1.1: KEY POLICY QUESTIONS FOR EX-ANTE IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF EU AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL POLICIES

Background

One the first objectives for the MIND STEP project, was to establish its own research agenda. This report was thus aimed at analysing current and proposed policies as well as some important global drivers affecting agriculture in the EU. This assessment was then used to derive the policy scenario that the project should have modelled using Individual Decision Making (IDM) models, to enable the ex-ante evaluation of potential future policy settings that may have an influence on the European agricultural and rural sector.

The resulting research agenda is the first step of the MIND STEP conceptual model, which consists of: defining key policy questions; identifying the indicators for monitoring and measuring the impacts of policies; investigating whether current IDM models can be used to for evidence-based policy analyses.

This study specifically sought to address the following research questions: *Q1: "What agricultural policy objectives are relevant and worth of investigation today?"; Q2:" Which benchmark scenarios should be investigated in order to capture the most relevant impacts of these policy objectives on EU agriculture and rural areas?".*

Methodological Approach

Qualitative research tools have been used to answer these questions. These included the involvement of the core stakeholder group of the project through interviews and the use of a focus group (which included members of the core stakeholder group and the policy expert team of the project).

The MIND STEP core stakeholder group was specifically designed to include people from the public and private sectors (e.g.: EU, national and regional policy makers, farmers' organisations, international organisations, researchers). Particular attention has been given to the inclusion of policy makers at a strategic level, that are expected to focus on questions with medium to long term time horizon and researchers, that could help properly defining the policy scenarios to be modelled. Each single interview covered the following topic*: (i) "What agricultural policy objectives do you consider relevant and worth of investigation today and for what reasons?"; (ii) "Among the proposed post-2020 CAP objectives, which one you consider to be most relevant and for what reason?"; (iii) "In this moment, which benchmark scenario could be useful to investigate in order to capture its relevant impacts on EU agriculture and rural areas?".*

We ranked the proposed post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) objectives using a 5-step qualitative research methodology based on the stakeholders' responses and the pertinent key policy questions for each post-2020 CAP objective, as determined by the policy expert team. Finally, we included a list of pertinent benchmark scenarios determined by the stakeholders for each policy topic.

Key outcomes

The perspectives of the MIND STEP core stakeholder group showed a distinct focus on environmental policy objectives. The post-2020 CAP goals of "preserving biodiversity, ecosystem services, and landscapes", "fostering environmental care", and "climate change action" received the highest ratings.

The significance of environmental issues was clearly seen in the scenarios that were put out, where stakeholders more commonly mentioned low-carbon and environmental setups. Regarding modelling concerns, it became evidently important to examine the trade-offs between and among environmental objectives as well as between economic and environmental objectives.

More specifically, results were organised within a table were the proposed post-2020 CAP objectives are arranged according to the ranking that emerged from the stakeholders' answers. For each post-2020 CAP objective the list of key policy questions proposed by the policy expert team is also indicated. Finally, the table lists the corresponding relevant benchmark scenarios defined by the stakeholders and/or by the MIND STEP policy team. This table helps clarifying which policy question (and related future CAP objective) each scenario should answer to. Overall, 17 scenarios are proposed for the three environmentally related objectives, 9 for the competitiveness-related objectives and 5 for the rural development, generational renewal and food health and quality.

Implications of obtained results

The findings in this analysis have helped MIND STEP researchers identifying the policies that need to be modelled more precisely, enabling them to provide timely impact assessments for evidence-based policy making. In fact, deciding on future agricultural policy priorities is essential to understanding the direction that research using IDM models should go.

The main message provided was to give as much importance as possible to environmental issues and thus to put a strong effort in modelling the environmental impact of policies, in order to foster the assessment of the economic and environmental performances of the EU agricultural sector and the potential trade-offs between environmental objectives.

This report also paved the way for the remaining Work Package 1 activities, particularly for the identification of pertinent indicators for tracking and evaluating policy impacts (D1.2) and for the investigation of IDM models' potential for producing accurate simulations of these effects (D1.3).