Plan de Modernisation des Bâtiments d'Élevage*)

General conclusions: overall assessment of the HRDP

We organize the presentation of this assessment in two stages: first, an analysis of the effectiveness of the programme (has it achieved its objectives?) and second, the main factors that increased or decreased this effectiveness.

What framework for evaluating ex post the effectiveness of the HRDP?

In order to make a legitimate assessment of the programme effectiveness, it is first necessary to specify the **evaluation framework**, i.e. (1) the objectives assigned to the programme, and (2) the logic of the action required to achieve them.

From this point of view, the first elements that come to mind are the **objectives and the intervention logic of the programme, organized in the HRDP in the form of an objective tree by programme axis**. While these are undeniably the most legitimate benchmarks, the analysis of these elements during the mid-term evaluation led to underlining of at least three important limitations:

- In the first place, their poor appropriation by the actors, illustrated by the “rigid” character of the objectives tree, which was hardly subject to modification during the successive phases of the programme. This low degree of ownership gives the HRDP objective tree a rather theoretical character and somewhat weakens its legitimacy to serve as a reference point for judging the outcome of programme implementation.

- Second, this HRDP objective tree takes very little account of regional strategies. Indeed, the analysis of the measures and sub-measures included in each of the Regional Rural Development Document (RRDD) has shown a high variability in the level of differentiation displayed in the regional strategy as compared to the hexagonal programme strategy.

- Finally, over this period 2007/2013 the objective tree is strongly influenced by the European regulation, which through the axes “determines” the strategic objectives, and through the list of measures strongly frames the means and the resources within the strategic objectives (given that the measures are linked to the axes in the Regulation). This objective tree therefore only imperfectly reflects the strategic options of the designers of the HRDP.

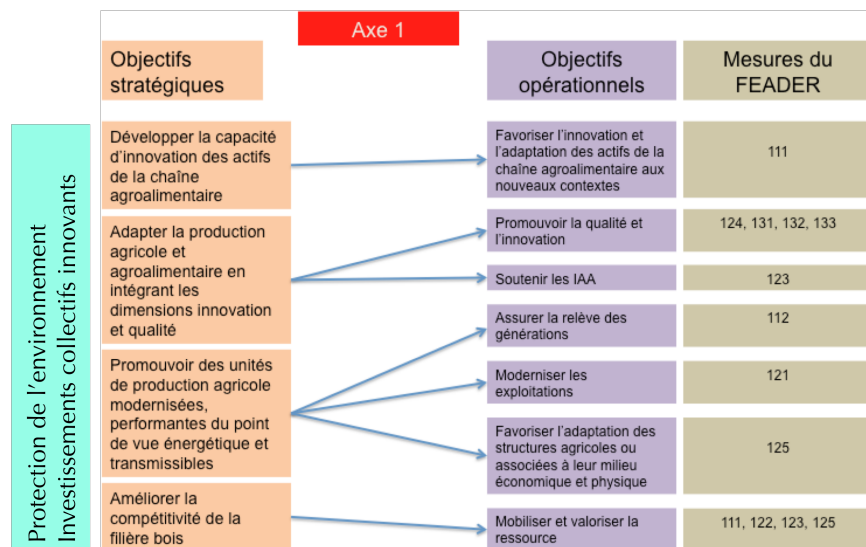
This legitimate evaluation framework is therefore largely imperfect from the point of view of its capacity to serve as a reference for evaluative analysis. For this reason, another reference framework has been widely used in the evaluation: that of the **expected impacts of the programme as can be read in the European evaluation questions** and as has been analysed within this evaluation (see above section on the IFD). The great advantage of this second reference framework is that it made it possible to overcome the constraints of the axes or measures framework mentioned above - at least for the use made of it within this evaluation - since our approach was to consider, for each expected result of the programme, all measures potentially contributing to this outcome (through the IFD developed by the evaluation). Its disadvantage is nonetheless that of presenting a European rather than national legitimacy, as the expected results of the HRDP have been reformulated by the national actors in the framework of the programme design through the objectives trees for each axis, as mentioned above.

As such, two reference frameworks, both more or less legitimate and both imperfect, have been at the disposal of the evaluation team in order to arrive at its judgment. We will therefore use the juxtaposition of these two references in the following effectiveness analysis: (1) the strategic objectives of the HRDP as formulated in the programme strategy, and (2) the expected programme results derived from the CMEF if not already included in the strategic objectives of the HRDP.

Mixed effectiveness

EXPECTED IMPACTS IN THE ECONOMIC AREA: IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES DEPENDING ON THE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The expected programme results in the economic area relate primarily to the strategic objectives of axis 1. The intervention logic of HRDP axis 1 is presented below, as can be found in the latest version of the programme. Some of the strategic objectives of the HRDP clearly relate to the expected programme impacts as can be found in the evaluation questions of the CMEF (innovation, competitiveness of the forest sector) or in the specific national questions (collective innovation). But the CMEF also introduces an expected impact on the competitiveness of the agricultural sector, which should be added because it is not present as such in the objectives tree below.



We can therefore consider as a reference the following expected programme results in the economic area:

- the four strategic objectives of axis 1 (capacity for innovation, adaptation, modernization/transfer of agricultural holdings and competitiveness of the forestry sector);
- the two cross-cutting strategic objectives for the whole axis (or even the programme): environmental protection and innovative collective investments;
- overall expected impact on the competitiveness of the agricultural sector.

Considering first the development of the innovation capacity, the response to the evaluation question on this theme (see 5.4.3) highlights (1) the lack of a specific intervention logic on support for innovation, (2) weak mobilization or difficulty in assessing the impact on innovation of measures with strong expectations on this topic (M124, M111B), and (3) low utilization of the potential of other measures to support innovation, even if this was not their main objective. The answer to the evaluation question on the National Rural Network (see 3.5.1) also underlines its disconnection from the implementation of the programme, while promoting the removal of barriers between stakeholders could have been a source of innovation. Effectiveness in respect of this first strategic objective can therefore be considered as low, which confirms the judgment given at mid-term.

Next, as regards adaptation of production by integrating the innovation and quality dimensions, the evaluation revealed considerable support by the programme for EU quality schemes, particularly in certain regions which had made it a real strategic axis (protected designation of origin in the Auvergne, for example). As for innovation, even if programme

support is generally weak, as explained previously, it was somewhat more significant in the case of the agri-food industry (see answer to the evaluation question on measure 123A). We therefore present a mixed assessment of the effectiveness of this second strategic objective, which is a positive development *vis-à-vis* the judgement of the more severe mid-term evaluation.

Considering the strategic objective of transmission-cum-modernization, the IFD illustrates the “proven” intervention logic that characterizes it: the logic rests on several measures (M112, M121, etc.), some of which have been implemented almost identically since the previous programme generation (M112, part of M121). The counterfactual impact evaluation assessing the impact of one of the central sub-measures of measure 121 (PMBE) has brought to light a significant impact on the increase in farm size, value added, gross operating surplus, and labour productivity in support of its beneficiaries. The evaluation has also shown, at least in some regions (notably Brittany), a marked effect of the programme on improving the energy performance of the beneficiary farms. These elements of modernization are important for the sustainability of the farms, even if the issue of transfer of agricultural holdings persists, considering the amount of capital necessary for taking over a farm. In this area the evaluation, like its predecessors on setting up support for young farmers (M112), has confirmed their usefulness for the renewal of generations, although their effect is clearly stronger for certain trajectories (family) than for others (outside the family). It is therefore possible to reach a positive conclusion on the effectiveness in attaining this strategic objective of modernization, which is a confirmation of the mid-term judgment. The transfer of agricultural holdings is also effective in terms of setting-up, working conditions and attractiveness of the profession. However, constraints on the transfer of agricultural holdings persist, with a resultant increase in the capital needed to take over farms.

Finally, as regards the strategic objective of the competitiveness of the forestry sector, the following emerges from the answer to the evaluation question addressing this topic (see 5.1.4):

- the programme has had some rather short-term effects on timber mobilization and improved working conditions;
- the programme effect on the longer-term competitiveness of the forestry sector remains (1) very difficult to assess given the uncertainties in supply (climate change impacts) and demand, (2) *a priori* weak and not up to the challenges of long-term adaptation of the French forestry industry.

The assessment in terms of achieving the objective of improving the competitiveness of the forestry sector as revealed by these results, is therefore both mixed and embodying a degree of uncertainty. It appears to be in line with the judgment of the mid-term evaluation, which was provided on the basis of much more fragmentary elements. The current judgement is based on a much more evidence-based evaluation, despite the uncertainties inherent in the characteristics of the forest sector (long-term economy).

Looking now at the achievement of the two transversal strategic objectives of axis 1 displayed in the intervention logic of the HRDP, we can emphasize:

- concerning environmental considerations, results are significant for several measures from axis 1 with an explicit environmental objective (training on pesticides, PVE⁴ [Crop environmental plan] and PPE⁵ [Energy performance plan] in support of investments, certification costs in organic farming under measure 132)

⁴ PVE Plan végétal pour l’environnement

⁵ PPE Plan de performance énergétique

but also more marginal for important measures of the axis with an economic priority (PMBE⁶, M123A, support for setting up young farmers);

- innovative collective investment is a little-invested dimension, with the exception of CUMA⁷ support and a few measures open to collective projects (for CUMA, the collective approach to investment is targeted more than the innovative dimension).

Finally, with regard to the more general expected impact on the competitiveness of the agricultural sector, the evaluation question concerned (see 5.1.1) highlights (1) the difficulty of assessing the contribution of the HRDP to this objective, in particular if one selects a broader approach to the question than that of interpreting of the European framework focusing solely on value added, (2) a noticeable effect on the maintenance of the competitiveness of the dairy sector despite the weak anticipation of the end of the milk quota, (3) difficulties in the beef sector, but for reasons specific to the sector and independent of the HRDP.

All in all, the following table summarizes the assessments by the evaluation of the programme's effectiveness in the economic area. The effectiveness of farm modernization as well as setting-up of young farmers is recognized, although the overall assessment of axis 1 remains contrasted against all the defined objectives. Specific objective 3 is that with the largest budget and the most appropriate for axis 1.

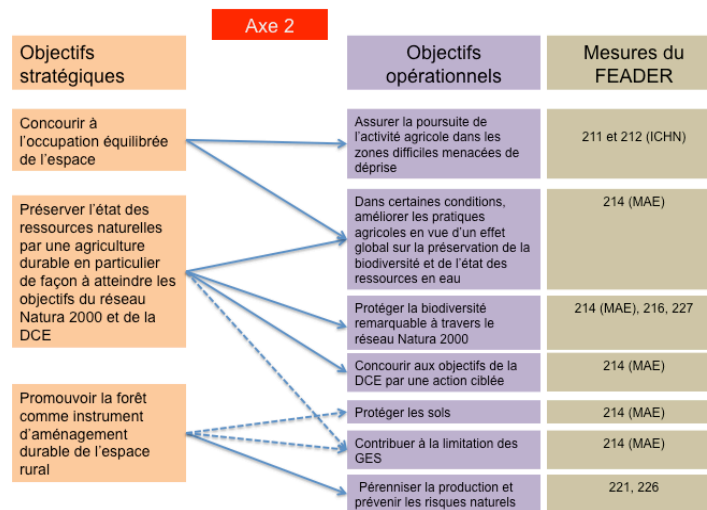
Référentiel	OS1 (capacité d'innovation)	OS2 (adaptation production)	OS3 (modernisation)	OS4 (filière bois)	OT (environnement)	OT (inv. coll. innovants)	EA UE (compétitivité)
Efficacité PDRH Ex post				?			?

EXPECTED IMPACTS IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL AREA: PROGRESS FROM THE PREVIOUS PERIOD, BUT AN EFFECTIVENESS WHICH IS CONTRASTED ACCORDING TO THE THEMES CONSIDERED

The expected environmental impacts of the programme refer primarily to the strategic objectives of axis 2. The intervention logic of the HRDP relating to this axis is reproduced below, as can be found in the latest version of the programme. Some strategic objectives of the HRDP clearly refer to expected programme impacts as can be read in the CMEF evaluation questions (protecting outstanding biodiversity through the Natura 2000 network or water resources via the EU Water Directive), but others refer more specifically to national objectives (contribute to the balanced occupation of space or promote forest management as a means of sustainable management of rural areas). Finally, the CMEF also introduces expected results related to biodiversity as a whole (high-nature-value zones) and to climate change mitigation, which should be added to our assessment of effectiveness because they are not part of the intervention logic below.

⁶ Modernization scheme for livestock buildings (*Plan de Modernisation des Bâtiments d'Élevage*)

⁷ Cooperatives for the use of agricultural equipment (CUMA)



It is therefore possible to take into account as a reference the following expected programme results in the field of the environment:

- the three strategic objectives of axis 2 (balanced use of areas, preservation of natural resources, which can be duplicated according to the two main targets: the Natura 2000 network and the achievement of EU Water directive objectives, and promotion of forest management as a tool for sustainable development);
- two more comprehensive expected impacts appearing in the CMEF on the protection of biodiversity as a whole and on mitigation of climate change.

Concerning the first strategic objective, namely **balanced occupation of the hexagonal area**, we can rely on the following for the conduct of this analysis: (1) evaluation of the compensatory allowances for natural handicaps carried out concomitantly with this *ex post* evaluation, (2) the in-depth analysis of grassland premiums 2 carried out as part of the mid-term evaluation, and (3) transversal approaches to the programme impact carried out in the *ex post* evaluation. It emerges from these different elements:

- that compensatory allowances for natural handicaps contributes to maintaining agricultural employment in less-favoured areas by rebalancing, at least partially, differences in income, particularly between lowland areas and mountain areas;
- that grassland premiums may in some cases be an effective complement to this compensation;
- that compensatory allowances for natural handicaps and especially grassland premiums 2 are less effective on territories with specific problems for the environmental management of grasslands: strong competition with cultivation (areas for arable farming, mixed farming/livestock areas), high risk for abandonment of agricultural land (dry mountains, high mountains with steep slopes), risk of grass management practices intensification (Cotentin, Basque country, Ségalias, ...).

We can therefore conclude that some tools are effectively contributing to a global rebalancing of the hexagonal area (especially the lowland/mountain equilibrium), but with greater difficulty in managing the equilibria on a smaller scale. Insofar as these finer balances are the result of other more territorialized tools, it can be said that from the point of view of this strategic objective of rebalancing, the “mass” support provided by compensatory allowances for natural handicaps and grassland premiums 2 have been rather effective.

Concerning the second strategic objective, focusing on water management and biodiversity and the attainment of the objectives of the two framework directives on these subjects (EU

Water Directive and Natura 2000), answers provided for the evaluation questions addressing this subject (see 5.2.1 and 5.2.2) highlight the following:

- a significant improvement compared to the previous period of the targeting of measures on the areas at risk (catchment area, areas of the Natura 2000 network);
- an increase in the ambition of the proposed measures, still in comparison with the previous period, where "confusion" with the requirements of conditionality or market demands was high;
- a probable positive impact on the remarkable biodiversity by the various tools mobilized in connection with implementation of the Natura 2000 Directive (animation, territorial agri-environmental measures, ...), even if this impact remains difficult to assess with precision owing to the absence of a monitoring system adapted to biodiversity;
- a positive effect on the maintenance of permanent grasslands, particularly in mountainous areas, probably leading to induced effects in terms of carbon storage and the fight against climate change;
- programme impacts on water quality appear limited, especially at the level of priority territories (EU Water Directive catchments). These limited effects can be explained by the nature of the tools mobilized (very focused on the evolution of agricultural practices alone) and local strategies often poorly adapted to the challenges, whereas the mobilization of more structural levers (evolution of production systems, support to the low-level input sectors) seems essential to achieving the environmental objectives sought.

On the whole, this second strategic objective reveals a contrasted judgment in terms of effectiveness according to (1) the reference framework referred to, and (2) the environmental theme considered. Indeed, compared to the results of the previous period, our assessment shows a clear improvement. On the other hand, in comparison with the current programme objectives, which are better defined and more ambitious, the evaluation concludes that the effectiveness in terms of biodiversity is remarkable yet considerably more mitigated in the priority areas *vis-à-vis* the quality of water resources.

Concerning finally the third strategic objective of axis 2 of the HRDP, aimed at promoting the forest as an instrument for sustainable management of rural areas, and based mainly on two measures (221 and 226) which have had very different degrees of success in terms of achievements (very low for 221 and high for 226), we can emphasize that:

- this strategic objective seems poorly taken on board by the actors encountered* (in contrast with the previous one in particular);
- the effects of forestry measures on biodiversity appear very limited, except in the Natura 2000 zone, as pointed out above;
- the « chablis » plan made it possible to accelerate the reconstruction of the forest after the storms of 1999 and 2009, thus boosting the carbon sink function, and that fire protection measures seem to have had some effect on the area burnt in Aquitaine but that the extent of taking account of the challenges of adapting the French forest to climate change by the programme remains generally weak.

* The linking of the M214 "agri-environmental measures" to this strategic objective in the intervention logic referred to above is not very explicit in this respect, although it probably refers to agroforestry, which has been very weakly supported by the program.

On the basis of these elements, the likelihood of achieving this third strategic objective appears very weak. History seems to be repeating itself, since it had also constituted a weak point in the evaluation of the previous programme.

Looking now at the two more global expected impacts of the CMEF concerning the protection of biodiversity as a whole and mitigation of climate change, the evaluation has shown that (see 5.2.1 and 5.2.4):

- the programme produced little impact on ordinary and domestic biodiversity, particularly in lowland areas where it did not significantly influence agricultural practices or systems. In mountainous areas, the programme has nonetheless contributed to the maintenance of biodiversity linked to grassland systems through mass support measures for these systems, namely compensatory allowances for natural handicaps and grassland premium. The overall trend of biodiversity evolution, even if there is a lack of indicators for accurate assessment, has nevertheless continued to decline during the programming period (see, in particular, the decline in the FBI indicator for bird-species in the agriculture areas);
- the overall impact of the programme on climate change mitigation remains difficult to measure owing to the lack of clearly-defined monitoring mechanisms and benchmarks on the link between the HRDP measures and this type of expected impact. However, it can be concluded that it is still fairly small as a consequence of outputs focusing on direct energy savings (which are only a small component of agricultural GHG emissions) and remains modest at national level.

The following table summarizes the assessment⁹ of the *ex post* evaluation of the programme effectiveness in the environmental area.

Référentiel	OS1 (équilibre territorial)	OS2 (bio-diversité N2000)	OS2 (eau DCE)	OS3 (forêt et espace rural)	EA UE 1 (bio-diversité)	EA UE 2 (CC)
Efficacité PDRH Ex post		?				?

EXPECTED IMPACTS IN THE « RURAL AREA »: A MORE OBVIOUS EFFECTIVENESS COMPARED TO MID-TERM

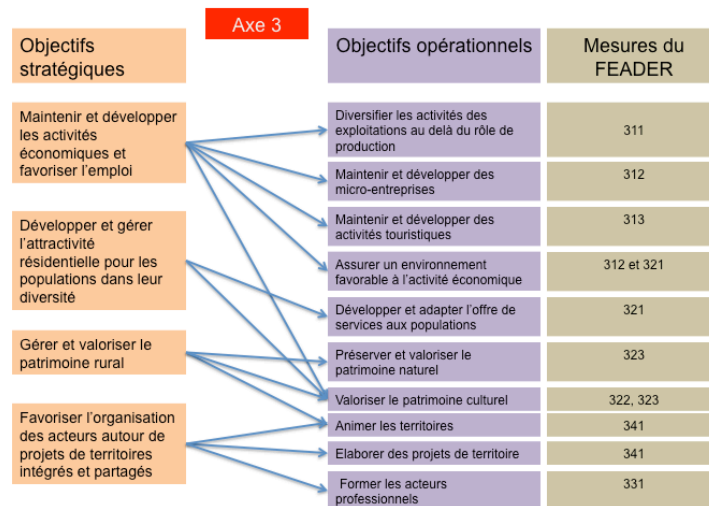
It should first be recalled that the expected impact of the programme in the thematic field of quality of life and economic diversification of rural areas could not be deeply studied during the mid-term evaluation, mainly because of the insufficient amount of progress at that time. These effects refer primarily to the strategic objectives of axis 3. The intervention logic of the HRDP concerning this axis is reproduced below, as can be found in the latest version of the programme. The formulation of the strategic objectives of the HRDP with respect to this axis is quite different from the expected programme impact as can be found in the evaluation questions of the CMEF (improving the quality of life of rural areas and promoting diversification of their economic activities).

The first strategic objective of the HRDP emphasizes the maintenance and development of employment rather than diversification of the economic fabric. The second strategic

⁹ <http://indicateurs-biodiversite.naturefrance.fr/indicateurs/evolution-des-populations-doiseaux-communs-specialistes>

¹⁰ Green colour: a rather favourable appreciation of effectiveness, yellow colour: mixed appreciation, red colour: rather unfavourable appreciation, grey colour: inability of the evaluator to pronounce, question mark: appreciation with greater uncertainties given the methods used and/or the time horizon considered.

objective is targeted on residential attractiveness, which is undoubtedly linked at the quality of life in rural areas (expected effect in the CMEF), both equally broad but the determinants of which are not necessarily similar (as long as we have an accepted definition of the determinants of residential attractiveness and quality of life, which is not the case). The third strategic objective – the management and valorisation of the heritage - can be seen as a contribution to the expected impact on the quality of life of rural areas, which is therefore broader. Finally, the fourth strategic objective of the HRDP for this axis is a specific national objective. According to the CMEF, facilitation and training measures under axis 1 contribute broadly to the two expected impacts on quality of life and economic diversification of rural areas.



Given these differences in wording and "levels" between the strategic objectives of the HRDP and the more comprehensive expected impacts in the CMEF, both should be taken into account as a reference for the expected programme impacts in the rural areas:

- four strategic objectives of axis 3;
- two more comprehensive expected effects of the CMEF on the quality of life in rural areas and the diversification of their economic activities.

On the first strategic objective, concerning the maintenance and development of economic activities and employment, the evaluation has highlighted: (1) support for diversification within farms with a significant impact in terms of turnover, (2) a weak effect of the programme on the creation of micro-enterprises, (3) an effect on tourism activities, but difficult to quantify in terms of employment, and (4) a specific effect of axis 3 on employment, in particular in the field of services and trade¹¹ (on-the-spot employment). One can therefore conclude that the programme has achieved a certain effectiveness in relation to this first strategic objective.

With regard to the second strategic objective, focusing on the development of residential attractiveness, we can emphasize that:

- activities undertaken by the programme contribute to residential attractiveness (services and heritage in particular);
- the mid-term evaluation highlighted implementation of these actions which was not always optimized (lack of needs analysis and prioritization at regional level), a situation which partially improved during the second part of the programme;

¹¹ In municipalities which have benefited from an aid amount of at least 30 euros per inhabitant, which may leave some territories aside.

- the counterfactual analyses carried out in the context of this ex post evaluation have revealed a specific effect of measure 321 on the level of equipment in municipalities;
- these same counterfactual analyses showed that axis 3 had a net effect on the rate of change in net migration, hence on residential attractiveness;
- the actions undertaken have been implemented with little or no synergy with operational programmes from the ERDF, even though attractiveness is the result of multiple factors (accessibility, level of services, landscape, cost of housing, etc.) over which each programme has only limited control.

Concerning the second strategic objective, it appears that the programme is also effective, although it seems that it could have been still better with optimized implementation. This evaluation finding is in strong contrast with the findings of the mid-term evaluation because of (1) the significant contribution of counterfactual methods in the appreciation of this type of global impact, and (2) the important limits for assessing these results at mid-term.

Concerning the third strategic objective, aimed at the management and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage, and which is essentially based on measure 323, one can underline a positive contribution of outputs and a rather strategic implementation of a significant part of the resources engaged (important support for LEADER territorial strategies for cultural heritage, well-targeted actions for the remarkable natural heritage through the Natura 2000 network). Nevertheless, the mid-term evaluation had highlighted a slightly optimized implementation of funds not passing through LEADER. It is also difficult to assess the programme's own effect in the field of natural or cultural heritage because of the lack of indicators available in these two areas (see above on biodiversity). We therefore conclude that the effectiveness is probably more favourable than the severe assessment at mid-term, but it still suffers from considerable uncertainty.

Lastly, with regard to the fourth strategic objective aiming at fostering the territorial organization of the stakeholders, we can emphasize that:

- the project territories have been rather well associated with the programme, mainly because of the LEADER programmes which have been an important means of disbursing Axis 3 funds;
- the articulation of the implementation of axis 3 with the regional policies supporting project territories varied (1) according to the region (Lower Normandy is an example where this articulation is particularly strong), (2) during the programme (with some regions having significantly reduced their support to project territories during the period).

Looking now at the two broader expected effects of the CMEF related to quality of life in rural areas and to the diversification of economic activities in the same areas, the *ex post* evaluation has shown that (see 5.3.1 and 5.3.2):

- the programme has produced at least two types of impact related to the quality of life of rural areas: impact on one of the important components of quality of life (access to services) and an impact on a global indicator of quality of life (net migration). These results of the statistical analyses are consistent with those of the more qualitative analyses carried out in the context of territorial case studies, which showed that the reinforcement of services or territorial amenities constituted the two strategies of action favoured by the territories to improve quality of life. They point to a certain effectiveness of the programme even though, like the above assessment on the strategic objective on residential attractiveness, it would probably have been superior with optimized implementation;
- the overall impact of the programme on the diversification of economic activities in rural areas, in the sense generally given to the term in economics (reduction of risks linked to specialization, opportunities to develop niche markets or

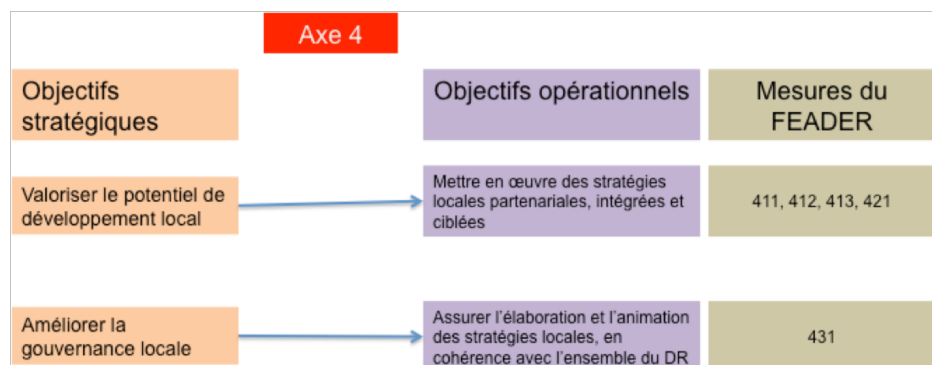
opportunities to develop synergies between activities), could not be assessed in a solid way in the context of this evaluation, beyond the employment effects discussed above (effectiveness on the first strategic objective of the HRDP concerning axis 3).

The following table summarizes these assessments¹² by the evaluation of the programme effectiveness in the field of quality of life in rural areas.

Référentiel	OS1(activités économiques et emploi)	OS 2 (attractivité)	OS3 (patrimoine)	OS4 (organisation territoriale)	EA UE 1 (qualité de vie)	EA UE 2 (diversification)
Efficacité PDRH Ex post			?			

EXPECTED IMPACTS IN THE « RURAL AREA »: MIXED EFFECTIVENESS OF AXIS 4 LEADER

Let us first recall that the LEADER methodological axis has mainly focused on axis 3 measures, and it can therefore be considered that its impacts are mainly visible in the thematic field of quality of life and economic diversification of rural areas, and are low or very low in the other two fields (economic and environmental impact). The effects of axis 4 also refer to the strategic objectives specific to this axis that appear in the HRDP, as they appear in the intervention logic set out below.



It is therefore possible to take as a reference for the expected impact of axis 4 LEADER:

- two strategic objectives of axis 4 displayed in the HRDP;
- two more comprehensive expected effects of the CMEF on the quality of life in rural areas and the diversification of their economic activities.

Concerning the first strategic objective of axis 4 focusing on the valorisation of local development potential, supported by the implementation of integrated and targeted local

¹² Green colour: a rather favourable appreciation of effectiveness, yellow colour: mixed appreciation, red colour: rather unfavourable appreciation, grey colour: inability of the evaluator to pronounce, question mark: appreciation with greater uncertainties given the methods used and/or the time horizon considered.

partnership strategies, and thus referring to the seven principles of the LEADER¹³ method or approach, the evaluations specific to LEADER and this evaluation have highlighted:

- financing of local strategies being limited to 5% of the funds, the minimum share provided for in the Rural Development Regulation;
- a partnership in, and integrated nature of, local strategies that can be considered as quite variable;
- innovative strategies as well as funded projects also being characterized by high variability;
- a certain difficulty in conducting transnational cooperation actions;
- management of funds at the conclusion of programming, which is highly influenced by consumption objectives, to the detriment of the link with the territorial strategy.

The assessment of effectiveness in relation to this first strategic objective is therefore mixed.

Concerning the second strategic objective of axis 4 on the improvement of local governance, the same sources were able to show that:

- LEADER constituted a real injunction to the implementation of private public governance in rural territories and that it was actually implemented, even if the innovative and successful nature of the governance varied considerably from one territory to another;
- LEADER had a positive effect on the development of networks and the involvement of actors, particularly private players, in the development of territories;
- the governance practices put in place to access LEADER funds were not always sustainably integrated in the governance of the territories, the latter being also strongly disturbed by the numerous reforms underway in the structuring of French territories.

We can therefore conclude that there is a mixed assessment of this second specific strategic objective of axis 4.

Finally, with regard to LEADER's contribution to the two more global expected effects of the CMEF on quality of life in rural areas and on the diversification of economic activities in the same areas, the evaluation showed that:

- LEADER had a net effect on the implementation of Axis 3 funds, thus contributing to the positive effects of this axis highlighted above on quality of life (access to services and residential attractiveness in particular);
- the most innovative strategies in this field were carried out by LEADER territories (EHS development, energy transition, cultural services, etc.). At national level, however, these strategies are still limited and it is impossible to assess their overall impact on the economic diversification of rural areas.

The following table summarizes the assessments¹⁴ of the evaluation regarding the effectiveness of axis 4 LEADER in the field of quality of life in rural areas.

¹³ These seven principles are: existence of a local development strategy, public/private partnership, bottom-up approach, integrated multisectoral approach, innovation, cooperation and networking.

Référentiel	OS1(valoriser le potentiel de dév. local)	OS 2 (améliorer la gouvernance locale)	EA UE 1 (qualité de vie)	EA UE 2 (diversification)
Efficacité PDRH Ex post	?			

Factors that strengthened programme effectiveness

The evaluation was able to highlight a number of factors that have enhanced the effectiveness of the programme:

- the consolidation of the second-pillar support schemes into a single programme, with a simple and readable four-axis structure, has made it possible to: (1) enhance the legibility of the second pillar, and (2) the establishment of a first step towards « programme » management (dedicated teams, a more or less global monitoring system, evaluations covering the entire programme, etc.);
- the possibility of breaking down and adapting the programme to some extent has allowed certain regions to take advantage of this possibility to support their regional strategies and policies: energy consumption in agriculture in Brittany, Registered destination of origin dairy in Auvergne, logging in Auvergne or Aquitaine, etc.;
- the reinforcement of emerging dynamics supported by strong societal demand, such as short circuits or organic farming, in particular by linking the programme with national or regional policies on these themes, has also been a factor in effectiveness;
- the coupling of the levers of action mobilized, in particular by combining intangible and material actions (animation and support for investment or income in particular), has generally proved effective: this evaluation highlights it very well in the case of the Natura 2000 zones (linking of animation measures, investment support and income support for the various types of beneficiaries concerned), in the case of forest management and logging (coupling of the forest chart with the “Plan de Développement de Massif”, creation of feeder roads and actions on forest stands), or also in the case of the development of rural services or rural tourism (coupling of LEADER animation and investment measures of axis 3);
- the targeting efforts of the programme, particularly of its surface measures (territorial agri-environmental measures in particular), on the areas at stake were also a guarantee of effectiveness. In the same vein, support for implementation in project territories that have elaborated a development strategy (measures to support tourism development or heritage management through LEADER for example) also contributed to this targeting;

¹⁴ Green colour: a rather favourable appreciation of effectiveness, yellow colour: mixed appreciation, red colour: rather unfavourable appreciation, grey colour: inability of the evaluator to pronounce, question mark: appreciation with greater uncertainties given the methods used and/or the time horizon considered.

- finally, the use of implementation modalities allowing a certain selectivity of the projects supported (call for projects) which generally guarantees effectiveness.

Factors that reduced programme effectiveness

The evaluation also highlighted a number of factors undermining the effectiveness of the programme. They are developed below with greater precision than the preceding factors in a spirit of preparation of the recommendations (identification of possible margins of progress).

LARGELY PERFECTIBLE STRATEGIC STEERING

Several elements highlighted by the evaluation - but also by the mid-term evaluation – can illustrate this first point:

- an unfinished and weakened programme management at the end of the period (see Part 3 of the report);
- difficulties in adapting strategies (national, regional, even territorial - LEADER) due to the cumbersome nature of the coexistence of three decision scales (EU, national and regional);
- a monitoring system put in place late and not well suited to strategic steering (see also part 3);
- relatively low involvement in on-going evaluation, particularly at regional level;
- implementation modalities with still an important place in the “waiting line”, even if one notes an increase in the use of the call for projects as highlighted above.

INCOMPLETE INTERNAL COHERENCE

In contrast with the relative readability of the structuring of the 4-axis programme outlined above, the evaluation revealed several important weaknesses in terms of internal coherence:

- An over-simplified intervention logic (notably with often a linear link: a strategic objective - an operational objective - a measure), which was not sufficiently dynamic. This first point, which is particularly central, reveals: (1) the programme’s difficulty in supporting integrated approaches or sectors, since it requires mobilizing several sub-measures to serve the same operational or strategic objective, and (2) the weakness or even the absence of an intervention logic on a set of themes, in particular emerging or reinforced during the programme (innovation, energy, adaptation to climate change, restructuring of the dairy sector, etc.);
- Frequent referral to regional level for the definition of a strategy and the co-financing of the measures to achieve its objectives, while at the same time allowing a financial margin of manoeuvre limited by the weight of the national framework;
- Levers of action and tools not always adapted to the achievement of objectives (example of the protection of water resources with an action too focused on the modification of practices);
- Possible competition between measures, particularly in the environmental field (grassland premium , rotational agri-environmental measures, territorially-targeted agro-environmental measures);
- Implementation of the principles of the LEADER method - innovation in particular - hampered by the need to fit into existing measures.

INSUFFICIENT EXTERNAL COHERENCE

Some weaknesses in external coherence have also been highlighted:

- Linkages that are not readable or are incoherent with the first pillar of the CAP (organic vineyards, « transfers » of support for organic farming between the two pillars during the period, positioning of the requirements between GAEC 1 and 2 and territorial agri-environmental measures, the use of certain environmental support, such as income support for certain sectors - grassland premium, or even rotational - bringing them closer together in the spirit of the Single programming document);
- A weak search for synergies between the different European funds, with an approach based on the definition of dividing lines rather than on the search for synergies;
- A lack of articulation with, or even possible competition from, the programme's support for certain national schemes (France Agrimer on innovation or production under greenhouses, ADEME on wood energy and methanisation, etc.), to link with the "orphan" themes in terms of the intervention logic outlined above;
- A requirement in terms of increased controllability during the programming and more demanding than that of national funding.

ADAPTATION TO NEEDS ALSO PERFECTIBLE

The final set of factors weakening effectiveness is related to insufficient adaptation to needs:

- the importance, in financial terms, of "historical" measures in the continuity of previous programmes, making it more difficult to take account of new needs;
- the lack of a precise definition of the EAFRD positioning and needs in terms of innovation (role of the EAFRD in relation to the ERDF, definition of targets and intervention modalities);
- a privileged modernization scheme (investments in livestock buildings and labour productivity) and more adapted support for selected (family) trajectories for setting up young farmers, while the diversity of installation and development trajectories is real;
- difficulties in adapting environmental measures to local contexts;
- identification of needs depending on the existence of regional schemes/ strategies or reference to the scale of the project territories, leaving the possibility that this identification is absent or obsolete in a certain number of cases.

Recommendations

The recommendations that can be formulated at the end of this evaluation are inspired by a twofold argument: (1) first, the conclusions of the evaluation which have just been presented; and (2) second, the recommendations made at the mid-term evaluation in 2010/2011 over the period 2014/2020, of which some remain fairly relevant. Moreover, given the timing of these recommendations, these evaluation recommendations cannot overcome the context in which they take place, namely the new programming period 2014/2020 resulting from the reform of the CAP 2013. Therefore these recommendations address two distinct time horizons: that of the current programming period, which has already begun but which should be optimized in the light of the lessons learned from the evaluation, and that of the post 2020 period, for which preparation has already begun.

Recommendations related to the strategy and the objectives of the programmes

R1. STRENGTHEN THE CAPACITY OF PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT INNOVATION AND CONDUCT CHANGE

The answers to the European and national questions on this theme highlighted the weaknesses of the HRDP in its ability to support innovation and change management in agriculture, agri-food, forestry and rural development. This has been a recurring weakness for two generations of programmes, as the evaluation of the national rural development plan (NRDP) also strongly pointed it out. Yet the « vocation » of the second pillar is precisely the driving force behind change, although EU members have tended to use it to « fix » the negative effects of the first pillar. Moreover, innovation remains a central concern in the development strategy of the EU countries (see EU 2020 development strategy) and the Structural Funds are all expected to contribute. The first cross-cutting priority of the Rural Development Programmes is thus to address this issue (see above). Even if identification of measures to implement this priority seems to have progressed in the new generation of programmes, it remains necessary to achieve significant changes in the second pillar programmes in France in this area. For this we propose:

- to specify the intervention logic for promoting innovation: what role has the EAFRD in supporting innovation? What is the linkage with the other structural funds (ERDF in particular) in this area? What objectives – i.e. what types of innovation - aim at different programme targets? What multiplier actions need to be mobilized to reach them? On what time horizon? ...;
- to conduct the articulation of RDPs with the European Partnership for Innovation (EPI) by facilitating the setting-up of EPI Operational Groups and of dedicated funding lines;
- to maintain the innovation capacity of LEADER by facilitating the application process for private actors;
- to set up collaborative research projects to improve the adequateness of resources/industry/market in the forest industry;
- to ensure the eligibility of new forms of collective structures (cooperative community-oriented enterprise, agricultural employment cooperatives, etc.) and to facilitate their access to programmes.

This recommendation had already been formulated at the end of the mid-term evaluation, and it is useful to recall the precise proposals which are still in place: (1) consideration of the articulation between RDPs and national and regional innovation policies, (2) generalizing of innovative implementation modalities emerging from feedback in France or abroad, (3) consideration of the governance of sub-measures to encourage the entry of new players

and to reach new targets, (4) differentiation of subsidy rates in accordance with the innovative character, (5) involvement of specialized innovation actors in the implementation of calls for projects.

R2. STRENGTHEN INTEGRATED APPROACHES (SECTORS, TERRITORIES)

In the answers to the cross-cutting questions and in the conclusions, we stressed how the structuring of the HRDP in axes and measures slows down implementation of the cross-cutting objectives and the support from integrated projects (sectors or territories). The structure of the current programmes seems to call for a more strategic approach and enhanced co-ordination of the various mechanisms, but there is no basis for judging what actually applies at present. We therefore propose:

- for agricultural and agri-food sectors, to reinforce the support of projects that are based on a real territorial strategy or on the consolidation of sectors;
- for the forestry sector, to provide for the possibility of financing upstream and downstream of the sector;
- for the forestry sector, to implement projects at the level of the forests, combining animation and investment measures, and integrating all functions of the forest (productive, recreational, environmental);
- for the environmental priorities, to promote global approaches to the territories at stake with a project logic (a « facilitator » project leader and a combination of mechanisms to differentiate the levers of action).

This recommendation had already been formulated at the conclusion of the mid-term evaluation, and it is useful to recall the precise proposals still in place: (1) introduce possibilities for a group allocation of support, or even the labelling of projects within the framework of the programmes, (2) set up "project managers" within the teams dedicated to implementation of the programmes (see R6).

R3. STRENGTHEN EXTERNAL PROGRAMME COHERENCE

The above conclusions highlighted that some of the factors that had undermined the effectiveness of the HRDP were related to the issues of articulation of the HRDP with other public policies and programmes. It is therefore necessary to improve the external coherence of the programmes, through:

- clarification, in the environmental field, of the place of the regional RDPs in the light of the regulatory arrangements and the first pillar;
- articulation of the various supports for the food industry such as state aid, regional aid that is not co-financed, support *via* the ERDF, aid for national or regional innovation;
- coordination of support for the development of renewable energy with the policy of ADEME¹⁵ and the State;
- articulation of programmes with the territorial policies of the new configuration of regions.

R4. STRENGTHENING THE TERRITORIALISATION OF THE PROGRAMMES

The responses given to the evaluation questions and the above conclusions have clearly pointed out (1) that territorial approaches are often synonymous with effectiveness,

¹⁵ Agency of the Environment and the Control of Energy (Agence De l'Environnement et de la Maîtrise de l'Energie - ADEME)

especially when they combine different action levers, but also (2) that they have been implemented in a rather limited way in the HRDP (MAET and LEADER basically), and (3) that they should allow aid to be adapted to local issues in order to maximize their effectiveness. That is why we propose:

- strengthening of the flexibility and local adaptability of EAMs;
- support for project territories whenever possible (for example, territories for individual support in the field of green energy [TEPCV]¹⁶). This recommendation implies defining the types of territory in which to support implementation and translation of this choice into calls for project selection criteria.

This recommendation had already been formulated at the end of the mid-term evaluation, and it is useful to recall the proposal which is still valid: generalizing the link between zoning of issues and involvement of local actors during implementation (notably through animation).

Recommendations on programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation

We formulate three recommendations on programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation, which are particularly important in the context of programmes that are already being implemented.

R5. STRENGTHEN PROJECT SELECTION

The analysis and conclusions of the evaluation showed that the efforts of targeting and selection of projects have produced results, in particular in terms of reduced deadweight effects. However, a large proportion of the projects were still implemented under the HRDP using a « queue » approach, and selectivity has often been replaced by the search for rapid consumption of funds at the end of the programme. We therefore propose strengthening the selection of projects in the current programming period, in particular through:

- further development of the implementation of sub-measures through calls for projects, and strengthening the capacity of these calls to guide project achievement and results (selectivity). This development of calls for projects should not, however, be to the detriment of fairness between the targeted beneficiaries involved in these procedures, which implies that they should be conducted under certain rules and precautions, *viz.*: (1) announcing in advance the criteria on which the selection will be made, (2) leaving sufficient time to respond to calls for projects, (3) considering support for the heaviest procedures or for inexperienced targeted beneficiaries;
- using this call for project procedure to select the facilitators of the sub-measures, or better the project leaders combining several sub-measures (see R2 and R4 above);
- increasing the selectivity or the modulation of investment and support for setting up young farmers;
- further modulation of aid according to the orientations expected (collective approach, triple performance, innovation, etc.);
- reinforcing and mobilizing references during the selection process (example: observatory of costs for investments).

¹⁶ Territoires à énergie positive pour la croissance verte

R6. STRENGTHEN PROGRAMME ACCURACY AND ACCESSIBILITY

The surveys realised among the various programme beneficiaries within the framework of the evaluation have clearly highlighted the difficulties of programme access by the « uninitiated ». The mid-term evaluation also revealed that the profile of the beneficiaries remained very similar to that of the previous generation, despite the involvement of more actors in implementation. It is therefore important to increase accessibility to the programme, especially for the most "fragile" target group. To do this, we propose:

- systematic pre-qualification of priority target groups in relation to the objectives assigned to each measure;
- establishment of targeted information procedures and support for access to sub-measures *via* professional networks (consular chambers, trade unions, etc.) but also *via* word of mouth through the setting-up of networks of ambassadors who can promote and value the benefits of the programme through campaigns or testimonial approaches;
- facilitation, as far as possible, of access to support: simplification of administrative procedures, dematerialization, support services, sponsorship, tutoring, etc.

This recommendation had already been formulated at the end of the mid-term evaluation, and it is useful to recall the specific proposals which are still relevant: (1) strengthening of communication, especially between the « new » target audiences, (2) definition of a communication plan and its evaluation, and (3) communication on the inter-fund strategy and the role of each of the structural funds in supporting rural and peri-urban areas.

R7. DISPOSE OF PERFORMING MONITORING AND EVALUATION TOOLS

The evaluation, as a « user » of monitoring data and evaluations, is well placed to formulate and support this latter recommendation (see in particular the limitations in Part 2.5 of the report). We propose in this area:

- reinforcement of the characterization of the beneficiaries and the projects financed in the monitoring system or to include at least identifiers making it easy to find beneficiaries in existing databases (INSEE, RGA, RICA, ...) and thus accessing their characterization;
- integration of the selection criteria used in the monitoring system. This integration has a double advantage: (1) it can be exploited in terms of monitoring and evaluation, and (2) it meets the traceability requirements of the selection of projects which will be more and more requested in the context of controls;
- provision of a network for national monitoring and evaluation. This is particularly important in a context in which the uniqueness of the monitoring system is not functional to date¹⁷ and where the national level will have to report to the Commission on implementation of the partnership agreement of the totality of the Structural Funds. This network must be linked with the National Rural Network, in the context of strengthening the latter's contribution to the implementation of the programmes;
- careful consideration of the role of each person in monitoring and evaluation: data to be provided by the beneficiary, role of the measure or device manager, role of the monitoring and evaluation officer, etc.;
- distinguishing the production of the annual implementation reports (AIRs) from that of the ongoing "thematic" evaluation, which makes it possible to deepen

¹⁷ This does not guarantee the availability of comparable and/or aggregate data between the various RDPs.

certain specific themes, measures or challenges. Such thematic evaluations could usefully involve several voluntary regions and the national level within the framework of the aforementioned network;

- strengthening of knowledge of environmental effectiveness and the linkages between measures and impacts (see, for example, areas in which impact indicator readings are very low);
- pooling and systematization of tools for evaluating LAGs at regional level;
- capitalization on the inputs of this evaluation in the framework of the implementation of the 2014/2020 CMEF (intervention logic by evaluation question, performance indicators in particular).

Reflexions for the preparation after 2020

Beyond the above recommendations, which fit within the already defined framework of the 2014/2020 programming, we consider it important to draw from the results of this evaluation some lines of reflection for the preparation of the next generation which, let us recall, must be strongly anticipated in relation to European policies and programmes. We voluntarily formulate these lines of reflection in the form of the following questions, in order to emphasize their vocation to fuel a debate:

- What is the financial balance between the different programme targets (agricultural sector, forest sector, other rural and peri-urban actors) if the aim is to maximize the effect on employment?
- What balance should be pursued between supporting restructuring, maintaining territorial equilibrium and taking account of new challenges?
- What balance must be pursued between the search for cost-competitiveness and non-cost-competitiveness for the agricultural and forestry sectors?
- How do we take into account the changes in forms of work on farms (wage labour, collaborative economy, etc.)?
- What balance should be struck between the action levers for the environment (practices / production systems / channels) ?
- What are the respective roles of the first and second pillars to ensure a certain balance and territorial equity ?
- What involvement should the second pillar have in insurance policies (climate and health risks)?
- What is the impact on the second pillar of the debate on the choice of implementing counter-cyclical support or as a function of the market situation?