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Overview of the progress in AKIS in Western Balkans

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6th Interim meeting

Skopje 20-22, November 2023

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AKIS, more relevant than ever

- A key policy question today is: how can we achieve the policy targets of **green transition, strategic food security** and **increasing productivity** to feed the world when green policies are expected to lead to falling productivity and lower incomes of nearly 15% in the sector?
- A functioning AKISystem of knowledge, research and innovation exchange, with the support of digitalization and investments in precision agriculture could be considered an indispensable contributing factor towards overcoming the impasse

Set targets of the project

- First, the target of **setting up of a network** bringing together farmers, representatives of governments, research institutions and the private sector to establish a functional AKIS structure that would facilitate the dissemination of knowledge, innovation and technology as an in-between mechanism acting top-down and bottom-up.
- Second, the **designation of a national Roadmap** strategic document and of a national Action Plan for the implementation of the specified strategic objectives resulting from a SWOT analysis.
- Third, the development and application of regional and/or sectoral or thematic **AKIS Plans** aiming at fostering knowledge and innovation transfer in defined topic areas.
- Fourth, the development of **an education and communication measure** for scaling up technical innovations and innovative business models with special target groups of young, dynamic farmers and agri-businesses.

National Action Plan key priorities

- The strategic objectives set in the Roadmaps have been projected into specified objectives in the National Action Plans.
- Where prioritizations differ, they reflect the various country/territory particular priorities set on the basis of their characteristics and the feasibility of the operationalization of their Action Plans.

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Two complementary paths of action initiated

1. The formalization path

- establishment of Advisory Services as a key component of AKIS and RITT
- establishment of AKIS as a system

1. The ‘experimental’ sectoral or thematic path

- adoption of regional AKIS interventions expected to function as ‘working/living laboratories’ and maturation processes

Common Action Plan priorities

1. The **formalization of AKIS and, in particular, of key actors like advisory services (where missing)** are set as top Action Plan priorities by most Experts.

- We have defined **formalization** as the means to give the process a **certain or definite form**, to shape it and give it a formal status or approval.
- For that purpose we have taken into consideration the Regulation for the Strategic Plans of CAP (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2021.435.01.0001.01.ENG, Article 114), according to which Member States must include in their Strategic Plans their proposals for AKIS under the horizontal objective of Modernisation.

Common Action Plan priorities

2. **Capacity building** of all AKIS stakeholders and enhancement of R&D and Research, Innovation & Technology Transfer (RITT).

- Training, accreditation and impartiality of advisors, considered as *conditio sine qua non* for the establishment of a trustworthy Advisory Services - an integral part of AKIS.

3. The **introduction of new structures** within AKIS differentiated on the basis of each country's needs. The feasibility of their realisation to be investigated in cooperation with the corresponding state authorities.

- The establishment of a **Coordination Body (CB)** is considered most critical. Its role and functionality should be foreseen and further elaborated in the AKIS formalization documents.
- **Private advisory services** considered to be a complementary structure/service that needs to be formalized and integrated in the AKISystem.

Common Action Plan priorities

4. **Public and institutional awareness raising for AKIS**, a commonly requested action, which needs to be seriously adjusted to the particular environment of each country/territory.

5. Establishment of **monitor and demonstration farms** and networking

6. The establishment of **Operational and Focus Groups**

7. **Digitalization**, acknowledged as a critical factor for the enhancement of advisory services and AKIS

Sectoral AKIS interventions previously discussed

Some such interventions have been:

- **Adjustment of the REAWG on Wine** to an AKIS Operational Group
- **Adjustment of REAWG on Soil** to an AKIS Operational
 - a **'living laboratory'** [example: Soil living labs working together to obtain healthy soils by 2030, The Walloon Agricultural Research Centre (CRA-W) in Belgium]

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?tab=rm#inbox/FMfcgzGqQcsMcFXRgNpmSvTxSgcZCch>
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- **Establishment of a Regional Organic farming** Operational Group
 - ✓ **Organic honey**, proposed as a micro AKIS case
- **Establishment of a Regional Dairy farming** Operational Group



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Thematic AKIS interventions previously discussed

- **Establishment of an AKIS Regional Educational, Training and Certification Structure** for the theoretical and practical training and accreditation of farm advisors.
- **Establishment of an ‘AKIS awareness raising’ structure** amongst farmers and other agri-food stakeholders.
- Identification of model **monitor/demonstration farms** and establishment of **WB region-wide network of host farms** for the exchange of organized visits of same-field farmers for the sharing of knowledge, practices, challenges and solutions.
- Cross-border and bilateral cooperation for the identification and **prioritization of specific climate and green agenda issues.**

Progress in the workplan and deliverables

General observations

- There are some divergences between the Workplan defined deliverables and the reported deliverables themselves. This makes the review of progress more difficult and needs to be harmonized
- There are different levels of progress owed to both the level of legislative departure for AKIS and its component parts and the level of historical composition and implementation of AKIS practices
- Different state/bureaucracy responsiveness is identified to policy adjustment requests
- The above differences have affected the work and results of the national teams. Most experts have turned their attention towards thematic interventions like capacity building, raising awareness, introduction of new structures, training and accreditation of FAs etc. rather than on sectoral interventions, as discussed at an earlier stage of our work

Observations

Formalization of AKIS and other legislative initiatives show slow progress in most countries. Even where drafting has progressed, no formal adoption has yet materialized

- Some states attempt to bypass delays in the formal drafting and implementation of legislation through the exploitation of related clauses in the existing laws and by-laws on agriculture and rural development (FAS, Coordination Body etc.)
- Fragmentation of AKIS and weak functional relationships between AKIS players are still dominant in most cases
- Serbia presents the most advanced picture with regards to the legislative framework for AKIS functioning and FAS operation. North Macedonia follows

Observations

According to the Workplan the **thematic specialization** concerns mostly four broad areas: the establishment of new structures (Coordination Bodies, private advisors), capacity building, development of functional relationships within AKIS and micro-AKIS (specific operational groups, demo farms and focus groups) establishment

New structures

- The **establishment of CB** is progressing slowly but agreement, as to its composition, dominates involving the key stakeholders engaged with the AKIS system drawing from a quadruple (and in cases quintuple - when natural environment is included) helix of academia, farmers, government and the public (consisting of civil society and the media)
- FBiH's proposed structure and role of CB have been the outcome of consultation with AKIS connected participants with the aim of acting operationally and actively, connecting all relevant actors to the system of knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture

Observations

- Proposals for the establishment of CB, as presented by some national experts, need to be less complicated and less bureaucratic in their structure
- Differences exist as to the placement of the CB within the administrative structure of different states or entities
- NMK introduces **private advisory services** as another new structure and makes provision for particular infrastructure in the legislative framework
- No progress is identified in the establishment of other new structures

Capacity building

- Capacity building is mostly referred to **training and accreditation of advisors**, well described in the report of NMK in which a life-long programme and an educational centre for the certification of advisors are introduced.
- Capacity building should be expanded directly to **farmers** through **training/educational and exchange programmes**

Observations

Functional relationships within AKIS

Two countries make particular reference to functional relationships between AKIS participants:

- First, MNE directs its attention to the ***establishment of a Working Group*** for strengthening the partnership and the networking between AKIS participants
 - Additionally, a detailed list of guidelines has been defined to contribute to the improvement of functional relations and connections in the triangle helix of agricultural producers, researchers and advisory services
- Second, NMK works on the encouragement of ***farmers-led interactive innovation*** aiming at the preparation of information material for knowledge exchange and the designation of Guides and Tools for the organization and promotion of events

Observations

Micro AKIS establishment

- **Demonstration farms**, field labs and networking add to farmers' education but this is limited to Serbia and, to a lesser extent, to NMK.
- Media productions, knowledge exchange and events organization, targeted to farmers, can add significantly to that, as suggested by the two cases
- Serbia has concentrated on a proposal for the establishment of a Demonstration farms network analyzing its structure, governance and funding
- This network would integrate **Focus Groups** to address specific agricultural challenges connected to climate change, organic production, sustainable production, soil and biodiversity preservation, plus other relevant topics

Observations

- The work proposed by Albania concerned the establishment of **Operational Groups** for specific regional crop clusters through the preparation of specific project calls to be financed through the Small Grants for Climate Change of ARDA. The added value of the work is the targeted formation of Technical/Operational Groups contributing to climate change adaptation
- Kosovo also plans to work on the establishment of an Operational Group connected to wine
- Both Serbian and Albanian cases involve climate change/environmental challenges in what could be treated as a quintuple helix of knowledge/innovation transfer

Despite the hard work of the AKIS team, reality shows:

- Slow progress in AKIS formalization adoption
- Slow state authority response to policy requirements
- Low budget support provided to knowledge and innovation transfer
- Low awareness of AKIS importance amongst key stakeholders
- Slow development of functional relationships amongst AKIS actors

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Which way forward?

- We exert political pressure to progress formalization of AKIS bearing in mind the importance of the Agricultural Policy Dialogue Germany – Western Balkans. Critical is considered the role of SWG in this direction
- We review and clarify the set thematic deliverables for 2024 and concentrate on fulfilling them
- We strictly prioritize tasks and delineate the pros and cons in our specific work
- We review the progress in each Interim meeting