

Kick off Meeting

Regional Expert Advisory Group on Agro-Biodiversity in the SEE countries

13th -14th, July 2017
Skopje, Macedonia



Meeting Report

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1. Introduction

The regional programme “Rural development by integrated forest and water resource management in South-East-Europe (LEIWW)” is implemented jointly by the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) and the German International Cooperation (GIZ).

The regional programme includes the South-East European (SEE) countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

One of the main objectives of the LEIWW programme is to create preconditions for evidence-based and EU-compliant policy design regarding conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources in agriculture which are essential for the sustainable development of agricultural production and of rural areas.

In line with this objective, development of evidence-based policy assessments and gap analysis is supported in order to provide policy recommendations for mainstreaming biodiversity in the agricultural and land management policies, plans and programmes of the SEE countries.

The Regional Expert Advisory Working Group (REAWG) on Agro-Biodiversity within the SWG, comprised by academic experts, Ministry representatives, as well as other stakeholders dealing with agro-biodiversity is under establishment and will serve as discussion platform for agro-biodiversity in South-East Europe.

The aim is to perform study and develop national and regional reports on state of the art on conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources in agriculture (animal and plant) in the SEE countries, as well as provision of recommendations for an alignment of regional / national priorities with EU policies and international conventions and agreements.

The kick-off meeting of the Regional Expert Advisory Working Group on Agro-Biodiversity of the SEE countries has been held in the period 13-14, July, 2017 in Skopje, Macedonia.

The kick-off meeting served as a preparatory meeting for setting up the structure and technical framework of the Regional Expert Advisory Group on Agro-Biodiversity in the SEE countries.

2. Objectives of the meeting

The objectives of the kick-off meeting were:

- Establishment of a dialogue platform for agro-biodiversity among Ministry representatives, experts and other stakeholders dealing with agro-biodiversity;
- Presentation of the bio-diversity state of the art in the SEE countries;

- Discussion and agreement on the scope of the assessment and content of the study;
- Discussion and agreement on the operational practicalities.

The meeting was performed according to the programme enclosed as Annex 1.

3. Minutes of the meeting

3.1 Participants

In total 22 participants representing academic and governmental institutions from SEE countries, as well as GIZ and SWG attended the event.

The list of participants is enclosed as an Annex 2 of this report.

3.2 Methodology

The event was conducted with a participatory approach, through plenary presentations and discussions, as well as group work.

3.3 Minutes from the event

The event started with welcome addresses by representative of the SWG Secretariat, Ms. Dori Pavloska Gjorgjieska, and well as GIZ LEIWW Team Leader, Mr. Benjamin Mohr.

Regional Coordination of the Regional Expert Advisory Working Group (REAWG) on Agro-Biodiversity will be performed by experts from the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Food, University St. Cyril and Methodius, Skopje.

The Dean of the Faculty, Prof. Vjekoslav Tanaskovic addressed the participants and underlined the importance of conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources in agriculture.

The programme continued with presentation of the SWG and its scope of activities which was done by Ms. Dori Pavloska Gjorgjieska, Project Manager.

The SWG is an International Intergovernmental Organization, consisted of governmental institutions responsible for agriculture and rural development in respective countries and territories of Southeastern Europe. SWG focuses at increasing horizontal collaboration among respective countries and territories of SEE, coordinating regional initiatives related to agriculture and rural development and supporting the process of sustainable development of rural areas in South Eastern Europe. More details are presented in Annex 3.

Mr. Benjamin Mohr, Team Leader of the LEIWW project gave an overview of the scope of the project. The overall objectives of the project is to strengthen regional capacities for rural development and natural resources management in Southeast Europe.

The three central fields of activity are: 1) Regional inter-sectoral coordination processes at the interface between rural development/agriculture, environment, forests and water, 2) Integration of environmental objectives into national rural development and agriculture policies in line with the targets of EU accession processes, and 3) Planning and implementation of integrated forest and water management in selected cross-border pilot regions. A second focus is placed on developing models for generation and diversification of income from the use of natural resources in SEE cross-border regions. More details are given in Annex 4.

Irena Djimrevska, Advisor at LEIWW project presented the aims of the assessment, tasks and responsibilities of the experts, as well as the organization of the REAWG on Agro-Biodiversity.

The foreseen outcomes of the assessment are:

- Regional methodology and approach for the assessment of the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources in agriculture in the countries of the SEE;
- Assessment of the relevant policy frameworks in place and development of policy recommendations for mainstreaming biodiversity in the agricultural and land management policies, plans and programmes, as well as socio-economic development efforts of the SEE countries;
- Regional report on state of the art on conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources in agriculture in the countries of the SEE and the provision of recommendations for an alignment of regional / national priorities with EU policies and international agreements and conventions.

Currently, the REAWG on Agro-Biodiversity is still in the consolidation process and the regional coordination will be performed by experts from the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Food, University St. Cyril and Methodius, Skopje.

International back-stopping will be provided by expert(s) from institution/ company with proven experiences in EU agriculture policy assessments and advise, as well as related to agro-biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. The international tendering process is completed and selection of the best service provider is in progress.

Two national academic experts (one on plant and one on animal genetic resources) from each country/ territory will perform assessment on national level.

Selection of experts is done based on the competitive tender procedure, and in most of the participating countries, the procedure is completed.

Based on the latest GIZ Rules and Procedures, tender procedure should be repeated for experts from Bosnia and Herzegovina (plant genetic resources expert from Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, animal and plant genetic resources experts from Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina), as well as animal genetic resources expert from Kosovo*.

Ministry representatives, as well as other stakeholders (civil society organizations) participating in the REAWG will contribute in the assessment process and will facilitate the cooperation among governmental institutions, civil society and academic community.

Details related to the tasks and responsibilities of the REAWG members, particularly the academic experts, as well as scope of the assessment are provided in the Annex 5.

After the introductory presentations, the programme continued with presentation of the state of the art of agro-biodiversity in SEE countries.

Ms. Rudina Cakraj from the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration of Albania presented the agro-biodiversity state of the art in Albania. Ministry of Environment is the central institution responsible for the conservation of biodiversity and for the sustainable use, both at national and local level. Also, Ministry of Agriculture, as well as Ministry of Education with their departments are responsible for the agro-biodiversity. More details are presented in the Annex 6.

Status of agro-biodiversity in Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina was presented by Dr. Gordana Djuric from the Institute of Genetic Resources within the University of Banja Luka and the presentation is enclosed as Annex 7.

Prof. Pakeza Drkenda from the Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences, Sarajevo, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina presented the institutional set-up, legal framework, genetic resources in agriculture, as well as activities in this field. More details are presented in Annex 8.

Considering that one of the biggest problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina is division of the institutional structures among four levels of governance: state, entity, cantonal and municipal, as well as different legal and policy frameworks on entity level, during the discussions Mr. Dusan Neskovic, Assistant Minister for Agriculture within the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina underlined the importance of harmonization on the state level of the legal framework, institutional set-up and policies related to agro-biodiversity.

Results of the analysis which will be performed on the entity level would facilitate this process and both SWG and GIZ could provide support.

Situation with the genetic resources in agriculture in Kosovo* was presented by Prof. Shukri Fetahu from the Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary within the University of Prishtina.

Direct responsible institution in Kosovo* for biodiversity in general, including the agrobiodiversity is the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, while indirectly involved are the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Education.

Detailed elaboration of the current situation is provided in the annexed presentation (Annex 9).

Prof. Zoran Jovovic from the Faculty of Biotechnical Sciences within the University of Podgorica, in Montenegro underlined that the Faculty has a key role in gathering, collection and studding of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture in the country.

Budget line for genetic resources within the support program of conservation and use of genetic resources is established since 2007. Other important information could be found in the Annex 10.

Prof. Sonja Ivanovska and Prof. Sreten Andonov from the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Food in Skopje informed that the Law on Agriculture and Rural Development as one of the main legal acts related to agriculture defines the autoctonous agricultural plant species and livestock races as historically introduced and adapted on the local conditions or local species that originate from the local areas.

However, policies related to animal and plant genetic resources in agriculture varies a lot.

Challenges related to agro-biodiversity conservation and its sustainable use are elaborated in the annexed presentation (Annex 11).

Comprehensive overview of the genetic resources in agriculture in Serbia were provided by Dr. Srgjan Stojanovic from the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection of Serbia.

The Strategy of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2014 - 2024 also focus on conservation of plant, animal and forestry genetic resources.

Two sub-measures for conservation of plant and animal genetc resources are foreseen with the National Program for Rural Development 2017-2020. More details are provided in Annex 12.

The programme continued with group work discussions which were moderated by Prof. Sreten Andonov and Prof. Sonja Ivanovska.

The discussions focused on the methodological approach, scope of the assessment and content of the study.

Proposed structure of the national reports is enclosed as Annex 13.

Based on the plenary presentations and discussions, as well as the panel discussions, the following deadlines were agreed among the participants:

- Comments and proposals on the content of the national report are expected latest by July 21st 2017;
- Final content of the report will be developed by the regional coordinators by July 31st, 2017;

- First draft of national/entity reports should be completed and delivered to regional coordinators and international back-stopper by September 25th 2017;
- Complete final draft of national/entity reports should be finalized by national experts and delivered to regional coordinators and international back-stopper latest by October 30th 2017;
- Final national/entity reports should be finalized by national experts and delivered to regional coordinators, international expert, SWG and GIZ latest by December 4th 2017.

**This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence*