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**INDEPENDENT EVALUATION SERVICE OF THE
REGIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR
THE PERIOD 2014/2020 OF THE LIGURIAN REGION
CIG: 7070449F14**

ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT 2021 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INDEX

Introduction	2
1. Methodological support activities for the self assessment of Local Development Strategies	2
2. Methodological approach for the ex post evaluation of synergies and complementarities between the programme measures	3

Introduction

The **Annual Evaluation Report** (hereinafter AER), concerning the state of implementation of the RDP 2014/2020 of the Liguria Region at 31 December 2020, has been structured in line with what was agreed during the coordination meetings with the Regional Administration.

The document, after a description of the activities carried out during 2020 in implementation of the RDP Evaluation Plan, is structured as follows:

- ▶ return of the first results of the methodological support activities to LAGs on the self-assessment of Local Development Strategies;
- ▶ formulation of a methodological proposal for the ex-post evaluation of the complementarities and synergies that can be verified thanks to the Rural Development Programme 2014/2020 of the Liguria Region.

1. Methodological support activities for the self-assessment of Local Development Strategies

This initial experiment made it possible to examine the contents of the questionnaires drawn up by the evaluator and completed by the LAGs and to draw up the main results, partly with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of the survey instrument and the correctness of the approach. More generally, the aim of the experiment was to circulate ideas, ideas and points of view on certain phenomena and on the different operational solutions that each LAG adopts in its day-to-day work among the LAGs, which operate in different ways.

The two meetings, held in December 2019 and November 2020, served to frame the role of self-assessment and to familiarise people with the self-assessment tool.

The first meeting aimed to define and articulate the themes to be covered by the self-assessment, which were then structured by the Independent Evaluator (Ie) in special self-assessment sheets. These were then shared with the LAGs during the second meeting during which the methodology was illustrated and a first application of the same was tested. The whole process was strongly characterised by a shared approach and by the active participation of the LAGs, who contributed by expressing their knowledge needs together with doubts and concerns.

Following the second meeting, the IE further customised the evaluation sheets according to the needs expressed by the LAGs. As a next step, the IE sent the LAGs an accompanying methodological document and the evaluation forms so that they could move on to the actual self-assessment phase, i.e. the "self-administration" of the questionnaire. Following the collection and analysis of the questionnaires completed by the LAGs, the IE proceeded to analyse the main results that emerged with respect to each evaluation question, also focusing on the correct use of the proposed tool so as to clarify the importance of the logical-methodological process underlying the self-assessment process.

As regards the **main conclusions that emerged**, the analysis carried out was aimed at analysing the **questionnaires filled out** by the LAGs in order to better guide them in the self-assessment process, which is a rather difficult and complex task for those who do not have specific professional skills. In spite of the difficulties in approaching something new, the LAGs were willing and involved in the meetings organised by the IE in order to introduce and start the self-assessment process: moreover, this activity, where possible, should be enriched also through the involvement of a plurality of actors in order to obtain a complete view of the territorial dynamics and avoid an excessive self referentiality.

The methodology developed and shared by the IE is extremely simplified in order to facilitate the work of the LAGs, but adequate attention must be paid to the **completeness, clarity and comprehensibility of the self-assessment, which are** essential characteristics to ensure that this tool provides useful elements for the LAG that go beyond the perception of itself and its work, but also for non-LAG actors, such as the IE and the MA.

Although the primary objective of the self-assessment is to **improve the LAG's performance**, it should not be underestimated that this **activity can also contribute to the programme-level evaluation carried out by the IA, which can take charge of some common criticalities and encourage dialogue with the Region to identify possible solutions**. It should also be remembered that self-assessment can be a means of consolidating the LAG's position in the area by formalising the actions carried out and the results achieved.

2. Methodological approach for the ex post evaluation of synergies and complementarities between the measures of the programme

The approach to the VEXP of secondary synergies and complementarities of the RDP will have to respond primarily to the Common Evaluation Question nr. 19 of Reg (EU) n. 808/2014, Annex V which states "To what extent have synergies between priorities and specific aspects strengthened the effectiveness of the RDP?" where "effectiveness" of the Programme means "[...] the extent to which the objectives pursued by an intervention are achieved. In this context, the objective of the evaluation is to capture the extent to which the (support of) the Programme has contributed to the achievement of the objective, and to show the causality between a change in the relevant result/impact indicators and the Programme itself".

Therefore, if the other Common Assessment Questions are aimed at "capturing" the results or impacts of the objectives of the FAs or of the themes defined at Union level through the quantification/estimation of the related indicators, the QVC n. 19 provides a different assessment of the degree of interaction of the Measures both among themselves, going down to the level of type of intervention, and between them and the general objectives of the Programme.

At European level, the guidelines "**Assessment of RDP results: how to prepare for reporting on evaluation in 2012**" suggest to apply a "qualitative-quantitative" approach and, as for the other CQAFs, define judgment criteria and result indicators as reported in the following table and as included also in the 2019 AER Liguria RDP³.

Table - Assessment criteria and indicators QVC no. 19 AER

Judging criteria	Indicators	Type of indicator	Primary sources	Secondary sources
RDP measures generate synergy through their interaction	All result and target indicators (including complementary ones)	R/T	-	RAA/ SIAN/ SIAR Documents of programming Table 7 of the RAA 2019
Complementarity between RDP measures	Degree of interaction between supported measures (descriptive)	VAL	-	SIAN/ SIAR/ Programming and implementation documents

¹ From 'Setting up the system to answer Evaluation Questions for Rural Development Programmes', ENRD slides available at:

http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/ew15_setting_up_the_system_to_answer_eqs.pptx

² ENRD guidelines available at: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/twg-01_rdp_results.pdf.

³ http://www.agriligurianet.it/it/impresa/sostegno-economico/programma-di-sviluppo-rurale-psr-liguria/psr-2014/2020/valutazione-psr-2014/2020/rapporti-annuali/item/download/7916_af73f908edd0043ec275ceac46ba84bb.html

Similarly, the approach proposed by the Evaluator is of a mixed type and stems from this first analysis of the programme documents (measure sheets and par. 11.3 of the RDP) and implementation (monitoring data): the results do not necessarily lead to a review of the indirect effects of IT on the Programme's objectives (table 11.3 of the RDP), but rather to a more in-depth knowledge of the interactions that have taken place during its implementation. Where there is a programme hypothesis or a hypothesis of the evaluator to be verified, these interactions can be quantified, to a certain extent, for example, by observing the level of adhesion to more than one MS by the same beneficiaries - e.g. the opportunity to activate jointly TI 4.1 and 6.1 for young people -, or the degree of resource utilisation (e.g. the number of applications for compensatory allowances for the beneficiaries of the main structural measures).

In particular, therefore, for this last step, the method could suggest, with respect to the provisions of the previous table, the implementation of specific surveys addressed to the beneficiaries of the interventions and/or the implementation of Focus Groups within which to involve homogeneous groups of regional stakeholders: the contribution resulting from this activity would make it possible to identify more clearly the "weight" and the hierarchy of externalities, points of contact or contrasting factors between MS, starting from the Independent Evaluator's interpretations.

The following are examples of evaluation questions, which could read as follows, incorporating the VEXP framework:

- ▶ How did the physical interventions of TI 4.1 (programmed directly in FA 2A) influence/supplement the first settlement financed by TI 6.1 (FA 2B)?
- ▶ How have interventions under TI 8.3 (FA 5E), aimed at improving soil stability, contributed to the reduction of damage to farms (FA objective 3B)?
- ▶ How have the interventions financed by TI 7.2 (FA 6A) - construction of thermal energy production plants from biomass - contributed to the objectives of FA 5C "Promoting the supply and use of renewable energy sources, by-products, waste materials and residues and other non-food raw materials for the bioeconomy"?

In conclusion, the adoption of a mixed method could foresee the activation of a path articulated in different steps/phases - for example in this document the analysis of the logical framework has been dealt with first - in order to

- ▶ to **verify the achievement of the individual objectives of the Programme**: analysis of the level of achievement of the values established ex ante for the result indicators included in the FAs and of the target indicators that make up the Performance Framework (quantitative analysis);
- ▶ identify areas of potential **synergies or complementarities** of interest for evaluation;
- ▶ **open to a possible comparison with the main stakeholders of the Programme**: by carrying out in-depth interviews/ focus groups with implementing subjects and/or other relevant actors (beneficiaries, trade associations, etc.), the Evaluator understands and justifies what emerged from the previous analyses and verifies the actual creation of secondary synergies and complementarities within the RDP.