

Using the theory of change approach for assessing the intervention logic – lessons learned from the impact evaluation of P6 of the Austrian RDP 2014-2020

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General Outline

- **Background** for the development of the tool
- What is **Theory of Change** (ToC) in brief
- A **practical example** from 2014-2020 impact assessment
- Appraisal of the intervention logic at the **micro-level of interventions** and at the **meso level of focus areas** (Specific Objectives in the new period)
- Conclusions and recommendations for **ex-ante application**

Background for tool development

For the **impact evaluation in 2019 of the Austrian RDP 2014-2020 / Priority 6** the evaluators developed a tool (**impact model**) to

- better understand the **design** of the measures,
- the **preconditions** for a successful implementation,
- their expected **impacts** towards overarching objectives and
- the suitability of the **indicators** for impact measurement

This tool is also interesting for **ex-ante evaluation**

The tool is based on the **Theory of Change (ToC) approach**

Background for tool development

- The Austrian RDP 2014-2020 is programmed at a **very detailed scale** (types of operation) according to the implementation responsibility
- Priority 6 includes **20 types of operation** with an allocation of approx. EUR 550 million (excluding LEADER)
- **Impact models** were established for each type of operation (in total 20)
- see the **composition** of Focus Area 6A on the next slide

Background for tool development

- Example Priority 6 / Focus area 6A

6a	art 19	farm and business development	6	
			6.4	6.4.1. Diversification towards non-agricultural activities
				6.4.4. Foundation of innovative small businesses in rural areas
	6.4.5. Promotion of local supply (Nahversorgung) including tourist facilities			
	art 35	Cooperation	16	
			16.2	16.2.2. Support for the development of innovative pilot projects in tourism
				16.3
			16.9	16.9.1. Promotion of horizontal & vertical cooperation lw. & Fw. Actors for the creation & development of social services
	16.10	16.10.1. Establishment and operation of clusters		
16.10.2. Setup and operation of networks				

← Impact models were established for each type of operation

Theory of Change basics

‘Theory of Change’, developed in the 1990s, is used to build a **strategic plan** and to design a related **evaluation model**

- It illustrates how a desired change is expected to happen and describes the **pathway** from activities to planned results. It pays attention to the **'mini-results'** that must be achieved to reach a long term objective ('outcome mapping')
- It identifies all necessary **preconditions** for successful implementation but also **limitations**
- It uses a system with **built-in indicators** for success control
- It works with a **visual** language

Theory of Change basics

Building blocks of an impact model

Limitations to
achieve results &
impacts

Long-term impacts

Accountability
threshold: scope of
effects which can
be attributed to the
intervention

Short-term results

Build-in
indicators

Planned activities grouped according to pathways

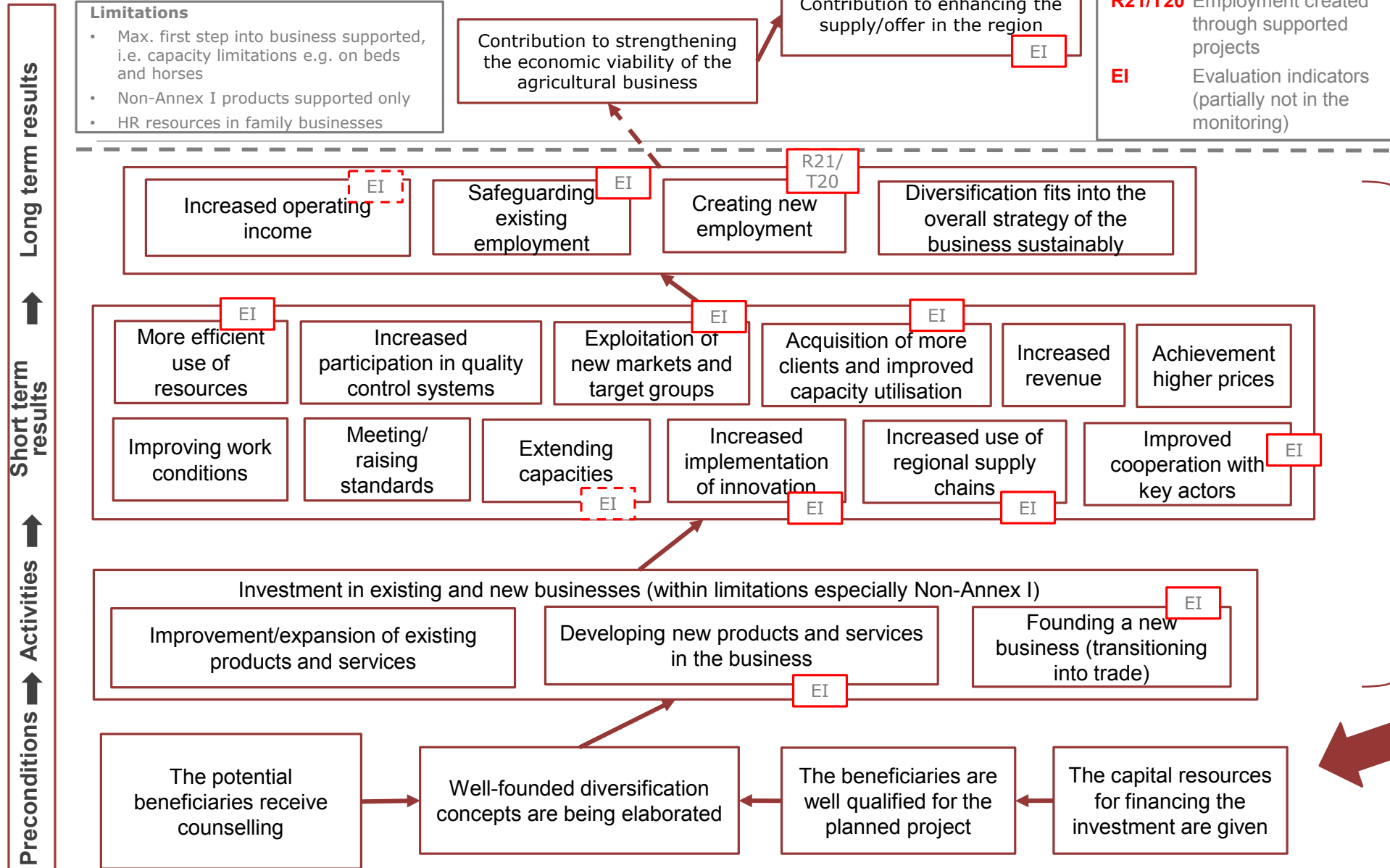
Preconditions for successful
implementation of the intervention

Using 'impact models' for assessing P6-interventions

- First, a **theoretical model** was re-constructed from programme documents
- All given common and programme specific **indicators** were outlined
- See a 'theoretical' impact model for 6.4.1 Diversification allocated with 43 Million € public funds on the next slide

Diversification towards non-agricultural activities (VHA 6.4.1)

Link to overarching objectives above the accountability threshold



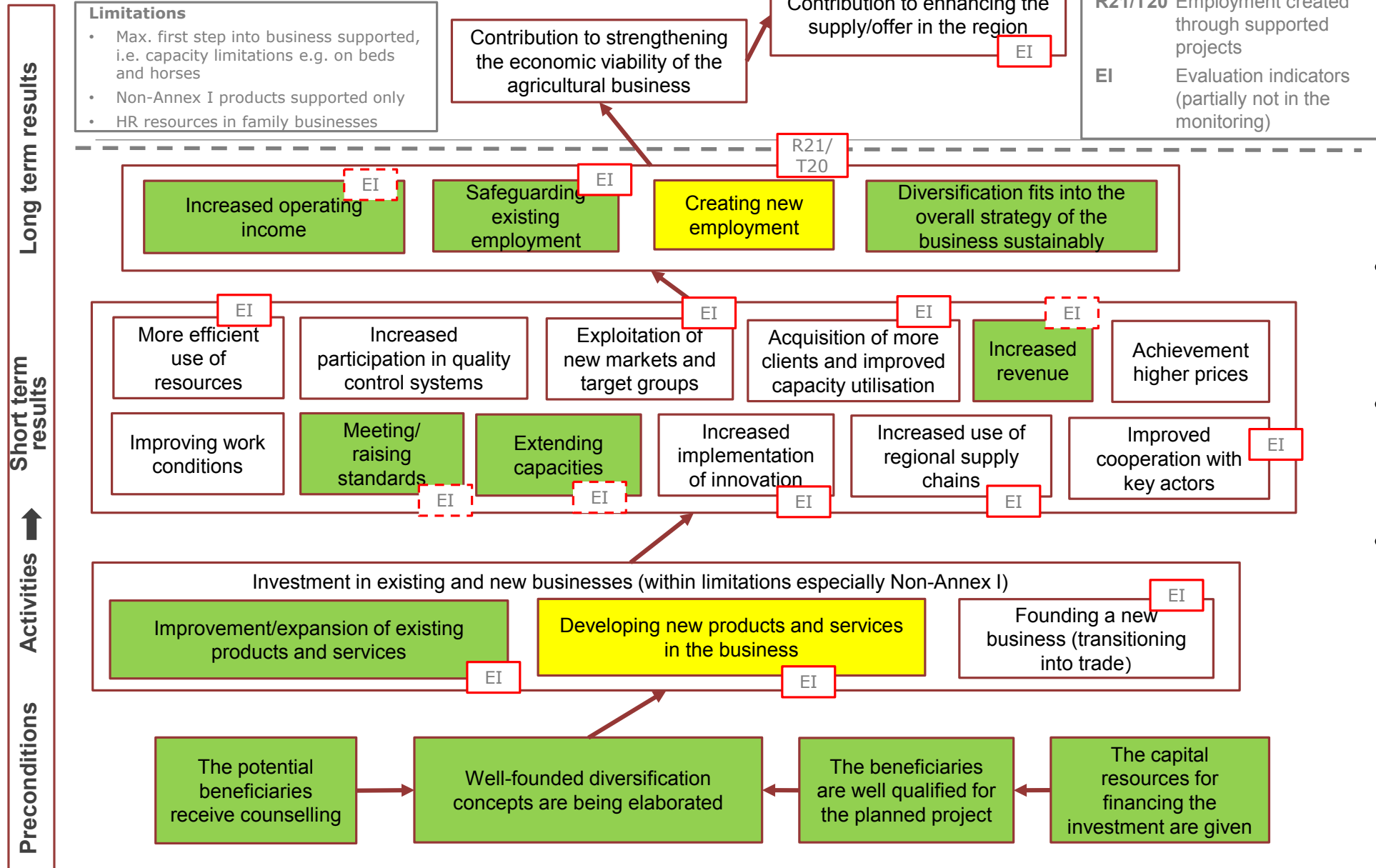
Pathway of activities leading to results with built-in indicators

Preconditions to be in place for successful implementation

Using 'impact models' for assessing P6-interventions

- The impact model was **empirically** verified in a later stage to show the actual impact paths at the end
- Each building block is verified through the analysis of **mixed sources** such as monitoring data, surveys, document research in a qualitative & quantitative way
- See a 'verified' impact model for 6.4.1 Diversification on the next slide

Diversification towards non-agricultural activities (VHA 6.4.1)



- Green: Main impacts
- Yellow: Side effects
- White: Not verifiable

Using 'impact models' for the ex-ante appraisal of interventions

The **ex-ante evaluator** can use '**theoretical**' **impact models** at the **intervention level** to answer the following questions:

- Does the (draft) strategy describe a clear system of objectives which can be translated into a visual impact model?
- Are the pre-conditions and limitations for successful implementation described in the (draft) strategy?
- Are planned short term results logically linked to longer term results?
- Is it possible to trace a clear pathway to the specific objective?
- Are all relevant activities covered by output–indicators?
- Are all relevant results covered by result indicators?

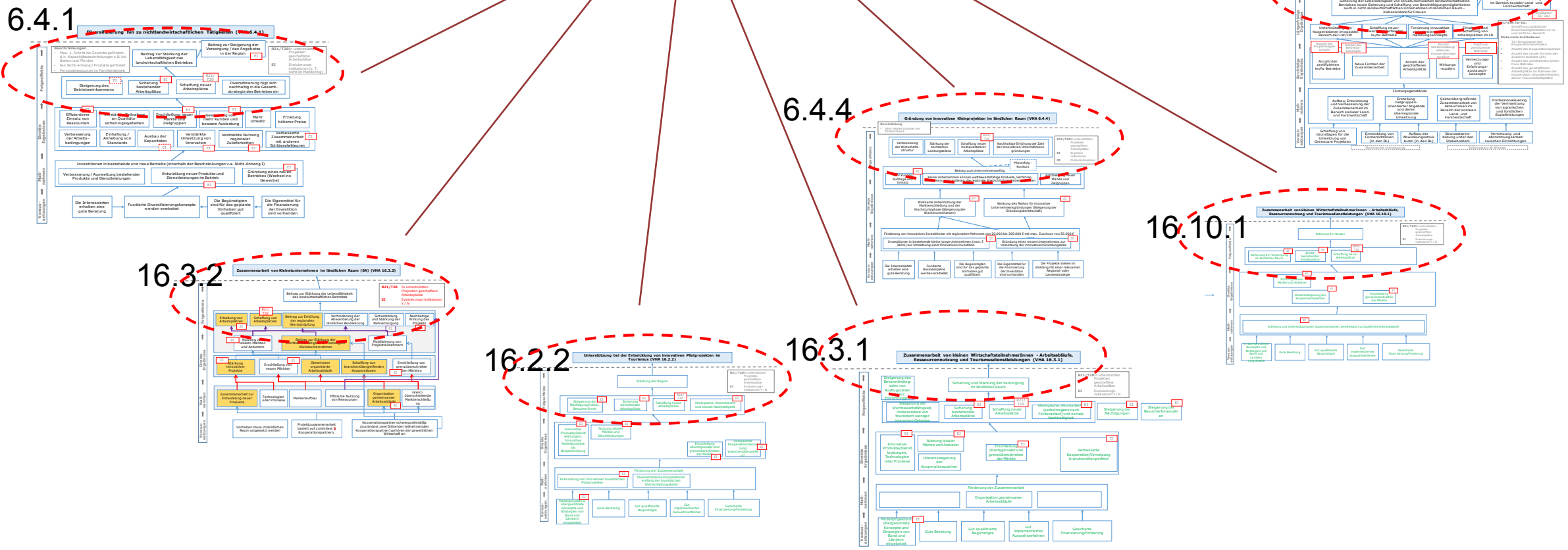
Using “impact models” for assessing Focus Area (SO) objectives

- At the FA level, the 2019 evaluation had to assess the contribution of the **combined set of interventions** towards the FA-objectives in order to answer the CEQ
 - **Challenge:** The objectives pursued in FAs in P6 are **very briefly described** in the outline of the strategy (while the types of operations are presented in more detail). There is only 1 common target/result-indicator e.g. for FA 6A allocated with 120 million € public funds
 - Therefore, in a **1st step**, the system of objectives had to be reconstructed at FA level. For this purpose, the impact objectives were clustered from the types of operation
- See the next slide for illustration

Contribution of the operations to the objectives of focus area 6A



Clustering of objectives



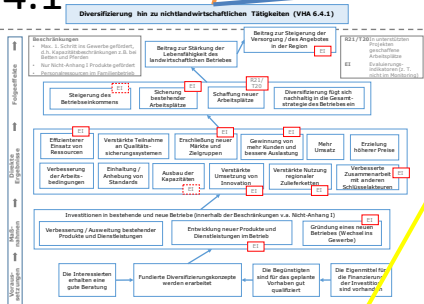
Using 'impact models' for assessing Focus Area (SO) objectives

- In the 2nd step the main results of the interventions in relation to the clustered overarching objectives were summarized by using the common and programme-specific indicators
- Several interventions can contribute to one objective
- See the next slide for illustration

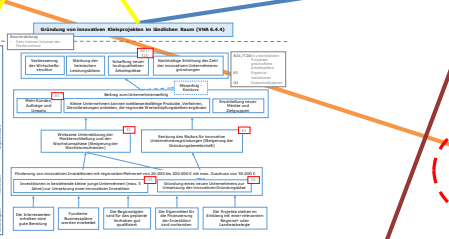
Contribution of the operations to the objectives of focus area 6A



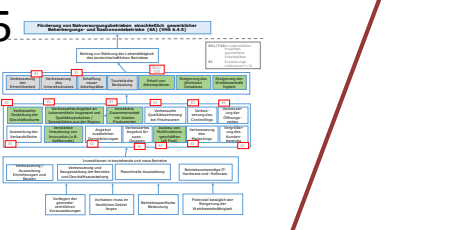
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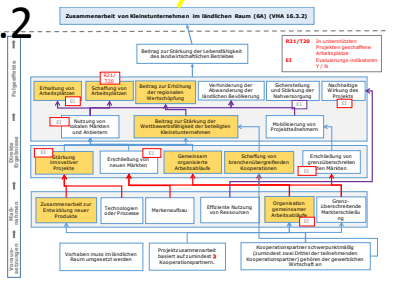
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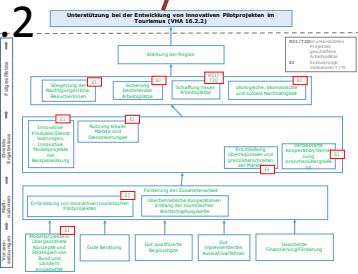
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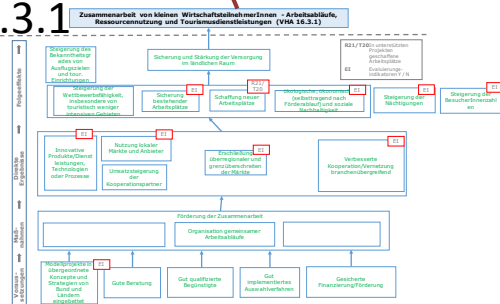
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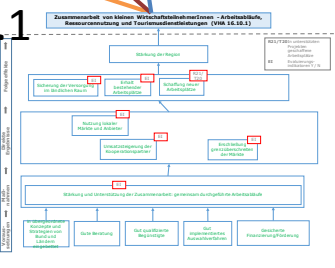
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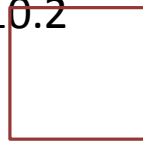
16.3.1



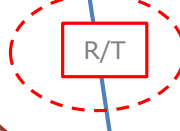
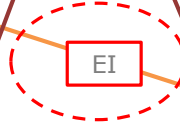
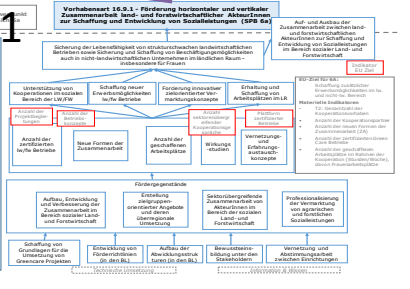
16.10.1



16.10.2



16.9.1



Using “impact models” for the ex-ante appraisal of Specific Objectives

- In the ex-ante evaluation, it should be checked whether the objective system is described **sufficiently precisely** at the level of the Specific Objective
- The Specific Objectives are somehow **general and need to be specified** in the national context. Without clear objectives at Specific Objective level, the (broad) impacts of underlying interventions cannot be assessed later
- The ex-ante evaluator can check the contribution of interventions towards the Specific Objectives by using **impact models**
- This serves more targeted national policies and **better designed interventions** in the context of the proposed overall shift from a compliance-based to a performance-based CAP

Conclusions and recommendations

- Common intervention-logics are often very schematic and hardly correspond to real effect relations. An ex-ante evaluation based on such logic is **limited** in its robustness
- **ToC** works very well at the **micro (intervention) and meso (specific objective) level** to check the plausibility of the pathways to achieve a goal, to discover flaws in the design of interventions and to prove the consistency between expected results and indicators
- The ex-ante established impact model can later be used for **ongoing evaluation** (2 flies are done with one flap!)
- Visualizations are very well suited as **participative** instruments in working groups

Conclusions and recommendations

- On the **macro-level** (programme-level) **ToC** becomes very complex. Probably macro-economic analysis (modelling techniques) is more suitable here
- In order to assess the effectiveness of interventions and groups of interventions thoroughly, impact models should be developed for **all interventions and Specific Objectives**. The existing evaluation results should be used for this purpose
- ToC thinking should be used **from the beginning**; therefore the ex-ante stage should be the starting point
- **My vision**: Every policy designer should have an impact model on the wall (printed in large format), which has to be improved more and more over the years

Austrian
evaluation
studies are
published at

https://www.bmnt.gv.at/land/laendl_entwicklung/evaluierung/Evaluierungsstudien.html

Thank you

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Further reading:

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/guide/evaluation_sourcebook.pdf

<https://www.theoryofchange.org/>