




**Assessing the added
value of LEADER**
Guidelines

May 2024



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List of acronyms

CLLD	Community-Led Local Development
CSP	CAP Strategic Plan
DG AGRI	Directorate-General Agriculture and Rural Development
DME	Data for Monitoring and Evaluating
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EIP	European Innovation Partnership
ELARD	European Leader Association for Rural Development
ENRD	European Network for Rural Development
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
FOS	Factor(s) of Success
LAG	Local Action Group
LDS	Local Development Strategy
LEADER	Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale
MA	Managing Authority
NN	National CAP Network
NTd	Network Diversity
OECD	Organisation of Economic Co-Operation and Development
PA	Paying Agency
PILA	Performance Index of LEADER approach
PMEF	Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
RDP	Rural Development Programme
SNA	Social Network Analysis
TWG	Thematic Working Group

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Introduction

LEADER ¹/community led local development (CLLD) has been implemented within the EU for over thirty years. Its scope and tools have expanded over multiple programming periods. According to the study that evaluated LEADER across the EU in the 2014-2020 programming period ², the LEADER approach for local development has proved effective for local rural development, targeting and achieving economic development, strengthening the social fabric and capacity, and enhancing local governance, with good coherence alongside other policies. This is also acknowledged in the CAP Strategic Plans Regulation ³ and, as a consequence, LEADER remains compulsory in the 2023-2027 period under the cooperation type interventions, with a minimum allocation of 5% of the total European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) contribution to the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP).

Although there is ample experience in assessing LEADER, there have been continuous challenges in addressing its added value. This was pointed out in the European Court of Auditors' special report on LEADER ⁴, which concluded that LEADER facilitates local engagement but additional benefits are still not sufficiently demonstrated. The report also pointed out that CAP indicators do not provide a meaningful assessment of the costs and benefits of the LEADER approach. For the 2023-2027 programming period, a wider set of indicators is collected on Local Action Groups (LAGs) and their activities ⁵.

The **purpose** of these guidelines is to provide the background and rationale for assessing LEADER added value in the context of the 2023-2027 CAP Strategic Plans (CSP) and then to set out an example of an evaluation framework on how to do it in practice. The evaluation framework is based on the assumption that the LEADER approach can provide added value – in other words, produce benefits (not necessarily in financial terms) that outweigh the additional costs involved in the application of this method – and that this added value consists of three main components: improved social capital, improved governance, and enhanced results and impacts of projects implemented within the Local Development Strategies (LDS). This concept of the LEADER added value was first described in previous guidelines of the European Network of Rural Development (ENRD) (2017) ⁶.

The **target group** of these guidelines are mainly CAP Managing Authorities (MA) and the evaluators of CSPs, particularly those specifically concerned with monitoring the implementation and evaluation of LEADER and the added value of LEADER. Using the guidance provided, they should be able to develop an appropriate evaluation framework for LEADER added value, select relevant indicators from the substantial pool of indicators presented in detail, set up the necessary databases and other information collection arrangements, and interpret the results of monitoring and evaluations. The guidelines are also of interest and usefulness

to other stakeholders, especially LAGs, in data collection and monitoring of implementation and assessment of LEADER added value at the local level, as well as to those supporting or otherwise engaged with LAGs.

Although this guidance is non-binding, it is **based on current EU legislation**, notably the Implementing Regulation ⁷, where LEADER added value is one of the topics to be assessed by Member States. To this end, the guidance offers Member States options for evaluating LEADER added value that can be adapted according to their specific contexts, evaluation needs, and CSP's intervention logic and implementation.

The guidelines consist of four parts:

Part 1 provides context and offers a short overview of the LEADER added value concept.

Part 2 focuses on the operationalisation of the LEADER added value concept to be used as a basis for the development of the evaluation framework. It identifies considerations for the development of an evaluation framework.

Part 3 proposes an example of the evaluation framework for assessing LEADER added value. An example of an evaluation framework is developed for each component of LEADER added value and their elements, including evaluation questions, relevant factors of success and related output, result, and impact indicators. It also reflects on data sources that are linked to the proposed examples of evaluation framework.

Part 4 provides insights on what to consider when interpreting the evidence provided by LEADER added value indicators and related factors of success, in order to answer the evaluation questions.

The **eight annexes** of the guidelines provide practical tools that can be used in analysing LEADER added value, for instance:

- Detailed indicator fiches for each indicator included in the proposed evaluation framework (Annex 1).
- Examples of the LAG-level monitoring database (Annex 2).
- Factors that facilitate and impede measurement of LEADER added value (Annex 3), and examples of linking LEADER principles with added value components (Annex 4).
- Detailed evaluation framework that includes additional indicators per LEADER added value element (Annex 5).
- Examples that show how the evaluation framework proposed in these guidelines can be applied in practice (Annex 6).
- Working definitions (Annex 7) and references to the information sources used in this document (Annex 8).

¹ According to the definitions in Article 3 of [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/2115](#), LEADER means community-led local development as referred to in Article 31 of [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1060](#). Therefore, the rest of this document refers simply to LEADER.

² CCRI, OIR, ADE, (2021). [Evaluation support study on the impact of LEADER on balanced territorial development](#).

³ Recital 93 of [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/2115](#).

⁴ European Court of Auditors, (2022). LEADER and community-led local development facilitates local engagement but additional benefits are still not sufficiently demonstrated. Special report 10, 2022, Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2865/097605>

⁵ Article 14 and Annex VII of [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) 2022/1475](#).

⁶ The European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development, (2017). [Guidelines: Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD](#).

⁷ Article 2(d) [Regulation \(EU\) 2022/1475](#).





Part 1

Context



1. Overview of the LEADER added value concept

This chapter aims to describe the main components that constitute the LEADER added value concept as well as the processes that enable the generation of added value, as these were defined in the 2014-2020 programming period. It sets the basis for operationalising this concept in the context of the 2023-2027 period, in Chapter 2.

In the 2023-2027 programming period, LEADER added value is referred to in EU regulations, notably the Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1475, where LEADER added value is one of the topics of the CSP to be assessed, where relevant. In the same regulation, data for monitoring and evaluation follows the three components of LEADER added value (improved social capital, improved governance, and enhanced results and impacts)⁸. Member States are also expected to provide in the CSPs a description of the expected added value of the LEADER approach and how its principles are applied⁹.

The working definition of LEADER added value is derived from the work of a Thematic Working Group (TWG) of the Evaluation Helpdesk in 2017 and it is a non-binding concept. It is defined as **the benefits that are obtained through the proper application of the LEADER method, compared to those benefits which would have been obtained without applying this method.**

The LEADER method is the combined application of its seven principles:

1. bottom-up approach
2. area-based approach
3. local partnerships (e.g. LAGs)
4. an integrated and multi-sectoral strategy
5. innovation
6. networking
7. territorial cooperation¹⁰

These principles are closely interlinked. It is hard to imagine that one single principle (e.g. the multi-sectoral strategy) would yield its potential in cases where the other principles are neglected.

According to the 2014-2020 working definition, the LEADER added value is an integral part of LEADER and is derived from the combination of three components: improved social capital, improved governance, and enhanced results and impacts.



Improved social capital is a multidimensional concept that includes features of social organisation, such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. The elements of improved social capital include shared mental models and beliefs, mutual support and trust, enhanced knowledge, shared skills and capacities, and well-established networks.



Improved governance covers both local and multi-level governance. Specifically, multi-level governance includes horizontal and vertical interactions among governmental and non-governmental stakeholders (LEADER stakeholders) involved in the implementation of LEADER at the EU, national, regional and local levels. The elements of improved governance include stakeholder involvement in decision-making and the ability to manage public and private funds. They also include cooperation at local level, e.g. within and between LAGs, and the local community and multi-level governance between different levels (vertical), e.g. between the MA/PA, LAGs and the National CAP Network (NN).



Enhanced results and impacts of programme/strategy implementation when applying the LEADER method for addressing local needs and contributing to the EU/ national/regional CAP policy objectives. Enhanced results and impacts imply that the type and quality of projects implemented under LEADER are different compared to those which are or could be implemented under other programmes/interventions. They can manifest themselves as increased leverage, more sustainable projects, more innovative projects and new project promoters, as well as enhanced synergies between projects.

⁸ For example, data on governance, data relevant to social capital (networking, jointly implemented projects, etc.) and data relevant to results (project objectives and contribution to result indicators).

⁹ [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) 2021/2289](#).

¹⁰ For a more detailed description of the seven principles, see "The seven features of LEADER" https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/networking/leader/leader-explained_en#paragraph-75802



In addition to the three components of the LEADER added value concept, there are also three enabling processes, i.e. they enable the generation of added value through the application of the LEADER method.

The **three interconnected enabling processes** that generate LEADER added value, as Figure 1 shows, are:

1. Implementation of the LDS i.e., operationalisation in the form of projects and the results and impacts they produce.

For example, the implementation of the strategy through the bottom-up principle of LEADER entails the interaction of actors, therefore building trust, which in turn contributes to social capital. Another example is the partnership principle used in strategy development and implementation, which entails local actor participation in decision-making and, in turn, contributes to better local governance. Also, for instance, the implementation of the strategy produces results such as new jobs, new enterprises, services, etc., in line with local needs due to the area-based approach principle of the LEADER method.

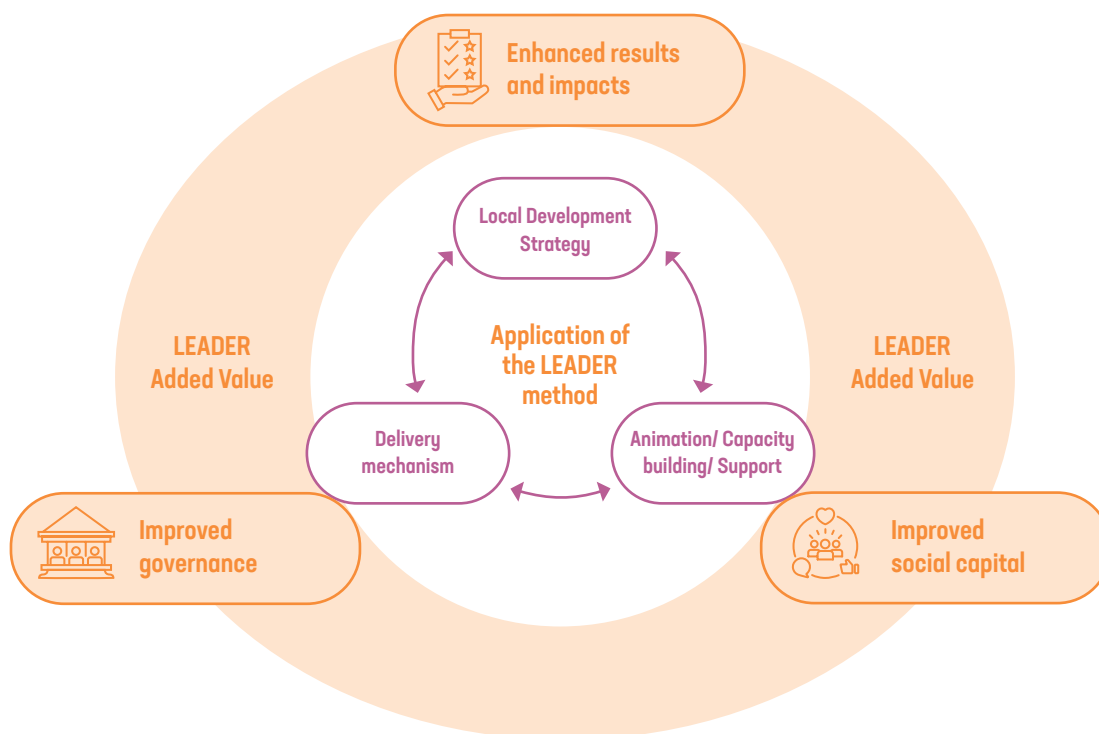
2. The CSP and LAG delivery mechanism i.e. provisions by EU regulations, the set of rules, procedures and administrative arrangements that ensure the LDS' objectives become concrete actions on the ground.

For example, the selection criteria entailed in the delivery mechanism stimulate the emergence of innovative projects (enhanced results) through the multi-sectoral or territorial cooperation principles of LEADER. Another example is the involvement of relevant actors within the partnership that contributes to better local governance.

3. Animation/capacity building support, which includes, on one hand, the LAG's capacity to animate (i.e. all its operations that are not directly project-related, aiming to raise the awareness, readiness, cooperation and networking capabilities of the local people to contribute to developing their area); on the other hand, the support provided the Managing Authority (MA) (directly or through the NN) to encourage and enable beneficiaries to participate in LEADER or the capacity building support to LAGs for improving their capacity to implement the local strategy in line with the LEADER method.

For example, LAGs may use animation activities focusing on empowering new project promoters to apply for LEADER funding, therefore having a leverage effect, contributing to enhanced results. Another example, is animation activities that facilitate exchanges between stakeholders and strengthen local identity, therefore contributing to social capital.

Figure 1. LEADER added value



Source: Adapted from the European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development (2017)

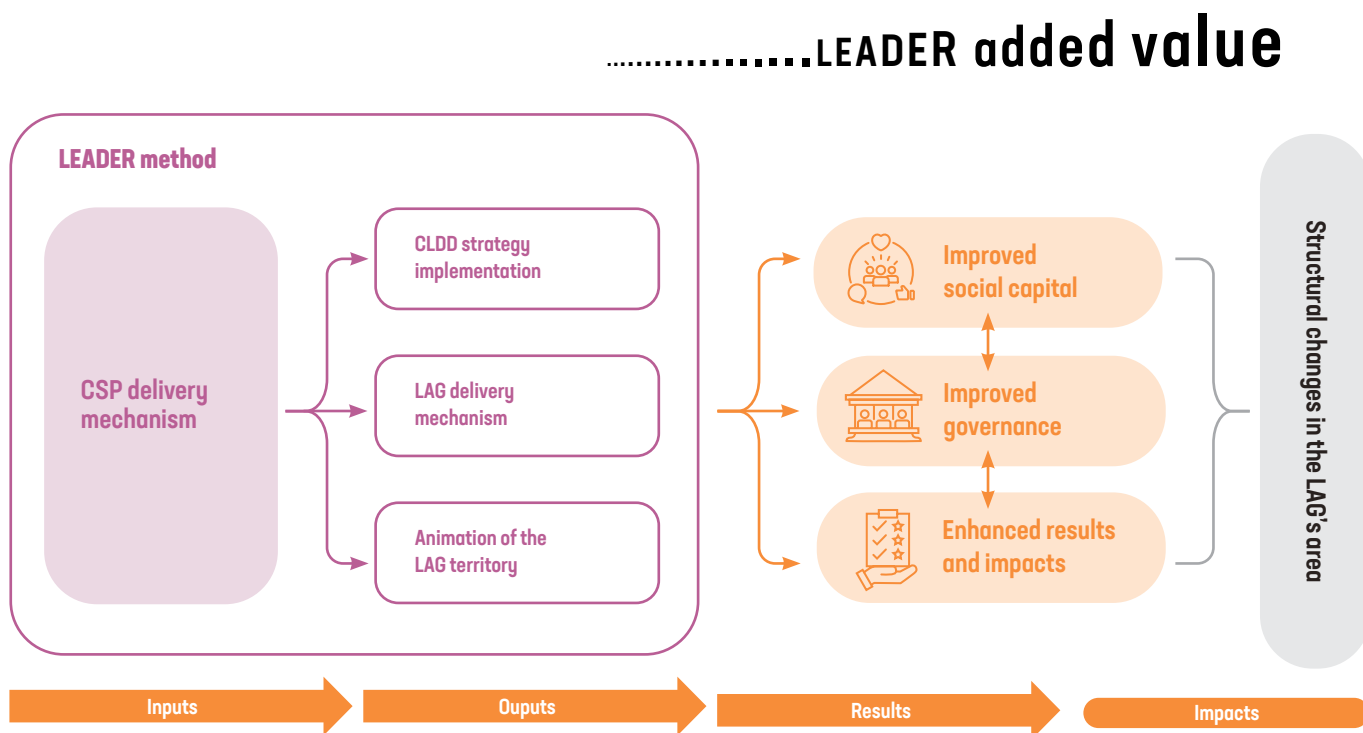


Annex 4 presents more examples of the links between the principles of the LEADER method and LEADER added value created through the enabling processes listed in Figure 1.

The visualisation of links between the seven LEADER principles and LEADER added value components in a particular Member State or LAG can be beneficial in identifying the exact activities of LAGs and other LEADER stakeholders that support the creation of LEADER added value. It can also help evaluators reconstruct the intervention logic and develop evaluation frameworks for evaluating LEADER added value.

All three interconnected enabling processes, i.e. the implementation of the LDS, the delivery mechanism and the animation/capacity building support provided, generate added value in the form of improved social capital, improved governance and enhanced results and impacts. The combination of these have an impact in terms of structural changes in the LAG area (see figure below).

Figure 2. The path to structural changes in the LAG area



Source: Adapted from the European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development (2017)

Structural changes, as defined in the 2017 guidelines, are considered those that respond to the needs of specific parts of the population and the territory as a whole and are sensitive to global aspects of local development, e.g. climate change, resource productivity, environmentally sound production patterns, demography, migration and social cohesion.





Part 2

Operationalisation of the LEADER added value concept and its components



2. How to operationalise the concept of LEADER added value

This chapter aims to provide working definitions for the three added value components of LEADER for evaluations in the 2023-2027 period and describe their different elements. It also considers the combined contribution of these three components to structural changes in LAG areas. Furthermore, it offers examples of how to operationalise these elements i.e. how to analyse them in practice. See also Annex 7 for working definitions.

The current guidelines are the result of discussions with experts analysing the previous LEADER added value concept and its components, including an identification of factors that facilitate or impede their measurement (see Annex 3 for the latter).

As a result of this work, these guidelines propose **working definitions for the LEADER added value components** as a basis for the subsequent development of the evaluation framework for evaluations in the 2023-2027 period. Each added value component consists of a number of elements. For each of these, the following tables offer a broad array of ideas for the operationalisation of LEADER added value elements so **evaluation stakeholders can select the ones that are most relevant to their context/evaluation needs** when designing their evaluation frameworks.



2.1. Improved social capital (working definition)

Improved social capital¹¹ in LEADER includes networks, mutual trust, shared mental models and beliefs that foster quality collaboration and cooperation within and among LAG areas.

Table 1. List of elements for the LEADER added value component 'improved social capital' with descriptions and examples on how to operationalise them

Elements	Descriptions	Examples on how to operationalise
Structural elements		
Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Groups of interdependent actors and the relationships between them. > Well established networking and cooperation among involved LEADER stakeholders, including interregional and transnational cooperation projects. > Quality of interactions within and outside the network e.g. being heard, common understanding reached, conflicts resolved, useful exchanges, features of bonding social capital (i.e. relations only among actors pertaining to the same category), bridging social capital (i.e. relations among actors pertaining to different categories) and linking social capital (i.e. relations among actors pertaining to different hierarchical level), as well as negative social capital (i.e. relations which are detrimental to the social context, acting as a barrier to social inclusion, dividing rather than uniting members of the network). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Analyse the diversity of LAG members. > Look for evidence of interactions within and outside the LAG networks and assess their quality. > Look for evidence of improved relationships/social interactions between local community members in the LAG area, based on local identity and/or a collective interest. > Identify joint projects and the typology/variety of participants. > Look for evidence that local community members are more capable of organising themselves in social groups after participating in LEADER. > Look for evidence that new networks supported locally have benefited from LAG networking. > Analyse the frequency and quality of interactions (i.e. producing real collaborations that lead to joint actions as opposed to collaboration simply through meetings) of LAG members amongst themselves and with other actors at different levels of decision-making (e.g. other national and transnational LAGs, business organisations). > Look for evidence of enhanced interactions for project promoters e.g. exchange of information, knowledge, skills and good practices, new collaborations (formal and informal) and collaborations leading to joint actions/ projects. In many cases, the benefit of being included in LEADER actions is even greater than the aid itself.

¹¹ Be aware that there is not one single widely accepted interpretation of social capital. The reason is that social capital does not have a clear, undisputed meaning for substantive and ideological reasons. Scrivens, K. and C. Smith (2013), Four Interpretations of Social Capital: An Agenda for Measurement, OECD Statistics Working Papers, No. 2013/06, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/four-interpretations-of-social-capital_5jzbcx010wmt-en.



Elements	Descriptions	Examples on how to operationalise
Relational elements		
Mutual support and trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Generalised trust i.e. perceptions that most people can be trusted or that one needs to be very careful when dealing with people. > Level of trust in the LAG thanks to its activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Look for evidence of generalised trust in the LAG area. > Look for evidence of the trust of local community members in the LAG and how this has changed over time.
Cognitive elements		
Shared mental models, values and beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Thought processes on how something works e.g. sense of belonging in the area, attitudes of solidarity, inclusiveness by welcoming disadvantaged groups, including women and youth, and recognition of social problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Analyse beliefs and shared values that predispose community members to cooperate. > Look for evidence of shared social awareness in LEADER projects. > Analyse power relationships that facilitate or impede the participation of disadvantaged groups, including women and young people. > Look for attitudes of solidarity. > Analyse the recognition of local social problems e.g. power relations, gender equality, vulnerable groups, welcoming disadvantaged groups.

Source: Elaborated by the EU CAP Network with the support of the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)



2.2. Improved governance (working definitions)

Governance in LEADER: Local and multi-level processes and mechanisms that ensure effective and transparent decision-making and relations between different actors involved in LEADER implementation, contributing to bringing the EU closer to citizens.

Local governance in LEADER: Processes and mechanisms established, coordinated and animated by the LAG to ensure participatory, transparent, and inclusive decision-making and strong community engagement in strategy development and implementation.

Multi-level governance in LEADER: Processes and mechanisms established collaboratively between the MA/Paying Agency (PA), relevant local and regional authorities, and LAGs, based on EU level standards, to empower LAGs, enhance their decision-making, management and accountability capacities, and promote responsive, innovative and tailored local development strategies.



Table 2. List of elements for the LEADER added value component 'improved governance' with descriptions and examples on how to operationalise them

Elements	Descriptions	Examples on how to operationalise
<p>Local governance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Manage the relationships at the level of the LAG with beneficiaries, local actors and other LAGs. › Development of activities and processes through which public, economic and civil society stakeholders improve their shared skills, articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. › Involvement of local community and LEADER stakeholders in decision-making evidenced by the composition and structure of the LAG, involving relevant decision-making actors and actors that can influence decision-making. › Commitment and engagement of local community members, creating an atmosphere of enthusiasm and energy for local development. › Communication within LAGs, with prospective applicants and the local community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Analyse inclusiveness by looking at the composition and membership of the LAG decision-making body (by gender, sector, type of organisation, etc.) and how the composition influences the decision-making process. › Assess the capacity of the LAG to formalise specific governance arrangements with local actors. › Look for evidence of improved animation and empowerment of the local community members that allows them to articulate their interests, exercise their rights, etc. › Look for evidence of improvements in the technical and administrative capacities/ competencies of the LAG, its members and staff. › Analyse perceptions that LAGs have become a central development agent in the area. › Look for evidence of LAG processes that facilitate local governance. › Analyse local mobilisation and encouragement of non-beneficiaries to participate in local development processes. › Look for evidence of LDS achievements published on websites and promoted through social media by the involved LEADER stakeholders. › Identify if LAGs have a detailed communication strategy for their activities. › Look for evidence amongst the local community of awareness of the LAG, its activities and LDS. › Look for evidence of procedures for conflict resolution within the LAG.
<p>Multi-level governance of LEADER</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Capacity of LAGs to assume critical tasks and interact with other institutions/networks locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. › Good coordination and communication between the LAG, MA/PA and NN. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Analyse the capacity of the LAG to create and manage links and two-way communication with the MA/PA and other relevant stakeholders and networks. › Assess the skills and capacities of the MA/PA and NA to manage the relationship with LAGs. › Analyse the support provided by the MA/NN to LAGs to improve their decision-making capacity. › Analyse the support provided by the MA and PA to LAGs in relation to simplification procedures and other ways of facilitating access to funding for applicants.

Source: Elaborated by the EU CAP Network with the support of the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)





2.3. Enhanced results and impacts in LEADER (working definition)

Enhanced results and impacts in LEADER relate to mobilising endogenous potential, valorising territorial assets, strengthening links between local community members/actors to achieve more with available resources, and fostering innovative, sustainable and integrated, community-driven projects that drive lasting impacts in the LAG area.

The added value lies in projects implemented with the LEADER method¹² and are expected to produce more enhanced results than those that would have been implemented under different programmes. As a consequence, these enhanced results would lead to longer term impacts in the LAG area and contribute to local development.

Table 3. List of elements from the LEADER added value component 'enhanced results and impacts' with descriptions and examples on how to operationalise them

Elements	Descriptions	Examples on how to operationalise
Increased leverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Contribution to local development as a result of stimulation of additional funding going into the LAG area. > More project ideas developed and presented for funding under the LDS. > The proximity of the LAG to the area encourages more people to present projects i.e. beneficiaries that would not have applied without LEADER. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Analyse the ability of LAGs, networks and local community members/actors to use the funds and get/mobilise extra resources out of the LDS and LEADER (e.g. EU/national/ regional/private funding for new projects). > Look for evidence that LEADER projects attract voluntary work. > Look for evidence of identifying and motivating new project promoters. > Look for evidence of new and/or non-mainstream profiles of companies/actors participating in LEADER projects.
Projects well-tailored to the needs of the LAG area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > The proximity of the LAG and bottom-up approach contribute to the selection of projects that are focused on the most pressing needs of the LAG area. > Projects also encompass several fields/sectors to address a range of issues/needs facing the LAG area. > In some cases, the links between projects also enable a focus on the needs of the LAG area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Look for evidence that a variety of promoters enable projects to address local needs with the LEADER method. > Look for evidence of projects that valorise specific territorial assets and identities.
More innovative projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Projects that generate new ideas, products or processes in the LAG area that are innovative in the local context¹³. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Look for evidence of the existence of innovative LEADER projects in the local context.

Source: Elaborated by the EU CAP Network with the support of the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)

¹² These may include umbrella projects, which can, under certain conditions, be a useful tool in LEADER delivery. They can help shorten the application process for small beneficiaries, reduce the amount of paperwork and make it possible to involve target groups that would otherwise be difficult to reach.

¹³ According to the [Regulation \(EU\) 2022/1475](#), Annex VII, 2(c), Member States, regional authorities or the LAG shall define the term 'innovative' in the local context.



Elements	Descriptions	Examples on how to operationalise
Sustainable projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Projects that produce sustainable results in terms of economic, social and environmental benefits or projects that evolve into other projects or networks. > Sustainability is also influenced by the knowledge of local conditions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Look for evidence of projects whose results are sustainable from an economic, social or environmental perspective. > Look for evidence of projects that are included in other related projects, networks etc. after the end of LEADER support. > Analyse how local knowledge contributes to more sustainable projects.
Projects that promote links between actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Examples of links include projects related to smart village strategies, projects with several partners, integrated projects and umbrella projects, etc. > Partnerships, networks and collaborations that would not have existed without LEADER. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Look for evidence of LEADER projects contributing to links between all involved stakeholders. > Assess whether/how LEADER projects build on each other/generate synergies and contribute to the achievement of the LDS. > Look for evidence of LEADER projects that have produced cooperation in the form of networks, partnerships and other collaborations, such as in the context of smart villages. The latter builds on participative approaches and innovation.

Source: Elaborated by the EU CAP Network with the support of the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)



2.4. Structural changes in the LAG area (working definition)

The above LEADER added value elements are achieved by applying the LEADER method in combination with the three enabling processes, notably the implementation of the LDS, the delivery mechanism and the animation/capacity building support provided, in particular by the LAG and/or the MA as well as NN. As a consequence of these combinations, structural changes are produced in the LAG area.

Structural changes in the LAG area refer to significant shifts in the way the local area, including its economy, society and institutions operate, brought on by the implementation of local development strategies through the application of the LEADER method. Structural changes that can be affected by LAG activities include, in particular (non-exhaustive list):

- > social structures (e.g. preventing depopulation or keeping young people in the area, reducing social exclusion, creating sustainable jobs);
- > economic structures (e.g. finding new markets, strengthening value chains – within or outside the area, opening new types of economic activities);
- > spatial structures (e.g. valorising spaces that have been neglected or unused);
- > mental and behavioural patterns (e.g. sense of identity, willingness to collaborate); and
- > cross-cutting structural changes (e.g. increased community resilience, which includes several social, economic and environmental aspects).

Examples of how to operationalise the concept of structural change include looking for evidence of structural changes as a result of the LDS (based on the assumption it generates added value in the form of improved social capital, improved governance, and enhanced results and impacts). For example, changes related to the different dimensions of the strategy, such as knowledge transfer, short supply chains, renewable energy including bio-based, environmental sustainability and climate, job creation, rural businesses including in the bioeconomy, smart villages, access to services, and infrastructure, social inclusion and gender equality.



3. What to consider in the development of an evaluation framework for LEADER added value

This chapter aims to provide specific considerations for each LEADER added value component in order to develop a clear evaluation framework that includes evaluation questions, factors of success and indicators.

The evaluation of the added value of LEADER should strive to cover all the identified elements of added value to substantiate the use of EU funding for LEADER with as much evidence as possible. Furthermore, the Commission considers that one of the core benefits of LEADER is bringing the EU closer to citizens¹⁴. In practice, it means that LEADER helps to increase public awareness of the EU co-financed initiatives carried out in rural areas and promotes citizen engagement through its inclusive nature. LEADER also helps communicate the relevance of such initiatives and increases trust towards EU institutions.

To facilitate the development of an evaluation framework for LEADER added value, more specific considerations for each component are provided below.

Social capital is a multidimensional concept and its assessment as a component of the LEADER added value should consider social processes, capacities and relationships among all stakeholders involved (see also Chapter 2 for working definitions and operationalisation of social capital). For example, the assessment of social capital may consider the extent to which the application of the LEADER method contributes to:

- › Strengthening mutual support and trust among relevant stakeholders (e.g. LAGs and their beneficiaries) and enhancing participation of all LEADER stakeholders in the design and implementation of a bottom-up approach.
- › Open partnerships between LEADER stakeholders at all levels, shared norms and values, and the facilitation of effective and efficient communication.
- › Networking and cooperation among involved LEADER stakeholders which are needed to implement LEADER and accomplish its objectives. This allows the enhancement of shared knowledge, skills and information.

Governance, both local and multi-level governance, is characterised by frequent and complex interactions between various governmental and non-governmental actors that are mobilised for the implementation of the LEADER method (see also Chapter 2 for working definitions and operationalisation of governance). The assessment of multi-level governance in the context of LEADER should consider the horizontal and vertical interactions among governmental and non-governmental stakeholders involved in the implementation of LEADER. For example, it should take account of:

- › The vertical management of LEADER e.g. between MA, LAGs and NNs to foster local autonomy and ownership and to facilitate broader participation of the public and private sectors as equal partners.
- › The horizontal coordination of LEADER e.g. between the MA and PA to facilitate the smooth implementation of LEADER, between

MA of other funds in case of multi-fund LEADER, between LAGs in order to facilitate the transfer of skills and knowledge and to promote joint projects, with actions that would not be possible to do separately and/or with better results than acting separately.

- › Innovative (public-private, at local, regional, national level) governance practices in LEADER (e.g. participatory public-private working groups) to provide answers to complex challenges and obtain better results.

Enhanced results and impacts stem from the application of the LEADER method for addressing local needs and contributing to the CAP objectives (see also Chapter 2 for working definitions and operationalisation of enhanced results and impacts). LDSs are developed by LAGs, with the involvement of the local community (bottom-up approach) and therefore allow for more tailored interventions. LAGs are entrusted with decision-making power on what, where, to whom and how the funds will be used to address local needs and meet relevant objectives. Therefore, when assessing enhanced results and impacts, the following could be considered:

- › The contributions to achieving CAP objectives can be increased with a more effective and better integrated approach in targeting the needs of rural areas.
- › The extent to which discussions and consultation of LAGs with the local community, as well as the LEADER project selection criteria, are conducive to better projects.
- › In the employment field, the proper application of the bottom-up approach can generate more sustainable jobs, as jobs created with this approach are more suited to local needs, provide better income opportunities for the local community and help to stop the depopulation of rural areas.
- › The promotion of cooperation can be an outcome of LEADER but also an impact in terms of improved social capital and local and multi-level governance that can lead to long-term impact in the form of structural changes. It should be taken into account in cases where for instance, there was no previous cooperation culture in the area, or it was limited.
- › The proper application of the innovation principle can help generate knowledge, translated into more innovative products and services for the local community. With these, it may be possible to contribute to social, digital and environmental transformation in the LAG area.

¹⁴ In line with the Cohesion Policy Objective 5 'Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories' (https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/how/priorities_en). The [handbook of territorial and local development strategies](#) complements the cohesion policy objective, contributing to achieving sustainable growth in all EU regions and bringing Europe closer to citizens.



In addition to the considerations regarding the added value components, there are also some technical considerations for developing the evaluation framework, such as:

- > The level addressed by the evaluation at the LAG/local level or CSP level, as this will determine whether indicators will need to be aggregated at the CSP level, an issue that will in turn determine the choice of indicators.
- > The required frequency of data collection and the level of aggregation (possibly linked to the reporting period).
- > The data sources, including the types of stakeholders who provide the answers/ information to the evaluation questions and their capacities/ability to participate. For instance, the local community who would be targeted by the surveys or interviews, the relevant LAG staff and/or the MA, PA or NN staff.

- > The resources available for the evaluation, for instance, taking into account that some LAGs have very limited human resources available for evaluation. In this case, it would be good to identify some core elements of the evaluation framework and some 'good to have' elements.

Last but not least, an important issue to consider when designing an evaluation framework for LEADER added value is its user-friendliness or simplicity. The starting point should be an evaluation framework that is simple and clear; for this reason, the one proposed below in these **guidelines is not compulsory but intends to provide a wide choice of elements and indicators** so evaluation stakeholders can then choose from and adapt to their capacities and contexts. Then, LAGs (more specifically, the LAG managers or staff members who will collect the necessary information) will need to have the required capacity (time, knowledge, etc.).





Part 3

Suggested evaluation framework



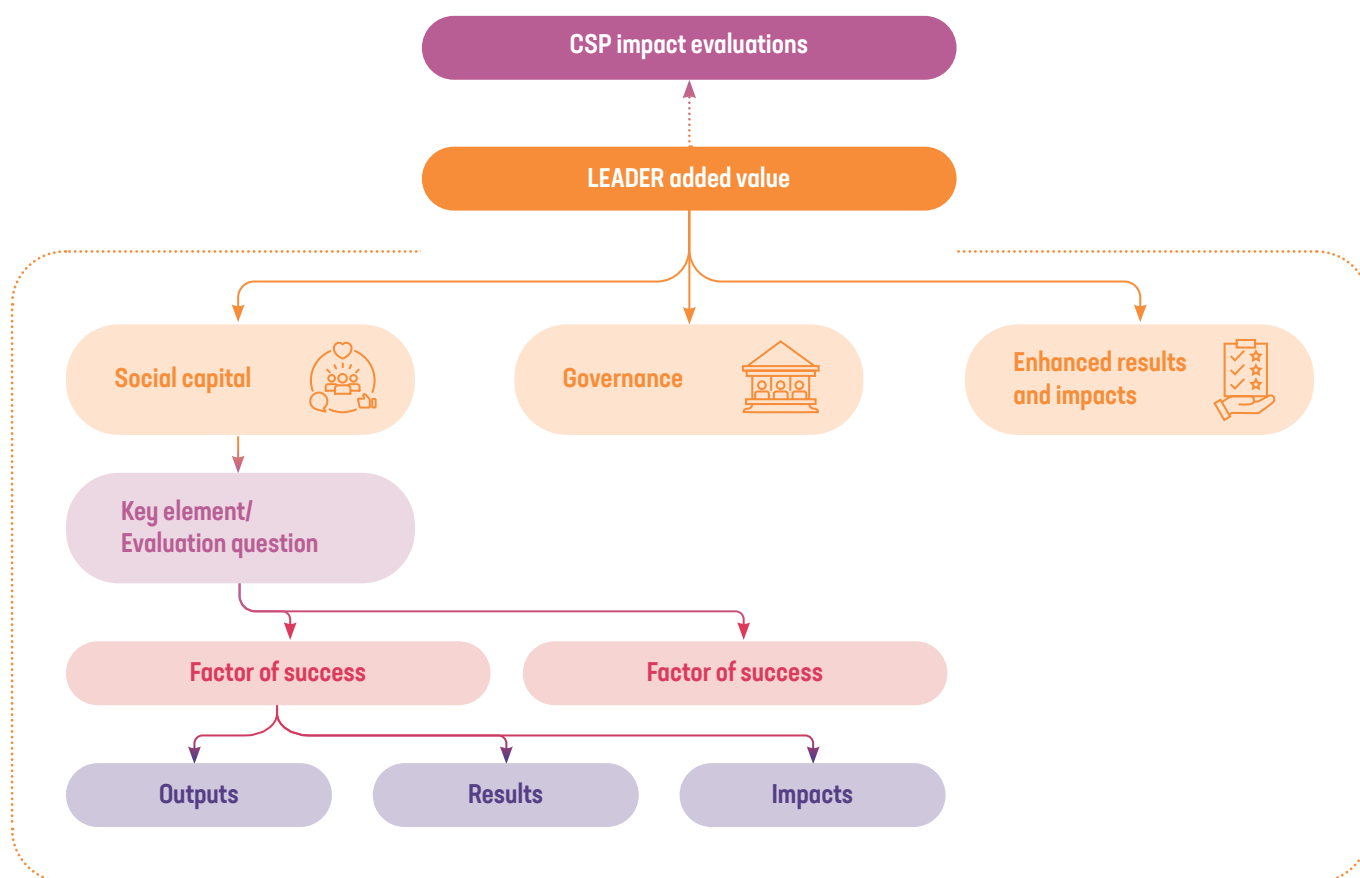
4. Developing an evaluation framework for LEADER added value

This chapter aims to describe the overall structure of the suggested evaluation framework and what it contains. The detailed evaluation framework for each LEADER added value component is then presented in Chapter 5.

As LEADER added value is one of the topics to be assessed by Member States, according to their evaluation needs and their CSP's intervention logic. A clear evaluation framework is suggested here to help understand the LEADER approach and demonstrate its added value. Such a framework is key to generating robust evidence on LEADER added value and helping identify areas where improvements can be made. It is suggested that MAs, if possible in consultation with evaluators, develop such a framework early in the programming period to adapt and/or design the necessary monitoring/information systems at LAG level for collecting the required data and information (see Annex 2 for an example of a LAG level monitoring database).

The overall structure of the suggested evaluation framework is depicted in Figure 3 and can help evaluation managers and evaluators plan and implement an evaluation of LEADER value added at the local and national level.

Figure 3. Overall structure of the evaluation framework



Source: Elaborated by the EU CAP Network with the support of the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)

The evaluation framework is developed around the three **components of LEADER added value**: improved social capital, improved governance, and enhanced results and impacts. Each of these components has been analysed using its key **constituent elements**, which are associated with corresponding evaluation questions.

Evaluation questions help formulate the issue that needs to be assessed, clarify the **key evaluation element** further and guide the formulation of the corresponding factors of success.

Factors of success represent a novel term in the design of the evaluation of the CSPs. They are also understood as 'judgment criteria'. They are used to further specify certain aspects of evaluation questions/topics and express the expected change of the evaluated intervention(s). They offer insight and explanation on how the evaluation questions will be answered by specifying what must be assessed and by setting the rationale for the development and use of specific metrics (output, result and impact indicators). They form the basis for the establishment of the causal chain and can be the core component around which evaluation findings can be structured. The rationale for the choice of each factor of success is provided in the tables of Chapter 5, which present the evaluation framework.



For each factor of success, a list of **output, result and impact indicators**, with their corresponding data sources, is proposed. The indicators use quantitative and qualitative data to measure the direction of change indicated by the factor of success and consequently answer the evaluation question.

The evaluation of LEADER added value can be considered a formative evaluation¹⁵. It assesses **to what extent the establishment and operation of the LAGs, their animation activities and delivery mechanisms, and the design and implementation of their LDS generate added value**. The findings of this evaluation can provide valuable input for CSP's impact evaluations helping to explain the contribution of LEADER interventions to the specific and general objectives of the CSP.

¹⁵ Formative evaluation is a systematic assessment carried out throughout the implementation of a programme, aimed at continuously gathering feedback and insights to identify areas for improvement at an early stage. The findings gained from formative evaluations provide valuable information for subsequent impact evaluations of the CAP Strategic Plan, ensuring that the evaluation process captures relevant components and outcomes accurately.



5. Breaking down the main components of the proposed evaluation framework

This chapter presents a detailed example of an evaluation framework for each LEADER added value component, including suggested evaluation questions, factors of success, indicators and data sources. Detailed fiches for each indicator can be found in Annex 1.

A possible evaluation framework for LEADER added value is presented in Tables 4-6 per LEADER added value component, based on the basic structure shown above in Figure 3. Although this is a suggested framework, it could be used by Member States without any adaptations as it covers all LEADER added value components and their elements, includes a wide range of factors of success with a rationale for their choice, and uses all existing data sources (notably all DME variables). Additional data sources are also feasible to work with since they consist mainly of qualitative data collection methods such as surveys and focus groups. This evaluation framework is based on input from experts of the TWG on LEADER added value, who have a lot of experience with LEADER and its evaluation. It could therefore be considered an adequate framework.

Notwithstanding this, Member States still have the choice to develop their own evaluation framework and apply the factors of success and indicators that are most relevant to their context and evaluation needs, or further adapt them if relevant. For each factor of success, there is a brief description, the indicators associated with it and proposed data sources. Each indicator is explained in detail, including its scope, definition of concepts, unit of measurement, data sources and methodology/formula for calculation in the indicator fiches in Annex 1



5.1. Improved social capital

The proposed evaluation framework for social capital can be used to assess the extent to which implementing the LEADER approach increases social capital in terms of improved networking, enhanced mutual support and trust, and endorsement of shared mental models and beliefs.

Table 4. Example of the evaluation framework for improved social capital

Improved social capital		
Key element to assess: 1. Networks		
Evaluation question: To what extent does LEADER contribute to quality interactions and networking among relevant actors?		
Factors of success (FOS)	Indicators	Data sources
<p>FOS.S:1.01: The size and diversity of the network and quality of interactions within the LAG are improving or remain at a high level.</p> <p><i>The LAGs are networks of local actors/ community members and constitute the essence of LEADER. A broad and diversified network encompassing all relevant local actors that cooperate closely enables them to exchange ideas and experiences, build their capacities and contribute to local development that responds to the needs of the area.</i></p>	LAV.O.01: Number of LAG members broken down by type of organisation: a) public administrations; b) private local economic interests; c) social local interests; and d) other.	<i>Data for Monitoring and Evaluation (DME). Variables L600 to L604 (Annex VII to the Regulation (EU) 2022/1475).</i>
	LAV.R.01: Network Diversity Index of the LAG membership (as a proxy of structural social capital of the LAG).	<i>Administrative records of the LAG. DME. Variables L600 to L604 (Annex VII to the Regulation (EU) 2022/1475).</i>
	LAV.I.01: LAG members that consider a quality cooperation culture was developed between LAG members.	<i>Surveys, focus groups.</i>



Improved social capital

<p>FOS.S:1.02: The social interactions in the LAG area (but outside the LAG itself) have improved or remain at a high level thanks to LEADER.</p> <p><i>By participating in LEADER projects, beneficiaries interact with other local actors and are integrated into the fabric of the local community and the dynamics of local development. This in turn improves social interactions among members of the local community in the LAG area.</i></p>	LAV.O.02: Number (or ratio) of operations (projects) jointly implemented by several types of promoters (specifying types).	<i>DME. Variables L700 and L706 (Annex VII to the Regulation (EU) 2022/1475).</i> <i>Interviews, surveys to specify types.</i>
	LAV.O.03: Number of participants in joint operations (projects).	<i>Project reports, LAG level monitoring database, surveys.</i>
	LAV.R.02: Evidence of participants in LEADER projects (operations) who improve their capacity to organise themselves in social groups and integrate into the community fabric.	<i>Surveys, focus groups.</i>
	LAV.I.02: Perception of improved social interactions in the LAG area amongst participants in LEADER projects.	<i>Surveys, focus groups.</i>
<p>FOS.S:1.03: The LAG has developed or maintained networking with relevant partners outside the LAG area.</p> <p><i>LAGs do not operate in silos. They are active networks that interact with other networks at local, regional, national and transnational levels and can benefit from the exchange of experiences.</i></p>	LAV.O.04: Number of interregional cooperation operations (projects) implemented by the LAG.	<i>DME. Variable L708 (Annex VII to the Regulation (EU) 2022/1475).</i>
	LAV.O.05: Number of transnational cooperation operations (projects) implemented by a LAG.	<i>DME. Variable L709 (Annex VII to the Regulation (EU) 2022/1475).</i>
	LAV.R.03: Evidence of the quality of interactions of LAG members with other (external) actors.	<i>Surveys, focus groups.</i>
<p>Key element to assess: 2. Mutual support and trust</p> <p>Evaluation question: To what extent has LEADER contributed to mutual support and trust within the LAG and the local community?</p>		
Factors of success (FOS)	Indicators	Data sources
<p>FOS.S:2.01: The level of mutual support and trust within the LAG, and the local community in the LAG area has increased or remains at a high level.</p> <p><i>The level of trust amongst LAG members depicts 'normative' social capital and supports building economic relationships and improving economic performance. It contributes to faster procedures, less disputes or time spent on them, and generally enables a smoother and more effective and efficient (lower transaction costs) coordination and implementation of LAG activities.</i></p>	LAV.O.06: Evidence of trust in the LAG.	<i>Surveys, focus groups.</i>
	LAV.R.04: Level of trust of the local community towards the LAG.	<i>Surveys, focus groups, case studies.</i>
	LAV.I.03: Change in the trust of the local community towards the LAG (to capture LEADER added value in terms of trust).	<i>Surveys, focus groups, case studies.</i>



Improved social capital

Key element to assess: 3. Shared mental models, values and beliefs

Evaluation question: To what extent does LEADER contribute to shared mental models, values and beliefs?

Factors of success (FOS)	Indicators	Data sources
<p>FOS.S:3.01: Shared vision for the LAG area, territorial identities, common objectives, values and/or beliefs are promoted by LEADER within the LAG and LAG area.</p> <p><i>Such components of social capital are intangible and can be measured by analysing perceptions. Shared mental models and beliefs imply common thought processes on how things work and facilitate cooperation and inclusiveness in local development.</i></p>	LAV.O.07: Evidence of shared social awareness in the LAG area.	<i>Surveys, focus groups.</i>
	LAV.R.05: Evidence of shared values in cooperation and/or joint operations (projects), considering: (a) capacity to keep agreements; (b) truthfulness in social and economic relationships; (c) responsiveness and respect for the rule of law; and (d) capacity to avoid opportunistic behaviours or free riding.	<i>Surveys, focus groups, interviews.</i>
	LAV.I.04: Perception that LAG actions have had an impact on improving local identity and the image of the LAG area, its people, resources and products.	<i>Surveys, focus groups.</i>

Source: Elaborated by the EU CAP Network with the support of the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)



5.2. Improved governance

The exemplified evaluation framework for governance can be used to assess the extent to which implementing the LEADER approach improves local and multi-level governance and increases the transparency of processes and decision-making.

Table 5. Example of the evaluation framework for improved governance

Improved governance		
<p>Key element to assess: 1. Local governance</p> <p>Evaluation question: To what extent has the implementation of LEADER led to the establishment of processes and mechanisms, coordinated and animated by the LAG to ensure participatory, transparent, and inclusive decision-making and strong community engagement in strategy development and implementation?</p>		
Factors of success (FOS)	Indicators	Data sources
<p>FOS.G:1.01: Inclusiveness in decision-making – the LAG’s capacity to bring together organisations and people in an inclusive manner in decision-making is improving or remains at a high level.</p> <p><i>This factor of success tries to capture positive coordination processes i.e. attempts to maximise goal achievement by exploring and exploiting shared strategic opportunities across organisations and localities.</i></p>	LAV.O.08: Number of LAG members in the decision-making body by type of organisation they represent, and by gender and age: a) public administrations; b) private local economic interests; c) local social interests; d) other (not covered by the previous categories).	<i>DME. Variables L610 to L620 (Annex VII to the Regulation (EU) 2022/1475).</i>
	LAV.R.06: Evidence of LAG processes that facilitate inclusiveness in local governance.	<i>Surveys, focus groups.</i>
	LAV.I.05: Perception of local community members that the LAG brings together organisations and people in an inclusive manner in decision-making.	<i>Surveys, focus groups.</i>



Improved governance

Factors of success (FOS)	Indicators	Data sources
<p>FOS.G.1.02: The administrative and technical skills of the LAG and its staff (in areas covered by the LDS) are improving or remain at a high level.</p> <p><i>Training, capacity building, and participation in LAG-related activities help build skills relevant to LEADER.</i></p>	LAV.O.09: Number of training/capacity building activities that have helped improve the administrative and technical skills of LAG by type of organiser (LAG, MA/PA, NN, other bodies).	<i>LAG level monitoring database, interviews.</i>
	LAV.R.07: Evidence of improvement of administrative skills.	<i>Surveys, focus groups.</i>
	LAV.R.08: Evidence of improvement of the technical skills of LAGs in the LDS and areas covered by it.	<i>Surveys, focus groups.</i>
<p>FOS.G.1.03: The LAG has improved animation and support to actual and potential beneficiaries.</p> <p><i>Animation is at the core of LEADER implementation. It sets the basis for improved local governance by motivating local community members to participate in the formation or continued activities of the LAG and strongly engaging them in the co-development of the LDS and its effective implementation.</i></p>	LAV.O.10: Number of animation activities, by target stakeholder group, organiser and type of activity.	<i>LAG yearly reports, LAG level monitoring database, interviews with LAG representatives.</i>
	LAV.R.09: Evidence of support (by type of support) provided to applicants and beneficiaries, and, particularly, to those that have not applied or been supported before, including hard-to-reach groups.	<i>Surveys, focus groups.</i>
	LAV.I.06: Number of new applicants as a result of animation and support activities.	<i>LAG level monitoring database.</i>
<p>FOS.G.1.04: Communication within LAG, with prospective applicants and the local community is improving.</p> <p><i>Communication activities improve local governance by increasing transparency of LAG operations and decisions. They also contribute to bringing the EU closer to citizens by advertising the achievements of implementing the LEADER method and LDS.</i></p>	LAV.O.11: Number of LAGs with relevant documents concerning their activities available on a website: a) statutes of the LAG; b) composition of the board; c) minutes of general meetings; d) financial statements (part of annual reports); e) LDS; f) published calls for projects; g) decisions on project selection and descriptions of funded projects; h) LAG evaluation; and i) newsletters.	<i>LAG websites.</i>
	LAV.O.12: Evidence of the LAG's communication activities and their reach e.g. a) existence of a LAG website; b) presence in social media; c) presence in other public common channels; d) meetings/ events; and e) other.	<i>LAG website, interviews, focus groups, communication statistics.</i>
	LAV.R.10: Percentage of local community members who are aware of a) the LAG; b) its activities; and c) the LDS.	<i>Surveys, focus groups</i>
	LAV.I.07: Evidence of local community members that think LEADER brings the EU closer to citizens.	<i>Surveys, focus groups.</i>
	LAV.I.08: Evidence of local community members with a perception that the LAG is a credible institution/central agent for local development.	<i>Surveys, focus groups.</i>



Improved governance

Key element to assess: 2. Multi-level governance of LEADER

Evaluation question: To what extent has the implementation of LEADER led to the establishment of collaborative processes and mechanisms between MA/PA, regional authorities, networks and LAGs, based on EU level standards, to empower LAGs, and enhance their decision-making, management and accountability capacities?

Factors of success (FOS)	Indicators	Data sources
<p>FOS.G:2.01: The coordination and communication between the LAG and other levels of governance is improving or remains at a high level.</p> <p><i>Coordination and communication between LAGs and other levels of governance are essential in building an effective multi-level governance. These interactions shape the division of competencies among the different levels.</i></p>	<p>LAV.O.13: Number and type of interactions between the MA/PA and LAGs or LAG representatives (e.g. participation in meetings, assemblies, Monitoring Committee meetings).</p>	<p><i>Records/monitoring data in the MA/PA and the LAG, LAG level monitoring database.</i></p> <p><i>Interviews with staff from the LAG, MA and PA.</i></p>
	<p>LAV.R.11: Evidence of improved quality of interactions between the MA/PA/NN and LAGs or LAG representatives.</p>	<p><i>Interviews or surveys with staff from the LAG, MA, PA and NN.</i></p>
	<p>LAV.I.09: Evidence of a positive perception of people in the MA/PA/NN and LAG who consider that the links and coordination/communication between the MA/PA/NN and the LAGs have been strengthened.</p>	<p><i>Survey, focus groups.</i></p>

Source: Elaborated by the EU CAP Network with the support of the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)



5.3. Enhanced results and impacts

The exemplified evaluation framework for enhanced results and impacts can be used to assess the extent to which implementing the LEADER approach leverages existing resources, promotes more innovative and sustainable projects tailored to local needs, and enhances links between local actors.

Table 6. Example of the evaluation framework for enhanced results and impacts

Enhanced results and impacts		
<p>Key element to assess: 1. Increased leverage</p> <p>Evaluation question: To what extent does LEADER generate leverage?</p>		
Factors of success (FOS)	Indicators	Data sources
<p>FOS.E:1.01: The LDS stimulated further investment or activities in the LAG area to achieve the strategic objectives of the LDS not directly funded by LEADER.</p> <p><i>EAFRD support through the LEADER method mobilised further resources and triggered further investments in rural areas.</i></p>	<p>LAV.O.14: Ratio of EAFRD funding for LDS to other (non-EAFRD) funding spent on the LDS, of which a) by private sources, b) by public sources.</p>	<p><i>LAG level monitoring database, LAG yearly reports and DME. Variable L922 (Annex VII to the Regulation (EU) 2022/1475).</i></p>
	<p>LAV.O.15: Evidence (number and expenditure) of projects to which the LAG applies outside EAFRD (e.g. other EU or national funds).</p>	<p><i>LAG level monitoring database, interviews.</i></p>
	<p>LAV.R.12: Evidence of operations (projects) that include voluntary work.</p>	<p><i>LAG level monitoring database, surveys.</i></p>



Enhanced results and impacts

Factors of success (FOS)	Indicators	Data sources
<p>FOS.E:1.02: LEADER interventions made it possible to identify and motivate new project promoters.</p> <p><i>The aim is to capture the LAG's efforts to identify and motivate new project promoters (i.e. first time EAFRD beneficiaries) to carry out actions that wouldn't be implemented without LEADER by measuring their number and the positive perception of local community members about the LAG's capacities.</i></p>	LAV.O.16: Number of new project promoters supported by the LAG where financial support from the LEADER intervention was decisive.	<i>LAG-level monitoring database, interviews, surveys.</i>
	LAV.R.13: Evidence of local community members in the LAG area with a positive perception of the LAG's capacity to identify and empower new project promoters.	<i>Surveys, focus groups.</i>
<p>Key element to assess: 2. Projects well-tailored to the needs of the LAG area</p> <p>Evaluation question: To what extent do the LEADER strategy and LAG actions meet specific local needs and territorial objectives?</p>		
Factors of success (FOS)	Indicators	Data sources
<p>FOS.E:2.01: LEADER meets specific local needs and territorial objectives by enabling projects by a variety of promoter types that valorise specific territorial assets and identities.</p> <p><i>The correct bottom-up approach enables LAGs to better address local needs compared to other, centrally managed interventions.</i></p>	LAV.O.17: Number and share of operations (projects) implemented by different types of promoters.	<i>DME. Variables L700-709 (Annex VII to the Regulation (EU) 2022/1475).</i>
	LAV.O.18: Number of operations (projects) that contribute to each typology of needs identified in the LDS, including green, digital or social transition of rural areas.	<i>DME. Variables L800-810 (Annex VII to the Regulation (EU) 2022/1475). LAG level monitoring database.</i>
	LAV.R.14: Percentage of operations (projects) that valorise unique territorial assets (e.g. social, cultural, culinary, landscape, natural, environmental).	<i>Surveys, focus groups, LAG monitoring database.</i>
	LAV.I.10: Evidence of operations (projects) that produce community benefits and reinforce community identity.	<i>Surveys, focus groups.</i>
<p>Key element to assess: 3. Projects with innovative elements at a local level</p> <p>Evaluation question: To what extent are LEADER projects innovative in the local context?</p>		
Factors of success (FOS)	Indicators	Data sources
<p>FOS.E:3.01: LEADER fosters the introduction/diffusion of innovations in the local context.</p> <p><i>LAGs and local project promoters implement product, process, service, organisational, technological, social, business model and other types of innovation as defined in each local</i></p>	LAV.O.19: Number of operations (projects) which are innovative in the local context.	<i>DME, Variable L710 (Annex VII to the Regulation (EU) 2022/1475).</i>
	LAV.R.15: Percentage of expenditure in innovative operations (projects) to the total expenditure.	<i>LAG level monitoring database.</i>



Enhanced results and impacts		
Factors of success (FOS)	Indicators	Data sources
<p><i>context by the LAGs, or, where relevant, by national or regional authorities.</i></p>	<p>LAV.R.16: Evidence of innovations produced at the local level in response to a) digital; b) green; c) economic; and d) social challenges/transition.</p>	<p><i>Surveys, focus groups.</i></p>
	<p>LAV.I.11: Percentage of LEADER stakeholders who consider that LEADER contributes to the generation of new ideas, products or processes in the LAG area that are innovative in the local context.</p>	<p><i>Surveys, focus groups.</i></p>
<p>Key element to assess: 4. Sustainable projects Evaluation question: To what extent do LEADER projects produce sustainable results?</p>		
Factors of success (FOS)	Indicators	Data sources
<p>FOS.E:4.01: LEADER projects produce sustainable results.</p> <p><i>Sustainability in terms of whether an intervention will produce lasting effects financially, economically, socially, and environmentally and in terms of the durability of the investment after the end of the support.</i></p>	<p>LAV.O.20: Number of operations (projects) that contribute to a) economic; b) environmental; and c) social sustainability.</p>	<p><i>LAG level monitoring database, CSP electronic information system, LAG yearly reports.</i></p>
	<p>LAV.R.17: Evidence of operations (projects) whose sustainability has been improved through consultation with the LAG.</p>	<p><i>Surveys, focus groups.</i></p>
	<p>LAV.R.18: Evidence of operations (projects) which are sustainable due to knowledge of local conditions.</p>	<p><i>Surveys, focus groups, interviews.</i></p>
<p>Key element to assess: 5. Projects that promote links between local actors Evaluation question: To what extent does LEADER promote links between actors (e.g. partnerships, networks, jointly implemented projects and other collaborations) that would not have existed without it?</p>		
Factors of success (FOS)	Indicators	Data sources
<p>FOS.E:5.01: Collaborative projects are established or sustained.</p> <p><i>The aim is to measure the number and share of operations (projects) that work in synergy and produce cooperation.</i></p>	<p>LAV.O.21: Number of LEADER operations (projects) that work in synergy (e.g. different projects covering different aspects or one project covering different sectors).</p>	<p><i>LAG level monitoring database, interviews, LAG yearly reports.</i></p>
	<p>LAV.R.19: Share of LEADER operations (projects) that have produced cooperation in the form of networks, partnerships, jointly implemented projects and other collaborations/synergies.</p>	<p><i>DME, Variables L706, L708, L709 and L700 (e.g. % of L706/L700, L708/L700, L709/L700 (Annex VII to the Regulation (EU) 2022/1475), interviews.</i></p>

Source: Elaborated by the EU CAP Network with the support of the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)





5.4. Structural changes

The proposed evaluation framework for structural changes can be used to assess to what extent the combination of all three added value components of LEADER contributes to structural changes in the LAG area (as depicted also in Figure 2. The path to structural changes in the LAG area).

Table 7. Example of the evaluation framework for structural changes

Structural changes		
Evaluation question: To what extent does the implementation of the LDS through the application of the LEADER method produce structural changes in the LAG area?		
Factors of success (FOS)	Indicators	Data sources
<p>FOS.SC:1.01: The implementation of the LDS with the application of the LEADER method produces structural changes in the dimensions covered by the LDS.</p> <p><i>The implementation of the LDS using the LEADER method produces added value in terms of social capital, governance, and enhanced results and impacts. This in turn leads to broader impacts in the LAG area i.e. structural changes in how its economy, society and institutions operate, in accordance with the dimensions in which the LDS intervenes.</i></p>	<p>LAV.I.12: Judgement expressed by LEADER stakeholders on the capacity of LEADER to produce structural changes in the dimensions on which the LDS intervenes.</p>	<p><i>Surveys, focus groups.</i></p>

Source: Elaborated by the EU CAP Network with the support of the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)



6. Getting an overview of available data/information sources

This chapter aims to collect existing data sources and insights into the additional ones and how they can be used.

Any evaluation is only as good as the data and information it uses to provide information for the indicators included in the evaluation framework. Therefore, it is suggested that MAs/PAs and LAGs obtain a good overview of the data and information needed for the indicators they choose to use in the evaluation of LEADER added value. This should be done in the early stages of the programming period, preferably when MAs are designing evaluation plans for a CSP (2023-2027). The latter contain a section on data and information that acts as a guide for the data that can be used and identifies data that is not available and needs to be collected.

The data sources in the suggested evaluation framework fall under two main categories:

1. Existing data sources for common data that all Member States will collect, notably for the variables/data for monitoring and evaluation (DME) defined in Annex VII to the Regulation (EU) 2022/1475;

2. Additional data sources at the LAG and MA/PA level for data that is not covered by DME.

The **existing data sources** refer to monitoring systems to collect data for the variables related to the situation of the LAGs as well as variables on LAGs' activities, as described in the Annex VII to the Regulation (EU) 2022/1475. Although the reporting obligations for these variables are not continuous¹⁶, the data can be available at any point in time. In particular, variables on LAGs' activities can be integrated into the application for support and measured from the moment of the first payment to a given operation (project). For variables related to the situation of the LAGs, these are available at the LAG level at any point in time as part of their documentation. The MA may request LAGs to provide data on LAG members (Variable L600 to L604) and LAGs decision-making body (Variables L610 to L620), not only at the time of selection but also during implementation of the LDS at commonly agreed frequency (e.g. once a year).

Additional data sources may include:

- › LAG level monitoring database. This is a database maintained at LAG level in which operational data on animation activities and operations (projects) are recorded. In order for the data to be collected from the start, it will need to be agreed upon following discussions between LAGs and the MA/PA at the early stages of the programming period. Annex 2 provides an example of a LAG level monitoring database.
- › LAG yearly reports. These are data that can be extracted from a LAG level database, complemented with other qualitative information as well as findings of LAG level evaluations.
- › Records/monitoring data in the MA/PA refers to the data collected and maintained at the MA/PA level, documenting the management and control of LEADER interventions.
- › Surveys, interviews, focus groups and case studies refer to primary data collected by the evaluator(s) when carrying out the evaluation of LEADER added value.
 - Surveys collect data and information in a systematic way based on the views of key stakeholders, e.g. LAG staff, LAG decision-making bodies and a representative sample of LAG members. They can help obtain information on the result and impact indicators that are of a more qualitative nature. Examples of survey questions are provided in all the indicator fiches in Annex 1 which propose surveys as a data collection method.
 - A focus group is a qualitative research method, in which a small group (e.g. 6-10 people) of selected people (i.e. based on certain criteria) answer predefined questions in a moderated setting. Focus groups are a good way to explore different views on topics and gain deep qualitative information through probing questions. Focus groups should not be confused with a workshop, which aims to arrive at a commonly agreed conclusion.
 - Case studies can be used to deepen the analysis of the LEADER added value components. They collect information and data that complements what is provided by LAG administrations and can help showcase some of the main achievements in terms of added value.
- › CSP electronic information system refers to the electronic system of Article 130 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115.

¹⁶ Data related to LAGs' activities must be reported in 2026 and 2030, while data related to the situation of the LAGs will be reported only once, in the year following the selection of LAGs.





Part 4

Interpretation of the results



7. How to interpret the results of LEADER added value evaluations

This chapter aims to provide insights on what to consider when interpreting the evidence provided by indicators and related factors of success to answer evaluation questions.

The information collected with the help of indicators related to factors of success will help answer evaluation questions on the assessment of the different components of the LEADER added value. The factors of success indicate the expected change and the direction of this change (i.e. increase, decrease, maintain). The values of the indicators provide the evidence to assess whether the expected change in terms of the different elements of social capital, governance, and enhanced results and impacts has been achieved. The following tables show what to consider when interpreting the evidence provided by indicators and related factors of success when answering evaluation questions.



7.1. Improved social capital

Table 8. What to consider when interpreting the results in relation to improved social capital

What to consider when interpreting the results in relation to networks	
<p>Networks:</p> <p>To what extent does LEADER contribute to quality interactions and networking among relevant actors?</p>	<p>This evaluation question is answered using three factors of success that relate to the networking and interactions a) among the members of the LAG; b) among local actors in the LAG area; and c) with actors/stakeholders outside the LAG area.</p> <p>Formal and informal networks at local level, involving representatives of the public and private sector, are at the heart of the partnership principle of LEADER. The variety of LAG members in these networks or their heterogeneity leads to higher representativeness of different categories of local actors in the LAG. Therefore, the higher the value of the network diversity index (LAV.R.01) the better the quality of the network among the members of the LAG. In addition, if a number of LAG members consider that the quality cooperation culture developed between them (LAV.I.01) is also high, it may mean that the LAG network has the potential to be sustained in the future. High values of these indicators (LAV.R.01 and LAV.I.01) show that networking and cooperation have been structurally embedded in the social interactions of the local stakeholders, implying a higher and more durable structural social capital of the LAG. High values of LAV.R.01 may only imply the start of the accumulation of structural social capital in the LAG, while the potential durability of this capital is still unclear.</p> <p>In relation to networking among stakeholders in the LAG area, participation in LEADER projects brings people in contact with each other. This is depicted by the number of operations (projects) jointly implemented (LAV.O.02) and number of participants in them (LAV.O.03). This can lead to more engagement in community life through participation in local groupings, captured by the evidence of participants in LEADER projects who improve their capacity to organise themselves in social groups and integrate into the community fabric (LAV.R.02). In turn, engagement of people in local groupings contributes to improved social interactions (LAV.I.02).</p> <p>In relation to networking with actors outside the LAG area, the participation of LAG members in other networks, and the interactions and new cooperations established, can lead to an increase in the number and quality of external networks that the LAG is associated with. Participation in interregional (LAV.O.04) and transnational (LAV.O.05) projects contributes to the LAG's ability to 'hold down' external inspiration and markets. Furthermore, the interregional/international exchange contributes to an exchange of ideas and fosters the skills to develop new ideas. Therefore, participation in interregional and transnational projects and frequent interactions of LAGs with others can lead to stronger networks, more strategic relations and generally improved quality of cooperation, captured with the evidence of the quality of interactions of the LAG with other (external) actors (LAV.R.03). Therefore, the higher the participation of the LAG in other networks, projects (operations), and international exchanges, the more likely it is that it can benefit from the exchange of experiences.</p>



What to consider when interpreting the results in relation to mutual support and trust

Mutual support and trust:

To what extent has LEADER contributed to mutual support and trust within the LAG and the local community?

This evaluation question is answered using a factor of success that relates to the level of mutual support and trust within the LAG and the local community in the LAG area.

The bottom-up and area-based principles of LEADER form the basis for building trust. Local community members interact in preparation for the LDS and develop trust towards the LAG and the capacity to work together to reach common aims during this process.

The existence of trust within the LAG (LAV.O.06) i.e. among LAG staff, a LAG decision-making body and LAG members, reduces and leads to faster resolution of disputes if they emerge. Furthermore, open dialogue, transparency of the decisional process, acceptance of new visions and continuous monitoring of the LAG activities facilitate the emergence of social trust between LAG members.

High levels of trust in the local community towards the LAG (LAV.R.04) indicate better dialogue, transparency, and coordination in implementing the LAG's activities. High levels of trust also support building economic relationships and pave the way for improving economic performance.

Changes in the local community's trust in the LAG (LAV.I.03) can be positive or negative. If they are positive, they indicate that the LAG and its activities add value in terms of trust, while if they are negative, they indicate that improvements are needed so that the LAG can be a trustworthy stakeholder in the process of local development.

What to consider when interpreting the results in relation to shared mental models and beliefs

Shared mental models and beliefs:

To what extent does LEADER contribute to shared mental models, values and beliefs?

This evaluation question is answered using a factor of success related to the LAG's capacity to promote a shared vision of its area, territorial identities, common objectives, values and/or beliefs within the LAG and in its area.

The involvement of local community members in networks and cooperation projects builds their common understanding of social problems, increases their solidarity and increases their propensity to include disadvantaged groups, women and young people in cooperation projects. This would increase shared social awareness (LAV.O.07).

In addition, the more evidence of shared values in cooperation and joint projects (LAV.R.05), the higher the possibility of improving the local identity and contributing to a common vision of the area, its people and resources. If the number of participants in LEADER projects and local community members considers that LAG actions have had an impact on improving local identity and the image of the LAG area (LAV.I.04) is also high, this means that the LAG has contributed to shared mental models and beliefs, thus building social capital in the area.

Source: Elaborated by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)





7.2. Improved governance

Table 9. What to consider when interpreting the results in relation to improved governance

What to consider when interpreting the results in relation to local governance	
<p>Local governance:</p> <p>To what extent has the implementation of LEADER led to the establishment of processes and mechanisms, coordinated and animated by the LAG to ensure participatory, transparent, and inclusive decision-making and strong community engagement in strategy development and implementation?</p>	<p>This evaluation question is answered using four factors of success that relate to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. inclusiveness in decision-making; b. development of administrative and technical skills among LAG members, decision-making body and staff; c. carrying out animation activities; and d. communication within the LAG and with the local community. <p>The area-based and partnership principles of LEADER imply that local community members are involved in the local development process through the LAG. This can be depicted by the diversity of the composition of the LAG decision-making body (LAV.O.08). The LAG's openness and inclusiveness allow new community members and actors to be involved. It also allows for already elected/appointed members of the decision-making body to get input from local community members in the area.</p> <p>Increased evidence of LAG processes that facilitate the involvement of the local community (LAV.R.06) reflects the efforts of the LAG towards a more open and inclusive governance structure. Different types of evidence can lead to different conclusions, for instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > written statutes including aspects related to mobility in decision-making (e.g. rotating membership in the decision-making body) as a precondition for the involvement of new groups of community members/actors; > general assembly meetings increase the possibilities for new community members/actors to be involved and for already elected/appointed members of the decision-making body to get input from people in the territory; > wider participation of different groups is more likely to strengthen the legitimacy and foster conflict solving with an early integration of different views; > assistance from the LAG staff to the decision-making body in relation to the involvement of new members can lead to the anchoring of persons, member groups and member organisations to the LAG. <p>An inclusive composition of the LAG decision-making body with solid processes for further facilitating inclusiveness increases the credibility of the LAG, which can be reflected in a more positive perception of the LAG among the local community (LAV.I.05).</p> <p>Effective management of the local governance structures requires specific administrative and technical skills for LAG members, the decision-making board and the staff. Participating in capacity building, training events, as well as in the development of the LDS, management, and animation activities (LAV.O.09), in line with the bottom-up principle of LEADER, leads to new or improved skills. Increased evidence of improved administrative (LAV.R.07) and technical (LAV.R.08) skills among LAG staff, decision-making bodies and LAG members shows a higher capacity of the LAG and its members to offer better quality support to the local development processes.</p> <p>These improved skills allow the LAG to carry out animation activities (LAV.O.10) that cover all local stakeholders. Higher levels of evidence of animation activities and support to applicants and beneficiaries (LAV.R.09) indicate that there are more possibilities that these will motivate local community members to participate in implementing the LDS. The more effective the LAG's efforts to animate and motivate the local stakeholders, the higher the number of new applicants participating in the LDS (LAV.I.06).</p>

Source: Elaborated by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)



What to consider when interpreting the results in relation to local governance

Effective communication works in synergy with animation activities to ensure that more local community members are motivated to participate in the implementation of the LDS. Moreover, together with animation activities, communication activities will provide opportunities for the local community to be heard and become part of the local governance. Increased evidence of communication activities (LAV.O.12) at the LAG level, and an increased number of LAGs with relevant documents concerning their activities available on a website (LAV.O.11) at the CSP level, will increase the percentage of the local community members who are aware of the LEADER approach, the role of the LAGs and the LDS (LAV.R.10).

The more awareness is developed regarding LEADER and its implementation, the more local community members/actors implement projects or have the opportunity to shape the local governance procedures and the visibility of the role of the EU in empowering local communities (LAV.I.07). Ultimately, evidence of the LAG activities as well as the results of the LDS may enable the local community to consider the LAG as a credible institution and a catalyst for local development (LAV.I.08).

What to consider when interpreting the results in relation to multi-level governance

Multi-level governance:

To what extent has the implementation of LEADER led to the establishment of collaborative processes and mechanisms between MA/PA, regional authorities, networks and LAGs, based on EU level standards to empower LAGs and enhance their decision-making, management and accountability capacities?

This evaluation question is answered using a factor of success related to the coordination and communication between the LAG and other levels of governance.

The networking principle of LEADER entails that LAGs are involved in vertical decision-making processes (multi-level governance). The size of this involvement can be depicted by the number and type of interactions between MA/PA and LAGs (LAV.O.13). This participation in multi-level governance empowers LAGs and enhances their decision-making capacities. Evidence of improvements includes the number and quality of interactions between the MA/PA/NN and LAGs or LAG representatives (LAV.R.11). Improvements and simplifications in the systems, rules and procedures as well as activities that improve communication and coordination, indicate stronger links between these different levels of governance (LAV.I.09). As a consequence of enhanced links and coordination, MA/PA staff and LAGs can contribute to improved implementation.

Source: Elaborated by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)





7.3. Enhanced results and impacts

Table 10. What to consider when interpreting the results in relation to enhanced results and impacts

What to consider when interpreting the results in relation to increased leverage	
<p>Increased leverage:</p> <p>To what extent does LEADER generate leverage?</p>	<p>This evaluation question is answered using two factors of success: a) the stimulation of additional investment or activities in the LAG area that is not directly funded by LEADER; and b) the identification and motivation of new project promoters.</p> <p>LDS generates a leverage effect as a result of strategic steering compared to the contribution to the local development of ad hoc (not in a strategic framework) applications. This leverage effect can be manifested by the level of additional resources invested in the LDS to match the EAFRD funding (LAV.O.14) but also by the evidence of projects to which the LAG applies, outside EAFRD (LAV.O.15), as a result of the skills and capacities they have acquired through their participation in LEADER activities. Another dimension of additional resources is the voluntary work (LAV.R.12) contributed by the local promoters and community as a result of the animation activities of the LAG and the implementation of the LDS.</p> <p>Another manifestation of increased leverage comes from the identification and motivation of new project promoters. The bottom-up approach of LEADER ensures it reaches local community members who have better knowledge of local needs. In addition, the animation and communication activities of the LAG will enable the potential beneficiaries from the local community to be well informed and motivated to apply for support. These activities can also help new project promoters improve their initial proposal and/or contribute to speeding up the implementation of their projects (operations). Increased numbers of new project promoters supported by the LAG, for which financial support from the LEADER intervention was decisive (LAV.O.16), offer an indication of increased leverage. The continuous efforts of the LAG to systematically identify and motivate new project promoters may result in a more established perception among local stakeholders, which was improved by the LAG capacity to leverage local knowledge (LAV.R.13).</p>
What to consider when interpreting the results in relation to projects well-tailored to the needs of the LAG area	
<p>Projects well-tailored to the needs of the LAG area:</p> <p>To what extent do the LEADER strategy and LAG actions meet specific local needs and territorial objectives?</p>	<p>This evaluation question is answered using a factor of success related to meeting local needs and territorial objectives.</p> <p>The area-based and bottom-up approach of LEADER ensures that the LDS reflects the needs of local territories and their communities. Various promoters implementing projects (operations) (LAV.O.17) with better knowledge of how to use local assets to address identified needs (LAV.O.18) will lead to an increased share of projects that build on territorial assets and meet the specific needs of the LEADER area (LAV.R.14). The more projects implemented by a variety of promoters building on territorial assets the more evident that the LEADER approach fosters the community identity (LAV.I.10).</p>
What to consider when interpreting the results in relation to projects with innovative elements at a local level	
<p>Projects with innovative elements at a local level:</p> <p>To what extent are LEADER projects innovative in the local context?</p>	<p>This evaluation question is answered using a factor of success related to the introduction and diffusion of innovations in the LAG area.</p> <p>The innovation principle of LEADER ensures that different types of innovations (e.g. social, technological, process and service) are implemented at the local level. Furthermore, the networking and territorial cooperation principles imply that participation in different networks and territorial cooperation projects can serve as an inspiration for the generation of new ideas that can be transformed into innovative projects in the local context. These can be depicted by the number of projects that are innovative in the local context (LAV.O.19). The evidence of an increased share of innovative projects due to the LEADER approach (LAV.R.16) indicates an improved ability of LEADER to generate innovation at the local level (LAV.I.11).</p>



What to consider when interpreting the results in relation to sustainable projects

Sustainable projects:

To what extent do LEADER projects produce sustainable results?

This evaluation question is answered using a factor of success related to the sustainability of projects' results.

The area-based and bottom-up approach of LEADER promotes projects that build on territorial aspects and local knowledge and have a greater potential to be more sustainable in economic, environmental or social terms (LAV.O.20). Evidence of projects that have been improved through consultation with the LAG (LAV.R.17) or which are considered by local actors as more sustainable due to knowledge of local conditions (LAV.R.18) may reflect the efforts of the LAG to increase the prospective durability of projects funded by LEADER and the effects they produce.

What to consider when interpreting the results in relation to projects that promote links between local actors

Projects that promote links between local actors:

To what extent does LEADER promote links between actors (e.g. partnerships, networks, jointly implemented projects and other collaborations) that would not have existed without it?

This evaluation question is answered using a factor of success related to the promotion and implementation of collaborative projects.

The partnership and multi-sectoral principles of LEADER ensure that the benefits of projects are spread more widely through partners' networks. The correct application of the integrated, multi-sectoral approach and cooperation may lead to the promotion of concrete and functional links between rural actors and generate synergies at a project level and between LEADER stakeholders involved in different projects. These will be reflected in higher numbers of projects that work in synergy (LAV.O.21).

The more joint, cross-sectoral projects are implemented, the more likely LEADER is to strengthen the links between local community members/actors through networks, partnerships, jointly implemented projects and other collaborations (LAV.R.19).

Source: Elaborated by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)





7.4. Structural changes

Table 11. What to consider when interpreting the results in relation to the capacity of LEADER to produce structural changes in the LAG area

What to consider when interpreting the results in relation to structural change	
<p>Structural change:</p> <p>To what extent does the implementation of the LDS through the application of the LEADER method produce structural changes in the LAG area?</p>	<p>This evaluation question is answered using a factor of success related to the implementation of the LDS using the LEADER method. It measures the extent to which structural changes are produced in the LAG area as a result of the combined added value effects of implementing all projects of the LDS with the LEADER method.</p> <p>To this end, impact indicator LAV.I.12 is used. This is a question that refers to the impact level, thus only an impact indicator is appropriate. The impact indicator captures, by means of a qualitative survey, the opinions of stakeholders on the extent to which the combined projects of the LAG have contributed to the various dimensions of the LDS: economic, social and environmental/spatial, as well as cross-cutting aspects. To understand the results from this indicator, it is important to first identify what are the specific dimensions covered by the LDS.</p> <p>The higher the value of this indicator, the greater the combined effect of LEADER added value components to produce structural changes in the LAG area, particularly on dimensions addressed by the LDS. The individual answers to the survey questions can also show the extent to which LEADER contributes specifically to certain types of structural changes in the LAG area under analysis.</p> <p>Furthermore, additional information provided by descriptive statistics (if available at the local/regional level) showing the trends/evolution of key structural changes related, for instance, to population, employment/unemployment, or poverty/social exclusion may help to further contextualise the information obtained with impact indicator LAV.I.12.</p> <p>However, the interpretation of the results needs to consider that the contribution of LEADER added value to any structural changes may not be easily attributed to LEADER or that there may also be other intervening factors.</p>

Source: Elaborated by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)



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