



Activities of the Secretariat of SWG

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September – December 2007

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Cc:

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- GTZ HQ Office, Eschborn, Germany
- InWEnt, Germany
- FAO Regional office, Budapest

Major activities carried out during the period September – December 2007

Summary

The report covers the most important information and activities undertaken by the Secretariat of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in SEE countries.

The Secretariat on behalf of the members in the reporting period conducted serial of activities supporting and coordinating the activities of the SWG.

1. Membership in the SWG

In November 2007, the Ministry of Foreign Trade and International Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina become a fullfledged member of the SWG.

Mr. Dusan Neskovic, Sector for Agriculture, Rural Development department – Deputy Minister and Mr. Renato Knezevic, Advisor were nominated to be official Ministry representatives.

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of Republic of Srpska, B&H, nominated Ms. Slavica Samardzic and Mr. Zoran Kovacevic as official Ministry representatives in the SWG, as replacement of Mr. Dusan Neskovic and Mr. Stevan Trivkovic.

2. PROJECTS

2. 1. The SWG Project financed by the GTZ Open Regional Fund (ORF) for South–Eastern Europe on the Foreign Trade Promotion entitled:”Strengthening regional–cooperation during the EU integration process and increase economic competitiveness of rural areas”

Project proposal was prepared by the Secretariat and it was submitted to the GTZ HQ - Open Regional Fund (ORF) for South–Eastern Europe on the Foreign Trade Promotion. The project has been approved by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

The management of the GTZ ORF Project for SWG is responsibility of the GTZ Macedonia, appointed coordinator Mr. Boban Ilik.

The project will support the activities of the SWG and will provide basic funds for organization of SWG meetings, as well as, for financing of the initial assessments of cross- border regions in SEE.

General planning of the project activities was performed during the Seventh meeting of the SWG held in the end of October in Budapest. During the meeting general project components and general activities per component were defined as following:

Project Component 1:

EU Approximation - Policy and Professional Dialogue

General activities related to the Project Component 1 – EU Approximation - Policy and Professional Dialogue:

1. Regional exchange of expertise for setting-up Rural Development Institutional Support, Strategic and Programming Doc.
2. Regional Networking and Public Awareness Campaign & Development of Internet Platform for Networking and Building Public Awareness
2.1 Regional networking of NGO-s for exchange of experience and cooperation in providing RD support (first step→conference→RD and Regional Cooperation from the perspective of the civil society: social partners, farmers organizations)
2.2 Bottom-up approach in RD local initiatives and decentralized RD support structures and local self governments
2.3 Public awareness meetings with high ranking officials in the governments in the regions and mass-media with success storey from new EU member states (Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria)

Project Component 2:

Cross – border project design and preparation

General activities related to Project Component 2 - Cross – border project design and preparation:

1. Multilateral Project for promotion of local initiatives (Multilateral project for exchange of experience among Local Action Groups – LAG-s)
2. Multilateral Project for cooperation in Agro-tourism
3. Assessment of the situation/potentials of cross-boarder regions
4. Diversification (promotion) of economic activities in Rural Regions

Project Component 3:

Trade promotion - Local and regional people-to-people Actions for Rural Economic Development

General activities related to Project Component 3 - Trade promotion - Local and regional people-to-people Actions for Rural Economic Development

1. Support organization of regional fairs and promotional events in order to foster regional networking
2. Organization of round tables and study tours for exchange of experiences and best practices in thematic areas related to Rural Development and economic promotion
3. Organization of Workshops and Trainings on Branding (Regions and Products) and increase of awareness on this issue

Detailed planning of the project activities as well as planning of the activities of SWG for 2008 in general has been done during the Eight meeting of the SWG, held in Macedonia in the beginning of December.

Operational plan for the SWG activities in general and the Operational plan for the SWG GTZ ORF Project were prepared.

2. 2. Detailed planning of the implementation phase of the FAO regional project: "Support Capacity Building for Agriculture and Rural Development Policy Analysis and Formulation in view of EU-Accession of Western Balkan Countries" (TCP/RER/3103)

During the Seventh meeting of the SWG, the SWG members gave detailed proposals for implementation of the FAO project: "Support Capacity Building for Agriculture and Rural Development Policy Analysis and Formulation in view of EU-Accession of Western Balkan Countries".

During the meeting Regional coordinator, National coordinators, assistant to regional coordinator were defined.

Proposals for international and national experts which should carry out training activities were proposed.

Regional and National Coordinators should clarify the proposals by 15th of November.

The FAO/TCP/RER/3103 project Inception Missions will start in February-March 2008.

3. EVENTS

3. 1. Agricultural Policy Forum (APF) "Agricultural and Rural Development Policies - Challenges for Institutional Set-up and Co-operation in South Eastern Europe", Dresden, Germany, November 16-20, 2007

The Fourth AFP was jointly organized by InWEnt, GTZ, SWG and IAMO.

The overall objective of the Agricultural Policy Forum in Dresden "Agricultural and Rural Development Policies - Challenges for Institutional Set-up and Co-operation in South Eastern Europe" was to foster implementation of agricultural and rural development policies in SEE.

During the APF in Dresden the significant emphases was given on the initiative of the SWG and the following implementation issues were identified and included in the 2007 Dresden Agenda:

- The SWG has the potential of becoming the institutional memory of agricultural and rural development in SEE countries. In addition, it will have a major role to play in creating awareness for broader rural issues.
- It should continue to be the platform for exchange of experiences, best practices and information needed for improved regional cooperation.
- The SWG's role in facilitating regional, cross-boarder, trans-national cooperation and coordinating networking and collaboration between relevant organizations and institutions in SEE countries should be strengthened.
- A strong and resilient relationship between the SWG and the future Regional Cooperation Council shall be established.

- The SWG must campaign within and beyond the region in order to gain further visibility and recognition.

During the discussion it was concluded that the Agricultural Policy Forum in Dresden was a successful Forum, which resulted with serious obligation of the SWG member institutions and their officially nominated representatives, for the forthcoming period.

During the Ministers meeting in Dresden Ministries/ Secretariats Declaration was signed by the Ministers of Agriculture or their authorized signatories, sustaining the activities of the SWG.

With the document the Ministers/ Secretaries gave overall political, financial and technical support of the SWG activities in order to ensure the sustainability of this regional initiative.

With the Declaration the SWG members, were authorized to undertake all relevant steps to prepare statute, strategy, action plan and all other necessary documents for their respective institutions, to institutionalize the SWG.

3.2. Forum for rural development and regional cooperation, October 1-2, 2007, Skopje, Macedonia

The SWG initiative was presented during the Forum for rural development and regional cooperation organized by the Macedonian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy. The Forum was intended for Ministers of Agriculture from SEE countries.

Ministers from SEE countries (Albania, Montenegro, Macedonia) or their deputies/ State Secretary (Bulgaria, Serbia) participated on the Forum and discussed the national policies for rural development and possibilities for strengthening the regional cooperation.

Strong support to the SWG initiative was given during the Forum discussions.

4. COOPERATION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS

4. 1. Memorandum of Understanding with PREPARE- Partnership for Rural Europe

Following the meetings and communication between the Secretariat of the SWG and PREPARE – Partnership for Rural Europe, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed. PREPARE is the Non Governmental Organization working on strengthening of civil society and promotion of multi-national exchange in the rural development in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Memorandum of Understanding will formalize the discussions about joint realization of activities in the area of rural development and gives the basis for further mutual co-operation between the two organizations based on the willingness to support the activities in the mentioned sector.

4.2. Contacts with Stability Pact - Regional Cooperation Council

The Secretariat of the SWG established follow up contacts with the Stability Pact – Mr. Erhard Busek, Special Co-ordinator, related to the invitation received directly from Mr. Busek during the Agricultural Policy Forum in Dresden, for presentation of the initiative of the SWG during the meeting of the Working Tables which will be held in Tirana in the period 3 - 4 December, 2007.

After the e-mail contact with Mr. Busek, the Secretariat received information from Ms. Mary O` Mahoni, Mr. Busek`s associate, that the topics of the meetings of the Round Tables in Tirana are not compatible with the initiative of the SWG.

Ms. O`Mahoni suggested to SWG, to establish contact with Mr. Hijadet Bishchevic, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council, and to discuss possibility to schedule separate meetings in order to present the initiative of the SWG in front of the new Regional Cooperation Council.

It was decided that the Rotating President of the SWG for the year 2007/2008, Mr. Gjeci goes on the meeting in Tirana and to try to establish contacts with relevant participants on the Stability Pact meeting (especially Mr. Hijadet Bishkevic) in order to clarify and agree the possibility of special meeting of SWG with the Regional Cooperation Council.

4.3. InWEnt

As agreed during the previous meetings of the SWG, the SWG will be a political partner of InWEnt for the new programme on “EU integration of rural economic areas” for the period 2008-2010.

The draft InWEnt training programme for 2008, was a topic of discussion during the Eight meeting of the SWG. The proposed training programme was very much appreciated by the present representatives of the SWG member institutions.

During the discussions most of the participants expressed their concern that the planned schedule of InWEnt is mostly relevant for regional development policy and regional management, with a limited focus toward rural development issues and problems and needs of the SWG member institutions (Ministries of Agriculture).

Namely, the proposed programme is more appropriate to the Ministries of Local Self Governments and Regional Development, than for the Ministries of Agriculture, which competency is rural development.

It was suggested that besides the proposed training programme, some of the training topics to be reframed according to the needs of the institutions, members in the SWG.

It was proposed the following topics to be included in the InWEnt programme for the SWG:

- Producers groups and common market organization in relation to RD and Agricultural policy of the EU;
- Establishment, structure and functions of the Paying Agency – success stories;
- Extension services and their role in the implementation of RD policy of the EU;
- Negotiation skills and procedures, communication, leadership, conflict management with emphases on negotiations in the chapters – Agriculture, Fishery and Food safety;

4.4. Hungarian Center for Regional Cooperation

Following the meetings between the SWG and the Hungarian LEADER Center, held during the Seventh meeting of the SWG in Budapest, the Secretariat of SWG is going to start-up communication and preparations for establishment of cooperation with the Hungarian Center for Regional Cooperation: LEADER+. This cooperation should become official by signing of an official document - Memorandum of Understanding;

4.5. Meetings with the Secretariat of the VISHEGRAD Group (V4 Group)

The Permanent Secretary of the SWG, after the initial contacts established with the International Center for Democratic Transition (ICTD) had meetings at the Secretariat of the Vishegrad group located ICTD.

The meeting was performed during the SWG meeting in Budapest.

The discussions were focused on the Structure of the Vishegrad group, legal status, roles and responsibilities of the Secretariat of the group as well as possibilities for future cooperation.

The V4 cooperation can currently be referred to as the most profound initiative in Central Europe. The backbone of this cooperation consists of mutual contacts at all levels - from the highest-level political summits to expert and diplomatic meetings, to activities of the non-governmental associations in the region, think-tanks and research bodies, cultural institutions or numerous networks of individuals.

5. REGULAR MEETINGS OF THE SWG

5.1 Seventh Meeting of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in SEE Countries

The Seventh meeting of the SWG has been held in Budapest, Hungary in the period October 29-31, 2007.

The meeting was organized by the Secretariat of the SWG and FAO, hosted by FAO REU, SEUR and supported by GTZ ORF for SWG.

Purpose of the meeting:

The Seventh Meeting of the SWG was a targeted multipurpose meeting organized in order to:

- Finalize the preparation for the Agricultural Policy Forum: "Agricultural and Rural Development Policies - Challenges for Institutional Set-up and Co-operation in South Eastern Europe", and
- Plan the General Activities of the SWG, as per the approved GTZ Open Regional Fund Project for the SWG: "Strengthening regional-cooperation during the EU integration process and increase economic competitiveness of rural areas".
- Discuss in detail implementation issues for the FAO regional project TCP/RER/3101 project: "Support Capacity Building for Agriculture and Rural Development Policy Analysis and Formulation in view of EU-Accession of Western Balkan Countries";

During the meeting the following conclusions were decided:

- The SWG is going to start-up communication and preparations for establishment of cooperation with the Hungarian Center for Regional Cooperation: LEADER+. This cooperation should become official by signing of an official document - Memorandum of Understanding;
- The Secretariat of the SWG is intensively working on establishment of contacts with similar groups in the Region and EU;
- The SWG members discussed and agreed upon the final text of the Declaration for "Sustaining the activities of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group of South-Eastern Europe (RRD SWG)" to be convened in Dresden on November 19th 2007. SWG members will hand over the final version of the Declaration to their Ministers;
- Regarding the new GTZ ORF approved project: "Strengthening regional-cooperation during the EU integration process and increase economic competitiveness of rural areas", the members of the SWG discussed and defined Major Project component as well as General Project Activities corresponding with the major components;
- The SWG members gave detailed proposals for implementation of the FAO project: "Support Capacity Building for Agriculture and Rural Development Policy Analysis and Formulation in view of EU-Accession of Western Balkan Countries". The FAO/TCP/RER/3103 project Inception Mission will start in February-March 2008.

5.2. Eight Meeting of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) has been held in the period 30 November – 2 December, 2007 in Mavrovo, Macedonia

The Eighth Meeting of the SWG was a multipurpose meeting organized in order to:

- Plan activities of the SWG for the year 2008, as per the approved GTZ Open Regional Fund Project for the SWG: "Strengthening regional-cooperation during the EU integration process and increase economic competitiveness of rural areas".
- Discuss, clarify and deliver responsibilities to the appointed representatives of the member institutions in SWG, as per the Dresden Agenda 2007 and the Declaration sustaining the activities of the SWG

During the meeting the following conclusions were decided:

- The Rotating President of the SWG for the year 2007/2008, Mr. Gjenci should go on the meeting in Tirana and to try to establish contacts with relevant participants on the Stability pact meeting (especially Mr. Hijadet Bishkevic) in order to clarify and agree the possibility of special meeting of SWG with the Regional Cooperation Council;
- It was suggested that beside proposed topics, the InWent annual programme for 2008 to be extended with specific topics of special interest of the SWG, the political partner of InWent;
- Revision of the current version of the Statute of the SWG, as a precondition for formalization of the cooperation among SWG member institutions (registration and financing) is a priority as well as Preparation of the Strategic Action Plan-Annual Plan;
- Trainings how to access the web platform and how to use it, will be organized during the next SWG meetings;
- In order to foster the cooperation and communication between SWG members video conference connection to be established;
- During the Agricultural Forum in Berlin, organized within the Green Week Trade Fair, presentation of SWG and lobby to relevant German organizations to be performed by the President and Secretariat of the SWG;
- Discussions with civil society partners of the SWG (PREPARE, Hungarian LAG Centre) should continue and result with realization of concrete activities;
- During 2008, the SWG to be promoted in front of the European organizations and institutions;
- Set of promotional material to be prepared and delivered to the SWG members by the Secretariat;
- An Operational plan of activities of the SWG for the period December 2007 - December 2008 is prepared.

6. PREPARATION OF STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS FOR THE SWG

Taking into consideration conclusions of the AFP in Dresden as well as the Ministries/ Secretariats Declaration, the representatives of the SWG member institutions concluded that the revision of the current version of the Statute of the SWG is a priority as well as Preparation of the Strategic Action Plan and Annual Plan.

For the Revision of the Statute of the SWG the responsible person is Mr. Gjenci, Albania. Mr. Gjenci took responsibility to contact the proposed professionals in order to discuss their availability to work on the new version of the SWG Statute.

The Strategy should be developed by Ms. Miroslava Geogaiva.

The Annual Operational Plan for the activities of the SWG is a responsibility of the Secretariat of the SWG. The Operational Plan of the SWG will consist activities as for the GTZ ORF project, FAO TCT project for SWG as well as InWEnt training activities.

7. RRD SWG Web-site (www.seerural.org)

The general conclusion is that the web platform still is in the initial stage of its development and it is not utilized as it was expected at the beginning.

Most of the SWG member institutions still didn't submit the necessary basic contribution/ documents for the web –site.

In order to complete the basic structure of the web – site as well as to develop it on the more advanced stage, responsible persons from each member institutions were appointed.

Certain criteria for experts and organizations and institutions were agreed.

It was also agreed that each SWG member should share information about different trainings, events with RD relevance with the SWG colleagues.

The Secretariat should search on internet about different events and trainings, which could be of interest of the members and post it on the web – site.

The idea proposed by the Secretariat in the new year all relevant information; announcement to the SWG members to be sent by the web-platform was accepted by the SWG members.

Short trainings how to access the web platform and how to use it will be organized during the next SWG meetings.

In order to foster the cooperation and communication between SWG members video meetings/ discussions were propped.

ANNEX I: Pictures



Seventh Meeting of SWG, October 2007, Budapest, Hungary



APF, November, Dresden, Germany



Breakfast of Ministers of Agriculture from SEE with the Saxon Minister of Agriculture



Ministers Meeting, November, Dresden, Germany



Signing of MoU between SWG and PREPARE



Eight Meeting of SWG, December 2007, Mavrovo, Macedonia