

**EX-POST EVALUATION REPORT OF THE NATIONAL RURAL  
NETWORK PROGRAMME FOR PORTUGAL (PRRN)  
2007-2013**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
(ENGLISH VERSION)**

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The present document contains the english version of the Executive Summary for the Ex-post Evaluation Report of the National Rural Network Programme for Portugal 2007-2013 (PRRN).

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## Executive Summary

The Programa para a Rede Rural Nacional 2007-20013 (PRRN)<sup>1</sup> was approved on December 2008, under European Commission decision C(2008) 7840, with the purpose of guaranteeing the functioning of the Rural National Network (Rede Rural Nacional, RRN) and its activities as foreseen in the Action Plan. The regulatory framework that establishes the Rural Network (Rede Rural, RR) is pursuant to Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005, article 68, according to which each Member State shall establish a national rural network, which groups the organisations and administrations involved in rural development. The same regulation establishes that Member States with regional programmes may submit for approval a specific programme for the establishment and the operation of their national rural network as pursued by Portugal.

## Re-evaluation of the Intervention Logic

In the context of re-evaluating the intervention logic of the Programme, focus was given to how the different needs identified during diagnosis were addressed in terms of conception, implementation, and execution of the PRRN Programme (including the relevance of eligibility and application selection criteria, as well as the adequacy of selected monitoring indicators), and to how internal and external coherence was accounted for and, finally, how the hierarchy of objectives fits into the community goals for rural development. Notwithstanding a discussion in terms of results considering expected outcomes, which is detailed in the section for the Effectiveness and Efficiency, no reasons were found to support alterations of the internal and external coherence relationships identified during Programme conception. The Rural National Network (RRN), as an instrument and space for aggregating rural development agents, enhancing knowledge transfer, and facilitating cooperation, is in accordance with the objectives defined in PENDER (Plano Estrategico Nacional para o Desenvolvimento Rural) and, accordingly, with those established for the national and regional Rural Development Programmes, and has the potential to dilute the needs identified during diagnosis (particularly in respect to the promotion of cooperation). Moreover, it deserves to be mentioned, without prejudice to subsequent analyses presented throughout the present document, that the steps taken towards the establishment of RRN and the execution of its Action Plan would not have been possible outside the context of PRRN, as the severe economic and financial crisis that has affected the country for the duration of the Programme would have prevented the establishment of a forum for the promotion of sharing and cooperation, which would not have prevailed in the absence of support mechanisms such as the ones provided by PRRN (100% non-refundable).

## Governance Model

The governance model for PRRN is defined by Decree-law 2/2008, January 4<sup>th</sup>, later amended by Decree-law 66/2009, March 20<sup>th</sup>; 69/2010 June 16<sup>th</sup>; and 62/2012, March 14<sup>th</sup>. Programme management was very unstable until February 2012. The present evaluation confirms a substantial increase in the effectiveness of the adopted governance model following stabilization of the management team (which coincides with its full integration under the designated Management Authority for ProDeR and PRRN - AG). Several management options that were particularly effective for a well-developed execution of the Programme, though not deriving directly from the governance model, are concomitant to its full integration under AG ProDeR.

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1 Programme for the National Rural Network (PRRN)

## Information System

The Information System is pivotal to support the management, monitorization, and evaluation of the Programme, hence the need to consider relevant evaluation outcomes that derive from it. Notwithstanding the modifications of SIPRODER (Sistema de Informação do ProDeR<sup>2</sup>) and its interface with SIIFAP (Sistema de Informação do IFAP<sup>3</sup>), the present evaluation identifies caveats in the information system, in the sense it does not allow uploading relevant information regarding the monitorization of result indicators, thwarting good Programme monitorization.

## Information and Publicity

Effectiveness of the communication mechanisms adopted were evaluated based both on information, collected by the Managing Authority (accesses to website, number of participants in dissemination sessions, number of phone calls received, etc) as presented in the Execution Report (RE), and inquiry to the RRN Members (beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the Programme). Following the integration of AG PRRN within AG ProDeR, the communication strategy of the PRRN was maintained, though adapted to the existing channels for ProDer and benefiting from the dynamics and communication experience of AG ProDeR. The integration of PRRN in the ProDeR communication platforms was strategic as such platforms were already accessed and known by a large number of potential beneficiaries, who in turn may serve as intermediate communication agents.

The Programme website was advocated from the earlier Programme stages as a fundamental dissemination mechanism, and, indeed, it has revealed to be one of its main communication platforms. In fact, most of the inquired beneficiaries stated they first knew about the Programme from its website and the dissemination sessions organized. Moreover, most of the inquired beneficiaries (85%) considered the contents of the website to be adequate in framing the application process to the different Intervention Areas (AI). Interaction with target audience and clarification regarding the Programme and its functioning through different means of communication was overall rated as satisfactory by beneficiaries.

## Programme Implementation and Budget uptake

Following open calls, a total of 97 projects<sup>4</sup> (corresponding to 200 Operations) were approved, with the Intervention Area 1 (AI 1 Capitalização da experiência e do conhecimento), representing 34% of approved projects, followed by the Intervention Area 4 (AI 4 *Facilitação do acesso à informação*<sup>5</sup>) with 24%. The two remaining Areas of Intervention of the Programme, *Observação do mundo rural e implementação das políticas de desenvolvimento rural*<sup>6</sup> (AI 3) and *Facilitação da cooperação*<sup>7</sup> (AI 2) represented, respectively, 13% and 7% of approved projects. Regarding application typology (single vs. partnership application), Intervention Area 3 held a higher percentage of partnership applications. 64% of all beneficiaries only applied to one of the Intervention Areas (AI), which reveals the proper definition of the objectives and priorities of each AI. Regarding the application process, inquiry results indicate that most beneficiaries rate the application process and evaluation methodologies as adequate. Management simplification and flexibilization mechanisms were adopted following the establishment

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2 ProDeR information system.

3 Paying agency (IFAP) information system.

4 Project is defined as an initiative, and may correspond to one or more PA (Operation). In this document, most of the analysis is centered in the number of projects, as opposed to the number of PA, as it provides higher relevance to the cooperation capacity among agentes fo rural development that is required in the context of the present evaluation. As such, minors discrepancies in some of the results, when compared with results presented in the Execution report (in which PAs where the unit for analysis), may exist.

5 Information access facilitation.

6 Rural world and rural development policy implementation observation.

7 Cooperation facilitation.

of the new Management Authority (AG ProDeR and PRRN), in compliance with Portaria<sup>8</sup> 201/2012, July 2<sup>nd</sup>, and proved to be effective to Programme execution, which accomplished an execution rate of 100%.

## Effectiveness and Efficiency Analysis

This dimension of the evaluation was designed seeking a clear identification of how effective the Programme has been in the achievement of its objectives, and assessing resources utilization in pursuing programme objectives, considering the intervention logic of the Programme. On one hand, the developed analysis has considered the global reduction of the initial budget (as a consequence of non-compliance with the n+2 rule), the budget adjustment among the different areas of intervention (without accruing changes to the fund contribution), and the execution rate of the Programme budget (100%). On the other hand, the analysis has taken into account the lack of a system to report common indicators, contrary to other rural development programmes, and also the fact that, although there is an indicator plan for Programme monitoring, which comprises result, output, and impact indicators, sometimes neither qualitative nor quantitative targets have been defined for those indicators.

Notwithstanding constraints related to the definition of indicators/indicator targets, the analysis of the PRRN results under consideration of the abovementioned budgetary reduction indicates that the Programme has revealed to be both effective, in the sense its results were achieved, and efficient, in the sense that the obtained results were close to what was initially expected even though the budget has suffered a substantial reduction.

Information collected through inquiry has also been used to complement the effectiveness and efficiency analysis based on indicators of results. As such, and considering the National Rural Network (RRN) is designed to encompass a space for information sharing and cooperation promotion, it was considered pivotal to include in this evaluation an analysis to understand the behavior of beneficiaries, whom are all members of the RRN, as agents that foment networking dynamics. It was concluded that, even though it was not mandatory for beneficiaries to share the outputs of their projects in the RRN online resource centre ([www.rederural.pt](http://www.rederural.pt)), most of the inquired beneficiaries (82%) stated they have shared their final products with the Technical Support Structure (ETA).

## Programme Impact

Without prejudice of an analysis focused on a wide set of impact evaluation dimensions, including the dimensions expressed on the seven common impact indicators under CMEF<sup>9</sup>, the evaluation team understands that one of the main impacts of the Programme is the implementation and stabilization of the National Rural Network (RRN) in itself. The creation of structures required for the functioning of the RRN is the core programme objective to which not only AI 5 but also the remaining Intervention Areas (AI) targeting the implementation of the Action Plan have collectively contributed. Based on inquiry of the RRN members, it was possible to conclude that most of the inquired member were satisfied with the RRN functioning and activities, in general. In terms of participation and direct contribution to the Network's dynamics, most inquired members (53%) confirmed to have shared relevant information with other member of the Network, mostly directly through the created mailing list. In addition to this evaluation of the engagement level of the RRN members, impacts of the Programme could also be assessed based on other horizontal domains (including those envisaged by the seven common indicators) and considering the set of programme specific impact indicators. As listed in the corresponding section of this report, the use of this set of programme specific indicators was subject to several constraints such as lack of qualitative or quantitative targets and, even for the cases in which targets were defined, information availability was also a constraint. Still,

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<sup>8</sup> Ministerial Ordinance

<sup>9</sup> Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

elements that allowed assessing the impact of the Programme based on at least some of the binomes objectives/domains of impact foreseen in PRRN, and also based on the 7 common impact indicators under QCAA, were incorporated in the evaluation instruments (inquiries and interviews).

As such, considering the set of indicators used in the questionnaires, most of the beneficiaries considered their projects did not contribute, directly or indirectly, to indicators such as countering climate change or improving water quality. Contrastingly, most beneficiaries considered their projects to contribute significantly to the following domains: effective intervention of rural agents, improvement of politics in the rural development domain, innovation and increase in agro-forestry competitiveness, and establishment of long lasting partnerships. Even though beneficiaries have not considered the later element (“establishment of long lasting partnerships”) as the main contribution of their initiatives, it is important to mention that all inquired beneficiaries that participated in partnerships stated that they are willing to engage in future partnerships based on the experience they have had in the Programme.

## Conclusions and Recommendation

- The Evaluation concludes that the PRRN has achieved a good budgetary uptake, reflecting the good management options taken since 2012. In fact, the cumulative execution rates highlight a very significant increase between 2009 and 2012 (approximately 45%), and the increasing trend was maintained after that.
- The Evaluation Team concludes that there is a need to adapt the typology of indicators to the nature of the projects and initiatives, and to implement the necessary mechanisms for information collection that allows the estimation of such indicators (including the adaptation of the Information System for such purpose)
- The Evaluation activities developed, namely inquiry to different intervenients, suggest that the role of the RRRN as a space for sharing and disseminating relevant information for agents of rural development could benefit from requiring a mandatory disclosure of the projects’ final products and outputs to the ETA (Estrutura Técnica de Apoio), as part of the contractual obligations of the Programme beneficiaries. This requirement could be reinforced by conditioning the last payment to the proof of projects’ products delivery to ETA.
- The weak representativeness of PRRN beneficiaries from the Autonomous Regions of Portugal (Azores and Madeira), and from the region of Algarve should be countered by increasing the availability of human resources in respective focal points. Additionally, call objectives should be adequately framed to meet the reality of these territories.
- The Evaluation Team considers that, given the objectives of the Programme, partnership applications should be highly valued, and the creation of conditions for partnership establishment should be reinforced (by increasing the visibility of the initiatives pool<sup>10</sup>, for instance).