



EVALUATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE OF THE RURALCARE PROJECT: DIMENSIONS, CONTENT AND OBJECTIVES

The RuralCare Project recognises the importance of evaluation as a source of "knowledge and evidence" that makes it possible "to draw lessons to assist decision-making aimed at implementing a better performing, more effective, efficient and sustainable LTC system". This document explains the key dimensions of such an assessment.



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The RuralCare Project devotes special attention to two key issues: evaluation and quality. The contents, processes, tools and responsibilities for both issues are well defined in the project.

Evaluating a project is a complex and demanding task, but also necessary. Especially for projects such as RuralCare, that aim to experiment with new strategies that allow innovative models to be shaped helping to efficiently face challenges as relevant as long-term care (LTC).

The RuralCare Project recognises the importance of evaluation as a source of "knowledge and evidence" that makes it possible to "obtain lessons that will help in decision-making aimed at implementing a better performing, more effective, efficient and sustainable LTC system" (p. 58 RuralCare Project), attributing to the University of Valladolid, together with the external consultancy Fresno Consulting, the responsibility of carrying out the evaluation process. The evaluation approach clearly establishes two dimensions to be considered: the impact or results derived from the actions contemplated and the implementation process of the Project.

The complexity of the RuralCare Project and the two dimensions of the evaluation have led the University of Valladolid (UVa) to share responsibilities by actors belonging to different departments competent in the management of different theoretical and methodological perspectives that can complement each other when dealing with the evaluation of the Project. Thus, the evaluation is carried out with the contributions of teaching and research staff belonging to two departments: Psychology and Sociology and Social Work, who assume responsibility for the evaluation on behalf of the University of Valladolid and with the support of the aforementioned external consultant. Each of them is responsible for one type of evaluation.

Teachers and researchers from the Department of Psychology, together with Fresno Consulting, are in charge of the impact assessment. The project establishes that in order to carry out this type of evaluation, the results on people, institutions and the community environment will be analysed, as well as an economic evaluation focused on the relationship between costs and results from the perspective of the efficiency and sustainability of the model. For the study of the effects or results on individuals, an experimental methodology is being applied whereby the results in the intervention group (experimental) will be compared with those obtained in two control groups (at home and in residential homes). A longitudinal analysis will be carried out at different points in the process, with the following aspects being the objects of study:

- Socio-demographic characteristics.
- If continuing to live at home.



- Health.
- Intensity of needs and support required.
- Satisfaction with the service.
- Quality of life and living conditions.
- Social support.

For the analysis of results on the environment and the community, we have chosen to use the Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology, focusing on the following objects of observation:

- Employment and the generation of economic activity in a rural environment with the impact that this entails by contributing to depopulation.
- The activation of community resources, more linked to an intangible and social impact.

The analysis of institutional performance looks at three key issues:

- Changes in LTC's response to needs: appropriateness, speed, comprehensiveness and quality.
- Organisational changes.
- Institutional changes.

Teachers and researchers from the Department of Sociology and Social Work are in charge of the evaluation of the implementation process. For this purpose, a system has been established to collect the necessary and sufficient evidence to describe and explain everything related to the development of the different actions contemplated in the project. The follow-up of the processes comprises the monitoring of the implementation by observing, in particular, the space between the resources mobilised (inputs) and the effects or results produced (outputs). The evaluation of the project implementation process aims to "determine the consistency and deviations between the initial design of the project, its execution and the results achieved, and to define the key and most effective actions in order to draw lessons to improve the final design of the policy reform" (p. 59, RuralCare).

Process evaluation will explain why some parts of the project work better than others, providing relevant knowledge for learning and decision making. The analysis of processes will also facilitate



the advancement of explanations of the differences between forecasts and realisations, providing useful knowledge for improvement. From the methodological point of view, it is proposed to carry out a comprehensive and useful monitoring, close to the territory where it is implemented and to the people who manage it, execute it and benefit from the services it offers, as well as to the rest of the participants and collaborators. This type of evaluation relies on a mixed methodological approach that requires a combination of quantitative and qualitative perspectives as a way of gathering and analysing meaningful information based on external and systematic observations and looking at the dynamics of the action from the perspective of the different actors involved.

In addition, the RuralCare Project contemplates in detail a quality assurance strategy throughout the entire implementation process. For this purpose, a Quality Assurance Plan has been defined that extends throughout its life cycle, to ensure the quality of products, deliverables and tools, as well as to address risks and contingencies. Within this framework, the Quality Assurance Plan has the following objectives:

- Clearly identify the organisation for quality management.
- Define a clear and agile internal communication system for collaboration and coordination between participating entities.
- Establish a map of processes and responsibilities of the different actors and participants.
- Determine the procedure for the identification of risks and for the development and monitoring of the contingency plan.

Responsibility for the technical design of the Plan was assigned to Project participants from the Department of Sociology and Social Work. After several versions, the Quality Plan was approved in November 2021 by the Quality Group. This Plan explains the process of its elaboration (led by the Quality Group of the Project), the inspiring principles in the design and configuration of the Plan and the coordination system established to articulate it operationally and its structure. The Plan consists of four areas of action: organisation, communication, process management and identification of critical points and risks and design of the contingency plan; and nine lines that address the fundamental issues and processes in quality management and control: organisation for quality, internal communication, external communication, document management, process mapping, strategic and operational management, learning and knowledge management, risk matrix and contingency plan.



The RuralCare Project states that "in the critical event identification phase, all partners and collaborators, in view of the project activities, will identify potential risks, which will be categorised and prioritised to assist in the management of high impact and high probability risks" (p. 79, RuralCare). In response to this objective, a Risk and Mitigation Matrix has been elaborated with the participation of all partners. The Matrix is organised according to the Work Packages (WP). In each WP, the following are identified:

- Actions: each of the implementation commitments that the RuralCare Project has assigned to each of the partners and that is reflected in the document called "Description of the action and work plan" (September 2019).
- Risk: critical or adverse situations that may prevent an action from being carried out in accordance with the pre-established technical conditions. Risk is assessed according to two considerations: probability and impact.
- Probability of a risk occurring: this is classified as high, moderate or low, depending on the degree of certainty with which it is estimated that the risk may or may not materialise.
- Foreseeable impact of the risk: relevance of the negative consequences that it would have, in the event of its occurrence, on other actions or on the achievement of the objectives foreseen in the Project. It is classified as high, moderate or low.
- Mitigation measures: actions foreseen to deal with the situation generated as a consequence of the materialisation of a risk.

As can be seen, the RuralCare Project pays due attention to two key issues: the evaluation process and quality management. This will contribute to the proper implementation of the UNCCD processes and to the proper management of the knowledge and learning that these processes provide.