

Assessment of the application of the LEADER approach in the Western Balkan Countries - “from a local initiative to a mainstream concept in the rural areas”

Rationale/Background

- **Overall objective:**
 - *To improve understanding of the current state and the barriers for effective implementation of LEADER initiative*
- **Specific objectives:**
 - *To present the current state of LEADER in country / territory in WB from the perspective of:*
 - *cross-country comparative analysis of the policy, regulatory and institutional framework;*
 - *To assess the available funds from public sources and donors;*
 - *Review practical activities already undertaken to identify good practice from previous actions and initiatives and lessons learned;*
 - *To draw conclusions by generalizing from the findings on the specific national needs, challenges and constrains*

Method

Desk research

- *Assessment of available policy documents, research papers, reports, studies etc. from public authorities, from academia and from international donors and organisations*

Interview(s) with representative(s) of the Ministry of Agriculture or other relevant Governmental body; identified resource person(s)

- *Interviews templates insert in Annex with contact of resource person;*

Case studies

- *Examples of good or existing practices – to illustrate the diversity of: contexts, approaches and types of partnerships and institutions developed by LEADER/ LEADER like initiatives, support and partnerships.*

Country study report outline (estimated of about 10-12 pages)

- *Cover page*
 - *Relevant design*
 - *Title of the country study*
 - *Year and month of publishing*
 - *Name of the organizations supporting the prepared study*

Table of content

- 1. INTRODUCTION (up to 1 page)
- 2. LEADER ENVIRONMENT IN COUNTRY/ TERRITORY) up to 3 pages)

The Objective:

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- 2.2 Institutional and Legal Settings (up to 1 page)
- 2.3 Funding (up to 1 page)
- 3. PREVIOUS INITIATIVES AND LESSONS LEARNED (up to 3 pages)
- 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (up to 2 pages)
- 4.1 Conclusions
- 4.2 Recommendations
- 5. ANNEXES

List of abbreviations

- Compiled list of abbreviations and explanations, from each country report

1. INTRODUCTION (up to 1 page)

State the EU integration status of the country (e.g candidate or else)

- Explain the current status of the country regarding the EU integration process
- Give brief history of the progress and achievements regarding the EU approximation process with a focus to agriculture and rural development (consider EU country report)
- Further steps (consider EU country report)

Describe strategic approach of rural development policy of the country.

- Consider national rural development strategic documents for the period 2014-2020.
- Give some statistical data on the percentages representing rural territories and population living in rural areas
- What are the major challenges and strategic objectives with regards to economic growth, jobs creation and sustainability of the rural communities and quality of life among rural population?

Explain the national rural development support scheme

- Take into consideration related national programs in terms of financial support and set of measures implemented

State the eligibility for utilization of the Instrument for Pre-Accession IPA, specifically IPARD

- Past performance and utilization of the IPARD I funds (where applicable) or other EU pre-accession assistance
- State the new IPARD II programming period with major goals and objectives
- Briefly describe the major set of measures
- The maximum EU contribution programmed for the period 2014-2020 in the amount of €.

Provide information on defining rural areas in the country both administratively and in relation to the implementation of the rural development policy

- *It is important to assess how the rural territories are defined under the current countries regulations. In some countries (Macedonia) the state statistical office provides data, on the basis of the law on territorial organization defining towns and villages based on the number of population, infrastructure and employment as one approach. While according the law on agriculture and rural development, rural areas are municipalities with less than 30 000 inhabitants and this is another approach*
- *Assess relevant laws and regulations for defining of rural areas*

2. LEADER ENVIRONMENT IN COUNTRY/ TERRITORY (up to 3 pages)

The Objective:

To present the current state of LEADER in country / territory in WB from the perspective of:

- *the policy, regulatory and institutional framework;*
- *previous actions and initiatives and lessons learned;*
- *available funds from public sources and donors;*

2.1. LEADER in the national strategic and program documents (up to 1 page);

Describe the strategic policy framework for the implementation of the LEADER;

- *Documents to be analysed:*
 - *National strategies (not only on Agriculture! look as well outside of the Ministry of Agriculture, e.g. regional development and local self-government), assess linkages between rural regional and local development for broader approach towards rural development. Consider involvement of sub regional partnerships as much as their responsibility politically allows.*
 - *Programs, annual regulations,*
 - *IPARD programs*
 - *Regional, sub-national strategic documents (example of RS and BA)*

2.2. Institutional and Legal Settings (up to 1 page)

Describe the institutional setting and relevant actors

- *Which organisations have a mandate and are responsible related to the issues concerning, programing, implementation; funding promoting, evaluation of LEADER.,(e.g. ministries, paying agency national rural networks, LAGs, or LAG initiatives existing organisations that provide services and activities,*
- *What are their roles and what relations do exist between these organisations; hierarchical lines: who gives orders to whom?*
- *How the responsibilities are divided between various governmental and ministry bodies*

- *The capacity of the relevant institutions (general observation based on previous programmes, assessments and activities)*
- *Networking / LEADER networks or Networks, Projects, Organizations supporting LAGs*
- *Please make a clear distinction between the formal national networks and the civil society networks*

Describe the legal and regulatory requirements for the implementation of the LEADER

- *Consider primary legislation like:*
 - *Law on Agriculture and rural development*
 - *Law on regional development*
 - *Law on local self-government*
 - *Legal form for establishment of a LAG (state the under which law)*
 - *Law for Non-Governmental Organizations and Foundation*
 - *Any other relevant Law*
- *Consider secondary legislation like:*
 - *Eligibility conditions for the geographical scope of possible co-operation partners,*
 - *Conditions for establishment of LAG and definition of partners*
 - *Main criteria for development of a Local Development Strategy*
 - *Regulation for establishment of a national rural network (is there a legal basis for establishment of a national rural network)*
 - *Any other relevant regulation*

Emphasise possible synergies between above mentioned relevant laws and regulations for mutual coordination in the process of the LEADER implementation

2.3. Funding (up to 1 page)

- *List the policy measures on support to activities related to LEADER, LEADER like measures (i.e. training, implementation of small projects; in-kind support like office rent etc. funded by Ministry of Agriculture (IPARD; national funds) or any other regional, local governmental body (e.g. through IPA cross border) and any other donor project or donor funded organization in period since 2010 (if any);*
- *Please consider other opportunities for drawing funds (if any out of listed)*
- *Please provide even indicative amount of money spent for these purposes*

3. PREVIOUS INITIATIVES AND LESSONS LEARNED (up to 3 pages)

Check out some of the stories from the communities/LAGs/ that have received public or donor funding to illustrate the diversity of contexts, approaches, types of partnerships and institutions developed.

The criteria for evaluating the good practices should reflect the STARS principles: Successful; Transparent; Adequate; Replicable; Sustainable

There must be evidence that the practice leads to results

- *Field Tested Best Practice*
 - *A program, activity, project or strategy that has been shown to work effectively and produce successful outcomes; supported to some degree by subjective and objective data sources*
- *Promising Practices*
 - *A program, activity, project or strategy that has worked within one organization and shows promise impact. A promising practice must have some objective basis for claiming effectiveness*

Please focus on the:

- *If the action derives from a Local Development Strategy stating 3 main priorities*
- *The objectives, activities, progress achieved*
- *Institutions involved, (LAGs, LAG initiatives with brief background)*
- *Structure and management of a LAG or LAG initiative including Participatory process, multi-stakeholder coordination*
- *The selection of stakeholders, capacity of the participants,*
- *Territorial coverage, (number of inhabitants; geographical spread ; main economic activities and natural specifics*
- *Provide examples of good practice in boxes:*
 - *Example of project(s) implemented by LAG or projects implemented based on LEADER principles like bottom up; territorial approach and public private partnership (1 to 2 examples)*

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (up to 2 pages)

4.1. Conclusions

- **Needs:** *What are the needs of the all relevant stakeholders concerning the implementation of successful LEADER programme in the country? (e.g. acceleration of the accreditation process of the LEADER measure, preparatory activities prior official start of LEADER; animation of rural stakeholders, capacity building of the potential LAGs, development of quality Local Development Strategy etc.)*
- **Challenges:** *What are the challenges faced by government, institutional capacities of relevant institutions, LEADER networks, LAGs etc. Possibilities for utilization of national funds or technical assistance measure from IPARD to support activities prior official start of the LEADER*
- **Constraints:** *Which constraints are preventing the target groups from fulfilling the needs? (legal, institutional, etc)*

4.2. Recommendations

- *Recommendation for institutional set up improvements*
- *Recommendation for policy improvements*
- *Recommendation for the empowering local stakeholders*

5. ANNEXES

- *References (including references on laws, annual regulations, decrees, acts; list links to the relevant projects, institutions)*
- *List contacts of resource persons and organisations*
- *Any other relevant info (maps, tables)*
- *Separate authorised documents, web sources, legal and policy documents etc.*

Interviews with Ministry of Agriculture or other relevant Government bodies

Rationale

- *Interviews with project stakeholders offer a rich source of insight into the collective mind of an organization.*
- *They can help you uncover areas of misalignment between a policy documents and the attitudes and day-to-day decision-making of stakeholders.*
- *They can also highlight issues that deserve special consideration due to their strategic importance*

Method

Step 1 – *Identify the key stakeholders; Conduct one-on-one stakeholder interviews before you conduct research and start with document writing*

Characteristics for identifying stakeholders:

1. *Responsibility and position;*
2. *Knowledge level of the domain; Experience level of the domain*
3. *Leadership role and Influence, control over resources ...*

Step 2 – *Explain the project and nature of your research; Collect as much as possible information of relevance to project objective and the structure of your report (including hard copy documents, web address, personal contacts...)*

Step 3 – *Do not hesitate to return to the stakeholders for clarifications after interview and your research; get outstanding questions resolved...*

Proposed questions for semi-structured interview with representatives of the Ministries of Agriculture

1. *Please explain your position in the overall structure of Ministry of Agriculture or other governmental body. Specify the hierarchical lines and internal structure of different units responsible for LEADER*
2. *How the responsibilities are divided between various governmental and ministry bodies?*
3. *Please explain the way of communication within institution(s). Is there the officially established platform, inter-ministerial body, committee working group etc. responsible of coordinating the formulation of policies and support.*
4. *How the national strategic and programming documents, action plans deal with LEADER? Is it listed among priorities?*
5. *If yes, what are the key aspects of LEADER that are in focus?*
6. *Is there a framework for implementation of LEADER at local level?*
7. *Is there clearly defined legal frame for implementation of LEADER like measures, activities?*
8. *Which laws are regulating LEADER?*
9. *Are there some other relevant agreements, texts or other references?*
10. *Who are the stakeholders, partners? Please list most influential?*
11. *Please explain the way of communication with stakeholders.*
12. *What does the local government (or other local stakeholders) do to support LEADER?*
13. *Are awareness-raising measures included in the Ministry and local government's activities?*
14. *Address the question regarding cooperation and sharing experience regarding LEADER with EU MS and what will be required.*
15. *How and how often Ministry or the local authorities monitor the effects - is there a plan for how to monitor and when effects of measures and resources concerning?*
16. *Please list the projects implemented since 2010 on strengthening capacity for LEADER program implementation on ministry or regional level.*
17. *Describe a project or idea that was implemented primarily in the favour of LEADER*
18. *What were key achievements; sustainability of action?*
19. *Is there any documentation, analysis documents you can share with us?*
20. *Are there any other stakeholders or users we should be talking to consideration?*
21. *Can we follow up with you after the draft study is prepared?*