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**INDEPENDENT EVALUATION SERVICE OF THE
REGIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR
THE PERIOD 2014-2020 OF THE LIGURIA REGION**

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ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT

Dissemination Synthesis

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Introduction

The **Annual Evaluation Report** (hereinafter referred to as RVA), therefore relating to the state of implementation of the RDP 2014-2020 of the Liguria Region as at 31 December 2019, was structured in accordance with what was agreed during the coordination meetings with the Regional Administration.

1. Main findings and related evaluation conclusions

The **main results that emerged and the relative evaluation conclusions** drawn from the surveys carried out for the Annual Evaluation Report are summarised below for each of the Rural Development Priorities.

► **Priority 1 - "Promoting knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas".**

In Liguria, the entrepreneurial fabric (existing, new entrants and those who will be made up of "young" conductors) needs support at the level of training, information and consultancy activities to counter the low rate of specific preparation currently expressed (about 2.7% of entrepreneurs have a higher education diploma or degree). Not only: collaboration, cooperation and the organisation of the supply chains must also be relaunched through the implementation of innovative projects capable of promoting competitiveness in the agricultural sector.

The transversal measures programmed in this priority through measures 1 - "Knowledge transfer and information actions", 16 - "Pei-Partenariato europeo per l'innovazione groups" and 19 - "Sostegno allo sviluppo locale LEADER - sviluppo locale di tipo partecipativo" (LEADER support for local development - participatory local development), have so far contributed rather marginally to the improvement of the specific needs defined in the programming phase due to delays in the publication of specific calls for proposals or to specific delays in implementation. Therefore, the first evaluative evidence shows, first of all, a physical progress of the operations but little can be said about the real strategic contribution of the interventions with respect to the increase in skills and the stimulus to innovation. It should be noted, however, that the training offer, implemented with measure 1, appears to be rather evenly distributed among the different sectors of interest. However, its activation time has not contributed to improve access to other strategic measures given the long activation time.

For these reasons, the recommendations revolve around the need to accelerate the implementation of the whole Priority 1, which has cross-cutting implications on the whole Programme and its main actors.

► **Priority 2 - "Enhancing farm viability and competitiveness of agriculture in all its forms in all regions and promoting innovative technologies for farms and sustainable forest management".**

Priority 2 has been designed to reinforce the process of modernisation and generational turnover in Ligurian farms, in continuity with previous programming periods.

The negative dynamics of the sector (decrease in the number of farms - medium/small size - scarce propensity to the market and scarce recourse to new production models), according to the evaluation findings, have been rather significantly addressed by the interventions carried out.

There was, in fact, an improvement in economic performance in agricultural and forestry farms and a general propensity for diversification, as well as a factual and strategic support to young people entering the agricultural sector: young farmers benefiting from the Liguria RDP represent 75% of

new farms registered with the regional Chambers of Commerce and measure 6.1 supported 278 new settlements.

The RDP has also acted on other aspects: 78% of the investments supported by measure 4.1 include environmental measures; finally, it is possible to state that all the initiatives undertaken to strengthen the structural 360° of farms may have some kind of impact on employment.

Finally, it should be stressed the importance of accompanying this process with substantial training and information activities which, however, as noted above, still suffers from implementation delays.

► **Priority 3 - "Promoting the organisation of the agro-food chain, including the processing and marketing of agricultural products, animal welfare and risk management in the agricultural sector".**

Priority 3 covers two macro areas of rural development that are rather central for Liguria: on the one hand, the interventions aim to support and protect quality production (an important sector for the region both in the "food" and "wine" sectors) and, on the other, the action shifts to the protection against climate change and environmental emergencies faced by farms in the area.

As of 2018, the results produced by the Programme with respect to the participation of companies in organic and quality label products, as well as the adoption of agro-food safety standards, also pursuing environmental objectives, appear satisfactory.

In continuity with the interventions provided for in the past programme, the aid offered has been allocated to the reduction of the direct costs of the individual farms linked to the control and verification of compliance with the specifications: out of 75 farms benefiting from measure 3.1, 51% have adhered to organic quality systems and quality labels and 49% have chosen to adhere to voluntary certification schemes for regional horticultural products, others have adhered to association bodies for the expenses incurred for information and promotion activities, participation in events, fairs, etc.. (M3.2).

M4.2, dedicated to improving the integration of primary producers in the agro-food chain, which plays a key role in the system productivity game, showed an excellent financial performance, with a ratio between liquidated and programmed resources of 84%.

The recommendations formulated for this priority are, in summary, referred to the rapid implementation of the measures that contribute to the FA 3A and 3B to support the development of the regional agri-food system, favouring the construction of a productive fabric that leverages on certified quality and supply chain organisation and to guarantee the sustainable management of natural resources by flanking agricultural activity with information and advisory tools on specific issues.

► **Priority 4 - "Preserving, restoring and enhancing the ecosystems connected to agriculture and forestry".**

The results obtained by the RDP for this priority, which aims to safeguard fundamental elements of nature, can be listed according to the 3 key elements to which it refers: biodiversity, water and soil.

With regard to the first aspect, the RDP is considered to be making a positive contribution to the protection of genetic diversity, species and regional ecosystems. However, the evaluation suggests to enhance the effectiveness of environmental measures to improve certain birdlife conditions in agricultural habitats by reducing chemical inputs and to continue proposing measures that increase the complexity (and self-protection) of the landscape.

As far as water quality is concerned, the in-depth evaluation suggests to continue the implementation activities of the Action Plan for NVZs, providing the necessary support to interventions aimed at reducing the agricultural impact in NVZs.

► **Priority 5 - "Stimulating resource efficiency and the transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy in the agri-food and forestry sector".**

From an evaluation point of view, the themes programmed within this Priority for the Liguria Region would seem to have obtained results that are not entirely satisfactory, since they have not been placed at the centre of the objectives of the interventions selected so far.

Starting with water-saving measures, this study showed that the logic of "economic" investments within farms has prevailed, to the detriment of those that would have affected the efficiency of irrigation systems, with a low role for the RDP in this aspect. With regard to the production of energy from renewable sources within the selected project park, it represents a reduced portion of the total, noting the low consistency of the overall dedicated investments.

Good success, on the other hand, of the structural measures (M8.3 - "Interventions to prevent forest damage from fires and natural disasters", 8.4 - "Interventions to restore forests damaged by fires and natural disasters", 8.5 - "Interventions to mitigate forests and increase the environmental value") which intervene on the integrity of the forest system by favouring the adaptation of forests to climate change and improving the resilience of forest ecosystems, which have actually improved the carbon sequestration process with a good potential demand expressed by the territory.

► **Priority 6 - "Working for social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas".**

The creation, diversification of enterprises, local development and, in general, social inclusion through the reduction of the marginality of territories and their inhabitants, are objectives pursued by the interventions included in Priority 6.

The interventions for the implementation of broadband (Measure 7.3) have been started but the target of the population living in rural areas (16.46%) is still far from being reached.

A positive note is the trend of Measure 6.2 (start-up of non-agricultural enterprises in rural areas) for which there is a progress of expenditure of 11% of the budget and the selection of 6 interventions in the forestry sector.

Another data to be noted as far as the LEADER strategy is concerned, is the start of the LAGs' self-evaluation process (5 selected for the same number of LAGs) with the support of the evaluator: in this case it was suggested to the Region to keep constant and lively the discussion with the LAGs in order to favour the identification of shared and strategic choices and paths for the territory.

2. Methodological support activities for the self-evaluation of Local Development Strategies

During 2019 the Independent Evaluator defined the methodology for self-evaluation of local development strategies.

At the basis of the approach used there are some fixed points that characterize and stabilize the proposed method:

- the shared and participatory construction of what is evaluated and how it is evaluated;
- the identification of a minimum set of data, necessary and sufficient, to accompany LAGs in formulating their evaluation judgement with respect to the objects of self-evaluation;
- the sharing of why it is necessary to collect the minimum set of data and the organisational implications (for the LAG) in their collection; when they are to be collected, by whom and how they are to be managed in a systematic way (database);
- the awareness that the self-assessment process will have to be built looking at the usefulness of the tool;
- in order to express its full potential at local level, all those who gravitate around the LAG must be informed and involved: members, Board members, LAG technicians, experts, other stakeholders not included in the social structure with whom network relations are established;
- the connection of the self-assessment process with the independent evaluation process (the RDP Assessor).

2.1. The "objects" to be assessed in the self-assessment process

On 26 February 2019, an evaluation session was held at the headquarters of the Liguria Region to jointly identify the objects of self-evaluation. Different techniques were applied in the session, which are summarised below:

A. Brainstorming Valuation, in turn divided into:

- Creative phase (all participants freely identified all the elements that characterise the daily process of implementing Local Development Strategies, henceforth OSH);
- classification phase (the placement of each indicated element in a specific class, respecting in the aggregation of the different objects a principle of semantic proximity);
- reclassification phase (the identification in each class of further subclasses, the latter representing the final objects to be evaluated).

B. Priority scale Obligatory; the hierarchy of the identified objects with respect to two dimensions: **external effectiveness** (what guarantees a greater impact of OSH on the territories) and **efficiency** (what guarantees a greater fluidity of the OSH implementation process).

Objects of the evaluation identified

Below are some examples of cards describing the objects of the self-assessment that have been identified through the self-assessment session.

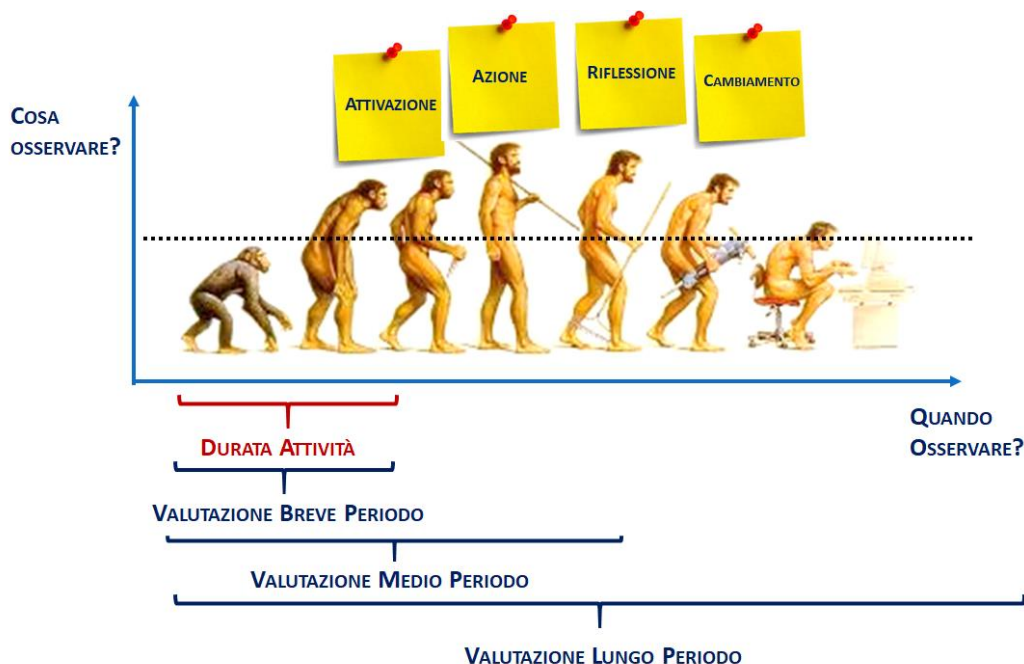
Each object (Indicator) is associated to an evaluation question and the elements classified in the

INDICATOR NAME	(A. STAKE) ABILITY TO DEAL WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS OUTSIDE THE GAL
ASSOCIATED BS STRINGS	NOT EASY TO EXPLAIN IN THE TERRITORY (TO MAYOR OR FARMER) WHY THEY HAVE TO WORK TOGETHER - ATTENTION TO THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE TERRITORY - GREATER/MINOR PARTICIPATION OF ALL THOSE INVOLVED
EVALUATION QUESTION	TO WHAT EXTENT ARE WE ABLE TO ACTIVATE RELATIONS (FUNCTIONAL TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SSL) WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS OUTSIDE THE GAL?

INDICATOR NAME	(B. PARTGAL) CAPACITY OF THE PARTNERSHIP GAL
ASSOCIATED BS STRINGS	THE EFFORT IN THE SHARING OF OBJECTIVES WITHIN THE PARTNERSHIP - FACILITATING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC - LACK OF A STIMULUS OF (PRIVATE) REPRESENTATIONS TOWARDS THEIR ASSOCIATES - MUCH WORK ON THE PUBLIC SIDE TO FACILITATE COOPERATION BETWEEN MAYORS - LACK OF INTEREST ON THE PART OF SOME MAYORS - UNIFICATION EXPERIENCE TWO GAL 19. 1 DIFFICULTY IN FINDING A STRUCTURE, ALL THE MUNICIPALITIES IN THE ASSEMBLY - EXAGGERATED EXPECTATIONS WITHIN THE GAL PARTNERSHIP - ASSEMBLIES CALLED 4 TIMES A YEAR FOR CALLS FOR TENDERS AND OTHER RELEVANT ELEMENTS - BOARD OF DIRECTORS WITH 20 SUBJECTS - GREATER WEIGHT OF SOME CATEGORIES - CONSTANCY AND SACRIFICE OF ALL THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE ASSEMBLIES WOULD BE A WISH - DRY ASSOCIATIVE BODIES (19 ASSEMBLY) AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS (11) - WE THINK AS ADMINISTRATIVE BODIES - ATTENTION TO THE FUNCTIONALITY OF THE BODIES - COHESION BETWEEN THE ASSEMBLY AND THE BOARD -.
EVALUATION QUESTION	TO WHAT EXTENT ARE WE ABLE, THROUGH PARTNERSHIP RELATIONS, TO ENSURE THAT OUR LOCAL HEALTH SERVICES HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE TERRITORIES?

2.2. The self-assessment process, the Evaluator's proposal

The self-assessment process must be conducted periodically, at least once a year. Depending on the object of the evaluation, the following may be involved: LAG members, Board members, LAG chairman, technical staff employed on a stable basis, technicians in charge of the investigations extracted from the LAG experts' short lists, beneficiaries, potential beneficiaries, other partners not included in the LAG's membership. As shown in the figure below, each LAG activity can produce a change in the short, medium and long term.



A self-assessment proposal is presented for each object of the assessment identified:

- what elements should/could be collected to support the formulation of the self-assessment judgement. For each object of the evaluation a qualitative self-assessment scale is provided, ranging from a minimum, "critical performance", to a maximum, "excellent performance";

- what are the elements, with respect to the proposal of the Evaluator, that the LAG's referents believe can be reasonably collected and what are those that they believe cannot be collected, indicating the motivation;
- what are the additional elements that the LAG's contacts think they can collect and why they consider them useful in formulating the self-assessment judgement.

The methods of self-assessment by request for assessment

Below are the forms elaborated for each object (indicator) identified and the related application for evaluation. Please remember that the evaluation question is: what do we ask the evaluation? The evaluation should, if done well, return an awareness of the need for knowledge (the question) with respect to the effectiveness, efficiency and usefulness of the activities you carry out.

The lesson learnt, on the other hand, contains elements that could be transferred to the outside world:

- what could be done in the future (not in this programming) to improve;
- what are the results/impacts of our activities;
- what are important elements that our territory should know about the dynamics we are observing in our activity as local development agents (LAGs).

The methodological proposal for the construction of the self-assessment system

Below is an example of a standard card that will allow you to build the final instrument. For each evaluation request, a form is presented to understand how the search for "**DATA to be translated into INFORMATION**" that is considered necessary to express a judgement could be articulated.

Within each form there is a field: "**CRITERIA AND/OR ASSERTS TO BE VERIFIED TO MAKE A JUDGE**" which should guide the way in which it is appropriate to move in order to make an evidence-based judgement.

The sheet contains a scale from 1 to 5 that is associated with a **SYNTHETIC JUDGMENT** that photographs the present situation for each object of the evaluation (from very critical to very good performance).

INDICATOR NAME	(A. STAKE) ABILITY TO DEAL WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS OUTSIDE THE GAL				
EVALUATION QUESTION	TO WHAT EXTENT ARE WE ABLE TO ACTIVATE RELATIONS (FUNCTIONAL TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SSL) WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS OUTSIDE THE GAL?				
CRITERIA AND/OR ASSURANCES TO BE VERIFIED IN ORDER TO MAKE A JUDGEMENT	- WE HAVE ACTIVATED MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF EXTRA-LEADING PROJECTS (YES/NO) - WE COLLABORATE PERMANENTLY WITH OTHER LOCAL DEVELOPMENT ACTORS (YES/NO) - THE WORK CARRIED OUT IN THE TERRITORY HAS GIVEN RISE TO OTHER PROCESSES (DISTRICTS, ITINERARIES, DOP) (YES/NO)				
SUMMARY JUDGMENT	VERY GOOD	GOOD	SUFFICIENT	RISK	CRITICAL
ARTICULATED JUDGEMENT					
Corrective action					