

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”

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Current situation with the LEADER approach in the Western Balkan countries /territories

LEADER environment in WB - major findings

LEADER in national strategic and program documents

- Strategies for agriculture and rural development
- Mid-term programmes
- IPARD II programmes
- Strategic / or programming documents of other ministries (regional development, local self-governance)

LEADER environment in WB - major findings

Institutional and Legal Settings for implementation of LEADER support

Responsible authorities in charge for LEADER implementation are:

- ministries for agriculture with their organizational units(departments, managing authorities, paying agencies)
- In Bosnia and Herzegovina (cantonal ministries)
- Serbia (additionally in Provincial secretariat for Agriculture of Vojvodina)

LEADER environment in WB - major findings

LAGs per country

- Albania – 4 LAGs
- FBiH – 3LAGs
- Republic of Srpska - 3LAGs
- Kosovo* - 30 LAGs
- Macedonia - 16 LAGs
- Montenegro – No LAGs established(some initiatives in process)
- Serbia – no reliable data (20 potential LAG initiatives)

*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.

LEADER environment in WB - major findings

Legal framework for implementation of LEADER

- Laws on agriculture and RD
- Rulebooks on LAG establishment and LDS preparation (only in Macedonia)
- Law on associations and foundations (majority of LAG are registered)
- Law on local self-government (cooperation between municipalities and other local stakeholders)
- Law on regional development (municipal and inter regional cooperation)

Funding

Government support

Country/province	Government funding support
Albania	No
Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina	No
Republic of Srpska	No
Kosovo*	Yes
Macedonia	No
Montenegro	No
Serbia/	Until 2013
Vojvodina province	Yes

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Funding

Donor support

- Major donor organizations :The European Union, UNDP, USAID, SIDA, Swiss Aid, GIZ

Previous initiatives

Country/Province	Previous actions
Albania	Leader Promotion, capacity building of local stakeholders, LAG creation, implementation of LEADER like initiatives (MADA, UNDP and ALCDF)
Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Establishment of LAGs, training for LEADER principles and project management of stakeholders, developing LEADER guidelines(not approved)
Republic of Srpska	Establishment of LAGs, developing LDS of some LAGs
Kosovo*	Collaboration of Ministry, and municipalities(Vitina) and other donors. Development of local development strategy , LAG creation
Macedonia	LEADER promotion capacity building of local stakeholders, LDS development, LAG creation, implementation of LEADER like initiatives, Rulebooks developed/enacted
Montenegro	LEADER-like activities promoting rural tourism; area based approach supported by SWG
Serbia	Support local partnerships by ministry involving CSOs from rural areas
Vojvodina province	Capacity building of LAGs, LDS development, implementation of LEADER like initiatives. Province subsidies for LEADER

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Most important obstacles of the LEADER approach in the WB countries/territories

Conclusions

- In all of the WB countries LEADER is part of the national strategic and programming documents and are envisaged in IPARD. *With an exception of FBiH, where entities are responsible for implementation of LEADER program on their territories.*
- The existing LAGs in all countries, are registered as CSOs.
- The rulebooks on LAG registration and LDS development are adopted only in Macedonia and Kososvo, while in Serbia the process is in progress
- Lack of capacities and staff in the responsible ministries and local authorities regarding LEADER implementation
- LEADER-like activities up to now are supported by different donor organizations, including local resource organizations, local government and networks
- Serbia and Republika Srpska) started to finance LEADER and LAGs, it was later stopped, only Kosovo* currently provides support.
- The support is usually with limited funding and restricted timeframe which causes discontinuity in the process of implementation of a full-fledged LEADER method.
- The financial and technical support gap discourages stakeholders to stay involved in LEADER, making it highly unlikely to mobilize enough local participation and support

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Preliminary recommendations

General Recommendations

Recommendations for institutional set up improvements

- Government institutions at all levels should continue to work on development of
 - strategic and programming documents , incl. IPARD to be developed consolidated in all countries)
 - regulatory framework for introduction of LEADER (consolidate with latest EU regulations for LEADER (and CLLD) – (EU) 1305/2013, (EU) 1303/2013 in Macedonia and Kosovo*)
 - In FBiH the entities should prepare their own strategies that would foresee the LEADER approach
- Strengthening human capacities of relevant institutions
 - Engage enlarged number of staff from relevant ministries and Paying Agency
 - The staff of ministries and other stakeholders (municipalities, CSOs, business sector) need more tailor made trainings
 - The staff of the Managing Authority and the Paying Agency will have to be trained to implement LEADER measure
 - Specialized information campaigns and seminars for representatives of local self-governments should be prepared.

General Recommendations

Recommendations for policy improvements

- Local development policies should be implemented with a bottom-up decision-making process allowing for better connection and coordination of diverse rural actors
- Development of guidelines on establishment, role, functioning and accreditation of LAGs including start-up toolkits for development of Local Development Strategy (LDS) for potential LAG constituents
- Synchronization and complementarity of National rural development funding with EU IPARD funding

General Recommendations

Recommendations for empowering local stakeholders

- Awareness raising campaigns needed - diverse models of networking of various local stakeholders (public, civil and business)
- Exchange of information and transfer of best international practices from EU LAGs.
- Capacity building and training of local stakeholders about bottom up, community based actions.

Recommendations for National institutions regarding strategic, legal, institutional and funding actions to prepare for LEADER

Logical steps for action:

- LEADER approach is part of the national strategic and programming documents and IPARD in all countries, with an exception of FBIH. The entities should prepare their own strategies that would foresee the LEADER approach.
- Set up regulatory frame to be in line with European Commission regulations relevant for LEADER (and CLLD). Develop rulebooks for establishment of LAG and development of LDS as per regulation: (EU) 1305/2013, (EU) 1303/2013.
- Assign/increase responsible staff persons in relevant departments of the ministries responsible for implementation of LEADER approach
- Capacity development of ministry and paying agency staff in administering procedures for LEADER approach measure according to the regulatory frame
- Use National funding or IPARD technical assistance measure for supporting LEADER/ LAG-like partnerships

Recommendations for strengthening the capacities of the local stakeholders for implementation of LEADER in WB countries

WB core recommendations regarding LEADER approach	To strengthen awareness and increase capacities of the rural population for implementation of the LEADER approach	To create system for providing advisory support to the existing and potential LAGs (RD Networks)	Support for creation of LAGs and preparation of LAG strategies	Support implementation of LDS through the established LAGs	Support Cooperation and networking between LAGs at national and international level
LEADER specific activities in WB countries	<p>Preparation and distribution of promotional materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Realization of promotional and informative events at national/regional level -Mapping of potential territories for establishing of LAGs at national level -Assessment for establishment of LAGS at national level by considering the LEADER principle of area based approach 	<p>Strengthening capacities of RD networks and other entities for animation and mobilization of rural stakeholders regarding the LEADER approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Provide on-going support to potential LAGs through mentoring and coaching 	<p>Strengthening the capacities of the potential and existing LAGs for developing transparent procedures among the main actors (communication and decision making)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training in establishment of local partnerships -Training in acquiring skills in strategic planning Training in Project Cycle Management 	<p>Assistance for realization of projects derived from the LAG strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Training to LAG management for implementation of public procurement procedures concerning realization of the projects -Training for financial and administrative mechanisms for LAG operations 	<p>Development of joint projects between LAGs at national level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Provide opportunities for LAGs to take part in transnational (TNC) cooperation projects with EU partners

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Thank you

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