Thematic Evaluation
LEADER
2014-2020
Rural Development Programme

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Executive Summary

This report presents a thematic evaluation on LEADER to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance of the LEADER approach with the aim to promote economic, social, and environmental development in rural areas.

Over the past 30 years, the LEADER approach' to community-led local development (CLLD), financed by the Structural and the Rural Development Funds, has helped rural actors consider the long-term potential of their local region, and has proved as an effective and efficient tool in the delivery of development policies. In the case of LEADER, for which continuous EU support has been provided since 1991, CLLD has become an important element of rural development policy with a high level of acceptance all over Europe[1].

The CLLD principles, as defined in Article 32 (2) of the Common Provisions Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013[2], are as follows:

- **A focus on specific sub-regional areas** and territories designated by the local population in a bottom-up way;
- **A public-private partnership = local action group (LAG),** which represents the territory and its population and leads the development process with no interest group nor public authorities having a majority in the decision-making process;
- **An area-based strategy** created and implemented through a bottom up and participatory decision-making process, organised by LAGs, to address the area´s most urgent needs;
- **Multisector local development strategy** to foster and link the local development potentials of various sectors for the achievement of local objectives;
- **Innovation** as a cross cutting objective in the development of the LAG's territory;
- **Networking** among actors inside the LAG's territory, among LAGs and other public-private partnerships, in order to establish a stronger foundation for the transfer of knowledge, and exchange of experiences; and
- **Cooperation** among local actors and among LAGs from different territories within the Member State, the EU and outside of it.

The fundamental rationale for using CLLD is that these principles improve on the results achieved by traditional, centralised top-down through interaction which leads to achieve better overall results.

LEADER in Malta is implemented through Measure 19 of the RDP with a total approved budgetary allocation of €7.1 million (EAFRD) or €9.5 million total public funds. In Malta there are three LAGs each of which have developed their own specific Local Development Strategies (LDS). The LDS for Xlokk, Majjistral and Gozo (and Comino) are comprehensive plans or frameworks that set out a vision, goals, and actions for promoting sustainable development of the rural areas. The strategies are developed through a participatory process that involves stakeholders and community members, and are based on an analysis of local needs, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The aim of the LDS is to promote the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the local area, by identifying and

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[1] community_en.pdf (europa.eu)

[2] Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 (europa.eu)

addressing the specific challenges and opportunities facing the territory. The strategies typically cover a range of issues, including economic development, job creation, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and infrastructure development. Each LAG is responsible for implementing local development initiatives in their respective regions, including the allocation of funding for projects that support rural economic and social development. The LAGs play a vital role in promoting community-led development and ensuring that rural development initiatives are tailored to the specific needs of each local area.

The objective of this Thematic evaluation has been to answer Common Evaluation Question (CEQ) 17 which is related to Focus Area 6B - ***To what extent have RDP interventions supported local development in rural areas?***

This FA is composed of two measures but given that Measure 19 (LEADER) absorbs 97% of the total allocated budget for FA6B, this evaluation answers the CEQ by evaluating the performance of measure 19 in the RDP. This thematic evaluation is carried out at the RDP level and not at the LAG level. However, to assess the overall performance of LEADER as part of the RDP, LAG specific indicator data is being used. Towards this end, the evaluation findings are presented in terms of enhanced results, improved social capital and improved governance. By understanding the contribution of LEADER to the development of the rural area, it is possible to understand the effectiveness and efficiency of Measure 19 RDP intervention in supporting rural areas (FA 6B).

In order to assess these elements of LEADER and answer the main evaluation question, six specific evaluation questions are being identified:

1. To what extent has the LEADER method been effective in addressing local needs?
2. To what extent has LEADER contributed towards conserving and increasing the valorisation of cultural assets?
3. To what extent has LEADER contributed towards an improvement in social capital?
4. To what extent has LEADER contributed towards the improvement of environmental capital?
5. To what extent has LEADER contributed towards enhancing the rural economy?
6. To what extent has LEADER contributed towards more effective multi-level governance?

To answer these questions, a set of judgment criteria and evaluation indicators have been identified. A mixed method approach has been adopted whereby both qualitative and quantitative approaches consisting of data from the LAGs database, surveys with beneficiaries, analysis of closure reports and case studies has been utilised. Throughout the evaluation process, several meetings were also held with different stakeholders including the Managing Authority (MA), the Decision Committees (DC) of the three LAGs and the LAGs beneficiaries.

Figure E.1: Applied Mixed Methodology
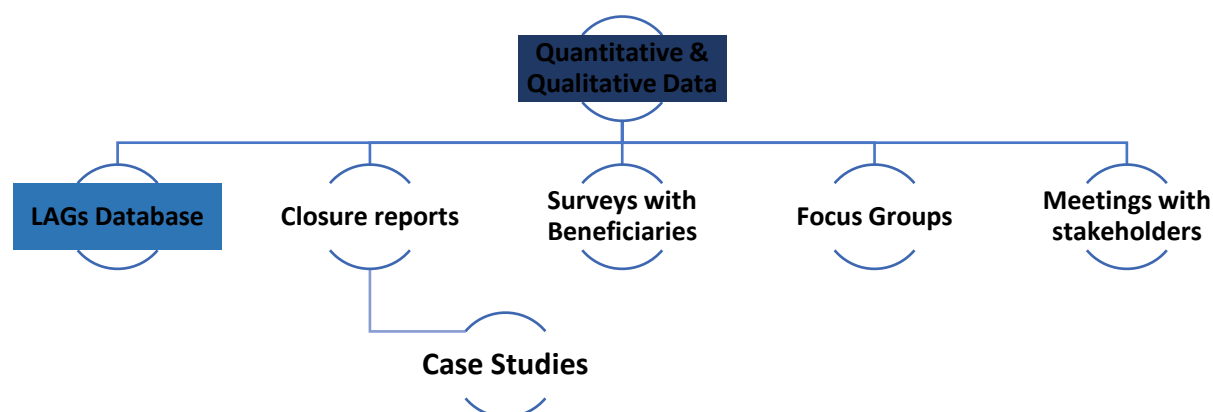
Using these different types of methodologies, the findings are categorised in two sections:

1. Implementation of LEADER

There has been relatively good progress in the implementation of LEADER. As at the end of 2021, around 65% of the allocated budget had been committed but only 30% realised.[3] Specific to measure 19.2 which deals with the implementation of LEADER, committed expenditure amounts to more than €4.3 million (65%) and realised expenditure at the end of 2021 amounted to €1.7 million (25%).

An analysis of data provided by the LAGs demonstrates that there have been 220 approved applications, registering an increase in the number of approved project applications over the period 2018-2022. This indicates the success of the LAGs in generating interest in their projects and encouraging applicants to submit and complete applications. However, it is evident that the COVID pandemic had a negative impact on the number of completed projects, with a decline in 2020 and 2021.

One key performance indicator of the RDP is the result target for 'FA 6B', which is the percentage of rural population covered by local development strategies. In Malta, this target has been attained as the entire rural population is being covered by the strategies. The established population target of 268,733 has been exceed by 15%. The RDP also has a target of 10 jobs to be created by the end of 2025. As yet, this target has not been met which with 2.5 Full time Equivalent (FTE) registered by the end of 2021. However, this must be interpreted within a context in which the objectives of LEADER in Malta do not explicitly focus on job creation. The LDSs focus more intently on the cultural heritage, social and environmental assets, as well as the preservation of the rural community.

2. Answering Evaluation questions

Six evaluation questions have been identified and studied separately to assess the different aspects of LEADER contribution to the development of the rural area. The findings below reflect a set of judgement criteria and indicators prepared as a tool to answer each EQ.

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[3] Available data submitted as part of the AIR, at the time of drafting the evaluation report.

1. **To what extent has the LEADER method been effective in addressing local needs?**

Evaluation Indicator	Evaluation Finding
% of respondents who agreed that the LAG strategy reflects the need of their organisation and locality (Survey Q6)	94% of the survey respondents agreed that the LAG strategy reflects the need of their organisation and locality
Views on the extent to which the local identity has been strengthened (FGs and Case Studies)	According to the FGs participants, the projects supported by the LEADER measure have all contributed to the local community. The case study analysis indicates that projects supported by LEADER have strengthened the local identity, mainly in terms of allowing the public to appreciate the value of important landmarks in their localities.

2. **To what extent has LEADER contributed towards conserving and increasing the valorisation of cultural assets?**

Evaluation Indicator	Evaluation Finding
Views on the extent to which participation in cultural activities has increased (FGs)	According to participants, projects related to culture and heritage have led to an increase in interest in national traditions.
Number of restoration projects of important cultural value (LAGs Data)	Target value of restoration projects (69) with a cultural value has been achieved[4]. Almost 80% of approved projects address cultural heritage and identity.
Number of new/improved quality cultural and/or social investment in the LAG area (LAGs Data)	Target value of new/improved quality cultural and/or social activities in the Xlokk and Majjistral areas is almost met. (Achievement of 80 – Target of 86)

3. **To what extent has LEADER contributed towards an improvement in social capital?**

Evaluation Indicator	Evaluation finding
Number of participating local operators and stakeholders in inter-territorial and trans-national cooperation projects (LAGs Data)	37 participants stakeholders in inter-territorial and trans-national cooperation projects including local operators and stakeholders. – Target of 30 has been exceeded.[5].
Number of local councils, businesses and NGOs offering new and improved amenities for young persons and families (LAGs Data)	Based on data received from the Gozo LAG, there were 24 local councils, businesses and NGOs offering new and improved amenities for young persons and families such that the target value of 9 has been exceeded.
Views on the extent to which trust and confidence among local actors has increased (FGs)	The Partnership criterion was a difficult element to implement specifically because of the lack of trust between stakeholders and the intensity of bureaucracy.

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[4] Overall, the target value has been achieved however, for one LAG, the target value for specific indicator for the restoration projects of sites has not been achieved.
[5] Based on the information collected from 2 LAGs which have included a specific indicator on the number of participant stakeholders in inter-territorial and transnational cooperation projects.

Evaluation Indicator	Evaluation finding
Views on the extent to which the density and quality of interactions between local actors has improved (FGs/LAG Data)	Cooperation has improved between local actors even with those not directly involved with the project. This stems from the recognition of the projects' local importance.
Views on the extent to which the capacity of local actors to organise themselves in various forms of partnerships, networks, lobbies and interest groups has increased (FGs)	The Partnership criterion was a difficult element to implement. However, beneficiaries indicated that locals' assistance was immediately provided when required.

4. To what extent has LEADER contributed towards the improvement of environmental capital?

Evaluation Indicator	Evaluation Finding
Improvement in environmental awareness (FGs and Case Studies)	Based on conclusions derived from the FGs and Case studies, some projects have resulted in an improvement of environmental awareness. Putting together, the educational and environmental aspects, the projects made sure to reach out and increase environmental awareness.
Number of projects receiving support for the development of green infrastructure (LAGs Data)	27 projects have received support for the development of green infrastructure, representing 12% of approved projects (2018 – mid-2022). The target on green infrastructure (20) has been met.
% of completed projects contributing to a carbon neutral economy (Closure Reports Data)	36% of closure reports projects contributed to a carbon neutral economy.

5. To what extent has LEADER contributed towards enhancing the rural economy?

Evaluation Indicator	Evaluation finding
% of partial and zero deadweight (Survey Q5)	Based on the focus group discussions there is no deadweight in the application of LEADER. This has also been confirmed from the survey respondents who indicated that in the absence of LEADER, they would have abandoned the project or reduced its scale.
% of beneficiaries who are of the view that LEADER is supporting businesses in their locality/region (Survey Q8)	88% of survey respondents indicated that LEADER is supporting businesses in their locality/region.
% of beneficiaries who are of the view that LEADER has contributed to improving the skills set of employees in the area (Survey Q9)	44% of survey respondents agree that LEADER has contributed to improving the skills set of employees in the area.
% of beneficiaries who are of the view that LEADER has facilitated innovation (Survey Q9)	94% of survey respondents indicated that LEADER has facilitated innovation.
% of completed projects with an innovative element (Closure Reports Data)	23% of the projects that submitted a closure report have an innovate element.

6. To what extent has LEADER contributed towards more effective multi-level governance?

Evaluation Indicator	Evaluation finding
% of beneficiaries who agreed that their organisation was involved in the design of the LAG strategy for their region (Survey Q6)	69% of survey respondents indicated that their organisation was involved in the design of the LAG strategy for their region.
Number of participants in the events to set up the strategy (LEADER Strategies)	Each LAG held 3 consultation sessions (Nine public consultations in total)
% of beneficiaries who agreed that the project application procedure is accessible and	88% of survey respondents agreed that the project application procedure encourages local stakeholders to

Evaluation Indicator	Evaluation finding
encourages local stakeholders to participate in LEADER (Survey Q6)	participate in LEADER. Notwithstanding different challenges were identified by different types of applicants ex: Voluntary organisations, NGOs and Local Councils**.**
Views on the extent to which the role of the MA facilitated the smooth implementation of LEADER (Interview with LAGs and MA)	Vertical governance has improved since the introduction of LEADER, but coordination could possibly be enhanced further.
Views on the extent to which effective collaboration existed between the (1) MA and PA and (2) between the three LAGs (Interview with LAGs and MA)	Despite facing challenges in terms of resources, the channels of communications proved to be open between the MA and the LAGs and all LAGs provide significant assistance to beneficiaries throughout the application stage as well as during the monitoring phase.

Based on the evaluation findings a number of recommendations are put forward. The sustainability of the LAGs presents a persistent challenge particularly between funding programmes. While it is recognized that EU regulations require Managing Authorities (MA) to conduct competitive calls for LAGs, there is a need to design the current system and procedures in a way that facilitates a smooth and uninterrupted process, even during transition between programmes. One potential aspect to consider is the wider role that LAGs can play within the rural environment that extends beyond the use of LEADER funds.

It is also important to ensure that the process of implementing projects is managed efficiently and effectively by all stakeholders. This means that actions should be taken to avoid duplication of effort, as well as reduce administrative and fiscal burdens for beneficiaries. This could include the timely payment of claims not to create financial burdens on beneficiaries, particularly voluntary organisations which may be deterred from participation for such reasons, as well as regular and effective communication between stakeholders.

Finally, it is essential that there is proper management and monitoring mechanism in place to ensure that the objectives of the respective strategies are met. Consequently, data for listed indicators in the strategies should be collected and managed adequately.

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Acronyms

Common Evaluation Question (CEQ)

Common Provisions Regulation (CPR)

Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)

Decision Committee (DC)

Evaluation Committee (EC)

Focus Areas (FAs)

Focus Groups (FGs)

Evaluation Questions (EQs)

Local Action Groups (LAGs)

Local Councils (LCs)

Local Development Strategies (LDSs)

Managing Authority (MA)

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Outside Development Zone (ODZ)

Rural Development Programme (RDP)

Selection Committee (SC)

Small and Medium Sized Entities (SMEs)

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

Voluntary Organisations (VOs)

1 Introduction

Leader is a local development method used to engage local actors in the design and delivery of strategies, decision-making and resource allocation for the development of rural areas. As a method, it has been applied in various Rural Development Programmes in Malta including the 2014-2022 period. Indeed, the implementation of LEADER is programmed under Focus Areas 6B aimed at fostering local development.

The purpose of the evaluation is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Leader approach, as well as the factors that facilitate or hinder its implementation. The evaluation is a process that assesses the effectiveness of the Leader approach in achieving community-led local development (CLLD) objectives and contributing to the sustainable development of rural areas. The evaluation focuses on the LEADER guiding principles which include area-based and bottom-up approach, local partnerships, a multi-sectoral strategy, innovation, interregional and international cooperation and networking, and the governance mechanism. It also assesses the impact of LEADER-funded projects and initiatives on the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of rural areas.

This thematic evaluation is undertaken at the level of Measure 19 of the RDP in order to determine the extent to which LEADER is addressing the objectives of the Maltese Rural Development Programme. While the analysis considers the three local strategies funded by the Measure, the evaluation is not undertaken at the level of the Local Action Group (LAG) strategies. More specifically, this evaluation analyses the efficiency and effectiveness of the LEADER measure and its value added as part of the 2014-2022 RDP, by evaluating the implementation of LEADER in Malta and the extent to which the LEADER measure has impacted the Maltese rural communities. This is based on a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, including data collected at the level of the strategies, questionnaires, case studies, and interviews with key actors involved in the Leader approach. **Figure 1.***1***Error! Reference source not found.** depicts how the LEADER measure theoretically fits within the context of the overall RDP Programme.

Figure 1.1: RDP Framework
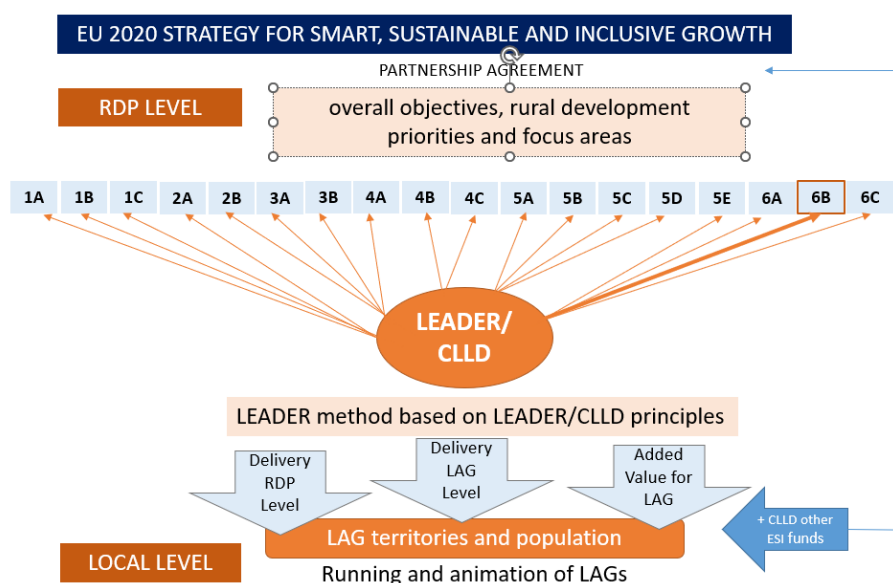
Source: Guidelines: Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD 2017, European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development

The findings of this evaluation aim to provide policy recommendations for the current LEADER measure and to inform the development of future policies and funding programmes for rural development in Malta. The findings also seek to provide guidance on how to improve the design and implementation of the LEADER approach, and to ensure that it continues to contribute to the development of rural areas.

2 LEADER as part of the Rural Development Programme

The objective of the LEADER approach is to address problems faced by different rural areas in Europe which top-down policies failed to address. The objective is to create a community initiative in the form of an EU funded instrument, aimed directly at the challenges faced by rural areas in Europe. The experimental phase of LEADER was conducted between 1991-1993, involving 217 areas in designated disadvantaged rural regions. This proved to be successful and was reintroduced in the fourth programming period (2007-2013) as an integral part of the EU's rural development policy, this time covering 2,416 rural territories across all the Member States[6]. It then became a mandatory component of all RDPs, with a minimum budget allocation of 5% in EU-15 and 2.5% in EU-12. In 2007, the method was also extended thematically to the fisheries policy with over 300 Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs) being developed in 21 Member States.

As per Articles 32-35 of Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013[7] of the European Parliament and of the Council Common Provisions Regulation (CPR), the applicability of the LEADER approach during the 2014-2020 period was further extended as CLLD in rural, fisheries and urban areas. This regulation gave rise to the CLLD which is regional specific and driven by the LAGs. The objective is to prioritise local needs and ensure innovation, networking, and cooperation within the local context. According to Article 33 of the Regulation (1303/2013), for each LAG, a development strategy is required defining the area and population, the needs of the area based on the identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and a well-defined action plan of how these needs are translated into actions including a monitoring and financial plan.

The objective of LEADER is to present local communities and policy makers with the opportunity to develop and implement integrated strategies designed specifically for the area, without the restrictions of general priorities that do not reflect the specific needs of that area. Moreover, this is done whilst contributing to the achievement of rural development policy objectives[8]. The LEADER approach utilises a bottom-up approach in the development of the LDS, that starts with the identification of the needs and then moves up towards the development of measures specifically to address these needs. Over the years this approach has proved to be more effective in dealing with specific issues in the rural community.

This section provides a detailed review of the CLLD principles guiding the use of CLLD and practical examples of thematic studies which evaluate the implementation of such CLLD principles. This section also provides an outline of LEADER in Malta within the context of the RDP.

2.1 The Principles of Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)

CLLD was introduced as a new policy instrument to support territorial cohesion in the programming period 2014-2020. It builds on the experiences of the LEADER approach, by further promoting projects carried out through local partnerships in a bottom-up way, via area-based, multi-sector local development strategies. CLLD supports the enhancement of the local economy through the creation

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[6] Source: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-toolkit/leaderclld-explained_en
[7] Source: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1303&rid=1
[8] Source:
https://eufunds.gov.mt/en/EU%20Funds%20Programmes/European%20Agricultural%20Fund/Pages/LEADER.aspx

of sustainable jobs, utilising local resources, strengthening social cohesion, networking, cooperation and innovation. LEADER, with its clear linkage to rural areas has continued to be used under the EAFRD as LEADER/CLLD[9].

2.1.1 Description of CLLD principles and their added value

CLLD is a tool used for involving citizens at local level in developing responses to the social, environmental and economic challenges. The CLLD approach requires time and effort, but for relatively small financial investments, it can have a marked impact on people's lives and generate new ideas and the shared commitment for putting these into practice[10].

At the EU level, the implementation of CLLD has been critical in delivering the Europe 2020 Strategy goals of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, fostering territorial cohesion and reaching specific policy objectives. Member States can choose from a broad range of policy measures supported by various European Structural and Investment Funds. Articles 32-35 of the Common Provisions Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 are based on the LEADER approach and concern four of the Funds covered by the Common Strategic Framework – the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund – in the 2014-2020 programming period.

Two possible scenarios can be adopted by Member States: using only one fund (mono-fund) or using several funds (multi-fund). CLLD is, however, only mandatory under the EAFRD in the form of LEADER. If Member States opt for the use of several funds, they can apply various combinations in order to meet their territorial needs. In Malta, CLLD is implemented solely through the EAFRD in the form of LEADER.

Figure 2.1: CLLD within the EU policy architecture for the programming period 2014-2020

Source: European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development (2017) Guidelines: Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD

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[9] twg-03-leader_clld-aug2017.pdf (europa.eu)
[10] guidance_community_local_development.pdf (europa.eu)

Article 32 (2) of the Common Provisions Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013[11] lays down the CLLD principles, which are also referred to as the 'LEADER method'. These are as follows[12]:

- **A focus on specific sub-regional areas** and territories designated by the local population in a bottom-up way;
- **A public-private partnership - local action group (LAG),** which represents the territory and its population and leads the development process with no interest group nor public authorities having a majority in the decision-making process;
- **An area-based strategy** created and implemented through a bottom up and participatory decision-making process, organised by LAGs, to address the area´s most urgent needs;
- **Multisector local development strategy** to foster and link the local development potentials of various sectors for the achievement of local objectives;
- **Innovation** as a cross cutting objective in the development of the LAG's territory;
- **Networking** among actors inside the LAG's territory, among LAGs and other public-private partnerships, in order to establish a stronger foundation for the transfer of knowledge, and exchange of experiences; and
- **Cooperation** among local actors and among LAGs from different territories within the Member State, the EU and outside of it.

The fundamental rationale for using CLLD is that these principles improve on the results achieved by traditional, centralised top-down approaches. However, CLLD should not be regarded as competing with or opposed to top-down approaches from national, regional authorities or local authorities, but instead as a tool interacting with them, in order to achieve better overall results.

The Figure below provides a schematic representation of each of the CLLD principles, thereby providing a better understanding of the added value of using CLLD.

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[11] Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 (europa.eu)
[12] twg-03-leader_clld-aug2017.pdf (europa.eu)

Figure 2.2: Schematic representation of CLLD principles

Focus on sub-regional areas	Funds are **concentrated on the areas that need and can use them most**. Solutions are adapted flexibly to meet their diverse needs and opportunities - at the right time and place.
Local Action Groups/PPPs	Co-responsibility and ownership. **No one interest group whether public or private dominates**. The partnership mobilises the knowledge, energy and resources of local actors.
Multi-sectoral and area-based local development strategies	The actions reinforce each other and build on the strengths of the area. **Linkages are improved horizontally** with other local actors **and vertically** with other levels in delivery or supply chains. There may be different priorities and entry points.
Innovation	In a local context, the method generates **new ways of thinking and doing** - new markets, new products, services, ways of working and social innovation.
Networking and Cooperation	Local areas and communities **learn from each other and find allies** for strengthening their position in a global economy.

Source: European Commission (2018) Guidance for Member States and Programme Authorities on Community-led Local Development in European Structural and Investment Funds

2.1.2   Evaluation of CLLD Principles

This sub-section sets out the evaluation questions which can be considered in assessing the implementation of CLLD principles or the 'LEADER method'. Indeed, the Table below outlines the seven evaluation questions in relation to each of the CLLD principles[13].

Table 2.1: Evaluation Questions related to the CLLD principles

CLLD Principle	Evaluation Question
Local Partnerships	To what extent have local partnerships contributed to solve challenges in the local community?
Bottom-up	To what extent has the bottom-up approach contributed to local anchoring?
Area based approach	To what extent has the involvement of local resources (social, cultural, natural) contributed to local development?
Cross-sectoral approach	To what extent has this approach been used? And what are the effects of this approach?

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[13] Based on the Danish experience of evaluating the enhanced results of LEADER. Source:
7_GPW7_PPT_LEADER_Enhanced_Results (assets.gov.ie)

Innovation	To what extent has LEADER contributed to innovation in the local community?
Networking	To what extent has this approach been used? And what are its effects?
Cooperation	To what extent have cooperation projects been developed and implemented by LAGs, nationally and/or internationally? And what did the projects contribute to?

Source: Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development (2018), Good Practice Workshop, Evaluating enhanced results of LEADER: the Danish experience

A number of Member States have already carried out thematic studies focusing on the implementation of LEADER. The sections below put forward a few examples of such studies whereby it can be noted that each evaluation focused on a particular aspect of LEADER. The first study shown in Box 1 is based in Austria and focused on social innovation.

BOX 1 – FOCUS ON INNOVATION, NETWORKING, COOPERATION
Thematic Study on Social Innovation – implicit to the LEADER approach (Austria, 2018)

In 2018, the Austrian Managing Authority commissioned a team of independent consultancies to undertake a study on social innovation, its relevance in LEADER projects and its effects on different age and disadvantaged groups across all Local Action Groups (LAGs) in Austria. The study defined **'social innovation'** as approaches that facilitate the improvement of relationships and the quality of life of people through the creation of new forms of cooperation between public, economic and societal actors.

A **combination of qualitative and quantitative methods** was used. In total, 1,628 project descriptions were analysed on which basis eight detailed 'Social Innovation' case studies were elaborated. Finally, trans-regional focus groups facilitated the sharing of experience, exploring the topic in greater depth across LAGs.

The study found that **between a sixth (17%) and a third (33%) of all projects in Austria addressed social innovation issues**, the first estimation based on experts' views, the second one on a self-assessment of LAG managers. When LAG strategies explicitly identified 'social innovation' as one of their aims, their activities and staff showed stronger engagement and know-how in the subject matter. At times, LAGs even took on the role of a 'social entrepreneur' themselves by connecting with relevant institutions, facilitating dialogue and exchange, and working in partnership on relevant social issues. These findings demonstrate that LAGs can occupy an important position in pro-actively pursuing social innovation and achieve significant effect.

The study identified important lessons learned which can be found at:
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/enrd_publications/s12_leader_case_study-

BOX 2 – FOCUS ON MULTI-SECTORAL AND AREA-BASED APPROACH
Assessing the economic, social, cultural and environmental impact of LEADER on rural communities (Scotland, 2018)

The aim of this evaluation was to assess the economic, social, cultural and environmental impact of LEADER on rural communities. Its aim was to provide policy recommendations for the current LEADER programme and for a potential follow-up programme post-Brexit.

To gain information on LEADER's impact, the project was divided into two phases – **an analysis of administrative data** on the Local Actions in Rural Communities system (LARCs) and secondly, the collection and **analysis of qualitative data generated through focus groups** in four Local Action Groups (LAGs). All LEADER projects and their details are uploaded to LARCs. However, whilst LARCs asks projects to report a number of outcomes that will help to capture economic, social, cultural and environmental impact, data at this stage is very limited due to the low share of completed projects. Therefore, four focus groups were conducted for the second stage of this research.

One of the quantitative findings of the report is that both the budget size per LAG varies considerably, but also that some LAGs are lagging behind in terms of the value they have committed to projects at this stage. The qualitative part of this research showed that in terms of an **environmental impact**, LEADER projects help to preserve the environment and engage people with natural heritage. **Economically**, LEADER has helped to create new employment and training opportunities by investing in tourism, crafts, farm diversification and in small businesses. Furthermore, projects – sometimes indirectly – **support the local rural community** and business networks to build knowledge and skills and **encourage innovation and cooperation** in order to tackle local development objectives.

The study puts forward a number of recommendations which can be found at:
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/evaluation_publications/leader_2014-2022_process_evaluation.pdf

BOX 3 – FOCUS ON GOVERNANCE (COOPERATION, NETWORKING)
Assessing an improved local governance through LEADER/CLLD –Looking at the input and output of governance arrangements (Germany, 2019)

This evaluation focused on four federal states or RDPs in Germany, namely Hesse, Lower-Saxony, North-Rhine-Westfalia and Schleswig-Holstein. The evaluation question was defined as follows: What is the contribution of LEADER to improve local governance? Improving local governance is understood as better cooperation of actors from public sector/state, economy and civil society. The evaluation also distinguishes between two aspects of local governance: (1) on the input side (type and structure of participation, gender representation, whether it is really bottom up) and (2) on the output side (contributions to cooperation and rural development).

The evaluation approach is based on a LAG survey and general data directly obtained from LAG managers. In terms of findings, from the input-side, it was concluded that although there are no clearly defined duties for wider participation, there is a wider participation of local stakeholders in working groups. In LAGs, dominance of the "usual suspects" of participation was found (i.e., male, academic, over 40) – so the LAG-compositions show a lack of underprivileged groups and shortfalls in gender balance. From the output-side, it was concluded that added value to improve local governance in general was achieved. Nevertheless, the evaluation study suggests a rethinking of the role of the economy, in terms of carefully monitoring a possible dominance of public sector.

Further information on this evaluation study can be found at: gpw-07_5_improved_governance_pollermann_0.pdf (europa.eu)

2.2 LEADER in Malta

LEADER in the Maltese RDP is covered by Measure 19 – Support for LEADER local development (CLLD – community-led local development) (Art 35 Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013) and is comprised of four sub-measures:

- M19.1 – Preparatory support
- M19.2 – Implementation of operations under the CLLD Strategy
- M19.3 - Preparation and implementation of co-operation activities of the LAG
- M19.4 – Running costs and animation.

 LEADER is implemented by three LAGs which were also established to deliver the LEADER objectives under the 2007-2013 RDP in Malta. With the launch of the Programme, the LAGs - Xlokk, Majjistral and Gozo - re-applied... The renewal of the LAGs, created a sense of continuity, allowing them to further build upon the foundations and recognition they had previously established. Each of the LAGs have developed their LDS which address the specific needs to their territories and meet the objectives of the national RDP (An overview of each Strategy is presented in Section 4 of this report). The objectives of LEADER in the RDP are to support small-scale community projects which are innovative in nature, increase the capacity of local rural community and business networks in order to build knowledge and skills and encourage innovation and cooperation so as to tackle local development objectives (refer to **Figure 2.*3***).

LEADER is programmed under Focus Area (FA) 6B – Fostering local development in rural areas, which absorbs 5.4% of the entire rural development programme. The total approved allocation for Measure 19 in the RDP (version 6.1) stands at €7,120,000 (EAFRD) or €9,493,333 total public funds. Measure 19 accounts for 97% of the funds allocated under 6B. The remaining balance is allocated towards M16. Based on the legal requirements set out in the EU Commissions Regulation 1305/2013, LEADER accounts for the minimum threshold of 5% of the EU programme.

Measure 19.2, which specifically allows for the implementation of the CLLD strategy absorbs 70% of the total allocation for Measure 19. This is followed by M19.4 (running costs and animations for the LAGs) which absorbs 18% of the funds allocated under this measure. The rest of budgetary allocation falls under preparatory support in the development of the strategies and cooperation activities.

Table 2.2: Budget allocation for Measure 19

Sub-Measure	Title of Measure	Total Public (Incl. Transitional Funds)
19.1	Preparatory Support	866,667.00
19.2	Implementation of operations under the CLLD Strategy	6,601,333.00
19.3	Preparation and Implementation of co-operation activities of the Local Action Group	300,000.00
19.4	Running costs and animations	1,725,333.00
	Total	**9,493.333.00**

Source: Intervention Logic Data provided by the MA (2021)

The relevant evaluation question to address for Focus Area 6B is: *'To what extent have RDP interventions supported local development in rural areas?'*

Given that as at the end of 2021, no realised expenditure was incurred on M16, this common evaluation question is addressed in this report entirely through the assessment of LEADER.

Figure 2.3: Malta LEADER Framework

Managing Authority

Rural Development Programme - €149.3 million (Incl. EURI & Transitional funds)

Measure 19 LEADER

LEADER Budget
€9.5 million (Incl. Transitional funds)
Allocated between 3 LAGs

- Majjistral LAG
- Xlokk LAG
- Gozo LAG

Local Development Strategy, one for each LAG Bottom-up approach

Delivery Mechanism

Impact of the LEADER Actions

Based on the CLLD principles
- Specific regional area
- Public Private Partnership
- Area-based & multisector LDS
- Innovation
- Networking
- Cooperation

- Social Capital
- Cultural Capital
- Rural Environment
- Rural Economy
- Governance

Source: Based on the European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development 2017 guidelines

3 Intervention Logic of the RDP in relation to LEADER

This section turns its focus on the implementation of LEADER in Malta, by exploring the intervention logic of the RDP when it comes to LEADER. The intervention logic of the RDP 'establishes the causal chain from the budgetary input, via the output and the results of measures, until their impact' (Cagliero et al, 2010). Thus, the intervention logic guides the consecutive assessment of a measure's contribution to achieving its objectives. The intervention logic starts from the needs of rural areas, which describe the socio-economic or environmental requirements to which the programme and the measures should respond.

The policy response is developed through what is referred to as the "hierarchy of objectives" (Cagliero et al, 2010), representing the break down from the overall objective, via more specific objectives, to operational objectives, in harmony with general development aims expressed at EU and Member States' level. Therefore, the strategy of the RDP, composed by activities and measures meeting the needs of rural areas, is built on the "hierarchy of objectives". This "hierarchy of objectives" is in turn matched by a "hierarchy of indicators" which reflect the different elements of the intervention logic of a measure (Cagliero et al, 2010).

Figure 3.1: The intervention logic
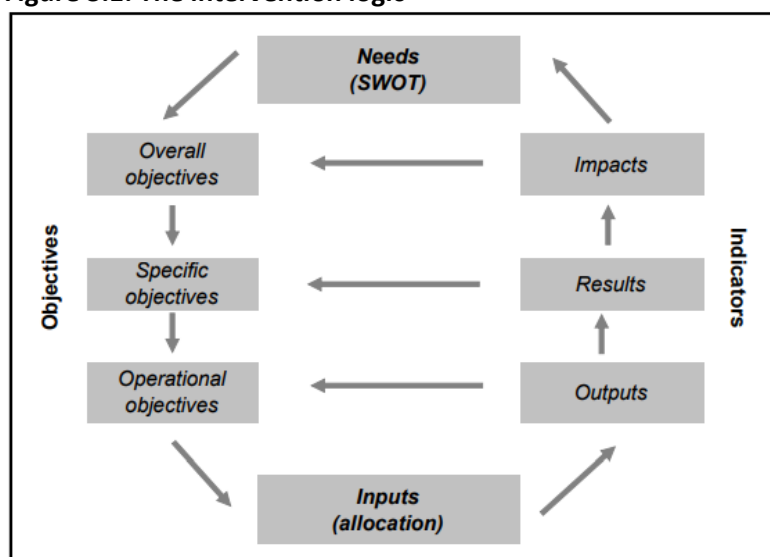
Source: EAAE, 2010

This chapter delves into the intervention logic of the Maltese RDP (2014-2022) which is built upon the same process described in the introduction to this chapter (refer to **Error! Reference source not found.**), but with a focus on the needs underlying the LEADER measure.

Malta's RDP has identified the following five needs that have emerged from the SWOT analysis through discussions with rural stakeholders and potential beneficiaries:

1. **Water, waste & energy**: improving sustainable use and generating renewable energy
2. **Maltese quality produce**: improving quality, traceability, strategic marketing, adding value, branding and promotion
3. **Sustainable livestock:** improving resource efficiency, competitiveness and productivity, and welfare
4. **Landscape and environment**: managing habitats and features

5. **Wider rural economy & quality of life**: developing rural tourism, rural skills and promoting social inclusion.

The table**Figure 3.***1***Error! Reference source not found.** below shows how each of these needs are addressed by the RDP through the 'hierarchy of objectives' or otherwise referred to as Focus Areas (FAs).

Table 3.1: Needs Assessment by Focus Area

	1A	1B	1C	2A	2B	3A	3B	4A	4B	4C	5A	5B	5C	5D	5E	6A	6B	6C
Need1: Water, wastes and energy	1	1	1	1				1	1		1	1	1	1				
Need2: Maltese quality produce	1		1	1	1	1						1				1	1	
Need3: Sustainable livestock	1	1	1	1	1	1		1			1	1	1	1				
Need4: Landscape and environment	1		1					1	1	1					1			
Need5: Wider rural economy and quality of life	1		1	1	1											1	1	1

Source: Maltese RDP

In this Thematic Evaluation the focus is on FA 6B - Fostering local development in rural areas – which contribute towards addressing Need 2 and Need 5.

The needs were identified from the SWOT analysis that is presented in Chapter 4 of the RDP. The following table presents the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as derived in the RDP, and which led to derivation of Need 2 -Maltese Quality Produce- and Need 5 -Wider Rural Economy and Quality of Life.

Table 3.2: SWOT Analysis related to Focus Area 6B

SWOT	Need 2	Need 5
STRENGTHS	S.3 Customer Loyalty and demand for quality produce S.4 Short supply chain S.5 Delivery of fresh produce S.6 Small distance for produce to be transported to consumers S.8 Increased local interest in rural management S.9 Already set-up co-operatives S.12 Increasing awareness about the benefits of organic produce S.15 Farmland provides valuable function with respect to rainwater capture S.16 Low GHG emissions from agricultural waste S.19 Accessibility to rural development	S.1 Strong cultural attachment to farming S.7 The natural environment is considered and important economic and cultural asset S.8 Increased local interest in rural management S.9 Already set-up co-operatives S.10 High level of broad-band penetration S.11 Vital role of farmers in shaping and managing the distinctive Maltese landscape S.12 Increasing awareness about the benefits of organic produce S.13 Good climatic conditions for rural tourism S.14 Garrigue and maquis represent habitats of national and international importance for biodiversity S.15 Farmland provides valuable function with respect to rainwater capture S.16 Low GHG emissions from agricultural waste S.17 Growing renewable energy sector S.18 Demand for risk prevention measures from the farming sector S.19 Accessibility to rural development
WEAKNESSES	W.1 Lack of knowledge and expertise W.2 Low level of education and training W.4 small scale farming W.5 Limited veterinary and laboratory services W.6 Lack of traceability in the sale and marketing of fresh produce W.7 Lack of control on the quality and origin of imports W.8 lack of cold storage and processing facilities W.9 Fragmentation arable land has a negative impact on agricultural land W.11 Difficulty in leveraging economies of scale W.13 Lack of trust and high level of competition between farmers	W.1 Lack of knowledge and expertise W.2 Low level of education and training W.4 small scale farming W.7 Lack of control on the quality and origin of imports W.8 lack of cold storage and processing facilities W.9 Fragmentation arable land has a negative impact on agricultural land W.10 Physical geographical constraints W.11 Difficulty in leveraging economies of scale W.12 Difficulty of young farmers to enter the industry W.13 Lack of trust and high level of competition between farmers W.14 Cost of energy and water W.15 Ageing agricultural population

SWOT	Need 2	Need 5
	W.16 High levels of part-time manual labour create difficulties in getting produce to the market W.19 Very limited potential for animal grazing W.22 Limited Land space W.27 Small land parcels W.31 Water management W.33 High Nitrate levels W.34 water scarcity W.36 No local expertise to implement prevention measures W.37 Dilapidated farm access roads	W.16 High levels of part-time manual labour create difficulties in getting produce to the market W.17 Distance from international markets W.19 Very limited potential for animal grazing W.20 Low income in livestock, pig, and poultry sectors W.22 Limited Land space W.23 Low cover of woodlands W.24 Landscape degradation through land abandonment W.25 Insufficient capture, management, and use of rainwater W.26 Vulnerability of agricultural land to pests and diseases W.27 Small land parcels W.28 Underutilisation of natural and cultural heritage W.29 seasonality within the tourism industry W.30 Social disadvantage and exclusion arising is rural households which remain dependent upon agriculture as their main source of income W.32 Limited sustainable utilisation of animal waste W.33 High Nitrate levels W.34 water scarcity W.35 Waste management W.36 No local expertise to implement prevention measures W.37 Dilapidated farm access roads W.38 Small size of LAGs W.39 Limited management skills available to implement and manage LAGs
OPPORTUNITIES	O.1 Potential of further viability and sustainability O.2 Enhancing productivity and innovation by promoting education and skills O.3 Promoting innovation and knowledge transfer through cooperation. O.4 Shift towards innovative & more environmentally friendly technologies O.5 Better quality produce & development of new crops O.6 Improved business performance	O.1 Potential of further viability and sustainability O.2 Enhancing productivity and innovation by promoting education and skills O.3 Promoting innovation and knowledge transfer through cooperation. O.4 Shift towards innovative & more environmentally friendly technologies O.5 Better quality produce & development of new crops O.6 Improved business performance O.7 Increasing demand for quality local agricultural produce

SWOT	Need 2	Need 5
	O.7 Increasing demand for quality local agricultural produce O.8 Opportunity to educate consumers with respect to fresh produce O.9 Developing markets for agricultural products and services O.10 Improve the sustainability and performance of agricultural holdings O.11 Improving agricultural productivity and profitability through investment O.12 Rehabilitation of disused quarries and abandoned land for agricultural purposes O.13 Increased scope of environmental intervention O.14 Increase resilience to climate change O.16 Improving approaches to soil management and irrigation O.17 More efficient use of water resources nutrient input to crop farming O.18 Maintaining genetic resources O.19 Potential for organic farming O.20 Potential for RES, exploiting nutrient values in manures and potential for energy generation through biogas O.21 Potential rural and eco-tourism O.22 Improving resource efficiency O.23 Potential for treated sewerage effluent for agricultural purposes O.24 Increased stability and sustainability for the farming sector through risk prevention measures O.25 Potential to involve rural communities	O.8 Opportunity to educate consumers with respect to fresh produce O.9 Developing markets for agricultural products and services O.10 Improve the sustainability and performance of agricultural holdings O.11 Improving agricultural productivity and profitability through investment O.12 Rehabilitation of disused quarries and abandoned land for agricultural purposes O.13 Increased scope of environmental intervention O.14 Increase resilience to climate change 0.15 Recognising the value of landscape and historical environmental assets O.16 Improving approaches to soil management and irrigation O.17 More efficient use of water resources nutrient input to crop farming O.18 Maintaining genetic resources O.19 Potential for organic farming O.20 Potential for RES, exploiting nutrient values in manures and potential for energy generation through biogas O.21 Potential rural and eco-tourism O.22 Improving resource efficiency O.23 Potential for treated sewerage effluent for agricultural purposes O.24 Increased stability and sustainability for the farming sector through risk prevention measures O.25 Potential to involve rural communities
THREATS	T.1 Reluctance of farmers to change practices T.2 Failure to adapt to new technologies T.3 Poor farm management T.4 Lack of quality assurance for the long-term sustainability of the sector	T.1 Reluctance of farmers to change practices T.2 Failure to adapt to new technologies T.3 Poor farm management T.4 Lack of quality assurance for the long-term sustainability of the sector T.5 Unsustainable use of natural assets and overutilisation f finite resources

SWOT	Need 2	Need 5
	T.5 Unsustainable use of natural assets and overutilisation f finite resources T.6 Diffuse pollution for agriculture T.7 Increasing input cost and higher cost of production T.8 Costs associated with the removal and storage of livestock manure T.9 More lucrative alternative career options for young people in the agricultural sector T.10 Decline of local indigenous populations and varieties for both livestock and endemic crops T.11 Creeping development T.12 Increased impact of climate change T.13 Soil sealing T.14 Soil contamination T.15 Soil Salination T.16 Environmental degradation and biodiversity decline T.17 Risks for animal and plant diseases introduced from abroad or due to climate change T.18 Limited knowledge within the farming community on organic farming T.20 Fresh water resources under considerable strain T.21 Increasing water demand T.22 Insufficient risk prevention measures T.23 Administrative burden related to funding implementation undermines the viability of the LAGs	T.6 Diffuse pollution for agriculture T.7 Increasing input cost and higher cost of production T.8 Costs associated with the removal and storage of livestock manure T.9 More lucrative alternative career options for young people in the agricultural sector T.11 Creeping development T.12 Increased impact of climate change T.16 Environmental degradation and biodiversity decline T.17 Risks for animal and plant diseases introduced from abroad or due to climate change T.18 Limited knowledge within the farming community on organic farming T.19 Deterioration of rural areas including natural and cultural heritage. T.20 Fresh water resources under considerable strain T.21 Increasing water demand T.22 Insufficient risk prevention measures T.23 Administrative burden related to funding implementation undermines the viability of the LAGs

Source: Rural Development Programme for Malta

Once these needs were established, the next step (refer to **Error! Reference source not found.**) was to establish the measures to address these needs, identify the financial allocation and establish the relevant indicators to assess the achievement of the measures towards those needs. This flow is presented in *Table 3.3*Table **3.**2 and *Table 3.4* which present the measure, the budget and the respective indicators for FA6B.

Table 3.3: Focus area 6B

Measure	Name	Sub-measure	Name	Original Approved Public Expenditure Allocation	Public Expenditure – Including Transitional	Total Realised (2021)
7 **Priority 6 - Fostering local development in rural areas**
16	Co-operation	16.2	Support for pilot projects, and for the development of new products, practices, processes, and technologies	250,000	250,000	-
19	Support for LEADER Local Development (CLLD)	19.1	Preparatory support	593,750	866,667	345,015
		19.2	Implementation of operations under the CLLD Strategy	4,425,000	6,601,333	1,665,462
		19.3	Preparation and implementation of co-operation activities of the Local Action Group	300,000	300,000	37,674
		19.4	Running costs and animation	1,181,250	1,725,333	838,464
Total				**6,750,000**	**9,743,333**	**2,886,615**

Source: Intervention logic, 29th May 2022

Table 3.4: Output and Result Indicators for FA6B

Focus Area		Measure		Output Indicators	Value
6B	**Fostering local development in rural areas**	M16	**Co-operation**	Total Public Expenditure € (16.1 to 16.9)	250,000
		M19	**Support for LEADER local development (CLLD)**	**Number of LAGs selected**	3
				Population Covered by LAG	268,733
				Total Public Expenditure € - preparatory support (19.1)	866,666
				Total public expenditure € - support for implementation of operations under the CLLD strategy (19.2)	6,601,333
				Total public expenditure € - preparation and implementation of co-operation activities of the LAG (19.3)	300,000
				Total public expenditure € - support for running costs and animation (19.4)	1,725,333

Focus Area		Result Indicators		Target 2025
6B	**Fostering local development in rural areas**	T21	**% of rural population covered by local development strategies**	**99.7**
			Rural population covered by local development strategies	268,733
		T23	**Jobs created in supported projects**	10

Source: RDP Version 6.1 and Intervention Logic (2021)

4 Local Development Strategies by Malta's Local Action Groups (LAGs)

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the Local Development Strategies (LDSs) for each of the LAGs[14] in Malta. The main objective of each of the LDSs is to deliver support to their respective rural areas especially through the implementation of small-scale projects. Through this approach, LAGs can target better the needs and priorities of their territory since they are part of the territory itself. **Section 4.1** describes the general composition of the LAGs in Malta, which basically covers three territories, being Gozo, Majjistral and Xlokk. **Section 4.2** explores the LDS of each LAG, delving into aspects such as the overall budget, the SWOT analysis and the measures programmed under each LDS. This is followed by a description of the LAG structure in **Section 4.3**.

4.1 Rural Territories

For the purpose of the RDP, rural areas are defined as follows:
• having a population density lower than 5,000 persons per square kilometre,
• having not less than 10% of the area of the locality agricultural land,
• having not less than 35% of the locality outside development zone.

The island of Malta is composed of 54 local councils whereas Gozo consists of 14. Out of these 68 local councils, only 47 rural communities were eligible to participate in the LEADER measure whilst the remaining 21 localities were not eligible since they are within urban areas.

Figure 4.1 shows the territory of each LAG, according to local council.

As highlighted in the RDP, these local rural areas cover about 289 Km^2 or 94% of the total surface area of the island with a total population of 276,082 inhabitants or 66% of the total population. The average population density in these areas is of 955 persons per Km^2. The remaining 34% or 141,350 inhabitants live in the urban localities which occupy around 6% of the island's surface area resulting in a high average population density of 7,661 persons per Km^2. The villages and towns in orange in

Figure 4.1 are not within the territory of a LAG because these are predominantly urban.

In order to implement LEADER, three LAGs have been selected. Apart from local councils, LAGs are also made up of members coming from the private sector, civil society and other organisations within the LAGs' territory.

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[14] A Local Action Group (LAG) is a non-profit-making composition made up of public and private organisations from rural villages having a broad representation from different socio-economic sectors. Through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), LAGs can apply for financial assistance in the form of grants to implement the Local Development Strategy of their respective territory. Source: Local Action Groups (gov.mt)

Figure 4.1: Rural Territories in Malta

Source: General Composition of the LAG's (gov.mt)

4.2 An overview of Local Development Strategies

This section presents the main elements of the LDSs designed for each of the three LAG territories in Malta. For each LDS, this section explores each of the following:

- A description of the territory
- The overall objective of the LDS
- The overall budget
- The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of the territory
- The strategic needs of the territory
- The measures programmed under the LDS

4.2.1 LDS for Gozo

Gozo is geographically the second largest island of the Maltese archipelago. Another smaller island, Comino, is located in the channel separating Malta and Gozo. Gozo has 14 local councils (municipalities) and a population of 31,592 persons as at the end of 2014 rising to 34,563 as at 2020.[15]

The Island preserves a distinct identity and is sought after for its lifestyle. The region is particularly known for its landscapes and rural character. Indeed, this rural character has made Gozo attractive to

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[15] NSO regional statistics, 2022.

both domestic and international visitors. Gozo is also rich in cultural heritage, agriculture and tourism are the main economic sectors in Gozo. One of the main challenges that the region faces is the emigration of younger generations due to better career prospects on mainland Malta.

The overall objectives of the LDS developed for Gozo are to:
- increase investment and create jobs,
- increase innovation,
- increase the number of businesses in Gozo,
- attract younger people to Gozo,
- promote the Gozo lifestyle and;
- encourage partnership projects between the private and the public entities.

Towards this end, the LDS has an overall budget of €2,980,818, which is distributed as follows:
- Preparatory support - €150,000
- Support for the implementation - €2,242,785
- Running costs and animations - €489,032.83
- Cooperation activities - €99,000

The SWOT analysis for Gozo, which was presented in the Strategy, was based on a solid understanding of the socio-economic and environmental developments of the island but was enhanced further through the adoption of a bottom-up approach whereby extensive public consultations were undertaken to develop the strategy. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified throughout this process were categorised under five categories, mainly: Economy, Environment, Social, Culture and Heritage and Governance.

Strengths

- **Economic:** Higher resilience to economic shocks due to prevalence of micro-businesses, Strong reputation for domestic tourism and incipient activities in tourism niches, Strong development in infrastructure

- **Environmental:** Presence of unique natural environment, more abundant environmental capital

- **Social:** Higher community ties, Considerable knowledge on traditions by elderly, Perceived enhanced quality of life, Safe and secure living environments, Lower population density

- **Cultural:** Significant number of cultural heritage sites

- **Governance:** Existence of specific Ministry for Gozo, Active involvement in local government, Strong presence of NGOs, Existence of Gozo Regional Council, Tangible results produced by the implementation of the first LEADER in Gozo

Weaknesses

- **Economic:** Accessibility issues, Emigration of youths, Smallness and peripherality, Low productivity, Difficulties in determining one clear direction for education, Seasonality in economic activity, Excess dependence on public sector, Low to no presence of 'new economy' activities

- **Environmental:** Lack of quantity and quality of irrigation water, Land fragmentation, Unsustainability of certain agricultural practices

- **Social:** Degentrification of population, Lack of openness to external cultural influences, General lack of sufficient amenities for youths and young families

- **Cultural:** Ageing population, Exploitation of cultural heritage sites

- **Governance:** Excessive fragmentation of NGOs, relatively higher bureaucratic costs due to small nature of operators, Insufficient statistical information on Gozo, Fragmentation of businesses, Excessive proximity of social networks limits proper and fair conduct of certain governance functions

SWOT

Opportunities

- **Economic:** Gozo's location and uniqueness creates opportunity for niche markets (ex: film industry), Economic value for tourism valorisation of Gozo's unique characteristics, Potential for further development in agriculture, Opportunities for 'new economy' activities, Unexploited potential of youth entrepreneurship

- **Environmental:** Presence of under-valued sites, Potential for climate adaptation investments

- **Social:** Positive traits of Gozo's lifestyle could be promoted to wider audiences, Attraction of youths through modernisation of NGOs and other social actors

- **Cultural:** Widening of knowledge and appreciation of indigenous food and craft products, as well as sites could enhance cultural and natural heritage capital

Threats

- **Economic:** Potential severe repercussions from shocks due to excessive dependence on a limited number of sectors, Vulnerability of agriculture to climate conditions, Dependence on national political for the undertaking of substantial investment, Careers in traditional activities are perceived to be inferior by workers and students

- **Environmental:** Vulnerability to climate change, Development of economic activities in a manner that is incompatible with the valorisation of Gozo's natural environment

- **Social:** Development of economic activities in a manner that is incompatible with the valorisation of Gozo's lifestyle

- **Cultural:** Development of economic activities in a manner that is incompatible with the valorisation of cultural and natural heritage sites

- **Governance:** Excessive fragmentation and inappropriate use of proximity could deteriorate the efficiency of resource use

Source: Gozo LEADER Strategy, 10th of November 2022

On the basis of this SWOT, the LDS for Gozo identified the following strategic needs for Gozo:

- **Need 1: New Economy Activities**: Diversification into 'new economy' activities which:
  - (i) create job opportunities for younger, better skilled workers
  - (ii) create synergies with the existing economic base, while reducing dependence on few sectors,
  - (iii) are less influenced by peripherality, physical transport costs, and smallness issues,
  - (iv) are based on a backbone of micro-and small enterprises whose competitiveness does not require economies of scale and;
  - (v) generate opportunities for focused training for youths and workers.

- **Need 2: Food Supply Chain Verticalisation**: Enhance the value added and reduce seasonality in agriculture and tourism though:
  - (i) the valorisation of Gozo gastronomy within the tourism product offering
  - (ii) the verticalisation of food production in Gozo through strengthening of the local supply chain and;
  - (iii) the promotion of innovation in both sectors.

- **Need 3: Agriculture and Environment**: Enhancement of the interplay between agriculture and environment by:
  - (i) investments which reduce inherent weaknesses in agriculture (e.g., water),
  - (ii) improving the environmental sustainability of agricultural practices and;
  - (iii) promoting climate-friendly practices.

- **Need 4: Climate and Environment**: Enhancement of environmental amenities and climate resilience within the context of sustainable economic development.

- **Need 5: Gozo Lifestyle**: Preserve and valorise the Gozo traditional lifestyle, while ensuring sufficient openness to positive external influences for social regeneration through the retention and attraction of younger population cohorts, to develop the Gozitan lifestyle proposition into a competitiveness asset for sustainable tourism and 'new economy' activities.

- **Need 6: Cultural Heritage**: Preservation of cultural heritage assets and creation of knowledge regarding such heritage, and valorise heritage assets to develop sustainable tourism, education and other activities.

- **Need 7: Partnership Approach**: Foster a stronger partnership approach between NGOs, business and public governance, also to reduce excessive fragmentation.

The objectives of the Strategy and needs of the region are transformed into measures which aim to support the needs of relevant stakeholders in the Gozo region. The subsequent Table presents details on the identified four measures programmed under the LDS for Gozo:

GAG 1: Develop an ICT media platform for the valorisation of Gozitan lifestyle concept
GAG 2: Maximise the contribution of Gozitan agriculture to the Gozitan culinary tradition, its evolution and future sustainability
GAG3: Develop Gozo's all-season tourism product offering
GAG 4 Improve the attractiveness of living in Gozo for young persons and young families

Table 4.1: Measures developed under the LDS for Gozo

Measures	Measure 1	Measure 2	Measure 3	Measure 4
Name of Measure	**Develop an ICT media platform for the valorisation of Gozitan lifestyle concept**	**Maximise the contribution of Gozitan agriculture to the Gozitan culinary tradition, its evolution and future sustainability**	**Develop Gozo's all-season tourism product offering**	**Improve the attractiveness of living in Gozo for young persons and young families**
Specific Objective	To showcase the various aspects of the Gozitan lifestyle which can serve as bases for sustainable development.	To sustain the appreciation and evolution of the Gozitan culinary tradition, generate better economic value added in Gozitan agriculture and food production, which benefits the health of consumers.	To enhance performance across all seasons, in a sustainable manner.	To improve amenities and services in Gozo so as to improve the quality of life for young persons and young families
Description of the Actions				
Type of operation	Showcasing the products of micro and small enterprises and providing an e-commerce portal; presenting activities of NGOs and providing opportunities, Preserving Gozitan identity, culture and natural heritage through digital documentation; providing opportunities for strengthening of social cohesion in Gozo; and sustaining the presence of Gozo in the social media.	Incentivise the development of the Gozitan culinary tradition, support food business operators in valorising the Gozitan culinary tradition, reap the health benefits of a wide acceptance of Gozo-based culinary products, develop the Gozitan culinary arts into tourist products and create self-sustaining activities leading to a greater appreciation and consumption of Gozitan agricultural and food products.	Development of infrastructure, including green infrastructure, aimed at attracting tourists, development of innovative events to attract international and domestic tourists and enhance the involvement of Gozo Local Councils and NGOs in the improvement of the Gozitan off-peak tourism in valorising the natural and cultural environment, in the off-peak season.	Development of infrastructures aimed at improving the quality of life and environment for young persons and young families and investments by NGOs, Local Councils, and/or business operators, with a direct interest in young persons and young families.
Type of Support	80% of the running expenses	80% of the running expenses	80% of the running expenses	80% of the running expenses
Action Intervention Logic	N.1 'New Economy Activities' N.4 'Climate and Environment' N.5 'Gozo Lifestyle' N.6 'Cultural Heritage' N.7 'Partnership Approach'	N.2 'Food Innovation/Evolution' N.3 'Agriculture & Environment' N.4 'Climate and Environment' N.7 'Partnership Approach'	N.4 'Climate and Environment' N.5 'Gozo Lifestyle' N.6 'Cultural Heritage'	N.4 'Climate and Environment' N.5 'Gozo Lifestyle' N.6 'Cultural Heritage'
Contribution to Cross Cutting Objectives	Competitiveness, innovation, and environment	Competitiveness, innovation, and environment	Competitiveness, innovation, and environment	Competitiveness, innovation, and environment

Measures	Measure 1	Measure 2	Measure 3	Measure 4
Eligible Beneficiaries	VOs, NGOs, and private entities	VOs, NGOs, and private entities	VOs, NGOs, and private entities	LCs, VOs, NGOs, and business operators
Aid Intensity	80%, as per Rural Development Plan for Malta 2014-2022	80%, as per Rural Development Plan for Malta 2014-2022	80%, as per Rural Development Plan for Malta 2014-2022	80%, as per Rural Development Plan for Malta 2014-2022
Budget Allocation	€175,805 Min €120,000 Max €200,000	€196,011 Min €100,000 Max €200,000	€1,146,083.94 Min €95,000 Max €180,000	€724,885.20 Min €40,000 Max €120,000
Target Indicators	Number of new ICT media platforms generated: 1 New jobs directly created by the action: 3 Number of media projects enabled by the action: 2 Size of circulation/media hits/views/exposure: 2,500,000 persons Number of businesses affected by the action: 150 Number of NGOs affected by the action: 75	Number of agricultural producers affected by the action: 3 Number of food production businesses affected by the action: 1 Number of culinary knowledge/research projects supported: 1 Number of jobs directly created by action: 3	Number of Local Councils (municipalities) affected by physical interventions: 6 Number of businesses affected by improved infrastructures and events: 6 Number of NGOs affected by action: 6 Number of cultural/environmental heritage tourism amenities improved: 7	Number of Local Councils (municipalities) offering new and improved amenities for young persons and families: 3 Number of businesses offering new and improved services for young persons and families: 1 Number of NGOs offering new and improved services for young persons and families: 5

Source: Gozo LEADER Strategy, 10th of November 2022

4.2.2 LDS for Majjistral

The Majjistral territory consists of sixteen localities situated on the North-West side of Malta, covering a substantial part of Malta's rural areas and associated coastlines. In 2014, Malta's population stood at 429,344, whilst the total population of the Majjistral region stood at 140,4967. Therefore, 33% of the total population in 2014, resided in the Majjistral region.

Over the past decade, the total population in Malta increased by nearly 6% whilst the population in Majjistral region increased by around 9%, leading to a higher-than-average annual growth rate of circa 1% per annum, as opposed to the average national 0.6% growth rate.

The Majjistral's total area is equal to circa 150.12Km^2. The largest locality within this territory is Rabat with an area of circa 27 Km^2. This is followed by Mellieha, Siggiewi and Mgarr. The smallest locality is Mdina with an area of just 0.89 Km^2.

The objectives of the LDS for Majjistral are:

- **to create opportunities for valorising the assets of the territory,**
- **transform the local know-how into a prospect for business and pleasure,**
- **to give space to the smaller projects that normally lag behind in the list of priorities,**
- **to enable people who, for one reason or another are not performing as well as the rest of the local community of which they form part,**
- **to provide some form of resilience in the face of happenings that challenge the traditional status and;**
- **to empower the people to move forward and be part of the same inevitable change that transforms their territory and their way of life.**

This is the vision that guides the strategy and the logic that underpins the measures and actions that have been programmed under this strategy.

Towards this end, the LDS has an overall budget of €2,275620 which is allocated as follows:
- Priority objective 1: To invest in the development of the cultural landscape and social heritage of the territory - €1,020.000
- Priority objective 2: To invest in the development of the environmental landscape of the rural areas- €499,120
- Trans-national and inter-territorial cooperation- €204,000
- Running Costs - €552,500

The LDS for Majjistral highlights the internal strengths and weaknesses of the territory, as well as the external opportunities and threats.

Strengths

- Lower level of long-term illnesses when compared to the Maltese average
- Lower level of dependency on the population of the region relative to the Maltese average
- Higher employment rates than national average
- Positive increase in new businesses
- Presence of large areas of land dedicated for agricultural purposes and high percentage of ODZ areas.
- Area of agricultural and rural importance and relatively high number of natural designated areas
- supporting Agro-biodiversity and positively contributing to the territory's economy
- Coastal and marine areas have a significant recreational and touristic value
- Relatively good air quality and number of beaches with good bathing water
- Limited manufacturing activity, thus leading to less environmental impacts and limited requests for large land use
- Presence of localities and sites having important cultural assets
- Presence of a Tourism hub

Weaknesses

- Lack of data available at regional levels
- Increased environmental pressure due to high population density and increased economic activity
- Conflicting use of environment
- Lack of information and interpretation facilities for visitors and tourists
- Numerous alleys and pathways in a run-down state
- Water sources under pressure and little water catchment
- Lack of infrastructure in various sectors
- Increase in properties, including vacant properties
- Little investment in crafts
- Limited collaboration between operators and stakeholders within the territory
- Limited funding for social and cultural activities, and for organisations implementing such programmes
- Limited availability of sports facilities within the territory.

SWOT

Opportunities

- Increasing population in the area leading to more economic activity,
- Slightly younger population than national average
- Higher literacy rates and educational attainment compared to the national average
- Untapped labour forces resources through inactive population, Increasing childcare
- Possibility of restoring cultural buildings and artefacts for improved tourism
- Exploiting local crafts and investing in them
- Coordinate between places of interest to create Tourism Information Centre's and utilise technology to digitise information
- Opportunities to showcase traditional farming techniques in rural settings
- Potential of creating synergies amongst different localities
- Trend towards informal educational systems and accreditations
- Use of existing sporting institutions to promote inclusivity
- Promotion of local produce and agriculture
- Potential for innovation, leading to the development of more sustainable farming techniques within the territory
- Greening of cities and open spaces identified as key for the improved well-being of the territory's communities

Threats

- Increasing population in the area may bring more pressure on resources,
- Increased population density leading to more pressure on land, water and air
- The importance of quarrying for hard-stone in the area brings about environmental repercussions, Urban sprawl
- High activity in fisheries putting pressure on coastal zones
- High activity in terms of agriculture and livestock rearing putting pressure on land
- Very limited knowledge transfer in terms of crafts and trades with the risk of long term loss of knowledge
- Limited land availability, leading to increased land use pressure in the region
- Calls for increased development in Gozo (including permanent links), leading to greater pressures on connecting areas
- High visitation patters to coastal areas leading to the loss of biodiversity
- Agricultural abandonment
- Loss of traditional knowledge associated with agriculture and fisheries
- Limited availability of funding for collaboration and innovation
- The loss of cultural heritage due to limited funding for restoration activities

Source: Majjistral LEADER Strategy, January 2021

Based on the SWOT analysis, the LDS for Majjistral identifies the following strategic needs for Majjistral:

- **Need 1:** To invest in the development of the cultural landscape and social heritage of the territory;
- **Need 2:** To invest in the development of the environmental landscape of the rural areas;
- **Need 3:** To invest in the transfer of skills and development of the knowledge base of the rural communities; and
- **Need 4:** To facilitate farm diversification and rural enterprise.

The objectives of the Strategy and needs of the region are transformed into measures which aim to support the needs of relevant stakeholders in the Majjistral region. The subsequent Table presents details on the identified six measures[16] programmed under the LDS for Majjistral:

- Priority objective 1: To invest in the development of the cultural landscape and social heritage of the territory
  - **Measure 1: Restoration of assets and sites of artistic and cultural value**
  - **Measure 2: Strengthening a healthy cultural identity**
  - **Measure 3: Promoting the cultural heritage**
- Priority objective 2: To invest in the development of the environmental landscape of the rural areas
  - **Measure 4: Development of green infrastructure**
- Other Objectives
  - **Trans-national and inter-territorial co-operation**
  - **Running costs and animation**

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[16] Initially there were seven measures however because of the COVID-19 pandemic the measure on training and education, which was originally measure 5, was not launched and removed.

Table 4.2: Measures under the LDS for Majjistral

Measures	Measure 1	Measure 2	Measure 3	Measure 4	Measure 5	Measure 6
Name	Restoration of assets and sites of artistic and cultural value	Strengthening a healthy cultural identity	Promotion of the Cultural Heritage	Development of green infrastructure	Inter territorial and transnational cooperation	Running costs and animation
Specific Objective	Invest in the cultural and historical heritage of the territory	Strengthen a healthy cultural identity in the rural community	Investment in the marketing and promotion of the unique cultural and natural heritage of the rural areas to continue to develop the tourism product.	Investment in green infrastructure of the territory as a means to develop the touristic product of the area.	Support joint projects	To support running and animation costs
Description of the Actions						
- Type of operation	Conservation and restoration of heritage items	Theatrical productions, leisure activities, activities related to traditional experiences and exhibitions	Supports the marketing, branding, promotion and dissemination of information related to the cultural and natural heritage	Native vegetation and trees in landscaping, regeneration of open space using natural and eco-friendly material, creation of green belts and green corridors, green infrastructure and restoration and embellishment of cultural and heritage sites.	Promotion of Malta's identity, create linkages and share experiences, social inclusion and adoption of innovative practices.	- Running costs - Animation - Training
- Type of Support	Reimbursement of eligible costs	Reimbursement of eligible costs	Reimbursement of eligible costs	Reimbursement of eligible costs	Contracts related to visits, training, information exchange and promotion activities are all eligible costs.	Reimbursement of eligible costs incurred and paid

Measures	Measure 1	Measure 2	Measure 3	Measure 4	Measure 5	Measure 6
- Action Intervention Logic	Priority 6c 'Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage'	Theme 5 of the Malta RDP for a wider rural economy and quality of life	Improve communication and cooperation and create opportunities for local tourism	RDP measure 4 sub measure 4.4 and RDP measure 10	Cooperation	In line with the strategy needs
- Contribution to Cross Cutting Objectives	Climate and Environment, Innovation	Climate and Environment, Innovation	Innovation	Environment	Collaboration to provide opportunities for knowledge exchange, training and skills development and for marketing the tourism and Malta's quality produce.	Climate and Environment Innovation
- Eligible Beneficiaries	LCs, NGOs, Vos and individuals	LCs, NGOs, Vos and private entities	LCs, NGOs, Vos and private entities	LCs, NGOs and Vos	Eligibility falls under the MA remit	LAGs
- Aid Intensity	80% of the total eligible expenditure	80% of the total eligible expenditure	80% of the total eligible expenditure	80% of the total eligible expenditure	80% support 20% private contributions	100% of costs
- Budget Allocation	Total: €410,400 Capping: €40,000 - Small scale restoration €12,000 - Restoration of objects	Total: €498,190 Capping: €40,000 - Major investment €20,000 - Small investment €1,000 - Organisation of events	Total: €111,410 Capping: €10,000 for isolated projects €18,000 for collaborations	Total: €499,120 Capping: €100,000 per project	Total Budget allocation: €204,000 Preparation and implementation of co-operation activities of the local action group: 17,000 EUR Inter-territorial co-operation: 68,000 EUR Transnational co-operation: 119,000 EUR	€552,500.00

Measures	Measure 1	Measure 2	Measure 3	Measure 4	Measure 5	Measure 6
- Target Indicators	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas -19 Number of small-scale restoration projects of sites of important cultural value -11 Number of small-scale restoration projects of artefacts of important cultural value -8 Total number of programmes promoting the cultural identity of the LAG territory through informational, educational and tourism activities -15 Number of visitors to the projects per year - 500	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas -22 Number of new/improved quality cultural and/or social activities in the LAG area - 22 Number of participants to the cultural activities per year, up to end of programming period -1,750	Number of projects by the end of the applicable programming period - 8 Number of visitors per annum per project - 100	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas - 9 Number of projects receiving support for the development of green infrastructure - 9	Number of cooperative projects - 1 Number of participating local operators and stakeholders - 15	Number of training sessions for LAG staff - 3 Number of information and networking sessions carried out by LAG - 6 Number of potential beneficiaries receiving support whilst developing operations and preparing applications - 30 Number of projects implemented by the LAG within the LDS Framework - 50

Source: Majjistral LEADER Strategy, January 2021

4.2.3   LDS for Xlokk

The Xlokk territory is situated along the south coast and extends from the West to the East of the Maltese Island. Seventeen localities fall under the Xlokk territory. The Xlokk localities represent a total population of 111,196 people and an area of circa 712km^2. The territory supports important national infrastructures, such as the Malta International Airport, the Malta Freeport, and many industrial estates such as the Bulebel, Hal Far and Hal Luqa industrial estates.

The overall objectives of the LDS for Xlokk are:
- cultural and social development,
- amelioration of landscape and environmental establishments and
- the creation of business opportunities particularly in niche areas of the rural economy

Towards this end, the LDS has an overall budget of €2,830,817.97, which are allocated as follows:

- Development of the cultural landscape, social heritage, and tourism product of the rural territory
    - Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value - €529,993.78
    - Strengthening a healthy cultural identity - €1,020,808.46
    - Promotion of the cultural heritage - €150,773.53
- Development of the environment landscape of the rural territory
    - Development of green infrastructure - €541,209.37
- Operations by the Foundation
    - Trans-national and inter-territorial co-operation - €99,000
    - Running costs and animation - €489,032.83

The LDS for Xlokk highlights the internal strengths and weaknesses of the territory, as well as the external opportunities and threats.

SWOT

Strengths

- Strong cultural associations, Business birth rates are more than twice the business deaths
- Presence of several SMEs
- Agriculture is dominated by forage and potato cultivation
- Coastal areas provide important recreational and tourism sites
- Presence of several local attractions and cultural and natural heritage sites

Weaknesses

- Ageing population, hefty increase in population density of coastal localities
- Relatively high percentage of illiterate people
- Percentage of no schooling higher than national average
- Tertiary level attainment is below national average
- Very small percentage of full-time skilled agricultural, fishery and forestry workers
- High dependency ratios, Secondary homes in coastal localities
- High emissions, Waste from construction sector
- Limited access to roads and tourist attractions
- Lack of designated crafts hub
- Small amount of designated natural areas
- Limited hotels
- Limited initiatives marketing Xlokk's tourism product
- Limited cooperation between local actors, Lack of data

Opportunities

- Improving infrastructure
- Improved marketing of tourist sites
- Restoration of cultural heritage sites
- Improving accessibility
- Most investment in formal and informal education directed to youth and children
- Increase in number of sign postings to better guide tourists
- Knowledge dissemination for the conservation and sustainable use of the territory's biodiversity
- More investments to improve the cultural element
- Increasing investment in open spaces
- Investment in particular crafts/skills
- Improved promotion of alternative forms of tourism
- Improvement in the marketing opportunities for the area's agricultural products

Threats

- The loss of sites and other areas of cultural importance
- Agricultural abandonment
- Loss of traditional landscape features
- Ageing population, Loss of biodiversity
- Loss of traditional knowledge associated with agriculture and fisheries
- Limited funding for research and development

Source: Xlokk LEADER Strategy, 26th November 2022

Based on the SWOT analysis, the LDS for Xlokk identifies the following key strategic needs for Xlokk:

- **Need 1:** To invest in the development of the cultural landscape and social heritage of the territory;
- **Need 2:** To invest in the development of the environmental landscape in rural areas;
- **Need 3:** To invest in the development of rural enterprise and trading activities;
- **Need 4:** To invest in the transfer of skills and development of the knowledge base of the rural communities; and
- **Need 5:** To invest in the development of the tourism product of the rural areas.

The objectives of the Strategy and needs of the region are transformed into measures[17] which aim to support the needs of relevant stakeholders in the Xlokk region. The subsequent Table presents details on the following measures programmed under the LDS for Xlokk:

- Development of the cultural landscape, social heritage and tourism product of the rural territory
  - **Measure 1: Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value**
  - **Measure 2: Strengthening a healthy cultural identity**
  - **Measure 3: Promotion of the cultural heritage**
- Development of the environment landscape of the rural territory
  - **Measure 4: Development of green infrastructure**
- Operations by the Foundation
  - **Measure 5: Trans-national and inter-territorial co-operation**
  - **Measure 6: Running costs and animation**

As can be seen from the analysis presented in this Section, the Xlokk and Majjistral territories have similar strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats which have been translated into similar needs and measures. On the other hand, the island territory of Gozo is distinct in its characteristics. Indeed, the island faces inherent challenges associated with double insularity. Consequently, the strategy for Gozo is different from the other strategies but addresses the specific needs of the region.

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[17] Initially there were seven measures however because of the COVID-19 pandemic the measure on training and education, which was originally measure 5, was not launched and removed.

Table 4.3: Measures under the LDS for Xlokk

| Measures	Measures 1	Measures 2	Measures 3	Measures 4	Measures 5	Measures 6
Name of Measure	**Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value**	**Strengthening a health cultural identity**	**Promotion of the cultural heritage**	**Development of Green Infrastructure**	**Inter territorial and transnational cooperation**	**Running costs and animation**
Specific Objective	Invest in the cultural and natural heritage	Strengthening a health cultural identity and improve quality of life	Promotion of unique cultural and natural heritage	Improve environmental landscape	Support joint projects	To support running and animation costs
Description of the Action						
Type of operation	Conservation and restoration of heritage items	Theatrical productions, leisure activities, activities related to traditional experiences and exhibitions	Branding of unique product or experience, recording, documentation, and dissemination of information on cultural heritage, cooperation to develop the territory and promote sites of cultural importance	Native vegetation and trees in landscaping, regeneration of open space using natural and eco-friendly material, creation of green belts and green corridors, green infrastructure and restoration and embellishment of cultural and heritage sites.	Promotion of Malta's identity, create linkages and share experiences, social inclusion and adoption of innovative practices.	- Running costs - Animation - Training
Type of Support	Reimbursement of eligible costs	Reimbursement of eligible costs	Reimbursement of eligible costs	Reimbursement of eligible costs	Contracts related to visits, training, information exchange & promotion activities are all eligible costs.	Reimbursement of eligible costs incurred and paid
Action Intervention Logic	Priority 6C	Theme 5 of RDP	Improve communication and cooperation and	RDP measure 4 sub measure 4.4 and RDP measure 10	Cooperation	In line with the strategy needs

Measures	Measures 1	Measures 2	Measures 3	Measures 4	Measures 5	Measures 6
			create opportunities for local tourism			
Cross Cutting Objectives	Improve rural economy and quality of life	Climate and Environment Innovation	Climate and Environment Innovation	Environment	Collaboration	Climate and Environment Innovation
Eligible Beneficiaries	LCs, NGOs, Vos and individuals	NGOs and Vos	LCs, NGOs, Vos and private entities	LCs, NGOs and Vos	Eligibility falls under the MA remit	LAGs
Aid Intensity	80% of the total eligible expenditure	80% of the total eligible expenditure	80% of the total eligible expenditure	80% of the total eligible expenditure	80% support, 20% private contributions	100% of costs
Budget Allocation	Total: €529,993.78 Capping: €20,000 per project	Total: €1,020,808.46 Capping: €30,000 - Major investment €15,000 - Small investment €5,000 - Organisation of events	Total: €150,773.53 Capping: €10,000 per project	Total: €541,209.37 Capping: €100,000 per project	Total: €99,000	Total: €489,032.83
Target Indicators	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for non-agricultural activities - 31 Number of restoration projects of artifacts of cultural value- 50	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for non-agricultural activities - 30 Number of improved/new quality cultural or social investment - 64 Number of participants following the undertaking of investment -6,000	Number of marketing and promotion projects - 19 Number of visitors per project - 150	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities - 10 Number of projects for the development of green infrastructure - 11	Number of cooperative projects - 1 Number of participating local operators and stakeholders - 15	Number of training sessions for LAG staff - 3 Number of information and networking sessions carried out by LAG - 4 Number of potential beneficiaries receiving support whilst developing operations and preparing applications - 72 Number of projects implemented by the LAG within the LDS Framework - 144

Source: Xlokk LEADER Strategy, 26th November 2022

4.3 LAGs Composition

The LAG Foundation is made up of both public and private partners from locally based socioeconomic sectors. Whilst the MA governs the overarching LEADER measure, the respective Foundations govern the territorial implementation of the LEADER. *Figure 4.1* depicts the different elements of the LAG.

Figure 4.2: LAG Structure
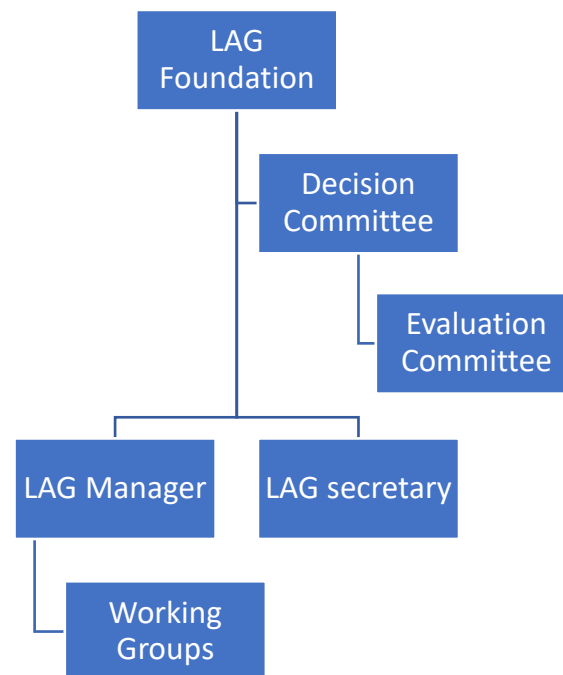
Source: LAG LEADER Strategies

1. **Decision Committee:** This is the core group of individuals responsible for overseeing the LAG's activities and making key decisions. The steering committee is typically made up of representatives from the local community and should include a balanced representation of different interests and sectors.

   The Decision Committee is composed of the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, DC secretary, the treasurer and other DC members. The DC is the decision-making body in relation to all activities within the LAG and is also responsible for all the recruitments and appointments throughout the whole process. The Decision Committee meets approximately once a month. In accordance with the statute, each meeting is minuted. The term of office of each DC member is three years, after which an election is held during the Annual General Meeting (AGM) which appoints the DC members.

2. **The Evaluation Committee:** An Evaluation Committee will be appointed to evaluate all applications and make its recommendations to the Decision Committee.

3. **Technical Secretariat:** This is the administrative arm of the LAG consisting of the LAG Manager and the secretary and is responsible for managing the day-to-day operations of the LAG, including coordinating meetings, providing support to the steering committee, and managing the implementation of local development initiatives.

4. **Working Groups:** These are sub-groups of the LAG, each focused on a specific area of activity, such as agriculture, tourism, or environmental sustainability. Working groups typically include experts and stakeholders with specific knowledge and expertise in the relevant area.

5. **Stakeholder Consultation:** The LAG should engage in a broad and inclusive consultation process to ensure that the local development strategy reflects the needs and aspirations of the local community. This can include public consultations, focus groups, and other engagement activities.

5 Evaluation Methodology

This chapter presents a detailed explanation of the LEADER evaluation framework **(section 5.1)** and a review of the evaluation questions used for this thematic evaluation which focuses on the implementation of the LEADER measure in Malta **(section 5.2)**. This is followed by a detailed description of the data collection process which involved a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data collection is geared towards the mix of evidence needed to make appropriate judgements about the intervention. It describes the data collected by means of an evaluation matrix **(Section 5.3)**. The is followed by a detailed account of the steps involved in conducting the adopted mixed methodology approach **(Section 5.4)**.

5.1 The Evaluation Framework of LEADER

This Thematic evaluation of LEADER is being carried out at the level of the RDP. According to the LEADER Evaluation Guideline issues by the European Evaluation Helpdesk (2017), the evaluation at the RDP level is defined by four main areas of assessment:

1. Assessment of the LEADER/CLLD contributions to the RDP's FA objectives. This assessment covers the analysis of contributions of operations implemented via CLLD strategies including cooperation projects and of their effectiveness and efficiency measured through common, additional and programme-specific result indicators linked to the respective FAs.

2. Assessment of LEADER/CLLD contributions to achieving the Union Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

3. Assessment of the LEADER/CLLD delivery mechanism to study the extent to which the programme administration and involved stakeholders have ensured the application of the LEADER method when implementing LEADER/CLLD through various rules and procedures.

4. Assessment of the added value of LEADER which addresses the benefits that are obtained as a result of the proper application of the LEADER method, compared to those benefits, which would have been obtained without applying this method. The added value of LEADER/CLLD at the programme level can be expressed in terms of improved social capital, improved governance and enhanced RDP results and impacts.

Although the assessment of the LEADER in this thematic evaluation is being carried out at the level of the RDP, to assess the overall performance of the LEADER as part of the RDP, LAG specific indicator data is being used. Towards this end, the evaluation findings are presented in terms of enhanced results, improved social capital and improved governance in the rural area as a result of the implementation of the LEADER as shown in **Figure 5.*1***.

Figure 5.1: Relations between delivery mechanism, LAG activities and added value
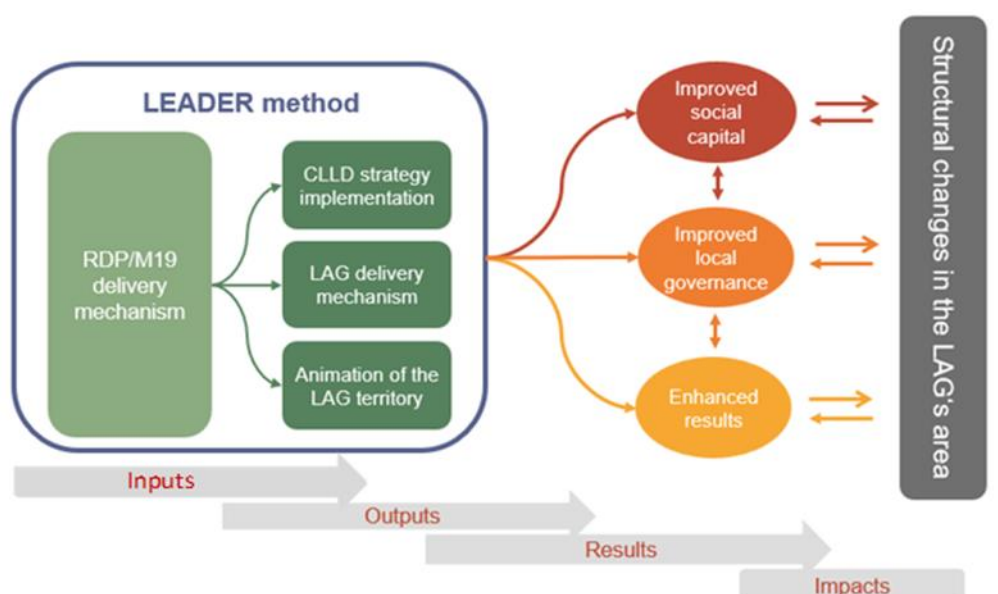
Source: Guidelines: Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD 2017, European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development

The three dimensions of assessment depicted in **Figure 5.1** are the measurable effects at the LAG level[18]. By understanding the contribution of the LEADER to the development of the rural area, it is possible to understand the effectiveness and efficiency of Measure 19 RDP intervention in supporting rural areas (FA 6B).

1. **Enhanced results and impacts** of the LEADER implementation, as compared to implementation without the LEADER method. It assesses the extent to which local needs are addressed. This is assessed by considering the contributions toa chieve rural policy objectives, the generation of more sustainable jobs and the generation of innovative products.

2. **Improved Social Capital** which includes features of social organisations such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit

3. **Improved Governance** consists of the institutions, processes and mechanisms through which public, economic and civil society stakeholders articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences to manage public affairs at all levels in a collaborative manner.

5.2 The Evaluation Questions

The main evaluation question that this evaluation attempts to answer is: **To what extent have RDP interventions supported local development in rural areas**? To answer this question six additional EQs have been identified as follows.

1. **To what extent has the LEADER method been effective in addressing local needs?** – This question assesses the usefulness of the strategy to local area and to potential beneficiaries with specific projects.

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[18] Guidelines: Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD 2017, European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development

2. **To what extent has LEADER contributed towards conserving and increasing the valorisation of cultural assets?** – This question assesses the extent to which the LEADER through the RDP has contributed towards restoring cultural assets, revitalising traditions and preserve cultural knowledge.

3. **To what extent has LEADER contributed towards an improvement in social capital?** This question assesses the LEADER contribution to social cohesion in various ways both at the level of the project, through cooperation in terms of design, application, and execution of a joint project and at the community level, with social cohesion enhanced through the project itself.

4. **To what extent has LEADER contributed towards the improvement of environmental capital?** One of the main objectives of the LEADER is the territory's environmental improvement. In fact, it is also one of the cross-cutting objectives which means that environment must feature throughout the LEADER strategy and therefore all measures must consider the environmental contribution.

5. **To what extent has LEADER contributed towards enhancing the rural economy**? The objective of this question is to capture the contribution of the LEADER in terms of economic growth, jobs creation, skills, and innovation.

6. **To what extent has LEADER contributed towards more effective multi-level governance?** This question assesses governance in terms of ethics, risk management, compliance, administration, monitoring and evaluation at the level of the RDP which concerns the Managing Authority (MA), at the level of the LAG which deals with the implementation of the LEADER strategies and the beneficiaries' participation and interaction with the LAGs.

More specifically, in order to assess the extent to which the RDP supported the development of local rural areas, this effect has been disaggregated into the abovementioned questions but which altogether assess the development of the local area as a result of the support provided by measure 19 (LEADER).

The evaluation process and the design of the above EQs is also based on five main evaluative criteria which represent the values that are used in an evaluation. More specifically, the five main criteria[19] guiding the evaluation process are:

- **Relevance**: If an impact evaluation aims to investigate the relevance of an intervention, it would seek to determine the extent to which the objectives of the intervention are in line with target group's requirements, country needs and policy direction and global priorities.
- **Effectiveness**: A measure of the extent to which an intervention achieves its objectives, considering their relative importance.
- **Efficiency**: This relates to the cost of achieving the intervention's objectives.
- **Impact**: The European Network for Rural Development defines impact as the medium and/or long-term causal effects of an intervention on the programme area. Evaluators assess the programme´s impacts (both intended and unintended) as expressed in 'net' terms, which is achieved by excluding all those effects which cannot be attributed to the programme´s intervention[20].
- **Sustainability**: This refers to the continuation of benefits from the intervention after the intervention has ceased. Interventions must be environmentally as well as financially sustainable.

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[19] As defined by the OECD-DAC
[20] RDP Impacts | The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) (europa.eu)

An evaluation may focus on some of these criteria rather than all of them, as some are appropriate to certain interventions and/or types of evaluation only.

5.3 Data Collection

Answering the EQs defined in the previous sub-section ensures that the purpose of the evaluation is fulfilled. The EQs also serve to provide direction on what data to collect, how to analyse the data and how to report on the evaluation findings.

The subsequent Table sets out the EQs that will be answered in this thematic evaluation and the method of analysis, judgement criteria and indicators that are used to answer each EQ. Each of the EQs feeds into the Common Evaluation Question (CEQ) 17 which relates to Focus Area 6B.

Table 5.1: Evaluation Matrix

Key Evaluation Question	Method of Analysis	Judgement Criteria	Evaluation Indicators
To what extent has the LEADER method been effective in addressing local needs?	Focus Groups (FGs) with LAG beneficiaries, Interviews with LAGs/LAG Committee, Case Studies and Survey to LAG Beneficiaries (Q6)	The LAG strategy aims to address local needs	% of respondents who agreed that the LAG strategy reflects the need of their organisation and locality (Survey Q6)
		The local identity and local profile have been strengthened	Views on the extent to which the local identity has been strengthened (FGs and Case Studies)
To what extent has LEADER contributed towards conserving and increasing the valorisation of cultural assets?	Focus Groups with LAG beneficiaries, Interviews with LAGs/LAG Committee, Data received from LAGs	Participation in cultural activities has increased	Views on the extent to which participation in cultural activities has increased (FGs)
		The targeted number of projects of important cultural value to be restored has been achieved	Number of restoration projects of important cultural value (LAGs Data)
		The targeted number of new/improved quality cultural and/or social investment in the LAG area has been achieved	Number of new/improved quality cultural and/or social investment in the LAG area (LAGs Data)
To what extent has LEADER contributed towards the improvement of environmental capital?	Focus Groups with LAG beneficiaries, Interviews with LAGs/LAG Committee, Data received from LAGs, Case Studies, Data from Closure Reports	The attitudes and perception of the community towards the environment has improved	Improvement in environmental awareness (FGs and Case Studies)
		The targeted number of projects receiving support for the development of green infrastructure has been achieved	Number of projects receiving support for the development of green infrastructure (LAGs Data)
		Supported projects are contributing to a carbon neutral economy	% of completed projects contributing to a carbon neutral economy (Closure Reports Data)
To what extent has LEADER contributed towards an improvement in social capital?	Focus Groups with LAG beneficiaries, Interviews with LAGs/LAG Committee, Data received from LAGs, Case Studies,	Cooperation projects been developed and implemented by LAGs, nationally and/or internationally	Number of participating local operators and stakeholders in inter-territorial and trans-national cooperation projects (LAGs Data)

Key Evaluation Question	Method of Analysis	Judgement Criteria	Evaluation Indicators
	Data from Closure Reports	Younger generations are enabled to link their future perspectives with a vision of the area they live in	Number of local councils, businesses and NGOs offering new and improved amenities for young persons and families (LAGs Data)
		An increase in trust and confidence among local actors in the LAG territory has been achieved	Views on the extent to which trust and confidence among local actors has increased (FGs)
		The density and quality of interactions between local actors has improved	Views on the extent to which the density and quality of interactions between local actors has improved (FGs)
		Capacity of local actors to organise themselves in various forms of partnerships, networks, lobbies and interest groups has increased	Views on the extent to which the capacity of local actors to organise themselves in various forms of partnerships, networks, lobbies and interest groups has increased (FGs)
To what extent has LEADER contributed towards more effective multi-level governance?	Interviews with LAGs/LAG Committee and MA, Survey to LAG beneficiaries (Q6), Data from LAGs	The involvement of local actors in decision making (bottom-up approach) has been strengthened	% of beneficiaries who agreed that their organisation was involved in the design of the LAG strategy for their region (Survey Q6)
			Number of participants in the events to set up the strategy (LAGs Data)
		A quick and flexible decision process was achieved by reducing the administrative burden	% of beneficiaries who agreed that the project application procedure is accessible and encourages local stakeholders to participate in LEADER
		The shared management of LEADER between different levels (vertical) has improved	Views on the extent to which the role of the MA facilitated the smooth implementation of LEADER (Interview with LAGs and MA)
		The shared management of LEADER at the same level (horizontal) has improved	Views on the extent to which effective collaboration existed between the (1) MA and PA and (2) between the three LAGs (Interview with LAGs and MA)
To what extent has LEADER contributed towards enhancing the rural economy?	Interviews with LAGs/LAG Committee and MA, Survey to LAG beneficiaries (Q5,8 and 9), Data from LAGs, Closure Reports Data	Similar investment results would not have been achieved over the same time frame and scale in the absence of leader	% of partial and zero deadweight (Survey Q5)
		Local businesses and NGOs have been supported by LEADER	% of beneficiaries who are of the view that LEADER is supporting businesses in their locality/region (Survey Q8)
			Number of approved applications (LAGs data)
		LEADER has contributed to improving human capital in the area	% of beneficiaries who are of the view that LEADER has contributed to improving the skills set of employees in the area (Survey Q9)
		LEADER has contributed to fostering innovation in the local community	% of beneficiaries who are of the view that LEADER has facilitated innovation (Survey Q9)

| Key Evaluation Question	Method of Analysis	Judgement Criteria	Evaluation Indicators
			% of completed projects with an innovative element (Closure Reports Data)

As shown in the evaluation matrix, the tools used to answer each EQ are the evaluation indicators which are quantitative or qualitative variables that provide a simple and reliable means to measure achievement. The evaluation matrix also refers to the different methods of analysis that are used in this thematic evaluation. The subsequent section builds upon the evaluation matrix by providing a detailed account of the steps involved in conducting each of the listed methods.

5.4 Methods of Assessment

This evaluation is designed in line with the Guidelines by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development's titled 'Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD' (August 2017) which stipulate that the evaluation of LEADER should involve an assessment of:

- The contributions made by LEADER/CLLD to RDP focus areas with regards to their effectiveness and efficiency; and
- The contributions to the Union Strategy for smart sustainable and inclusive growth.

Figure 5.2: Focus of the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD at the RDP level
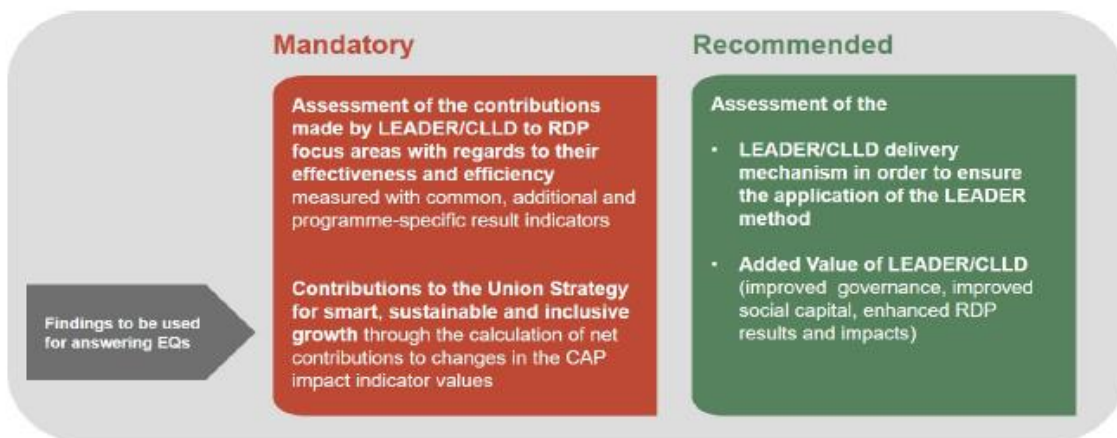
Source: Guidelines: Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD (August 2017)

As indicated in **Figure 5.*1***, the Guidelines also recommend that the evaluation includes the following aspects:

- an assessment of the LEADER/CLLD delivery mechanism which looks at the extent to which the programme administration and involved stakeholders have ensured the application of the LEADER method; and
- an assessment of the added value of the LEADER/CLLD which can be expressed as improved social capital, improved governance and enhanced RDP results and impacts.

Against this background, this evaluation adopts a mix of methodologies to address the requirements outlined in the Guidelines. This section articulates the implementation of each of the following methods:

- Analysis of data from Project Closure Reports and LAGs administrative data
- Organisation of Focus Groups with selected LAG beneficiaries
- Organisation of meetings with LAG Committee/LAGs and the MA
- Beneficiaries' survey

5.4.1 Analysis of Administrative Data

To collect comprehensive and timely data, the evaluators developed a set of excel-based tables which are filled by the LAGs on an annual basis. This dataset aims to track the progress registered by each of the three LAGs and includes data from 2018 onwards. In the first section of the dataset, LAGs are to fill in information on the number of calls issued in the preceding year as well as details about the calls issued, namely:

- Name of call
- Date of issue of call
- Number of applications received
- Number of applications approved
- Number of projects completed

The final part of the first section of the dataset requests information on the common indicators which are the following:

- Jobs created in supported projects (R24/T23)
- Number of partnerships created

The second section of the dataset requests periodic information on the specific indicators associated with the measures programmed under each of the LAG's strategy. The following tables list the specific indicators for each of the three LAGs, Xlokk, Majjistral and Gozo and the relative targets. As can be observed in the tables, the measures for Xlokk and Majjistral are similar in nature whereas the measures programmed under the Gozo LAG strategy reflect the specificities of the island of Gozo. It is important to Note that the targets for Gozo are lower as the strategy aims at developing partnerships and funding projects which are of a relatively larger size.

Table 5.2: Specific target indicators for the Xlokk LAG[21]

Measure	Indicator	Xlokk
1. Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value 2. Strengthening a healthy cultural identity	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas	31
	Number of restoration projects of artefacts of important cultural value	50
	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas	30
	Number of new/improved quality cultural and/or social investment in the area	64
1. Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value 3. Promotion of the cultural heritage	Number of participants following the undertaking of the investment needed, per year up to the end of the programming period	6,000
	Number of marketing and promotion projects by end of programming period	19
2. Strengthening a healthy cultural identity 4. Development of green infrastructure	Number of visitors per project	150
	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas	10
	Number of projects for the development of green infrastructure	11
5. Inter territorial and transnational cooperation	Number of cooperative projects	1
	Number of participating local operators and stakeholders	15
6. Running costs and administration	Number of training sessions for LAG staff and members of the Decision Body (by the Concerned Authorities)	3
	Number of information and networking sessions carried out by the LAG	4
5. Inter territorial and transnational cooperation	Number of potential beneficiaries receiving support whilst developing operations and preparing applications	72
	Number of projects implemented by the LAG with the framework of the LDS	144

Source: Xlokk LEADER Strategy, 26th November 2022

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[21] For the Xlokk and Majjistral LEADER Strategies apart from the specific indicators to the measures there are also a set of general measures attributed to the overall strategy. To date no information has been recorded by the LAGs on the general for all measures.

Table 5.3: Specific target indicators for the Majjistral LAG

Measure	Indicator	Majjistral
1. Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas	19
	Number of restoration projects of artefacts of important cultural value	8
	Number of small-scale restoration projects of sites of important cultural value	11
	Total number of programmes promoting the cultural identity of the LAG territory through informational, educational and tourism activities	15
1. Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value 2. Strengthening a healthy cultural identity 3. Promotion of the cultural heritage	Number of visitors to the projects per year	500
	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas	22
	Number of new/improved quality cultural and/or social investment in the area	22
	Number of participants following the undertaking of the investment needed, per year up to the end of the programming period	1,750
	Number of marketing and promotion projects by end of programming period	8
2. Strengthening a healthy cultural identity 4. Development of green infrastructure	Number of visitors per project	100
	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas	9
	Number of projects for the development of green infrastructure	9
5. Inter territorial and transnational cooperation	Number of cooperative projects	1
	Number of participating local operators and stakeholders	15
6. Running costs and administration	Number of training sessions for LAG staff and members of the Decision Body (by the Concerned Authorities)	3
	Number of information and networking sessions carried out by the LAG	6
5. Inter territorial and transnational cooperation	Number of potential beneficiaries receiving support whilst developing operations and preparing applications	30
	Number of projects implemented by the LAG with the framework of the LDS	50

Source: Majjistral LEADER Strategy, January 2021

Table 5.4: Specific indicators for the Gozo LAG

Measure	Indicator	Target
1. Develop an ICT media platform for the valorisation of Gozo lifestyle concept	Number of new ICT media platform generated	1
	New jobs directly created by the action	3
	Number of media projects enable by the action	2
	Size of circulation/media hits/view/exposure	2,500,000 persons
	Number of businesses affected by the action	150
	Number of NGOs affected by the action	75
2. Maximise the contribution of Gozitan agriculture to the Gozo culinary tradition, its evolution and future sustainability	Number of agricultural producers affected by the action	3
	Number of food production businesses affected by the action	1
	Number of culinary knowledge/research projects supported	1
	Number of jobs directly created by action	3
3. Develop Gozo's all season tourism product offering - Gozitan attractions and innovative events for all seasons.	Number of Local councils affected by physical interventions	6
	Number of businesses affected by improved infrastructures and events	6
	Number of NGOs affected by the action	6
	Number of cultural/environmental heritage tourism amenities improved	7
4. Improve the attractiveness of living in Gozo for young persons and young families	Number of local councils offering new and improved amenities for young persons and families	3
	Number of businesses offering new and improved services for younger persons and families	1
	Number of NGOs offering new and improved services for young persons and families	5

Source: Gozo LEADER Strategy, 10th of November 2022

The Xlokk and Majjistral LAG strategies also list several indicators which emanate from the local RDP, and which are used to evaluate the effects of the policy on the environment. The indicators are classified under five themes:

- Theme 1: Water, wastes and energy
- Theme 2: Maltese Quality Produce
- Theme 3: Sustainable Livestock
- Theme 4: Landscape and the Environment
- Theme 5: Wider Rural Economy and Quality of Life

By transposing these indicators on a regional level, an assessment of the individual strategies and their impact on the region through the fulfilment of such aims can be performed.

Table 5.5: Additional indicators in some of the LAG strategies

Indicator
Number of Projects Targeted for the conservation and management of natural assets/protected natural sites
Number of projects providing public spaces /recreation activities
Number of Projects in relation to renewable energy sources
Number of Projects implemented that include soil conservation
Number of water management projects
Number of waste management projects
Number of projects targeting the restoration of cultural heritage features, improvements of the cultural heritage
Total investment in renewable energy sources
Percentage of investment in renewable energy sources funded by LDS
Total investment in livestock
Percentage of investment in livestock funded by LDS
Areas (ha) concerned by investments in saving water
Location of projects with respect to groundwater safeguard zone*
Total investment in water management projects
Percentage of investment in water management projects funded by LDS
Total investment in waste management projects
Total energy produced from new renewable energy sources
Environmental impact assessment results on the landscape assessment**

Source: Xlokk and Majjistral LAG Strategies

The Xlokk and Majjistral LAG strategies also include the following additional output indicators, shown in the Table below.

Table 5.6: Output Indicators

Indicator
Number of beneficiaries receiving advice and similar support from the LAGs
Number of training days to LEADER staff by the relevant authorities
Number of trained beneficiaries /attendees to training

Source: Xlokk and Majjistral LAG Strategies

The LAGs submit data for the indicators listed above on an annual basis. This allows the MA and the evaluators to assess progress in the achievement of targets on a regular basis.

Another important data source for this evaluation is the closure reports submitted for projects that have benefitted from LEADER support and which have been completed. The analysis of data obtained from the closure reports allowed for the derivation of a number of key variables:

- Type of applicant
- Total Grant
- Total Project Cost
- Contribution to cross-cutting objectives
- Contribution to social/cultural/environmental/rural capital

The analysis of data derived from these two sources, namely the administrative data received annually from the LAGs and the data from the closure reports, is presented in Chapter 6 of this thematic evaluation report.

5.4.2 Focus Groups with selected LAG beneficiaries

While the administrative data from the LAGs and the information derived from the closure reports provide a valuable source of information for the evaluation, this data is limited by the extent of completed projects by June 2022. Against this background, three focus groups were organised with a number of selected LAG beneficiaries. The focus groups were organised in November 2022[22] and were organised as follows:

- Focus Group 1: Beneficiaries in the Gozo region
- Focus Group 2: Beneficiaries under M1 and M2 in the Xlokk and Majjistral regions
- Focus Group 3: Beneficiaries under M3 and M4 in the Xlokk and Majjistral regions

Annex 1 presents the questions that were discussed during the focus groups with beneficiaries. In essence, the questions aimed to collect examples and evidence on the cultural, social, environmental, and rural impact that LEADER funded projects might have had on the region. Participants in the focus groups were also given the opportunity to raise concerns about the delivery mechanism, funding, governance, administration, and other challenges.

5.4.2.1 The selection of focus groups

The selection of participants for the focus groups was based on an assessment of the closure reports such that only beneficiaries whose projects have been completed were considered for selection. The inclusion of completed projects allows for a better understanding of the impact that LEADER support has had so far. 104 closure reports were provided and analysed, of which 76 pertained to beneficiaries in the Xlokk region and 28 related to projects supported in the Majjistral region. The closure reports were analysed in terms of their key contribution (i.e., whether their main contribution is towards social, cultural, environmental, or rural capital) but also by the value of the project, the measure under which the project has been undertaken and type of applicant. Furthermore, 10 applications related to projects supported in the Gozitan region were also analysed to ensure adequate representation of all the three regions.

Based on this assessment, a total of five beneficiaries participated in the first focus group, seven beneficiaries participated in the second focus group and four beneficiaries in the third focus group (See list of participants in Annex Table A.2).

Table 5.7: Number of Beneficiaries selected by Focus group and Number of participants

Measures	Number of Invited Beneficiaries	Number of participants
Xlokk & Majjistral - Measures 1 & 2	10	5
Xlokk & Majjistral - Measures 3 & 4	19	4
Gozo - All measures	10	7

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[22] For Focus groups dates see Table A.1 in the Annex

The projects implemented by these beneficiaries included the restoration of cultural and heritage assets, upgrading and embellishment of parks and gardens, digital projects, and green infrastructure investments.

5.4.3   Meetings with LAG Decision Committee and MA

To explore the impact of the LEADER measure on the governance aspect, meetings were held with the Decision Committee (DC) of each of the three LAGs and with the Managing Authority (MA). In brief, the MA is responsible for the implementation of the LEADER measure as part of the RDP for Malta whereas the DC engaged within each LAG is responsible for the decision-making processes related to the implementation of the LDS.

Based on these meetings and the focus groups organised with the LAG beneficiaries, the governance aspect was explored in terms of two distinct levels:

- The level of the RDP, in terms of the relationship between the MA and the LAG
- The level of the LAG, in terms of the relationship between the LAG and its beneficiaries

The Annex section of this evaluation report outlines the main questions explored during the meetings held with the MA and the DC.

5.4.4   Design of the LAG beneficiaries' survey

The beneficiaries' survey[23] aims to investigate the additionality of LEADER support, whereby additionality is defined as 'the extent to which something happens as a result of an intervention that would not have occurred in the absence of the intervention'[24]. In essence, the survey consists of three sections. The first section is comprised of a set of five questions which serve to collect information about the region or locality in which the supported project is located, the measure under which the support is received, the value of support, the nature of the project and a question exploring the additionality element.

The question related to the additionality of LEADER support is shown in the below Figure. In this question, respondents are asked to answer a hypothetical question of what would most likely have happened if they had not received financial assistance from LEADER. This has been set to gauge whether there is an element of deadweight loss.

Table 5.8: Exploring the potential deadweight loss of LEADER

In the absence of financial assistance from LEADER, would you have (choose one option only):	
Gone ahead with the investment as now unchanged, that is, same scale and time	☐
Gone ahead at a later date (i.e., delayed the project)	☐
Gone ahead but at a reduced scale (i.e. changed the nature of the project-removed	☐
certain features such as the research function)	☐
Gone ahead but at a later date and at a reduced scale	☐
Abandoned the project	☐

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[23] Annex 2 presents the full survey.
[24] English Partnerships. (2008). Additionality Guide: A standard approach to assessing the additional impact of interventions. London: English Partnerships.

The above questions facilitate estimates of 'partial' versus 'pure' degrees of deadweight. If respondents indicate that in the absence of financial assistance, they would have gone ahead with the investment unchanged, that implies 'pure' (or full) deadweight. In contrast, if respondents indicate that without LEADER support, the project would have been delayed and/or would have been implemented at a reduced scale, that suggests 'partial' deadweight. Finally, if the absence of LEADER support would have led the beneficiary to completely abandon the project, that suggests 'zero' deadweight. By considering the number of respondents whose responses fall under the 'partial' and 'zero' deadweight categories, this evaluation derives the percentage of respondents who were impacted to some degree by the financial assistance from LEADER.

The second section of the survey focuses on the delivery mechanism of LEADER. Respondents are required to indicate, using a Likert scale, whether they believe that their organisation was adequately involved in the design of LAG strategies, whether the strategy reflects the local needs and whether the application process, eligibility conditions and communication tools used by LAGs are deemed to be adequate.

Finally, the third section of the questionnaire deals with the rural economy and innovation. In essence, in this section, respondents are required to indicate, also through the use of a Likert scale, to what extent they believe that the LEADER has contributed to the creation of jobs, improvement of skills, to enhancing development in the territory and to facilitating innovation.

5.4.5   Case Studies

The last method forming part of the mixed methodology approach for this evaluation is the case study analysis. This analysis was undertaken following the assessment of data provided by the LAGs, including the closure reports, and the meetings held with the LAG beneficiaries and LAGs. In this manner, a good understanding of the diverse range of projects that have benefitted from LEADER support could be obtained.

The aim of the case study analysis is to capture in more detail the impact of the LEADER on the local community and to explore the different nature of the projects which have been supported by this measure.

6. Evaluation Findings

This chapter presents the findings from a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches described in the preceding chapter, with the aim of determining the extent to which:

1. The LEADER method has been effective in addressing local needs;
2. LEADER has contributed towards conserving and increasing the valorisation of cultural assets;
3. LEADER has led to an improvement in environmental capital;
4. LEADER has led to an improvement in social capital; and
5. LEADER has contributed towards more effective multi-level governance.
6. LEADER has contributed towards enhancing the rural economy.

The findings presented hereunder are based on quantitative estimates centred around numerical indicators and qualitative information gathered through focus groups and questionnaires with beneficiaries, case studies and meetings held with the LAGs, Decisions Making Committees and the MA. Considering the completion status of the projects which are not yet finalised and thus limited availability of data, the use of a mixed method approach has been utilised to strengthen and increase the reliability of the findings of this evaluation.

This chapter is structured as follows:

- **Section 6.1** provides an overview of the budget available, committed and realised expenditure for Measure 19. It also provides an assessment of progress in the implementation of the strategies, in terms of the attainment of common output and result target indicators. The findings presented in this section are largely based on an analysis of administrative and monitoring data provided by the three Local Action Groups (LAGs) and the Managing Authority (MA).

- **Section 6.2** triangulates the different data sources and implements the mixed methods approach to provide evidence on the value added of LEADER in terms of the six EQs defined above. This section also presents a number of case studies with the objective of highlighting the achievement of LEADER by looking at individual projects.

6.1 LEADER – Implementation Progress

This section sets out the context for the evaluation findings which are presented in Section 6.2 by providing an overview of the approved budgets and projects supported through the LEADER measure. It also aims to provide some insight on the projects which have been completed by mid-2022. Finally, this section uses monitoring data to determine the progress recorded in the achievement of common output and target indicators.

6.1.1 Overview of LEADER implementation progress and supported projects

In 2021, the MA in collaboration with the three LAGs in charge of implementing the LEADER measure in their region registered positive progress in implementing M19. The most notable development in 2021 was recorded under M19.2 as a cumulative amount of 186 operations were selected resulting in a committed expenditure of more than €4.3 million while realised expenditure amounted to €1.7

million. In terms of the overall measure, the committed expenditure under Measure 19 represented 65% of the total approved allocation while realised expenditure remains relatively low at 30%. This however is to be considered in light of the fact that an additional €3 million were allocated to the measure from transitional funds in 2021.

Table 6.1: Overview of approved, committed and realised budgets by sub-measure

	Measure	Approved Allocation (Incl. transitional) (€)	Committed Allocation (€)	Realised Allocation (€)	Committed %	Realised %
M19 Support for LEADER Local Development (CLLD)	M19.1	866,667	365,584	345,015	42%	40%
	M19.2	6,601,333	4,320,028	1,665,462	65%	25%
	M19.3	300,000	299,961	37,674	100%	13%
	M19.4	1,725,333	1,192,000	838,464	69%	49%
	Total	**9,493,333**	**6,177,572**	**2,886,615**	**65%**	**30%**

Source: Intervention Logic Data provided by the MA (2021)

Indeed, the total approved allocation for M19.2 reached circa €6.6 million from the original allocation of circa €4.4 million and further support was also allocated for the running of the LAGs under M19.4 as well as for preparatory support. With the approval of the transitional funds, LAGs have been asked to update their strategies and determine whether the measures they have selected remain valid.

M19.3 which refers to cooperation activities by LAGs has been entirely committed but realised expenditure remains low at 13% of the allocated budget.

In terms of approved projects, administrative data provided annually by the LAGs indicates that over the period 2018 to mid-June 2022, there were a total of 220 approved applications. Of these, 83 represent completed projects, such that the share of completed projects is estimated to stand at 38% of approved applications.[25] As shown in Figure 6.2, the number of approved applications has been consistently increasing year-on year[26]. On the other hand, the number of completed projects started to decline in 2020 due to the impact of COVID which led to a significant slowdown in completed projects.

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[25] There is a mismatch between completed project registered in the administrative database and the number of closure reports submitted for analysis by the LAGs which may be due to a timing effect.
[26] Data for 2022 is only for the first half of the year.

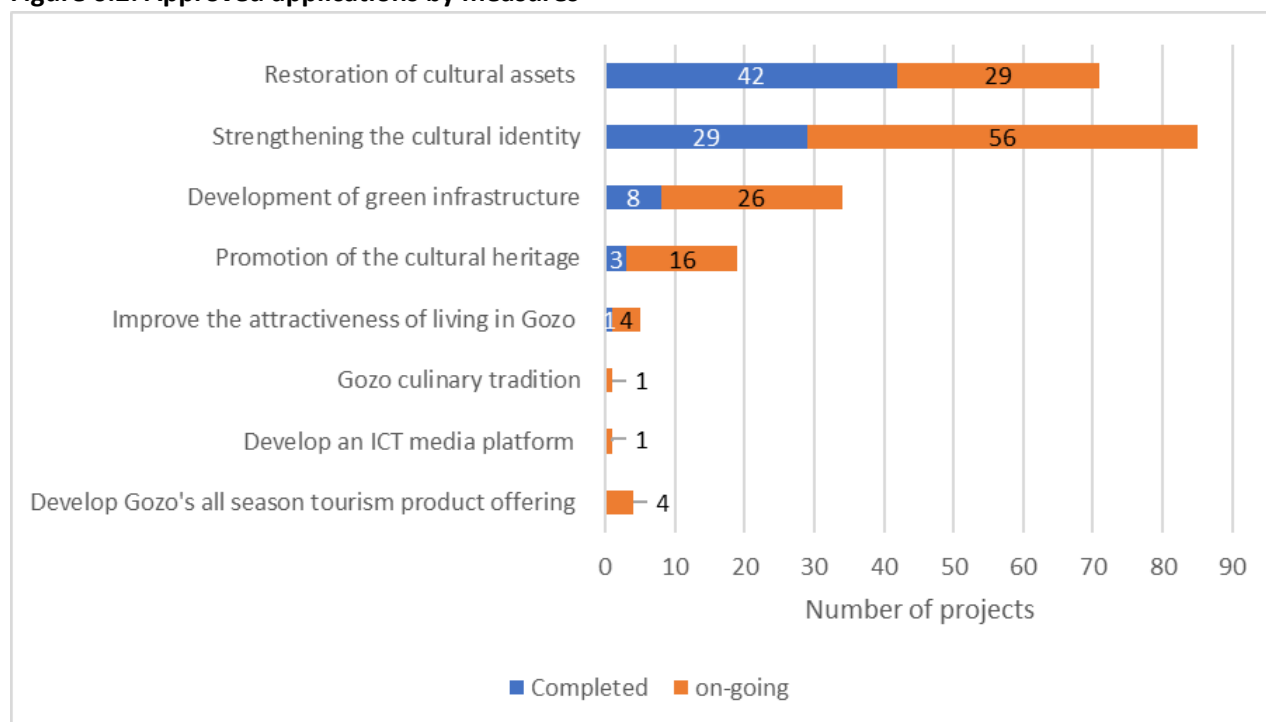**Figure 6.1: Approved applications and completed projects ***
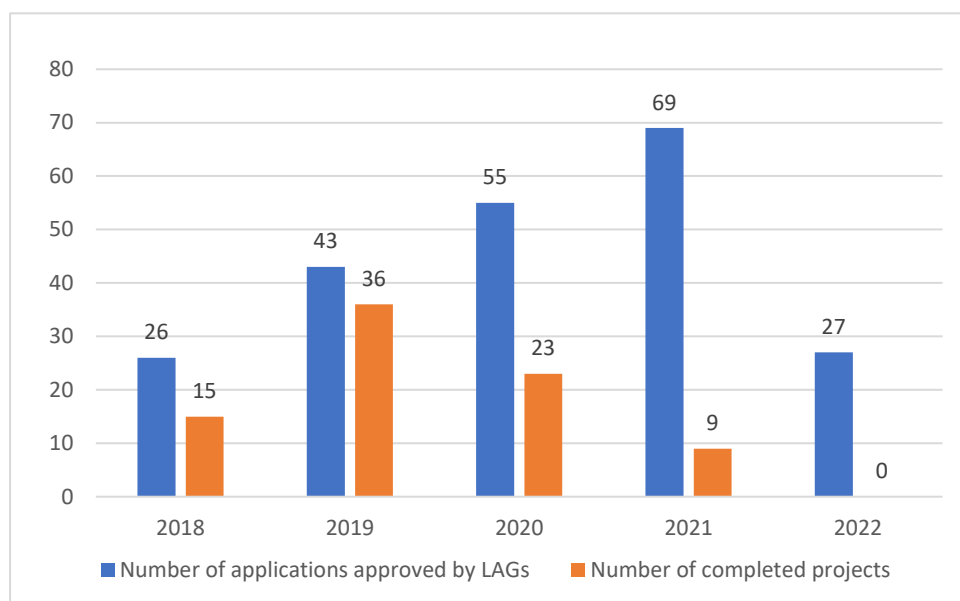
Source: Data submitted by LAGs
*Data for year 2022 is up to June 2022

When analysing the approved applications by the respective measures programmed under the Local Development Strategies (LDS), one can note that the highest number of approved applications were registered under the first two measures programmed under the Xlokk and Majjistral LDSs, which measures focus on supporting projects that contribute towards the regions' cultural and social capital. The smaller number of approved applications under the Gozo LAG measures is attributed to the relatively larger size of the projects supported under this strategy.

**Figure 6.2: Approved applications by measures**

Source: Data submitted by LAGs

In addition to data on the number of approved applications and completed projects, the LAGs provide periodic data on a number of specific indicators established in the LDSs. The progress in relation to these established targets is discussed in the subsequent section.

6.1.2 Overview of selected projects[27]

As part of this evaluation exercise, 114 closure reports were assessed. Of these, 76 pertained to beneficiaries in the Xlokk region, 28 related to projects supported in the Majjistral region and 10 related to projects supported in the Gozitan region. As indicated in the Figure below, the majority of completed projects have been undertaken by voluntary organisations or Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

Figure 6.3: Type of applicant
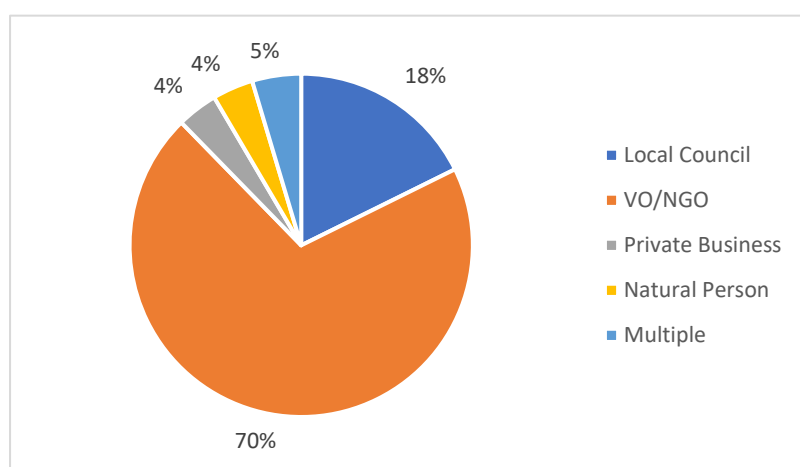
Source: Data from Closure Reports

In terms of the cost of completed projects, the Figure below indicates that almost 60% of the projects had a cost which is lower than €10,000.

Figure 6.4: Cost of Completed Projects (€)
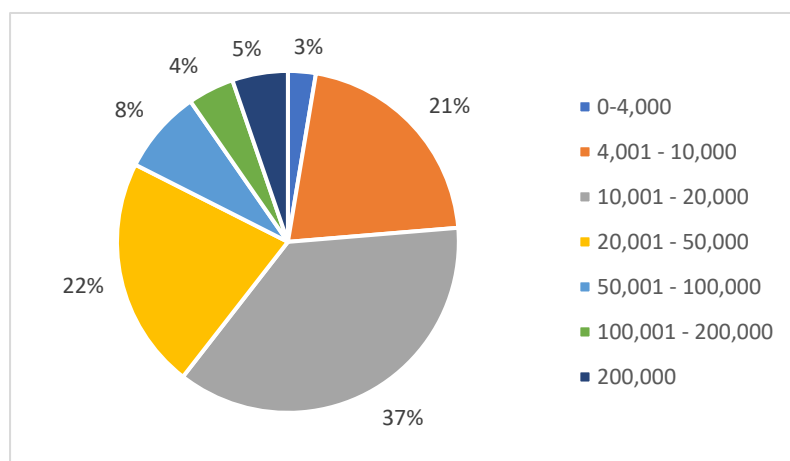
[27] Based on 76 closure reports provided by Xlokk, 29 reports provided by Majjistral and 10 applications by Gozo. The latter was included for the purpose of analysis even though they are not closure reports. It is also to be noted that there is a mismatch between the completed projects as reported till the end of June 2022 by the LAGs and the provided closure reports. This could be the result of time lag.

The assessment of closure reports also considered the potential contribution of each project towards different cross-cutting objectives, namely environment and climate change, sustainability, innovation, cooperation, education and training and accessibility. Almost 50% of the projects reviewed appear to address the cross-cutting objective of sustainability. The assessment also considered the potential impact of completed projects on social, environmental and cultural capital and on the rural economy which is explored further in Section 6.2.

In the closure reports, the beneficiaries also shed light on the key challenges experienced in the implementation of their projects. Some of the beneficiaries' key concerns included difficulty in finding skilled workers/contractors, difficulty in obtaining the necessary quotes, higher costs than expected and lengthy permit and procurement processes.

6.1.3 Progress: RDP Result indicators

As at the end of 2021, progress on the result indicator values linked to Measure 19 were as follows:

- (T21) % of rural population covered by local development strategies – The achievement at 2021 was registered at 105.75%. This achievement is the result of the current total population covered by the LAG strategies (as published in strategies) amounting to 283,284 - 15% higher than the established target in the programme. The increase in the population coverage emerges from the increase in population experienced over the last few years which has also been experienced in rural areas.
- (T23) No of jobs created in supported projects – The achievement by the end of 2021 amounted to 2.5 full time equivalent jobs compared to a target of 10 jobs by 2025. It is however to be stressed in this regard, that the objectives of LEADER in Malta does not focus explicitly on the creation of jobs. This is in part due to the fact that the rural employment rate at 78% (2019) is relatively high when compared to the EU level of 73%. Rather, the local development strategies focus more intently on the cultural heritage, social and environmental assets (Majjistral and Xlokk). In Gozo and Comino, the strategy focuses on the preservation of the rural community, the development of agricultural products as well as the attraction of the area for young families.

6.2.1 To what extent has the LEADER method been effective in addressing local needs?

The first element to assess is the pertinence of the LEADER measure. This sub-section evaluates the extent to which LEADER addresses the needs of the region as outlined in the respective strategies and its usefulness to beneficiaries.

This was a question directly incorporated in the questionnaire which was circulated by the LAGs amongst the beneficiaries. In total, there were 16 responses of which **94% agreed** (69% - agree and 25% -strongly agree) **that the LAG Strategy addresses the needs of the locality**. Only 6% (1 respondent) think otherwise.

Figure 6.5: Does the LAG strategy reflect the needs of your locality?
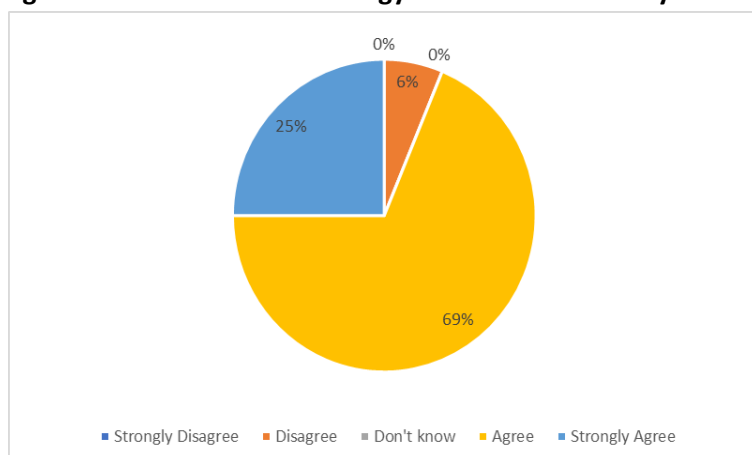
Source: Based on questionnaires disseminated amongst beneficiaries

To delve further into the specific needs, beneficiaries were asked whether the LAG strategy reflected the needs of their organisation. **All respondents provided an extremely positive reply** with all respondents agreeing to the statement.

Figure 6.6: Does the LAG Strategy reflect the needs of your organisation?
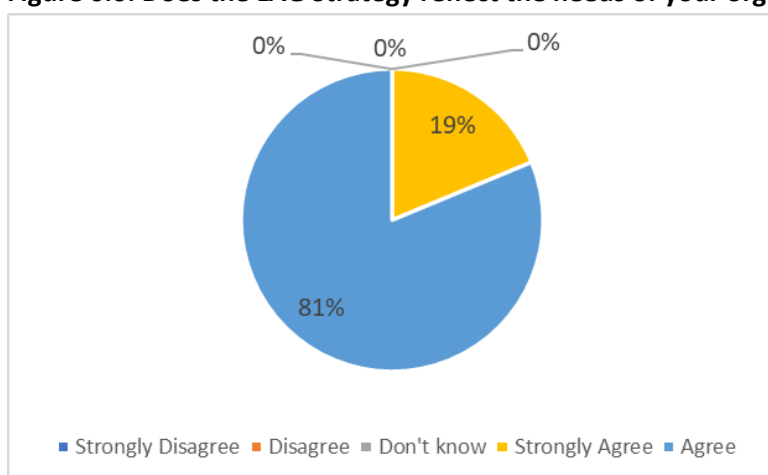
Source: Based on questionnaires disseminated amongst beneficiaries

This was further confirmed from the discussions conducted with several beneficiaries during the focus groups organised specifically for this evaluation. According to the participants, LEADER is crucial to develop and implement projects that would have otherwise never been carried out. The projects presented by the beneficiaries are of local interest and have all in some way contributed to the various aspects of the rural life, be it cultural, social, environmental, and rural.

Another data element which further witnesses relevance of LEADER on the local community is the data which emerges from the closure reports. As can be seen from **Table 6.2** all projects have positively contributed to one or more of the criteria shown in the Table, reflecting their positive impact on the localities in which they have been implemented. An average of 48% of the completed projects contributed towards the social and cultural needs of the locality, followed by an average of 26% having a direct contribution to the rural aspect and an average 17% of the projects contributing to the environmental capital.

Table 6.2: Contribution of projects to local needs

Criteria	Impact	(%) of total CR	Average
Social Capital	Improvement in community ties	46%	48%
	Inclusiveness/participation/collaboration and networking	33%	
	Increase in knowledge and awareness	67%	
	Enhance quality of life and promote Gozitan lifestyle	46%	
Rural Economy	Increase in added value of local products	11%	26%
	Increase/improvement in employment opportunities	19%	
	Enhancement of skills	27%	
	Improvement in local infrastructure and other rural services	24%	
	Increase creation/improvement in innovation	13%	
	Increased visibility/Tourism/international exposure	59%	
Environmental Capital	Contribution towards zero carbon generation	36%	17%
	Increase awareness and responsibility of the environment	17%	
	Reduction in waste generation/use of sustainable material	31%	
	Positive Impact on biodiversity	7%	
	Improved water efficiency/ reduced impact on ground water	6%	
	Better soil management	4%	
Cultural capital	Conservation and restoration of cultural and historical heritage	45%	48%
	Conservation of traditional crafts/art	18%	
	Cultural Exchange/appreciation/ cultural events	59%	
	Preservation of local identity/traditions	70%	

Source: Based on Closure Reports

While the case study findings are presented in detail throughout this section of the report, the projects studied further demonstrate the relevance of the LEADER measure to the local community. For example, the restoration of the Ghallis Coastal Watch Tower and the Maritime Painting Scheme in the Delimara Lighthouse Tower by Din l-Art Helwa are believed to have strengthened the local identity, through people's attendance to re-enactments and open days which allow the general public (both Maltese and tourists) to appreciate the historical and cultural value of such towers.

Sub-Section evaluation conclusion on the Relevance of LEADER

The Table below puts forward the key findings which provide a direct answer to the evaluation question dealing with the relevance of the LEADER measure. As indicated in this Table, this evaluation concludes that the LEADER measure is relevant in terms of addressing local needs.

Table 6.3: Evaluation Findings on the relevance of the LEADER measure

Evaluation Indicator	Evaluation Finding
% of respondents who agreed that the LAG strategy reflects the need of their organisation and locality (Survey Q6)	94%
Views on the extent to which the local identity has been strengthened (FGs and Case Studies)	According to the FGs participants, the projects supported by the LEADER measure are all of local interest and have all in some way contributed to the local community.

	The case study analysis indicates that projects supported by the LEADER measure have served to strengthen the local identity, chiefly in terms of allowing the public to appreciate the value of important landmarks in their localities.

6.2.2 To what extent has LEADER contributed towards conserving and increasing the valorisation of cultural assets?

The purpose of this sub-section is to assess the extent to which LEADER/CLLD has contributed to the RDP's objectives. In this respect the local development of the rural economy is considered by means of the cultural capital.

LEADER funded projects have helped not only to rediscover traditions, but to keep heritage alive and open it up to a much wider audience. Based on the submitted LAG data, over the period up to mid-2022, there were a total of **63 beneficiaries that were supported under Measure 1** (Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value) and **67 beneficiaries that were supported under Measure 2** (Strengthening a healthy cultural identity) of the Xlokk and Majjistral LAG strategies. Measure 1 supported a total of **69 small-scale restoration projects during the 2019-2022 period** whereas the support under Measure 2 contributed to a total of **80 new/improved quality cultural and/or social activities in the Xlokk and Majjistral areas** and **an average of 2,700 participants to the cultural activities per annum** over the same period. At the same time, a total of **23 projects are estimated to have benefitted from Measure 3 support focusing on the promotion of cultural heritage** in the Xlokk and Majjistral areas, with the number of visitors per project per annum standing at around 150 in the Xlokk area.

Measures under the Gozo LAG strategy focused on maximising the contribution of agriculture to Gozo's culinary tradition, whereby the support under this measure affected two agriculture producers and one food production business, and on developing Gozo's all season tourism product offering, in which 4 local councils, 3 businesses and 6 NGOs participated leading to an **improvement in 5 cultural/environmental tourism amenities**.

This analysis is further corroborated by information from the closure reports. An average of 48% of the projects contribute to the valorisation of the cultural heritage. As indicated in the Table below, around 70% of the completed projects have contributed towards the preservation of the local identity and traditions whilst 59% of the projects are believed to have contributed to cultural exchanges and creation of cultural events.

Table 6.4: Cultural Capital

Criteria	Impact	(%) of total CR	Average
Cultural capital	Conservation and restoration of cultural and historical heritage	45%	
	Conservation of traditional crafts/art	18%	48%
	Cultural Exchange/appreciation/ cultural events	59%	
	Preservation of local identity/traditions	70%	

Source: Based on Closure Reports

According to the focus group participants, the projects with a cultural and historical element (varying from restoration of religious icons and historical assets, historical buildings and restoration of band

clubs and investment in multipurpose halls) led to an increase in the appreciation of cultural and historical assets. Furthermore, most of these projects also involved the dissemination of information on the restored assets/buildings which led to an increase in the knowledge and understanding of these assets, thereby resulting in a higher admiration of their cultural and historical value.

This can be seen from the number of applications approved under the measures that focus on restoration of cultural assets and the strengthening of local identity. Indeed, as depicted in **Figure 6.*2***, 71 out of 220 approved applications (32%) deal with the restoration of cultural assets, whilst 85 out of 220 approved applications (39%) contribute to the strengthening of local identity. In total, 71% of the approved applications are of a cultural nature.

Focus group participants emphasised the importance of these projects in terms of their contribution towards protecting and safeguarding of traditions. According to these participants, projects related to culture and heritage have led to higher interest in local/national traditions. For instance, projects related to investment in musical instruments have led to an increase in the number of students attending music lessons. Some of these students are also progressing for examination abroad, resulting in qualifications and therefore enhancement of skills. Another example is a project focusing on reviving the 'Boċċii' Maltese tradition sports. This investment focused on the diversification of the annual calendar of events to further promote this traditional Maltese sport. The project also contributed towards the organisation of innovative activities which can attract youths to this sport. If traditional sports such as 'Boċċi' are not kept alive by local clubs, they run the risk of being lost.

As for other investments like multi-purpose halls, these have led to the organisation of several cultural events, achieving not only the cultural objective of these measures and hence enhancing local development in rural areas, but also contributing to other objectives like education and training within the local community.

Target Indicators

Table 6.5: Specific Target Indicators related to cultural heritage[28]

Measure	Indicator	Target: Xlokk	Target: Majjistral	Overall Target	Result as at mid-2022
1.Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas	31	19	50	63
	Number of restoration projects of artefacts of important cultural value	50	8	58	61
	Number of small-scale restoration projects of sites of important cultural value		11	11	8
	Total number of programmes promoting the cultural identity of the LAG territory through informational, educational and tourism activities		15	15	26
	Number of visitors to the projects per year		500	500	NA
2. Strengthening a healthy cultural identity	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas	30	22	52	67
	Number of new/improved quality cultural and/or social investment in the area	64	22	86	80
	Number of participants following the undertaking of the investment needed, per year up to the end of the programming period	6,000	1,750	7,750	8,000
3. Promotion of the cultural heritage	Number of marketing and promotion projects by end of programming period	19	8	27	23
	Number of visitors per project	150	100	250	300

Source: LAG Data

It is to be noted that most of the indicators associated with Measure 1 on the restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value have already been surpassed. This in particularly is the case for the number of beneficiaries supporting the number of restoration projects and the promotion of cultural identity. The target on the small-scale restoration of sites of cultural importance is in the process of being met. In terms of number of visitors to the projects in the Majjistral area, this data is still being collected.

Likewise, most of the indicators associated with the implementation of Measure 2 on the strengthening of the cultural identity have also been surpassed as has the indicator for Measure 3 on the promotion of cultural heritage where the number of visitors per project has surpassed the target of 250.

The following are two case studies specifically related to restoration of cultural assets and which are of particular interest.

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[28] Cells shaded in Green are the indicator values achieved.

LEADER Case Study 1: Increasing the valorisation of cultural assets

The Restoration of the Ghallis Coastal Watch Tower and Restoration of the Maritime Painting scheme of the Delimara Lighthouse Tower by Din l-Art Helwa

The local development strategies of the Majjistral and Xlokk regions in Malta aim to invest in the cultural and historical heritage of their respective territories as a means to develop the touristic product of the areas. When the non-governmental, not-for-profit, voluntary organisation Din l-Art Helwa (DLH) applied for LEADER funding to **restore the maritime painting scheme of the Delimara Lighthouse Tower in 2019** and to **restore the Ghallis Coastal Watch Tower in 2021**, the Local Action Groups (LAGs) approved the proposal.

The first restoration project in the Delimara Lighthouse Tower in Marsaxlokk involved a total cost of around €19,700, of which almost €9,800 was covered by the LEADER funding. The Delimara Lighthouse, which was commissioned in 1850 and was functional by 1855, was necessary to direct maritime traffic safely to Valletta's harbours. **The Lighthouse and its Tower are an important example of 19th century maritime industrial heritage in Malta, and it is the only surviving lighthouse in Malta.**

The maritime painting scheme of the Lighthouse tower was last restored by DLH over 10 years ago. Since then, the strong winds prevailing in the area, the close proximity to sea, exposure to sea spray and constant changes in temperature led to the expansion and contraction of the fabric. Against this background, this project involved the manual cleaning of exposed loose mortar joints, manual cleaning of loose plaster and paint, repointing of open joints using lime-based mixes, plastering of missing parts with a predominantly hydraulic lime-based mix and painting the whole tower with breathable black and white paint. DLH have also given information on the historical value of the Delimara Lighthouse to the visitors, volunteers and to council members. A total of around 200 persons were provided with this information over the course of 2020.

As for the restoration of the Ghallis Coastal Watch Tower in Bahar ic-Caghaq, Naxxar, this involved a total cost of over €54,000, of which €40,000 was covered by LEADER support. The tower was built in 1658 by the Order of St John as part of a chain of coastal defences around the Maltese islands. The exposure of the Ghallis Tower to the elements and pollution from emissions of passing cars and the landfill has led to its deterioration over time. **The structure is classed as Grade 1 by local public authorities, which is the highest rate of protection available, evident of its great historical and architectural importance.**

Its restoration therefore constituted investment in an asset of cultural value to the Majjistral territory. The location of the Ghallis Tower is the centre of many walking trails by the coast and is a major landmark in the area, which is visited by locals and tourists alike.

These projects are deemed to have led to an improvement in social and cultural capital. More specifically, they are believed to have strengthened the local identity, through people's attendance to re-enactments and open days which allow the general public (both Maltese and tourists) to appreciate the historical and cultural value of such towers.

More information: About | Din l-Art Ħelwa - National Trust of Malta (dinlarthelwa.org)

LEADER Case Study 2: Promotion of cultural heritage

The Zejtun Roman Villa: Interpretation through 3D Digital Reconstruction and 2D Animation by Wirt Zejtun

This project was undertaken in the Xlokk region by Wirt iz-Zejtun, which is a voluntary, non-profit making organisation working in the field of cultural heritage awareness and protection, focusing on the tangible and intangible heritage of iż-Żejtun; the south-eastern town of Malta. The total cost for this project amounted to just over €9,000, of which €7,200 was covered by funds under the LEADER measure.

The remains of the Zejtun Roman villa were first excavated in the 1970s during works on the construction of the secondary school. Since then, it was only in the past decade that the site was revisited again and studied by the Department of Classics and Archaeology of the University of Malta. Notwithstanding these studies, this important archaeological site has not been given its due appreciation mainly due to the difficult challenge in interpreting such sites.

Wirt iz-Zejtun has been in the process of getting involved in the management of this site and have been working closely with Heritage Malta and the Department of Classics and Archaeology in this regard. The project involved intensive research on the remains of the Roman Villa in Zejtun's secondary school which eventually fed into the development of a digital model which shows a virtual reconstruction of the Roman Villa. Research carried out by academics at the Department of Classics and Archaeology at the University of Malta and the Senior Curator of Punic, Roman and Early Medieval sites at Heritage Malta was combined with the technical skills of a local digital agency (Xadina Productions) to develop this digital model. This was a very innovative project which allowed the local community to better visualise the history of their locality and in this sense, the local identity was strengthened.

The outcome of this project is shared through a plaque which has a QR code that allows interested visitors to take the virtual tour around the digitally reconstructed Roman Villa. This model could also be used for future augmented reality (AR) interpretation. To compliment this interpretation medium, Wirt iz-Zejtun also commissioned the production of a short 2D animated video describing the process of olive oil production during the Roman period in the context of the Zejtun Roman Villa. This will facilitate further the interpretation of the actual agro-industrial activity which used to take place on this site and the surrounding region.

It is also being integrated in activities organised by the school and thus has a link with education. The information found through research has led to the discovery of elements that were going to be lost, thereby contributing to historical knowledge.

More information: About us | Wirt iż-Żejtun (wirtizzejtun.com) and The Zejtun Roman Villa

Sub Section evaluation conclusion on the contribution to the valorisation of cultural assets by the LEADER.

Based on the above considerations, this evaluation concludes that the LEADER measure has been effective in attaining its intended objectives, which chiefly focused on strengthening the cultural identity of the territories concerned. The Table below presents the main results for the indicators in the evaluation matrix presented in chapter 6.

Table 6.6: Evaluation Findings on the effectiveness of the LEADER measure

Evaluation Indicator	Evaluation Finding
Views on the extent to which participation in cultural activities has increased (FGs)	According to participants, projects related to culture and heritage have led to an increase in interest in local/national traditions.
Number of restoration projects of important cultural value (LAGs Data)	Target value of restoration projects (69)[29] with a cultural value has been achieved. Almost 80% of approved projects address cultural value, identity and heritage
Number of new/improved quality cultural and/or social investment in the LAG area (LAGs Data)	Target value of new/improved quality cultural and/or social activities in the Xlokk and Majjistral areas is almost met. (Achievement of 80 – Target of 86)

6.2.3 To what extent has LEADER contributed towards an improvement in social capital?

LEADER can contribute to social cohesion in various ways both at the level of the project, through cooperation in terms of design, application, and execution of a joint project and at the community level, with social cohesion enhanced through the project itself. From the findings of the analysis of the data available and focus groups, one can take record of the following outcomes:

- Improvement in Community ties
- Improved inclusiveness of young people and those in disadvantaged groups involved in their communities.
- Increase in participation of residents who have access to new or improved community - based services.
- Projects developed as a result collaboration and networking.
- Community assets developed/facilities created, and new services provided.
- Rural population benefitting from improved services/ infrastructure.
- Increase of knowledge and awareness.

Based on results obtained from the closure reports available (114 reports), an average of 48% of the projects have contributed in some way to the social aspect of LEADER with the majority contributing to the increase in knowledge and awareness (67%).

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[29] Overall, the target value has been achieved however, for one LAG, the target value for this specific indicator has not, as yet, been achieved.

Table 6.7: Social Capital

Criteria	Impact	(%) of total CR	Average
Social Capital	Improvement in community ties	46%	48%
	Inclusiveness/participation/collaboration and networking	33%	
	Increase in knowledge and awareness	67%	
	Enhance quality of life and promote Gozitan lifestyle	46%	

Source: Based on Closure Reports

One important aspect of the projects with a social capital element is that they strengthen community ties. In fact, the analysis of the closure reports shows that 46% of the completed projects have contributed to strengthen community ties. Projects related to Band clubs, theatres and multi-purpose halls led to the organisation of Expos, concerts, conferences, and other social and cultural events to which both local and tourists have attended, increasing interest and awareness towards local, products, heritage, culture, art, and music, not only by individuals within the locality but also outside.

Several other examples were provided in the focus groups of how LEADER has helped to connect generations by bringing elderly and children or young adults together and exchange experience, ideas and knowledge. This was also possible through the restructuring of local buildings to install lifts and facilitate accessibility. This has contributed to inclusiveness which has increase the participation of everyone including disadvantaged groups.

These projects have helped communities to identify their potential and build services and opportunities for several groups within the community. For instance, the restructuring or restoration of village cores, gardens and parks, the creation of heritage trails, Bocci club events and cultural hubs amongst other are providing several social opportunities for different age groups, both locals and foreigners, with a strong impact on the local economy, which is assessed in further detail later in this section.

In addition, there was strong cooperation and collaboration from local entities which were not directly involved in the project as a partner. However, given the local interest generated by the projects, beneficiaries confirmed that the locals have willingly assisted the project leader to develop and implement the project. Collaboration was given from the local parish churches, NGOs, local councils, the UoM and other entities.

Cooperation with the objective to strengthen community ties was also evident at the Inter-territorial and trans-national level which enables exchange of knowledge and experience on international level. Under Majjistral and Xlokk, there were two cooperation projects over the programming period involving 37 local operators and stakeholders.

Target indicators

Table 6.8: Specific Target Indicators related to improvement in social capital and cultural identity[30]

Measure	Indicator	Xlokk	Majjistral	Overall Target	Result (up to June 2022)
5. Inter territorial and transnational cooperation	Number of cooperative projects	1	1	2	2
	Number of participating local operators and stakeholders	15	15	30	37

Source: LAG Data

Sub Section evaluation conclusion on the contribution to social capital of the LEADER

Based on the above considerations, this evaluation concludes that the LEADER measure has contributed positively to the social capital. The Table below presents the results for each indicator related to the social contribution of on LEADER measure on the rural area.

Table 6.9: Evaluation Findings on the contribution of the LEADER measure to social capital

Evaluation Indicator	Evaluation finding
Number of participating local operators and stakeholders in inter-territorial and trans-national cooperation projects (LAGs Data)	37 participants stakeholders in inter-territorial and trans-national cooperation projects including local operators and stakeholders. – Target of 30 has been exceeded
Number of local councils, businesses and NGOs offering new and improved amenities for young persons and families (LAGs Data)	Based on data received from the Gozo LAG, there were 24 local councils, businesses and NGOs offering new and improved amenities for young persons and families such that the target value of 9 has been exceeded.
Views on the extent to which trust and confidence among local actors has increased (FGs)	Trust and confidence are two factors that require further work. The Partnership criterion was a difficult element to implement specifically because of the lack of trust between stakeholders and the level of bureaucracy involved.
Views on the extent to which the density and quality of interactions between local actors has improved (FGs/LAG Data)	Cooperation has improved between local actors even with those not directly involved with the project. This stems from the recognition of the projects' local importance.
Views on the extent to which the capacity of local actors to organise themselves in various forms of partnerships, networks, lobbies and interest groups has increased (FGs)	The Partnership criterion was a difficult element to implement specifically because of the lack of trust between stakeholders and the level of bureaucracy involved.

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[30] Cells shaded in Green are the indicators achieved.

6.2.4 To what extent has LEADER contributed towards the improvement of environmental capital?

One of the main objectives of LEADER is an improvement in the territory's environment. In fact, it is also one of the cross-cutting objectives. From an environmental perspective, during the period under consideration, data for the Xlokk and Majjistral areas indicates that there were 34 approved applications for Measure 4. This resulted in 27 beneficiaries and 27 projects receiving support for the development of Green Infrastructure[31].

According to the results obtained from the analysis of the closure reports, it appears that 21% of the reviewed projects, have contributed towards the environment. As depicted by **Table 6.**10**Figure 6.**6, an average of **17% of the projects have contributed in some way to the environmental aspect of LEADER**, with the majority contributing towards zero carbon generation (36%) and a reduction in waste generation and use of sustainable material (31%).

Table 6.10: Environmental Capital

Criteria	Impact	(%) of total CR	Average
Environmental Capital	Contribution towards zero carbon generation	36%	17%
	Increase awareness and responsibility of the environment	17%	
	Reduction in waste generation/use of sustainable material	31%	
	Positive Impact on biodiversity	7%	
	Improved water efficiency/ reduced impact on ground water	6%	
	Better soil management	4%	

Source: Based on Closure Reports

Based on a review of the **result indicators** in the Xlokk and Majjistral LDSs, the following results related to environmental aspect, were achieved during the period 2019 to mid-2022:

- 7 projects targeted the conservation and management of natural assets.
- 31 projects providing public spaces /recreation activities.
- 29 Projects implemented that include soil conservation.
- 8 projects related to water management.
- €60,585.80 investment in water management projects.
- 1 waste management project.
- 1 ha concerned by investments in saving water.

According to the participants of the focus groups, all projects related to green infrastructure had a strong environmental element. Some of these projects involved the restoration of parks and included a strong element of dissemination of information to educate and increase environmental awareness. In fact, these projects have also contributed to changing people's perception and attitudes towards nature and the environment. According to participants, all projects had a strong local environmental element, using indigenous plants to refurbish green areas or elevating sites of historical importance. These projects made sure that the information can reach locals and tourists through information boards and educational events like school visits. By putting together, the educational aspect to the environmental aspect of these project, the projects made sure to reach out to people and increase

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[31] The difference between the number of approved applications and the number of applicants receiving support reflects projects that were contracted but did not proceed with implementation.

environmental awareness. For instance, one project consisted of the upgrade of a recreational area involving the restoration and landscaping of an open green area to make it more accessible to children, youths, and the public. This involved general cleaning of debris and weeding, planting of indigenous plants, installation of irrigation system, landscaping, and installation of two educational poster boards. This project has led to several school visits through which students are learning how to plant trees by being given a tree to plant. After six months, the trees will then be planted at Majjistral park.

Target Indicators

Table 6. 11: Specific Target Indicators related to Green Infrastructure[32]

Measure	Indicator	Xlokk	Majjistral	Overall Target	Result
4. Development of green infrastructure	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas	10	9	19	27
	Number of projects for the development of green infrastructure	11	9	20	27

Source: LAG Data

As can be seen from the table above, the result indicator targets for Measure 4 on the development of green infrastructure have been surpassed with both beneficiaries and the number of projects exceeding the targets set*.*

The following are a case studies related to the improvement in green infrastructure which are worth noting given the link between the implementation of green infrastructure and the development of skills particularly among school children.

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[32] Cells shaded in Green are the indicators achieved.

LEADER Case Study 3: The development of green infrastructure in schools

This case study focuses on green infrastructure projects put forward by nine schools in the Majjistral region, namely the primary schools of Bahrija, Mgarr, Mellieha. Siggiewi and St Paul's Bay, the middle school of Naxxar, two secondary schools in Mosta and an induction hub in Naxxar. This section presents a brief overview of each of these nine green infrastructure projects and explores their contribution to the environment.

Bahrija Primary School – Development of a Green Outdoor Learning Space – €10,000 of which almost €7,000 would be covered by LEADER funds

Located in the outskirts of Bahrija, the school is surrounded by farmland. The school seeks to instil a sense of environmental awareness in its students by involving them in waste separation projects, gardening and sustainable development projects, such as the proper use of water and electricity. In order to continue enhancing the quality of life and wellbeing of its students, the school applied for LEADER funding to undertake a green infrastructure project. This project will involve the maintenance and embellishment of a currently unused open space in the school grounds to develop an outdoor classroom. This will require the procurement of a canopy, the installation of pots, planters and indigenous and endemic plants and the laying out of artificial turf to render it a safe place for all students. This area will enhance the quality of life of students and will be used to educate and inform students on environmental sustainability.

Mellieha Primary School – Improving environmental performance, embellishment of school and integration of green activities in students' day to day education - €12,700 of which €8,600 would be covered by LEADER funds

This project involves the installation of 65 new planters around the school yard's perimeter which would be planted with several indigenous shrubs, small trees and plants. The whole school will be involved in the planting and cultivation of the trees and plants. This will be complemented by a new green, recreational and educational area in the school yard to serve as a reading area for students. Artificial green turf will be installed and the existing wall will be turned into a living green wall. This new reading area will be used by the whole school for outdoor lessons and by the children during break for recreation. Furthermore, a long stretch of wall at the school's main entrance will be turned in a green wall. The project also involves a series of educational measures whereby the school will be disseminating information about the environmental results of the project via leaflets and a video published online.

Mgarr Primary School – Vertical garden in internal yard and Outdoor classroom - €13,100 of which €9,600 would be covered by LEADER funds

Mgarr primary is the village school of Mgarr, a picturesque rural village. The school currently has a green open space perimeter and an open internal courtyard which both provide students the opportunity to learn more about the environment. Nevertheless, the school seeks to implement more green projects in line with its commitment to enhance the quality of life and wellbeing of its students. Against this background, the school applied for LEADER funds to undertake a green infrastructure project which involves the installation of a vertical garden in the school's internal yard and an outdoor classroom. The vertical garden will involve the installation of pots and trellis and will be automatically irrigated through a dedicated irrigation system and water tank, ensuring sustainability.

LEADER Case Study 3: The development of green infrastructure in schools

Mgarr Primary School – Vertical Garden in internal yard and Outdoor classroom- €13,100 of which €9,600 would be covered by LEADER funds

It will feature various indigenous creepers, which students themselves will have the opportunity to plant and take care of. As for the outdoor classroom, this intervention entails the installation of benches and a blackboard as well as planters including indigenous plants. Through this intervention, the formal learning process will be merged with the informal environment learning. Furthermore, it provides a friendly and safe environment for special needs students.

Naxxar Middle School – the Greenhouse and Green Wall Project - €10,700 of which €7,300 would be covered by LEADER funds

The Naxxar Middle School seeks to ensure that its students receive holistic education that integrates sustainability and environmental issues into the regular curriculum. Through this project, the school will be installing a greenhouse for its garden club. The greenhouse will be used to grow a number of indigenous trees and plants. When these are ready to be planted into the ground, the garden club can do so in appropriate soft areas. Students will be constantly involved in the process throughout, and it will serve as an educational and recreational experience for them. Another element in the project is the installation of a green wall which will be covered by vegetation. The environmental contribution of green walls is significant, especially when compared to the space they take up. As a result, they are seen as innovative urban solutions to the environmental and climate problems of today. The LEADER funds will also be used to procure a handheld tiller and pruner scissors which are needed by the gardening club. Finally, the school will be publishing a leaflet and a brief video that will mainly detail its experience with the project.

Siggiewi Primary School – Embellishment of internal yard and school corridors – €15,200 of which €10,300 would be covered by LEADER funds

The Siggiewi Primary School is committed to foster education and appreciation of the natural environment among its students. The project put forward by the school involves the installation of a sustainable vertical wall, a potted herb garden and a significant number of potted plants. The vertical wall will be adjacent to the pool which is used by both the pupils in the school and by Sports Malta after school hours. Given that this pool is used by around 150 people on a regular basis, this implies that these people will also be benefitting from the green infrastructure project proposed by the school. The project also involves placing potted plants on the windowsills of all the school corridors, thereby improving the school's air quality and creating a more pleasant environment for the students, teachers and school staff.

Maria Regina Mosta Secondary School – Greening the Mosta Secondary School – €14,900 of which €10,100 would be covered by LEADER funds

The Mosta Secondary School is committed to use the surrounding environment as an inspirational resource for learning, for recreation and for socialisation amongst students. Through the proposed project, the school aims to rejuvenate the school garden. This will be achieved through the installation of a lighting system, including 15 lamps, works on walk path accessibility, benches and gate, hydroponics system complete with water tank, timer and water pump, trellis system for vertical garden and an educational initiative. This project is not only expected to have an environmental impact but also an educational impact.

LEADER Case Study 3: The development of green infrastructure in schools

Mosta Zokrija Secondary School – Enhancing sustainable agribusiness education - €9,900 of which €6,700 would be covered by LEADER funds.

The Mosta Zokrija Secondary School is a learning community that strives to ensure that all its individuals are holistically formed into responsible and compassionate citizens. In this regard, the school seeks to take further initiatives to improve the environmental performance of the school and enhance the quality of life of its students. On this note, the proposed project seeks to undertake three green infrastructure initiatives: (1) procuring a bio-digester (2) procuring three agricultural machinery and (3) installing a green wall. This project will contribute towards improving the environmental performance of the school. The Bio-Digester will convert waste nutrients into more accessible forms for plants to use, compared to raw manure, thereby increasing crop productivity and yield. A battery-operated harvester will improve the quality of harvest, whilst the use of battery power will ensure that no extra emissions are produced. A leaf blower will help accumulate debris from the Bio-Digester while aiding with the upkeep of the fields and orchard. Lastly, the green wall will help remove air pollutants, reduce urban temperatures and improve biodiversity.

Maria Regina College Naxxar Induction Hub – Recreational Roof Garden - €17,500 of which 11,860 would be covered by LEADER funds

In its commitment to protecting and improving the environment, the school strives to make itself greener and to adopt more practical means to teach its students about the importance of respecting and protecting the environment. Apart from the educational element, the proposed project will also have a social health aspect. The project involves the creation of a garden which will include the installation of an aquaponics systems, the installation of 40 planters and plants, installation of 8 benches and artificial turf as well as a trellis system and vertical garden. The project will directly impact the environment through improved carbon sequestration by the plants, providing a habitat to different pollinating insects and strengthening the ecosystem in the locality.

St Paul's Bay Primary School – Development of small recreational gardens – €9,900 of which €6,700 would be covered by LEADER funds

In view of the increased need by the school to expand on the number of green spaces it has available for students, the proposed project involves transforming these spaces into small gardens, further increasing the number of plants and greenery which the school has. The project will consist of the installation of an aquaponics system, installation of 12 floor planters and a vertical garden as well as an educational initiative. The area designated for the project will be used by teachers for recreational activities such as reading and writing. Students will be involved in the caring for plants, vegetables and herbs and use some of these during cooking sessions. They will also be able to see how such natural areas attract local wildlife such as bees, dragonflies, butterflies and other insects.

Sub Section evaluation conclusion on the effectiveness of the LEADER in improving the environmental capital

Based on the above considerations, this evaluation concludes that the LEADER measure has been effective in attaining its intended objectives, especially when considering that the environment is one of the cross-cutting objectives of the RDP.

Table 6.12: Evaluation Findings on the contribution of the LEADER measure to the environmental aspect

Evaluation Indicator	Evaluation Finding
Improvement in environmental awareness (FGs and Case Studies)	Based on conclusions derived from the FGs and Case studies, some projects have resulted in an improvement of environmental awareness. By putting together, the educational and environmental aspects, the projects made sure to reach out to people and increase environmental awareness.
Number of projects receiving support for the development of green infrastructure (LAGs Data)	27 projects have received support for the development of green infrastructure, representing 12% of approved projects (2018 – mid-2022) . The target on green infrastructure (20) has been met.
% of completed projects contributing to a carbon neutral economy (Closure Reports Data)	36% of closure reports projects contributed to a carbon neutral economy.

6.2.5 To what extent has LEADER contributed towards enhancing the rural economy?

Projects supported through LEADER are not only expected to have an impact on the environment, communities, and cultural heritage, but also on the rural economy. When assessing the effect on the rural economy there are several elements to consider:

- Existing jobs safeguarded
- Jobs created in supported projects
- Annual change in the number of visits to facilities/attractions
- Local residents who have access to new or improved community
- Community facilities created and new services provided
- New enterprises and new products or services created
- People accessing training/development opportunities
- Individuals trained/gaining new skills or re-skilled
- Young people trained/gaining new skills or re-skilled

The LDS for Gozo and Comino focuses more intently on the development of the rural economy as explained above. In the island of Gozo, the development of an ICT media platform is estimated to generate 4 jobs, enabled three media projects, with a media exposure of 2.5 million views/media hits and affected 1,000 businesses and 75 NGOs.

Other measures under the Gozo LAG strategy focused on maximising the contribution of agriculture to Gozo's culinary tradition, whereby the support under this measure affected two agriculture producers and one food production business, and on developing Gozo's all season tourism product offering, which affected four local councils, 3 businesses and 6 NGOs and led to an improvement in five cultural/environmental tourism amenities.

Finally, the measure focusing on attracting young families to live in Gozo resulted in 6 local councils, 2 businesses and 16 NGOs offering new and improved services for young persons and families (**Table 6.13**). As can be seen from the Figure below. A number of result targets have already been met.

Target Indicators

Table 6.13: Gozo Specific Target Indicators related to the rural economy

Measure	Indicator	Target	Result (up to June 2022)
1. Develop an ICT media platform for the valorisation of Gozo lifestyle concept	Number of new ICT media platform generated	1	1
	New jobs directly created by the action	3	3.5
	Number of media projects enable by the action	2	3
	Size of circulation/media hits/view/exposure	2,500,000 persons	2,500,000
	Number of businesses affected by the action	150	1000
	Number of NGOs affected by the action	75	75
2. Maximise the contribution of Gozitan agriculture to the Gozo culinary tradition, its evolution and future sustainability	Number of agricultural producers affected by the action	3	2
	Number of food production businesses affected by the action	1	1
	Number of culinary knowledge/research projects supported	1	1
	Number of jobs directly created by action	3	1
3. Develop Gozo's all season tourism product offering - Gozitan attractions and innovative events for all seasons.	Number of Local councils affected by physical interventions	6	4
	Number of businesses affected by improved infrastructures and events	6	3
	Number of NGOs affected by the action	6	6
	Number of cultural/environmental heritage tourism amenities improved	7	5
4. Improve the attractiveness of living in Gozo for young persons and young families	Number of local councils offering new and improved amenities for young persons and families	3	6
	Number of businesses offering new and improved services for younger persons and families	1	2
	Number of NGOs offering new and improved services for young persons and families	5	16

Source: LAG Data

The following are a case studies related to improvement in improved rural economy.

LEADER Case Study 4: The use of an ICT media platform for the valorisation of a region's lifestyle concept

Timeline Gozo by Harbour Solutions Ltd

The central concept of TimelineGozo is the setting up of an innovative ICT platform and website that provides information related to a variety of topics, all of which have Gozo as their key focus. This project was a collaboration between Harbour Solutions Ltd (the developers of the digital platform and the lead partners on this project), the Gozo Business Chamber, and the Mnarja Band Club. The estimated cost of the project stands at €238,200. TimelineGozo presents Information in the form of timelines that include concise excerpts of text organised in a chronological order. Each timeline groups together and displays information related to a particular topic.

The aim of this platform is to generate and coordinate efforts to upload more information about Gozo on the internet and to store information using the semantic format which makes searches easier. The information that may be stored on this platform can range from general knowledge related to arts, history and geology to information on commercial entities or tourism related entities.

In the long run, the platform will contribute to an increase in sale opportunities for Gozitan enterprises and increased opportunity to showcase events taking place in Gozo. By providing business with access to new marketing tools and payment systems, the platform is expected to lead to an improvement in their competitiveness. The project also includes the setting up of an augmented reality (AR) platform which will serve to provide more context and information about Gozo's ecological, economic and social aspects. The use of AR technology could create higher interest in local produce and boost sales of businesses based in Gozo.

Apart from the adoption and use of the latest technology, this project will also include dissemination sessions (ex: training and capacity building) targeted at NGOs, micro businesses and the general public to enable them to effectively use the tools offered by the platform and to invest in the creation of digital skills. This will contribute to the development of ICT, media and creative economy skills in Gozo, especially among the younger generations.

From an environmental perspective, through the promotion of the digital connectivity, the project is expected to reduce the dependence on climate-intensive activities such as physical transport. The platform will also serve to raise awareness on Gozo's natural and cultural environment.

Against this background, the project is expected to contribute directly to the four priorities set out in the Integrated Territorial Development Strategy for Gozo 2017-2020, namely: (1) fostering economic growth and job creation (2) developing Gozo's unique identity (3) facilitating accessibility and (4) promoting new services for a better quality of life.

Further to the progress in the implementation of the Gozo and Comino strategy, this section also considers the contribution of LEADER to economic activity, jobs creation, skills, and innovation. Since the information available is limited and the data obtained is not necessarily representative, the analysis also relies on qualitative information.

Economic Activity

Based on examples given during the focus groups, some projects, especially those of high cultural and historical value, attracted tourists, whilst others led to the organisation of conferences and events utilised local suppliers and therefore led to generation of business activity. Most of the respondents of the questionnaire agree with this outcome.

Figure 6.7: Business support
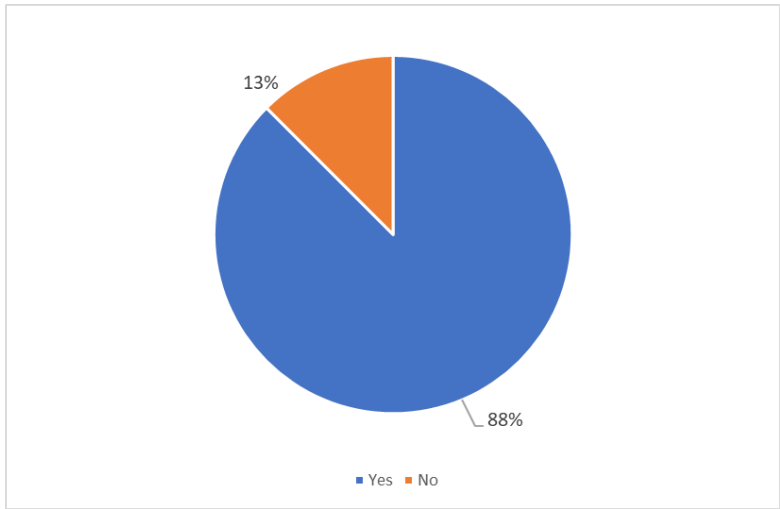
Source: Based on a questionnaire disseminated amongst beneficiaries

According to the survey carried out with some of the beneficiaries (16 respondents), 94% agree that LEADER has contributed to the development of the territory. The projects implemented and the changes and developments that occurred through the LEADER also led to generation of business activity.

Figure 6.8: The contribution of LEADER towards enhancing the development of the territory
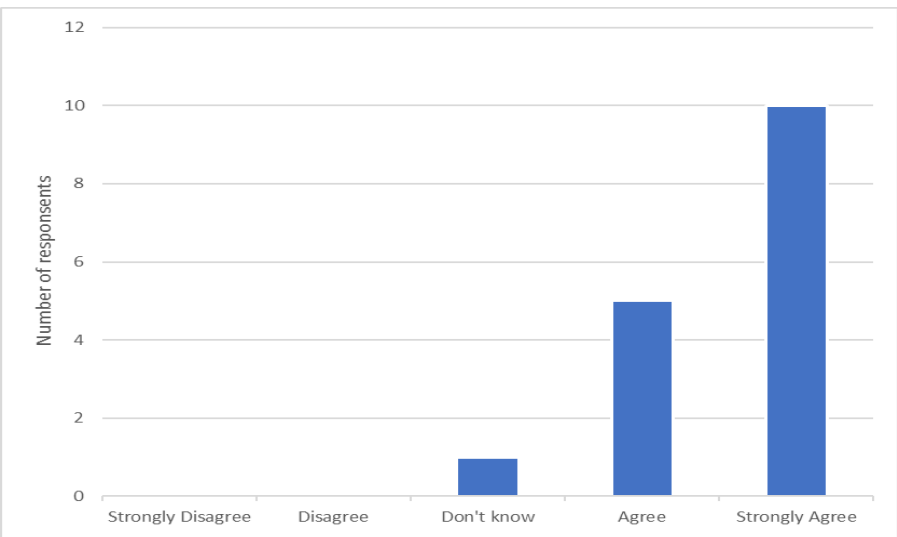
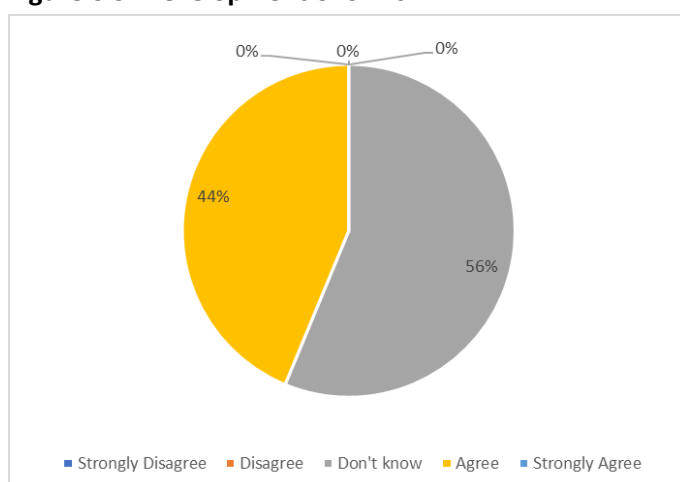Source: Based on a questionnaire disseminated amongst beneficiaries

Jobs Creation

The objectives of the Leader strategies which fall within the scope of the RDP, focus more intently on preserving the rural heritage rather than the creation of jobs. This is particularly the case for the Majjistral and Xlokk strategies. However, most of the projects contributed towards sustaining work rather than creating new jobs. For instance, restoration jobs involved the use of professionals like architects and construction workers. These jobs were not new jobs that were created as a result of these projects, but the projects helped in providing more work and therefore, sustaining existing employment.

Development of Skills

For the purpose of project implementation, some beneficiaries provided training to individuals. A beneficiary indicated that an individual has embarked on a career of sound engineering, following the investment made in sound proofing and sound engineering equipment. In addition, some of the projects have allowed for enhancement of skills by giving students or participants access to the required tools to develop their skills. For instance, projects related to investment in musical instruments have registered an increase in the number of students who are also progressing for examination abroad to obtain qualifications.

Figure 6.9: Development of Skills

0%   0%   0%

44%

56%

■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Don't know   ■ Agree   ■ Strongly Agree

Source: Based on a questionnaire disseminated amongst beneficiaries

Innovation

Whilst the scope of many projects was to increase the cultural and traditional value, many projects did it in an innovative way including an educational element to inform and educate people. One project in particular used an innovative approach to inform people by constructing a 3D visualisation of a historical site. Most of the projects with the innovative element included digitalisation.

Figure 6.10: Innovation
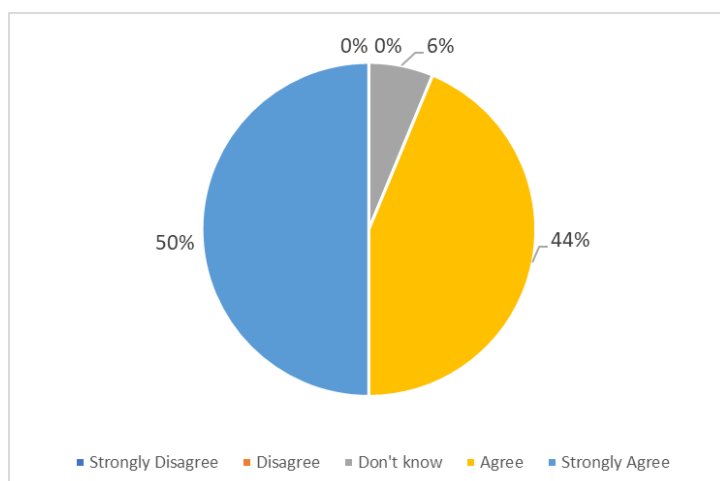
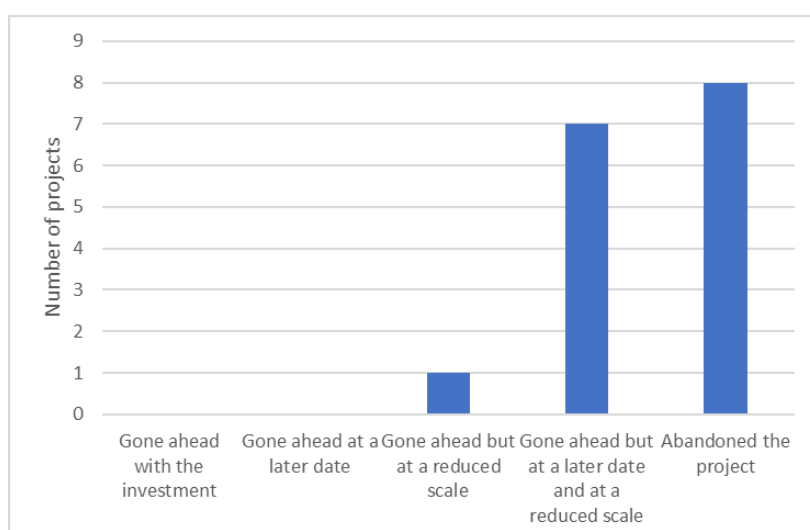Source: Based on a questionnaire disseminated amongst beneficiaries

An analysis of the output indicators reveals that, as of the year 2022, several projects incorporate elements of innovation.

6.2.5.1 Overall Assessment of LEADER

One of the most important elements is that the resources allocated for the implementation of LEADER are used in an efficient and effective way to contribute towards enhancing and maintaining the rural aspect of the territory. One way to assess the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the funds is by considering deadweight - defined as the degree to which projects would have gone ahead in the absence of financial assistance from the LEADER measure. This question was directly asked in the questionnaire disseminated with beneficiaries.

As can be seen from **Figure 6.11**, 50% of the respondents fit into the 'zero' deadweight category since they indicated that in the absence of LEADER support, they would have abandoned the project. The rest of the respondents, that is, 50% indicated that while they may still have gone ahead with the project, it would have been of a smaller scale and implementation would have occurred at a later point in time. Once again it is stressed that a higher response rate is expected once the projects are completed and the ex-post evaluation is undertaken.

Figure 6.11: Absence of funds

This result is further corroborated by the outcome of the discussions that took place during the focus groups, whereby those present confirmed that the projects would have not been possible without the financial assistance of LEADER. The main reason is that a significant proportion of beneficiaries operate on a voluntary basis and lack financial capacity to carry out these projects.

Sub Section evaluation conclusion on the Impact of the LEADER on the rural economy

Based on the above considerations, this evaluation concludes that the LEADER measure has had a positive impact. The Table below presents the results for each indicator related to impact on LEADER on the rural economy the impact of the LEADER measure.

Table 6.14: Evaluation Findings on the impact of the LEADER measure on the rural economy[33]

Evaluation Indicator	Evaluation finding
% of partial and zero deadweight (Survey Q5)	Based on the focus group discussions there is limited **deadweight in the application of LEADER**. This has also been confirmed from the survey respondents who indicated that in the absence of LEADER, they would have abandoned the project or reduced its scale.
% of beneficiaries who are of the view that LEADER is supporting businesses in their locality/region (Survey Q8)	88% of survey respondents indicated that LEADER is supporting businesses in their locality/region.
Number of approved applications (LAGs data)	220
% of beneficiaries who are of the view that LEADER has contributed to improving the skills set of employees in the area (Survey Q9)	44% of survey respondents agree that LEADER has contributed to improving the skills set of employees in the area.
% of beneficiaries who are of the view that LEADER has facilitated innovation (Survey Q9)	94% of survey respondents indicated that LEADER has facilitated innovation.
% of completed projects with an innovative element (Closure Reports Data)	23% of the projects that submitted a closure report have an innovate element.

6.2.6 To what extent has LEADER contributed towards more effective multi-level governance?

Governance encompasses the system by which an organisation is controlled and operates, and the mechanisms by which it, and its people, are held to account, including ethics, risk management, compliance, administration, monitoring and evaluation. This sub section analysis governance on three levels; governance of LEADER as part of the RDP which concerns the Managing Authority (MA), the governance of the LAG which deals with the implementation of the LEADER strategies and the beneficiaries' participation and interaction with the LAGs.

1. The implementation of LEADER as part of the RDP

The definition of tasks specific to the implementation of LEADER for the MA, the PA and the LAGs are outlined in the RDP.

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[33] Survey findings are based on 16 respondents.

In particular the MA engages in the following tasks:

- Provision of guidelines on LDS structure and content
- Issue call for LDS
- Receipt and evaluation of the LDS
- Approval of the LDS
- Approval of action plans on LDS implementation
- Allocation of budget
- Approve financing of preparatory costs
- Contracting LAGs
- Selection and approval of Cooperation projects
- Approval of operational budgets
- Monitoring and Evaluation of LAGs/LEADER
- Checks and controls on Paying Agency, LAGs and beneficiaries

The tasks of the PA are outlined as follows:

- Receipt of payment claims
- Processing and execution of payments
- Controls on beneficiaries

The objectives of the LAG in the implementation of Leader are to:

- Build the capacity of local actors to develop and implement operations including fostering their project management capabilities
- Preparatory actions for the development of an LDS including consultations, animation, design and development
- Draw up a non-discriminatory and transparent selection procedure and objective criteria for the selection of operations, which avoid conflicts of interest, ensure that at least 50 % of the votes in selection decisions are cast by partners which are not public authorities, and allow selection by written procedure (as per Article 34(3)(b) of Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013)
- Implementation of the LDS including drafting of guidelines including defining selection criteria, development of application forms, publicity and information, receipt of applications, evaluations and selection, contracting, project monitoring and controls.
- Calls for applications under the Local Development Strategies will be published by the respective LAGs.
- Implementation of cooperation projects including the undertaking of the necessary preparatory requirements
- Ensure coherence with the LDS when selecting operations, by prioritising those operations according to their contribution to meeting that strategy's objectives and targets;
- Monitor the implementation of the LDS and the operations supported and carry out specific evaluation activities linked to that strategy

On the basis of discussions held with the MA and the LAGs, open communication channels are maintained to ensure effective implementation. The operating guidelines prepared by the MA for LAGs (Version 1.9, 2021) have been particularly useful in outlining the governance structures in the implementation of LEADER including the role of the Decision Committee and Evaluation Committee. The MA has also provided training to the LAGs on LEADER. Indeed, an Evaluation Works capacity

building event was held in 2020 wherein training was provided on the importance of the evaluation of LEADER at the RDP level and the specificities of evaluation at the level of the local strategy.

In order to ensure more effective implementation, it has been suggested that decisions particularly ones on change requests are taken in a timelier manner as are payment requests.

2. The implementation of LEADER by the LAGs

This section analyses governance from the LAGs perspective with the objective to have a better understanding of the implementation of the LEADER in terms of the design of the LEADER strategy, selection process, monitoring and evaluation and its impact. The conclusions are based on one-to-one meetings held with the decision committees (DC) of the three LAGs present in Malta. For this meeting several questions (See **Annex 2Annex 1: List of questions for the focus groups**

Local and Cultural Identity

1. To what extent do you think that the local identity has been strengthened as a result of LEADER support? (ex: Has LAG support served to distinguish your locality in any particular manner? Has it contributed to an increase in the value of a cultural, environmental or heritage asset which is a distinct feature of your locality?)

2. Do you think that participation in cultural activities increased as a result of LEADER support?

Cooperation and Trust (Social Capital)

3. Do you think that LEADER support has led to an increased sense of trust among local actors? Has cooperation increased – are different organisations, entities more willing to work together?

4. Has the frequency and quality of interactions between local actors improved? Is there a good communication between the different organisations, clubs, businesses in your community?

5. Do you think that the capacity and opportunity for local actors to organise themselves in various forms of partnerships, networks, lobbies and interest groups has increased as a result of LEADER support?

Rural Economy

6. Has LEADER support contributed to an improvement in skills in your local community (ex: through higher training, conservation of traditional crafts, etc.)?

7. Has LEADER support facilitated innovation in your area? Are there any innovative elements in your project?

Governance

8. Were you involved in the design of the strategy for your territory? Do you think it reflects the needs of your territory?

9. Has the LAG helped you and your organisation to work more closely with local actors?

10. Has it been useful in helping you identify contact persons who were necessary for the implementation of your project?

11. How would you describe the application process? Did you find any challenges in applying for support?

12. How was the communication with the LAG? Did you find it difficult to reach the LAG or to receive assistance?

) were prepared to ensure that the scope of this evaluation is met.

1. **The role of the Decision Committee (DC) and the design and validity of the LEADER strategy.**

The DC is the body elected according to the stipulated clauses in the statute between the members of the LAG. It is composed of members from both the public sector mainly local councils, and the private sector consisting of NGO representatives, business people, and other representative bodies from different areas including agriculture, culture and arts, SMEs, and tourism. The DC is responsible for the decision-making processes related to the implementation of the LDS. All decisions taken during its meetings must be formally recorded in the minutes.

The role of the DC includes the assessment and review of all pre-recommendations made by the Evaluation Committee (EC), giving points to each eligible project and eventually ranking and selecting the projects together with the subsequent allocation of funding. When calls for submission are on rolling procedure, the applications are collected at end of each month. The committee meets at least once a month depending on the number of applications submitted. The evaluation of projects involves two main steps:

1. The committee checks whether the submission is eligible or not.
2. Issues a clarification period based on the selection criteria and the guidelines issued in the application.

Where the DC's decision is not in accordance with the pre-recommendations made by the EC, reasons backing the decision must be documented. In cases where the DC members have a conflict of interest, these cannot sit on the selection board assessing that particular call. The DC must appoint other independent members as replacements. Once the selection process is concluded, the DC will proceed to publishing the preliminary result.

The DC also sets up an autonomous and independent appeals board. Any appeals presented must be lodged with the Chairperson of the appeals board. No members from the evaluation committee or decision committee can be nominated to sit on this board.

For the design of the strategy, the LAGs issued a call for professionals to design the strategy in collaboration with the LAGs who have a wide and deep understanding of the local needs. In this regard, according to the DCs, all three strategies are still considered highly relevant. The validity of the strategy is evident from the interest demonstrated by the applicants. There has been consistent interest from NGOs, cultural organisations, and other entities. COVID presented a severe challenge in the implementation of the strategies. For instance, for Xlokk and Majjistral, a measure on training had to be removed from the Programme due to difficulties in its implementation due lockdown and limited interaction on account of the pandemic. Indeed, over the duration of the implementation period. LAGs have requested changes to adapt their strategies according to the evolving needs of the area. However, these requests are minimal. Indeed, due to the availability of the transnational funds, LAGS were invited to revisit their strategies and to determine the extent of their relevance whereby all LAGs confirmed the needs and the respective measures to address the needs.

The committees pointed out that the difficulties encountered were not related to lack of interest but mainly with respect to the selection criteria that caused impediment for potential applicants to apply. This is explored in the next section. Another challenge identified by the DC is that beneficiaries such as Local Councils face implementation challenges. For instance, any procurement made by LC, needs

to be approved by the department of LCs. This is then notified to the Central Bank of Malta who pays the supplier. Afterwards the LC submits a claim to PA and the PA would carry out the same checks carried out by the department of Local Councils creating a relatively long process.

Overall, the management of the design and implementation of the strategy was very effective in supporting several projects. There is good coordination among members and a good effort from all the DC members to meet and to have effective communication to come to an agreement for selection of projects.

2. Project Selection process and the monitoring approach

Project Selection

For project selection, the DC follows the selection criteria defined at the measure level in each respective strategy, which is also available in the guidance notes issued by the MA. When an application is received, the evaluation committee checks the documents and if there is the need for any clarifications, the applicant is contacted and is given five working days to come back with the documents requested. Upon submission of the requested documents, the evaluation committee assess the project and the documents received and allocated marks. These are then passed on to the board so that they can make their final decision. Therefore, the adjudication process requires:

- The beneficiary to present the project.
- A subcommittee of the project selection committee ranks the projects according to the selection criteria.
- The project is presented to the DC which typically endorses the decision of the project selection committee.

There are instances when a presentation from the project applicant is required for better understanding of the project objectives. This is because of the complexity of the projects involved and it is considered faster and more efficient than asking for more written information. All presentations and discussions are recorded.

As indicated in the previous sub-section, one major barrier encountered is in the application of certain selection criteria. In fact, a barrier has been the application of the 'Partnership' criteria in Gozo. It was noted that finding a partner and sharing of information between partners proved to be difficult possibly due to a level of mistrust. Also, the eligibility of all partners in the application created a vulnerability. For instance, if following the submission of the application, one of the partners was found to be ineligible, then the entire application had to fall through. Applicants are not given the opportunity to replace the ineligible partner.

In this respect it was also noted that ensuring compliance before the actual application submission is complex as the time allocated for submission of application can be relatively tight. This risk is further amplified in the Maltese context, when there is a small pool of partners that one can choose from.

Monitoring

The DC monitors the projects right from beginning to end. Among the challenges identified in this respect is the capacity of the LAGs to monitor the numerous projects through on-site visits. Regular communication is maintained with beneficiaries. It is the prerogative of the LAGs and its committees

to work directly with the applicant to ensure that they build a relationship with the applicants which ultimately facilitates the monitoring process.

Main Challenges faced in the implementation of the strategy

This sub-section delves into the challenges faced by the LAGs and their DC, which challenges hinder an efficient and effective governance in the implementation of the strategy.

One of the major problems highlighted by all three LAGs is the lack of financial resources available for the administrative process which has resulted in high staff turnover and consequently lack of continuity. Taking Gozo as an example, the recruitment process for secretary was carried out four times since 2018. This may be attributed to the fact that the remuneration offered to the LAG administrative staff, and in turn the qualifications requested, do not reflect the level of work which is required. For instance, the LAG secretary is involved in the implementation of the LDS, including the evaluation of project applications, and therefore needs to be well versed in EU funds regulations and requirements. The relatively low remuneration packages have led to the resignation of staff, which also implied lack of continuity and therefore loss of experience gained over the years.

This issue is exacerbated during the beginning of a programming period since there would be a time lag between the cessation of funds for administrative purpose at end of one programming period and the commencement of new funds at the start of another. This poses challenges for the LAGs since there would be no funds available to maintain the administrative staff required until the start of the next programming period. For this reason, staff resigns which bring to a halt the preparation work that the LAG could do for the upcoming programme. This also implies loss of experience which is something that cannot be underestimated as experience allows for improvement in governance and implementation of the programme.

Other challenges include delays in the approval of the respective strategies wherein the strategies were approved after a year from submission. This also led to HR challenges given that the administrative budget was reduced. At times there are also delays in the communication of decisions which leads to uncertainty particularly for beneficiaries.

A lack of cashflow is another challenge faced by LAGs which hinders the implementation of the strategy at the level of the LAG. One specific issue was noted in this regard is that the advance payment which is provided to the LAGs requires a bank guarantee of an equivalent amount. While there is appreciation for the required guarantee, the provision of such a guarantee creates cash flow problems to the LAGs.

It is to be noted that the only source of revenue for the LAGs is the membership fee paid by Local Councils participating in the LAG. In this regard, not all local councils within the region may decide to participate in the LAG. LAGs have discussed with their EU counterparts on the generation of revenue to ensure the sustainability of the LAG particularly in between funding programmes.

At times there are also delays for the approval of change requests as well as in the provision of payments to LAGs. for payments which also creates cashflow challenges to the LAGs. Communication and swift processes and decision making are important f implementation and good governance.

Other issues which are at times encountered are related to coordination. For instance, for the transnational projects, partners involved with the LAGs had to bring forward their deadline as a March 2023 was applied on Maltese LAGs.

Also linked to coordination is the required communication with other government entities. At times competing national measures impinge on the implementation of the strategy as beneficiaries opt for measures which are nationally funded. Open communication is maintained between the MA and the LAGs albeit more frequent communication could enhance overall governance

The DC emphasised that they are solution oriented, and their objective is to improve for better governance. They emphasised the importance of LEADER which allows for the implementation of effective projects enjoyed by the rural community and highlighted the importance of consideration the allocation of more funds to the Measure.

3. Bottom up -approach

LEADER pursues a bottom-up approach which is one of the seven key principles at the foundation of the LEADER structure, to improve governance by involving local stakeholders that develop and conduct projects. Towards this end, the LDSs must be area-based and involve local stakeholders. In fact, in identifying the local needs and initiatives to inform preparation of the Strategy, three consultation events by each LAG were organised, (Total of 9 consultation events)[34] and several interviews with different stakeholders were carried out involving NGOs and other entities from both the public and private sector.

When beneficiaries were asked on their level of involvement in the strategy, 50% of respondents (8 respondents) who participated in the questionnaire, indicated that they were involved in the design of the LAG strategy. It is important to note that only 16 beneficiaries have thus far replied to the questionnaire. With a higher level of competed projects at the level of ex-post, the number of participating beneficiaries in the questionnaire is expected to be higher.

Key challenges were also identified by the beneficiaries during the focus groups. For instance, a number of voluntary organisations and NGO at times, have insufficient funds to participate in projects. The problem of cash flow is exacerbated when there is a time lag between the payments which they incur and reimbursement. Specific for these smaller organisations, represent most beneficiaries ineligible costs such as costs for guarantees. For some of these entities an advance payment would facilitate the implementation of projects.

A strong point which was resonated throughout the focus groups is the support provided by the LAGs to applicants as well as throughout the implementation of projects.

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[34] LAG Strategies

Figure 6.12: LEADER assistance
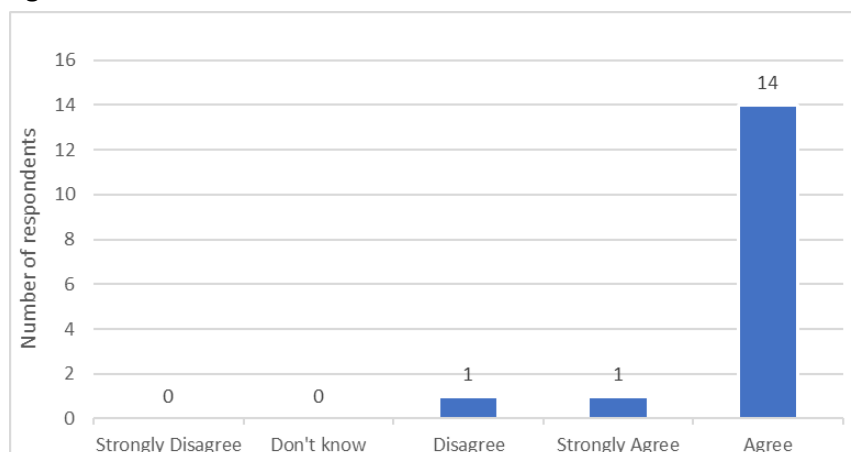
Source: Based on questionnaires disseminated amongst beneficiaries

Participants also had positive remarks on the response and swift communication between the LAGs and the beneficiaries. This was confirmed through the questionnaire whereby all respondents positively agreed that the communication tools provided by the LAGs were appropriate and accessible. This is also applicable to the dissemination of information. Beneficiaries indicated that information sessions were provided by the LAGs was helpful and emails with funding information was adequtely circulated.

Figure 6.13: Communication tools
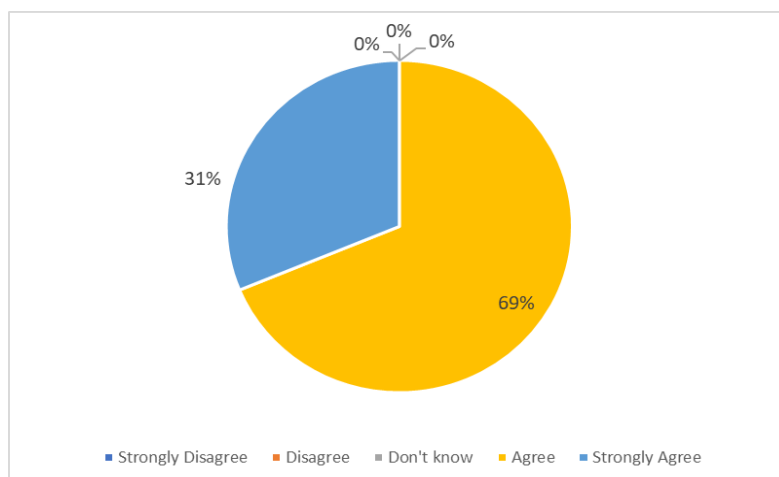
Source: Based on a questionnaire disseminated amongst beneficiaries

To further substantiate the above conclusions, based on a review of the **output indicators** in the Xlokk and Majjistral LAG strategies, the following outputs were achieved during the period 2019 to mid 2022:

1. 288 beneficiaries receiving advice and similar support from the LAGs.
2. 2 training days to LEADER staff by the relevant authorities to allow for better assistance.
3. 4 training sessions for LAG staff and members of the Decision Body
4. 70 trained beneficiaries /attendees to training.
5. 19 information and networking sessions carried out by the LAG.
6. 214 potential beneficiaries receiving support whilst developing operations and preparing applications.

Delving into the specifications of the application process, according to 88% of the beneficiaries who compiled the questionnaire, indicated that the project application procedure is accessible and encourages local stakeholders to participate in LEADER.

Figure 6.14: The efficiency and effectiveness of the application procedure
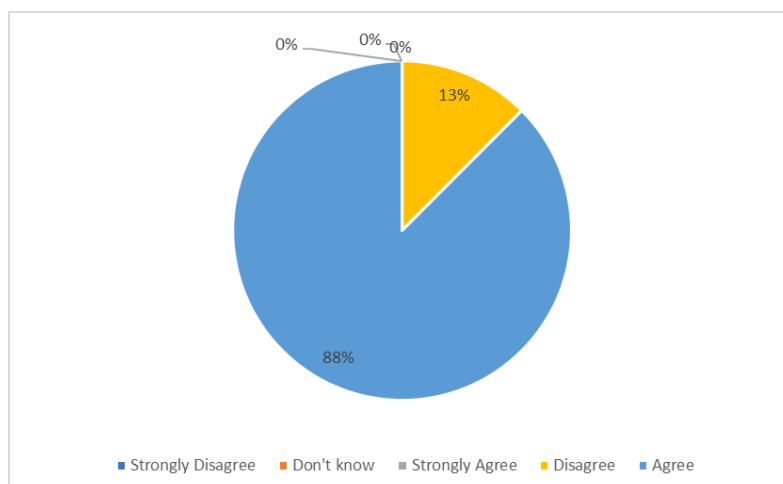
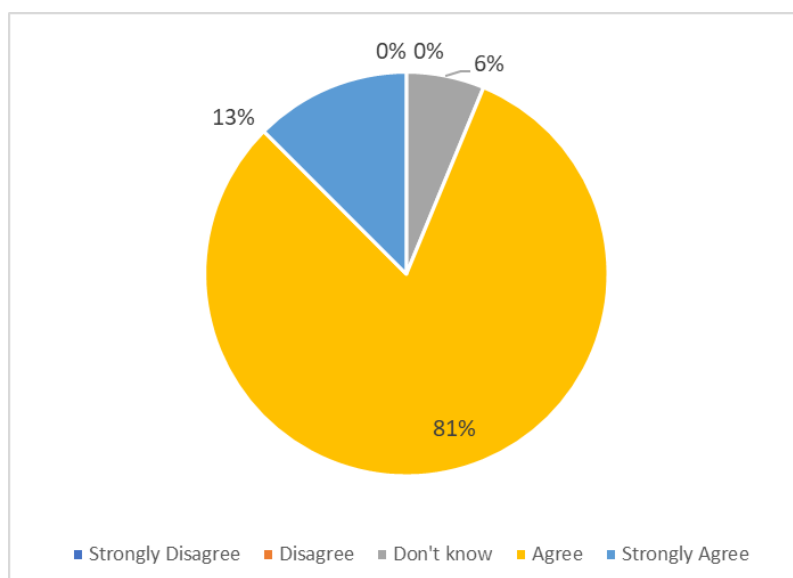Source: Based on a questionnaire disseminated amongst beneficiaries

On the other hand, 13% disagree that the application procedure is accessible and encourages participation. Some participants in the focus groups did indicate that the application process may be burdensome particularly as the applications must be submitted physically (rather than online). It has been suggested that an element of flexibility should be considered for procurement particularly when it comes to the validity of the quotations which are provided for projects. Indeed 26% of the respondents from the closure reports indicated that procurement is a challenge **(Table 6.*15*)**. Applicants are asked to provide three quotations in the application but there is a significant time lag between application and carrying out of work rendering the time period of the quotation null. This results in beneficiaries having to ask for additional quotations. Focus group participants noted that at times suppliers do not provide a quotation when they are aware that it is required for funding purposes.

Table 6.15: Key challenges

Key challenges	% of closure reports
Difficulty in finding skilled workers/contractors	18%
Difficulty in obtaining necessary quotes	15%
Lengthy permitting process	11%
Difficulty in finding necessary expertise	8%
Higher costs than anticipated	12%
Long procurement process	11%
Mismanagement of budget	2%
Lack of cooperation	1%
Technical difficulties	26%
Other	6%

In terms of the eligibility criteria, all respondents positively remarked that they deem the eligibility criteria to be appropriate and proportionate to the support provided **(Figure 6.*1*).**

Figure 6.15: Appropriateness of Eligibility Criteria

Source: Based on a questionnaire disseminated amongst beneficiaries

In terms of **partnership**, all participants agreed that cooperation with other partners has a lot of advantages when it comes to the implementation of the project, but the application process can be quite burdensome. For most of the projects the level of partnership involved was an indirect one and not as a result of a direct requirement. This also implies that the level of partnership was not as strong as one may have expected.

Table 6.16: Target Indicators related to governance[35]

Indicator	Xlokk	Majjistral	Target	Result
Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas	31	19	50	63
Number of training sessions for LAG staff and members of the Decision Body (by the Concerned Authorities)	3	3	6	4
Number of information and networking sessions carried out by the LAG	4	6	10	19
Number of potential beneficiaries receiving support whilst developing operations and preparing applications	72	30	102	213
Number of projects implemented by the LAG with the framework of the LDS	144	50	194	173

Sub Section evaluation conclusion on the Impact of the LEADER

Based on the above considerations, this evaluation concludes that despite the challenges faced in the day-to-day management, operations and implementation of the LEADER measure, the measure has had a positive impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of governance in terms of communication, monitoring and evaluation. The Table below presents the results for each indicator related to the improvement of multi-level governance of the LEADER measure.

Table 6.17: Evaluation Findings on the impact of the LEADER measure on improving multi-level governance[36]

Evaluation Indicator	Evaluation finding
% of beneficiaries who agreed that their organisation was involved in the design of the LAG strategy for their region (Survey Q6)	69% of survey respondents indicated that their organisation was involved in the design of the LAG strategy for their region.
Number of participants in the events to set up the strategy (LEADER Strategies)	Each LAG held 3 consultation sessions (Nine public consultations in total)
% of beneficiaries who agreed that the project application procedure is accessible and encourages local stakeholders to participate in LEADER (Survey Q6)	88% of survey respondents agreed that the project application procedure encourages local stakeholders to participate in LEADER. Notwithstanding different challenges were identified by different types of applicants ex: Voluntary organisations, NGOs and Local Councils.
Views on the extent to which the role of the MA facilitated the smooth implementation of LEADER (Interview with LAGs and MA)	Vertical governance has improved since the introduction of LEADER, but coordination could possibly be enhanced further.
Views on the extent to which effective collaboration existed between the (1) MA and PA and (2) between the three LAGs (Interview with LAGs and MA)	Despite facing challenges in terms of resources, the channels of communications proved to be open between the MA and the LAGs and all LAGs provide significant assistance to beneficiaries throughout the application stage as well as during the monitoring phase.

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[35] Cells shaded in Green are the indicators achieved.
[36] Survey findings are based on 16 respondents.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

This final section of the report presents the main conclusion and recommendations emanating from the evaluation.

Conclusions

- LEADER is consistent with the common evaluation elements of the RDP. It contributes primarily towards Focus Area 6B with 3 Local Action Groups established to implement local development strategies contributing towards the rural economy.

- There has been relatively good progress in the implementation of LEADER. As at the end of 2021, over 40% of realised expenditure was recorded for M19.1 and 19.4. The availability of transitional funds has allowed for a greater contribution towards M19.2 and M19.4. Specifically for the implementation of the strategies (M19.2), the budget increased from €4.5 million to €6.6 million (Public funds).

- In terms of approved projects, administrative data provided annually by the LAGs, indicates that over the period 2018 to mid-June 2022, there were a total of 220 approved applications. Of these, 83 represent completed projects, such that the share of completed projects is estimated to stand at 38% of approved applications. The number of approved applications has been consistently increasing year-on year. On the other hand, due to the impact of COVID, the number of completed projects suffered a set-back by declining in 2020 and 2021.

- Out of the completed projects almost 60% of the projects had a cost lower than €10,000 which reflects the relatively low value of projects supported through the Majjistal and Xlokk strategies. Conversely the strategy for Gozo and Comino supports less projects but ones which are of a significantly higher value.

- The result target for FA 6B namely % rural population covered by local development strategies has been met with the entire rural population covered by the strategies. With a target of 10 jobs, the number of jobs created at (2.5FTE) as at the end of 2021 has not, as yet, been met. It is however to be stressed in this regard, that the objectives of LEADER in Malta does not focus explicitly on the creation of jobs. This is in part due to the fact that the rural employment rate at 78% (2019) is relatively high even when compared to the EU level of 73%. Rather, the local development strategies focus more intently on the cultural heritage, social and environmental assets (Majjistral and Xlokk). In Gozo and Comino the strategy focuses on the preservation of the rural community, the development of agricultural products as well as the attraction of the area for young families.

- It is evident that LEADER addresses the local needs. The strategies themselves were based on extensive stakeholder consultation. Furthermore in a questionnaire conducted among the beneficiaries, 94% agreed that the strategy address the needs of the locality. According to the participants, LEADER is crucial to develop and implement projects that would have otherwise never been carried out. The projects presented by the beneficiaries are of local interest and have all in some way contributed to the various aspects of the rural life, be it cultural, social, environmental, and rural.

- Specific to culture, almost 80% of approved projects address cultural value, identity and heritage. An assessment of target indicator values at the level of the LAGs indicates that the target value of restoration projects (69) with a cultural value has been achieved. On the other hand, the target value of new/improved quality cultural and/or social activities in the Xlokk and Majjistral areas is almost met.

- In terms of the environment, 27 projects have received support for the development of green infrastructure, representing 12% of approved projects (2018 – mid-2022). The target on green infrastructure (20) has been met and 36% of closure reports projects indicated that they have contributed to a carbon neutral economy. Interesting case studies have emerged on green infrastructure as project applicants have sought to involve schools. This has led to widening the benefits.
- LEADER has also had a positive impact in terms of enhancing social capital. Based on results obtained from the closure reports, an average of 48% of the projects have contributed in some way to the social aspect of LEADER with the majority contributing to the increase in knowledge and awareness (67%). One important aspect of the projects with a social capital element is that they strengthen community ties. In fact, the analysis of the closure reports shows that 46% of the completed projects have contributed to strengthen community ties. In addition, there has also been strong cooperation and collaboration from local entities which were not directly involved in the project as a partner.
- Cooperation is also evident at the Inter-territorial and trans-national level with M19.3 enabling exchange of knowledge and experience at the international level. Through Majjistral and Xlokk, there are 37 local operators and stakeholders involved in such projects.
- Whilst the scope of many projects was to increase the cultural and traditional value, many projects did it in an innovative way including an educational element to inform and educate people. One project in particular used an innovative approach to inform people by constructing a 3D visualisation of a historical site. An analysis of data provided by the LAGs shows that up to year 2022, several projects incorporate elements of innovation. On the basis a questionnaire distributed to beneficiaries, 50% of the respondents fit into the 'zero' deadweight category since they indicated that in the absence of LEADER support, they would have abandoned the project. This result is further corroborated by the outcome of the discussions that took place during the focus groups, whereby those present confirmed that the projects would have not been possible without the financial assistance of LEADER. The main reason is that a significant proportion of beneficiaries operate on a voluntary basis and lack financial capacity to carry out these projects.
- Finally, this thematic evaluation has also sought to assess whether LEADER has contributed towards multi-level governance. The MA has provided training necessary to the LAGs and seeks to maintain open channels of communication to assist the LAGs in their implementation of LEADER. In addition, there appears to be good coordination among members of the DC.
- The LEADER approach has contributed towards involving the relevant actors of the socio-economic spectrum of the area in the decision-making process.

Recommendations

- At a national level, efforts should also be channelled towards widening the scope of the LAGs given their strong role in the adoption of a bottom up approach within the rural community. This includes the identification of revenue sources for the LAGs to ensure their sustainability.
- Beneficiaries, particularly voluntary organisations and NGOs face fiscal pressures which deters their participation. Where possible, payment claims should be made as soon as possible to alleviate such pressure. The potential use of simplified cost options could also be considered to reduce the burden for both managing authority and paying agency as well as the beneficiaries. This should also contribute towards allowing administration to shift the focus from collecting and verifying financial documents to achieving policy objectives At times, the

availability of data is lacking. In general, if a strategy contains an indicator, then the management system should cater for the collection of indicator data.

- Duplication of effort particularly in the processing of payments should be clearly identified and addressed. Indeed actions to reduce costs and administrative complexities should be undertaken. This is also in line with the audit report undertaken by the EU Commission on LEADER at the EU level.
- Timely and regular communication between the main players namely LAGs, MA and the PA should be enhanced so that administrative burdens can be reduced.

ANNEX

Table A.1: Meetings held as part of the evaluation.

Date	Type	Participants
10th October 2022	Meeting with the LAGs	LAGs
28th November 2022	Focus Group – Measures 1 and 2	beneficiaries
29th November 2022	Focus Group - Gozo	beneficiaries
29th November 2022	Focus Group – Measures 3 and 4	beneficiaries
26th January 2023	Decision Committee – Xlokk	Committee Members
31st January 2023	Decision Committee – Gozo	Committee Members
9th February 2023	Decision Committee – Majjistral	Committee Members

Table A.2: List of Focus groups participants.

Focus Group	Organisation
Xlokk	Wirt iz-Zeitun
	Malta Organic Agricultural Movement
	Luqa Local Council
	Salesian Brigade Klabb tal-Boċċi Ħal-Għaxaq
	Malta Sea Cadets
Gozo	Harbour Solutions
	Jochen Tabone
	Munxar Local Council
	Socjeta Filarmonika Leone
	Socjeta Filarmonika La Stella
	Kercem Local Council
	Ghajnsielem Local Council
Majjistral	Choral and Orchestral Society Maria Bambina, Mellieha
	Ghaqda Muzikali Naxxar
	Din l-Art Helwa
	Salesian Brigade

Annex 1: List of questions for the focus groups

Local and Cultural Identity

13. To what extent do you think that the local identity has been strengthened as a result of LEADER support? (ex: Has LAG support served to distinguish your locality in any particular manner? Has it contributed to an increase in the value of a cultural, environmental or heritage asset which is a distinct feature of your locality?)

14. Do you think that participation in cultural activities increased as a result of LEADER support?

Cooperation and Trust (Social Capital)

15. Do you think that LEADER support has led to an increased sense of trust among local actors? Has cooperation increased – are different organisations, entities more willing to work together?

16. Has the frequency and quality of interactions between local actors improved? Is there a good communication between the different organisations, clubs, businesses in your community?

17. Do you think that the capacity and opportunity for local actors to organise themselves in various forms of partnerships, networks, lobbies and interest groups has increased as a result of LEADER support?

Rural Economy

18. Has LEADER support contributed to an improvement in skills in your local community (ex: through higher training, conservation of traditional crafts, etc.)?

19. Has LEADER support facilitated innovation in your area? Are there any innovative elements in your project?

Governance

20. Were you involved in the design of the strategy for your territory? Do you think it reflects the needs of your territory?

21. Has the LAG helped you and your organisation to work more closely with local actors?

22. Has it been useful in helping you identify contact persons who were necessary for the implementation of your project?

23. How would you describe the application process? Did you find any challenges in applying for support?

24. How was the communication with the LAG? Did you find it difficult to reach the LAG or to receive assistance?

Annex 2: Questions for the Meeting held with the LAG's Decision Committee

1. Take us through the role of the Decision Committee (DC).
2. To what extent has the DC been involved in the design of the Strategy
   - *Involvement in the design of the strategy*
   - *Is the strategy still valid?*
3. Project Selection
   - *How does the DC approach the selection process?*
   - *What are the priorities considered for the selection process?*
   - *To what extent is the DC flexible with the selection criteria to achieve the outcomes of LEADER projects?*
   - *Are the selection criteria effective in achieving the CLLD strategy' objectives?*
   - *Are the selection criteria reviewed during the implementation of the CLLD strategy?*
   - *The impact of having few projects vs a few on the DC? (Economies of scale)*
4. Monitoring
   - *How are projects monitored by DC? Is there a particular procedure?*
   - *Do projects exceed the expectations of the committee?*
5. Main Challenges faced by the DC in the implementation of the strategy.
6. How has the DC internal systems and structures adapted over time?
7. Do decision-making processes encourage members to contribute and collaborate?
   - *Is the LAG delivery mechanism simpler than in the previous program? (Time consumption in carrying out processes and time efficiency in projects selection)*
   - *To what extent is the LAGs delivery mechanism transparent? (Are the decisions made public?)*
8. Extent to which the implementation of LEADER is leading to enhanced governance.
   - *To what extent has LEADER/CLLD contributed to improving local ownership and decision making?*

Table A.3: Xlokk and Majjistral LEADER Strategy Targets achievement

Measure	Indicator	Xlokk*	Majjistral*	Target	Result*
General for all measures	Number of funds needed for projects	0	0	0	0
	% of funds obtained through LDS	0	0	0	0
	Time elapsed between application - notification of approval and drawdown of funds	0	0	0	0
	Number of jobs created	0	0	0	0
1. Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas	31	19	50	63
	Number of restoration projects of artefacts of important cultural value	50	8	58	61
	Number of small-scale restoration projects of sites of important cultural value		11	11	8
	Total number of programmes promoting the cultural identity of the LAG territory through informational, educational and tourism activities		15	15	26
	Number of visitors to the projects per year		500	500	0
2. Strengthening a healthy cultural identity	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non agricultural activities in rural areas	30	22	52	67
	Number of new/improved quality cultural and/or social investment in the area	64	22	86	80
	Number of participants following the undertaking of the investment needed, per year up to the end of the programming period	6000	1750	7750	8,000
3. Promotion of the cultural heritage	Number of marketing and promotion projects by end of programming period	19	8	27	23
	Number of visitors per project	150	100	250	300
4. Development of green infrastructure	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas	10	9	19	27
	Number of projects for the development of green infrastructure	11	9	20	27
5. Inter territorial and transnational cooperation	Number of cooperative projects	1	1	2	2
	Number of participating local operators and stakeholders	15	15	30	37
6. Running costs and administration	Number of training sessions for LAG staff and members of the Decision Body (by the Concerned Authorities)	3	3	6	4
	Number of information and networking sessions carried out by the LAG	4	6	10	19
	Number of potential beneficiaries receiving support whilst developing operations and preparing applications	72	30	102	213
	Number of projects implemented by the LAG with the framework of the LDS	144	50	194	173

*The cells highlighted in green are the Targets that have been achieved as at mid-June 2022.

Table A.4: Gozo LEADER Strategy Targets achievement

Measure	Indicator	Target*	Result*
1. Develop an ICT media platform for the valorisation of Gozo lifestyle concept	Number of new ICT media platform generated	1	1
	New jobs directly created by the action	3	3.5
	Number of media projects enable by the action	2	3
	Size of circulation/media hits/view/exposure	2,500,000 persons	2,500,000
	Number of businesses affected by the action	150	1000
	Number of NGOs affected by the action	75	75
2. Maximise the contribution of Gozitan agriculture to the Gozo culinary tradition, its evolution and future sustainability	Number of agricultural producers affected by the action	3	2
	Number of food production businesses affected by the action	1	1
	Number of culinary knowledge/research projects supported	1	1
	Number of jobs directly created by action	3	1
3. Develop Gozo's all season tourism product offering - Gozitan attractions and innovative events for all seasons.	Number of Local councils affected by physical interventions	6	4
	Number of businesses affected by improved infrastructures and events	6	3
	Number of NGOs affected by the action	6	6
	Number of cultural/environmental heritage tourism amenities improved	7	5
4. Improve the attractiveness of living n Gozo for young persons and young families	Number of local councils offering new and improved amenities for young persons and families	3	6
	Number of businesses offering new and improved services for younger persons and families	1	2
	Number of NGOs offering new and improved services for young persons and families	5	16

* The cells highlighted in green are the Targets that have been achieved.