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# Second Interim Meeting of the Regional Expert Advisory Working Group on LEADER 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> February 2020, Pogradec, Albania

## REPORT



February 2020

## 1. Introduction

Support to Economic Diversification of Rural Areas in Southeast Europe (SEDRA) is a 3-year regional program jointly implemented by SWG and GIZ, aiming at strengthening the institutional capacities of selected stakeholders in Southeast Europe for supporting EU compliant economic diversification in rural areas. LEADER approach is one of the topics that is selected within the project, as part of the economic diversification agenda in SEE countries and focuses on the aspects of practical implementation with regards to administrative procedures, regulation and practical knowledge or experiences from implementation on the local level.

The Second interim meeting of the REAWG on LEADER took place in Pogradec on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> February 2020 and gathered national, regional and international experts, representatives of the relevant authorities and national rural networks to discuss the objectives, methodology and activities in respect to the creation of National Road Maps setting up the specific steps to be taken to relaunch the LEADER approach and to meet the capacity development needs to support this process in SEE countries. The list of participants is provided in Annex 1, and the program of the meeting in Annex 2.

Ms. Bogdanka Gjorshoska explained the objective of this assignment – provision of national expertise related to facilitation of horizontal and vertical integration, cooperation, dialogue and exchange of relevant stakeholders involved in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of CLLD/ LEADER in SEE and the provision of policy advice to boost capacities to implement Community Led Local Development (CLLD) and LEADER in Southeast Europe. The presentation on the terms of reference of the REAWG is provided in Annex 3.

## 2. Update on the state of play of LEADER implementation among SWG members

### Albania:

- A draft Law is circulated "on LAGs" by which the pre-requisites of the EU legal base as well as the needs from the Civil Society Organisations are taken into account. During the first part of 2019 the draft Law has been presented to various stakeholders. However the Law is not yet submitted for approval;
- The Managing Authority has sent for Accreditation the Measure on Technical Assistance which should boost the preparatory phase for LAGs. There is no response as yet from the EC related to this matter;
- There is no information available on the current state of LAG-like organisations in Albania; During 2018-2019 three LAGs were planned to be established through a World Bank program. The current official number is less than 10;
- There are three promising factors for the future: i) the technical assistance from IPARD; ii) the continuing area-based support given in the frame of '100 Villages' which up to now has been mainly focused on product/entrepreneurship development; iii) ISARD new strategic design which is expected to start the preparatory phase during 2020;
- Donor-wise the main promoter is expected to be GIZ through the SARD project. A separate activity of the project is focused on capacity building for LAG creation;
- Local Governments, despite the continuous reforms are not evolving toward the support of bottom-up initiatives, including LAGs;

*More details in Annex 4.*

### Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- BIH have developed a Strategic plan for rural development of BIH for the period 2018-2020 where LEADER and LAGs initiatives have been given an important place;

- There is insufficient financial support related to LEADER approach and LAGs in BiH;
- All the levels of relevant competent authorities for agriculture and rural development policy have not provided any significant financial support to LEADER nor to LAGs;
- There is no significant improvement regarding the introduction of the LEADER approach in the new legislative within the capacities or personnel of the institutions/ministries;
- The relevant institutions should implement measures to support LAGs in the annual rulebooks and programs, so the registered LAGs can apply for any measure available within programs/bylaws;
- Within the previous period LAGs were facing the funding problem because of inconsistent support from the public sector, a considerable dependence on donor funds and related implementation of international projects;
- The interest and importance of the role of the higher level of government needs to increase for the LEADER initiative to gain traction;
- Strengthening the cooperation among LAGs and building their capacities in the context of LEADER;
- Promotion of LEADER and LAG activities, in the areas of existing initiatives and in the new areas should be continuous;

*More details in Annex 5.*

#### **Kosovo\***

- In the programming period 2007-2009 about 30 LAGs have been established as well as the Rural Development Network with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture of Kosovo\* and the EU Office;
- The LEADER approach in Kosovo\* has been built on the bases of the new Agriculture Rural Development Policy 2014 – 2020;
- Further on, in 2014 LEADER has been part of the measure 303 with a budget of 2,4 MEUR;
- There are 12 LAGs in Kosovo\* having submitted strategies related to LEADER approach;
- By the end of 2014 about 12 LAGs applications were selected and approved as eligible encompassing 55 % of the territory of Kosovo\*;
- In 2015 the formally established LAGs opened their offices and started to implement their strategies while actively promoting and implementing projects in their areas;
- According to ARDP 2007-2013 LAGs are registered as NGOs at the Ministry of Public Administration and they can apply for funding from different funds.

#### **North Macedonia**

- The strategic policy document for the implementation of the LEADER Approach is stated within the National Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy;
- The National Rural Development Program is another document that describes the support measures for implementing the LEADER Approach;
- IPARD II foresees the introduction of the LEADER Approach as a new measure for the period 2014-2020 and the LEADER measure is to be introduced in June 2020;
- As a part of IPARD II, the designed LEADER measure fiche is one of the key documents for the development of the LEADER measure. Review of this LEADER measure fiche needs to be done.
- NAO - National Authorization Officer should provide a national accreditation of the LEADER measure;
- The process should continue with EU accreditation;
- In 2019, a successful public call has been announced for the implementation of Local Development Strategies under the National Program for Rural Development;

- Under the first public call in 2018 about 13 LAGs have been registered in the Ministry of Agriculture register;
- All the relevant documentation for the accreditation procedure is prepared, and the accreditation process of LEADER measure can start;
- Until the accreditation process starts the measure “Technical assistance” will serve for certain activities related the LEADER;
- Draft Guidelines for LAG establishment and LDS preparations and evaluation as well as procedures for LEADER implementation have to be reviewed;
- Clarification and coordination meetings between LAGs, IPARD Paying Agencies and Managing Authorities on the LEADER implementation Measure are needed;
- Planning of support for LAGs under the National Program for Rural Development 2020 will follow;
- Further communication and more trust between the Ministry and the Civil Society are needed;

*More details in Annex 6.*

### **Montenegro**

- The LEADER Measure is included in the Program for the Development of Agriculture and Rural Areas of Montenegro as a part of the IPARD scheme;
- According to the IPARD II program, the introduction of the measure, implementation of the strategy for Local Development – LEADER Approach was planned for 2018;
- The LEADER measure is still on hold and will be in the focus for accreditation hopefully soon;
- Significant progress has been made in the development of the regulatory settings, which encourages and makes it realistic that the LEADER measure becomes operational;
- Implementation of the activities related to the concept of LAGs and the promotion of the LEADER Approach are made through the members of the Network for Rural Network of Montenegro;
- Support to the local government in creating the strategic documents related to LAGs and LEADER is needed;
- By the time the local development initiatives in Montenegro based on the bottom-up approach and focused on mobilizing the rural population are mostly conducted by the Network for rural Development of Montenegro.

### **Serbia**

- Amendments to the Law on Incentives in Agriculture and Rural Development in 2013 have been made in order to provide financial support for subsidies for preparation and implementation of Local Development Strategies;
- The LEADER Approach has been recognized as one of the priorities in the Strategy of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Republic of Serbia;
- Within the National Program for Rural Development 2018-2020, support has been foreseen for the elaboration and implementation of the Local Strategies for Rural Development;
- The LEADER measure was also foreseen under the IPARD II Program for the period 2014–2020, however it will not be implemented under IPARD II;
- Under the Measure 9 – Technical assistance, support for establishing potential LAGs is foreseen and expected during the entrustment process;
- The preparations for the LEADER Measure as a part of IPARD III for the period 2021-2027 will start in 2020 on;
- The measure 5 foresees the implementation of local development strategies; the accreditation process is planned to start as of 2020;

- Rulebook on subsidies for support to programs related to the preparation and implementation of LDSs in accordance with LEADER has been published in January 2019;
- Open call for potential LAGs has been launched in 2019.  
*More details in Annex 7.*

### 3. Methodology and outline

The International Expert, Mr. Lukesch proposed the methodology to be used by the experts of the REAWG in completing the assignment, as well as a draft outline of the specific chapters. The presentation of the methodology is provided in Annex 8 and the *final outline for the road maps for the road maps could be found in Annex 8.*

### 4. Activity Plan for completion of the assignment

What	When	Who
Methodology for assessment and elaboration of the relevant national data, policy documents and research papers on CLLD/LEADER;	20th February	IE supported by RE
National Road Map outline	20th February	IE supported by RE
Participation at the Second Interim Meeting of the REAWG on LEADER	11th – 12th February	All
Draft National Road Map	30th May 2020	NEs
Participation at the Third Interim Meeting of the REAWG on LEADER	June 2020	All
Feedback on the draft National Road Maps	10th July 2020	RE supported by IE
Second draft National Road Map	01st September 2020	NEs
Participation at the Fourth Interim Meeting of the REAWG on LEADER	October 2020	All
Feedback on the second draft National Road Maps	30th September 2020	RE supported by IE
Final National Road Map	30th October 2020	NE supported by RE and IE
Participation at the Agricultural Policy Forum 2020	October 2020	RE and IE
Participation at the high-level LEADER conference	March 2021	All
Preparation of the policy paper following the high-level LEADER conference	April 2021	NEs, RE and IE

Legend:

NEs – National Experts

RE – Regional Expert

IE – International Expert

*More details in Annex 9.*

## **5. Discussion and ideas related to the high-level conference in March 2021**

Country: North Macedonia

Place: Either Ohrid, Bitola, Strumica or Skopje, with Ohrid as the preferred option.

Objectives:

- Celebrate the achievements made so far in the SEE countries regarding LEADER preparation and implementation;
- Gain a common picture and enhanced commitment about things still to be done to achieve full LEADER implementation in all the SEE countries/territories;
- Broaden and intensify cooperation ties and partnerships across Europe;
- Opportunity to announce the start of IPARD III (introducing the new measures) with EU Support which is appreciated.

Attendees:

- Political representatives from all SEE states, also from EU member states, EU Commission and Parliament, Committee of Regions, Social and Economic Committee;
- Networks and Platforms: ERP, ELARD, ENRD, Prepare and National LEADER Networks;
- Development Partners (WeEffect, SDC);
- Guests participating in neighbourhood programmes (Moldavia, Armenia, Georgia).

Possible outcomes:

- Kind of "proclamation" from the conference;
- Policy Paper synthesising the main messages from the conference and the whole assignment.

## **6. Planning session per country/territory on the next steps**

Expert session in each of the SWG member countries/territories is planned for May 2020, in particular for the subject matter discussion. Envisaged dates for the discussion meetings in the six countries/territories with national stakeholders and the international experts are presented below:

- The discussion groups should be not too small and not too big in size: somewhere between 10 and 20 persons. They should comprise a selection of relevant actors from national authorities (Managing Authorities and IPARD Agencies), Rural Networks and civil society associations, intermediary stakeholders (regional development, interest groups such as farmers, business etc., local government units) and local partnerships (LAGs)...those who are actually able and willing to move things forward.
- Each discussion will last between 3 and 4 hours including some pause and time to exchange informally. Thus, it will be wise to reserve one half day (morning or afternoon) for that.

- The table provides the range of days. The **X** marks the preferred option:

	MAY 2020									
	11	12	13	14	15	18	19	20	21	22
<b>Albania</b>						<b>X</b>				
<b>BiH FB</b>				<b>X</b>						
<b>BiH RS</b>					<b>X</b>					
<b>Kosovo*</b>								<b>X</b>		
<b>Montenegro</b>							<b>X</b>			
<b>North Macedonia</b>									<b>X</b>	
<b>Serbia</b>			<b>X</b>							

- The final point is envisaged for Skopje (North Macedonia) with an option to meet SWG and GIZ staff for a debriefing.

*Kosovo\* "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."*