

Preparation of calls and communication with applicants

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Preparation of the IPARD applicants in Croatia

- Main players: Ministry of Agriculture and Paying Agency as owners of knowledge;
- Lack of reliable knowledge among other potential stakeholders, but good co-operation with them;
- Poor response of the applicants to first several calls;
- Generally, satisfactory overall response at the end of Programme implementation;



Ways of communication

- WEB pages of Paying Agency and Ministry of Agriculture;
- Brochures, guidelines and leaflets (written in meta-language, transferred from ordinances);
- Extension Service, Chamber of Economy, Agricultural Chamber; banks
- Conferences and Workshops
- Advertising on TV and radio;
- Presentation of successful stories on special TV programs for farmers;
- Private consultants



Role of PA and Ministry

- Workshops and events held all over Croatia (more than 100 with >2.000 participants);
- Preparation of leaflets, brochures and other promotional materials;
- Presentation of success stories;
- Accreditation of TA measure in later stage did not help at all to promotional campaign;
- We did our best, but the outcome was not perfect (60% of utilization)



What was missing?

- Dissemination of knowledge among other stakeholders who would be able to transfer it
- User friendly guides for applicants, showing main steps for application; (the first one published by HGK in 2012);
- Earlier taking on board regional and local development agencies and Extension Service;
- Social networks as a tool;
- Innovative use of advertising (Poles use national soap opera as promotional tool for RD schemes);
- Good image of EU funds as such;



Some ideas from the past how to improve communication

What was suggested in 2010?

➤ **Popularize IPARD programme:**

- Create branched network of educated experts capable of communicating IPARD (Regional offices of PAAFRD, Croatian Agricultural Agency, Extension Service, regional and local development agencies etc.)
- Invest more money in IPARD audio-visual advertising through targeted TV and Radio stations

➤ **Enhance absorption of IPARD funds:**

- Training of trainers – create a circle of certificated individuals who will train the consultants who will than provide consulting to the final beneficiaries
- Sharing of experiences and good practices with other IPARD beneficiary Countries



Planning of calls and information of eligibility

- Funding opportunities communicated, but the way to get there was not easy;
- Planning of calls on yearly basis started from the end of 2010 on, since it was not possible to plan due to accreditation procedure, lasting more than expected;
- Lack of planning caused poor response of the applicants in first 4 calls;
- Plans have to be respected and therefore based on needs of sector and capabilities of PA;
- Multiannual planning is welcome but not easy to achieve, especially in first years;
- Deviations from plans could cause huge problems for the system;



The eligibility conditions

- There are some conditions directly imposed by regulations and Sectoral Agreement and they should be respected, finding the easiest way to check!
- National eligibility criteria should be wise, based on needs of sector and **CONTROLABLE!**
- Apart from external communication of eligibility criteria, it is important to communicate it with authorization staff in order to make them aware why they have to check something, which might get them to the best idea how to check



Selection criteria

- Selection criteria should be based on needs and easy to check.

They should include following:

- Past performance,
- Present performance (with very little room for manipulation) and
- Future performance (with clear picture of expected goals).
- Selection criteria has to be previously agreed with stakeholders through their representatives;
- Not everybody will be satisfied but I don't know any better approach;
- Criteria prepared in „Kitchen cabinets“ can't help agricultural sector at all.



How did it work?

- All criteria and requested documents were clearly presented to the applicants;
- Clear deadlines were stipulated in the ordinances (deadlines were calculated according to previous experience and expected number of applications);
- Deadline from receipt to issuing of decision was 90 to 98 days;
- Time of issuing varied from 85 days to more than 1500 (for measures including public procurement)
- Average grade of our efficiency was 2,56 (from 1 to 5)



Stakeholders and promotion

- It is crucial to include stakeholders at local and regional level in the information system;
- Regional and local development Agencies, Branches of Extension service, Croatian Agricultural Agency (livestock center), Chamber of Economy, Chamber of crafts, banks;
- All of them together can reach almost every potential beneficiary;
- There is problem of transfer of knowledge and lack of capacities in these institutions, but the Rome was not built in a day; it will take time;
- Once the LAGs will be established, they will take over huge role in promotion of RD
- Beneficiaries are obliged to inform the public about EU contribution, but apart from that they can be „used“ as promoters through stories of their projects - No better promotion!



Training of advisory services/consultants

- Advisory/Extension service started (modestly) with information of potential beneficiaries;
- There were 4 trainings of trainers held for SAPARD and one for IPARD
- Since 2012 (after several years of negotiations) they started with preparation of applications (just for smaller projects in measure 302, Diversification);
- They still prepare some smaller applications and have been much more involved in implementation of post accession funds;



Training of advisory services/consultants

- The majority of knowledge is concentrated in private sector, which became quite influential, starting to play much bigger role than wanted and expected (from my point of view);
- At the beginning there were very few of them and their number increased to several hundreds;
- Quality of their work varies from excellent to poor;
- Unfortunately, there is still no system of certification, blacklisting, etc.
- There is just one list and data-base of projects run by Croatian Chamber of Economy



The call for applications

- All the criteria were stipulated by Ordinance (commonly prepared by MA and PA, with participation of other stakeholders);
- Call for applications was prepared by the PA, providing just information of total allocation, deadlines and addresses for submission;
- Both documents had to be published in Official Gazzette, which complicated every necessary change;
- Presently, we announce Ordinance in Official Gazzette, while the Call is announced on web-sites of PA and MA, and it is easier to be changed if needed;
- Majority of provisions and criteria, including necessary documents are given in the Call itself;
- We had just suspension clause in IPARD for M 301, which did not cause any particular problems;



Experiences and lessons learned

- Include all stakeholders in the process from beginning; especially Extension service (they might not be able to prepare applications from very beginning but they can provide information to wider population);
- Prepare some light check-lists for fast scanning of the applicant, which could be filled-in by trained people from Extension service, Chambers, etc.
- Use all communication tools (social networks, blogs, TV shows);
- Do not hesitate to ask people from the sector when preparing criteria and procedures;
- Find balance between requests arising from regulations and needs of your beneficiaries!





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