



Policy brief No. 4:

Towards macro-macro level consistency in environmental evaluations of RDPs

Determining net impacts during evaluation of RDP measures is a complex task requiring consistent linkages between micro and macro level evaluations. Measurement along different scales faces a number of methodological and data related challenges. The ENVIEVAL project highlights the importance of long-term evaluation contracts and close institutional collaboration on setting a synchronised data-gathering strategy to enable robust macro level evaluations of environmental impacts of RDPs and consistent results with micro level assessments.

Context

Implementation of Rural Development Programmes (RDP) under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) framework, which absorbs a significant proportion of the EU budget, is facing increasing public demand for evidence that the measures funded are meeting their objectives and delivering a positive impact on public goods. However, the EU concept of accounting for the different direct and indirect effects of RDPs as part of the net-impacts is complex. It requires a triangulation of different evaluation methods across micro (e.g. farm) and macro (e.g. region) levels. A scientific review of methodologies suitable for macro level evaluation of RDP impact on public goods is documented in Deliverable D5.1. Requirements introduced and laid down in the Common Monitoring and Evaluation System (CMES) set higher ambitions for RDP impact evaluation. For most EU Member States it will require new and more in-depth evaluation approaches than before for consistent implementation of the new requirements.

Design of the evaluation plan introduced with new 2014-2020 RDPs supports the establishment of consistent evaluation at the beginning of the programme evaluation. However, eventually further action is required to organise appropriate data gathering, which allows the tracing of impacts at micro and macro levels. An assessment of data requirements for the macro level methodologies can be found in Deliverable D 5.2.

Based on the logic model for RDP evaluation (see policy brief 1) work package WP5 of the ENVIEVAL project has developed and tested a methodological framework to support the creation of a sound counterfactual design at macro level and include considerations of micro-macro consistency into the RDP evaluation of the net-impact at macro level. The results of the framework test is reported in Deliverable 5.3. Guidance for the application of the framework can be accessed through the project dissemination platform in form of the special handbook or descriptive logic model.

Tracing solutions for the challenges of macro and micro-level evaluation consistency

The main challenge for the consistency between macro and micro levels is the causality between farm-level action (micro) and beyond-farm boundary change (see policy brief 3). By incorporating consistency checks in the evaluation framework both at the beginning and the end of the process, evaluators are reminded, at critical moments, to integrate the micro and macro-level assessment that will benefit the quality of the net impact assessment. Environmental impacts consist of direct and different indirect effects and are driven by different intervening factors at micro and macro levels. Reviewing the intervention logic and causal relationships of the measures required changes in land management practices and environmental change need to achieve clarity on impact pathways across scales, levels and actors.

Macro-level evaluations are based on the following two approaches: a) the upscaling of micro-level results; or b) the application of macro-level specific evaluation approach. The best possible approach would be the combination of a 'top-down' macro-level approach (e.g. models with national or regional coverage) evaluating programme impacts with a 'bottom-up' micro-level approach assessing net-effects of different measures or measure combinations. Both approaches require plausibility and consistency

checks to be carried out on the data used as inputs and the comparison of the results at different levels. Such a combined approach requires sufficient time and resources for evaluation and long term evaluation contracts of the whole RDP and its measures.

For the net impact assessment, it is important that the results of both micro and macro-level assessment are consistent. They are accepted as consistent if results of these assessments show the same trend in relation to impact, even if the evaluator has used different indicators or methods for the assessments.

Case studies implemented within the ENVIEVAL project have tested the developed methodological framework as well as selected indicators and methods for their ability to address the key challenges faced by evaluators in the assessment of RDPs' environmental impacts.

In the case study, the robust assessment of comparison groups using elaborate statistics-based methods (see policy brief 2) has been proven to be difficult at a macro level. In most case studies, only a naïve group comparison was possible. While this is mainly caused by data issues (i.e. lack of good quality data, see policy brief 5), strategic sampling to ensure representative data for participants and non-participants for a large number of different regions would allow for robust econometric assessments of comparison groups at a regional level (see policy brief 6).

Lessons learnt

- The macro-level methodological framework developed by the ENVIEVAL project pays particular attention to addressing improved consistency of micro-macro linkages as one of the main evaluation challenges for the assessment of environmental net-effects of RDPs and their different measures. .
- Many aspects of the RDP environmental impact evaluation process can benefit from a consideration of integration of RDP monitoring with environmental monitoring programmes, in particular the causal relationships and the consistency between micro and macro level.
- Combinations of a 'top-down' macro-level approach (e.g. models with national or regional coverage) evaluating programme impacts with a 'bottom-up' micro-level approach assessing net-effects of different measures or measure combinations would increase the robustness and consistency of the assessment of net-impacts. However, both approaches require plausibility and consistency checks to be carried out in relation to the data used as inputs and the comparison of the results at different levels. Therefore, long-term evaluation contracts and close institutional collaboration on setting a synchronised data-gathering strategy become crucial.

Key contributors: Inge Aalders (JHI), David Miller (JHI), Jane Morrice (JHI), Gerald Schwarz (TI), Zymantas Morkvenas (BEF)

If any questions arise concerning the policy brief, please contact at zymantas.morkvenas@bef.lt

What is ENVIEVAL?

ENVIEVAL is developing and testing improved tools for the evaluation of environmental impacts of rural development measures and programmes in EU Member States. The project covers a representative set of EU member states, including Germany, Scotland, Greece, Finland, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary and regional case studies in the selected countries.

The main innovative aspects of the new methodological frameworks are that they enable the integration of micro- and macro-level evaluations (and their results) and provide guidance on the selection and application of cost-effective evaluation methods to estimate net effects of rural development programmes on the different main public goods from farming and forestry. In addition to the environmental public goods of climate change mitigation, biodiversity, landscapes, water quality and soil quality, the project will pay particular attention to animal welfare and include animal welfare case studies.

See the project website (www.envieval.eu) for additional information and documentation.



This document was produced under the terms and conditions of Grant Agreement No. 312071 for the European Commission. It does not necessarily reflect the view of the European Union and in no way anticipates the Commission's future policy in this area.