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LEADER perspectives in Western Balkans

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Western Balkan Region

- **Population:** 18.3 mill.
- **Area:** 218.800 km²
- **Diversity** of resource endowments (agro-climatic conditions and agro-ecological zones), ethnic, religious, cultures
- **Countries:** small, economically weak and politically vulnerable
- **Institutions:** weak, „governance deficit“
- **EU integration process:** different status
- **Rural areas:**
 - Small scale and the fragmented nature of private farming
 - Long-lasting and continuous decline in the population, demographic imbalances and rural poverty
 - Rural labour markets are dominated by informal employment and lack of alternative employment and income opportunities
 - Profound environmental consequences of depopulation

Objectives and Approach

- ***Objectives:***
 - To present the regulatory, policy and financial settings for implementation of LEADER – like initiatives in Western Balkan countries/territories
 - To provide insights into current developments and trends related to the key LEADER principles based on Serbian case
 - To highlight some key issues and challenges that need to be addressed in order to facilitate the implementation of LEADER
- ***Approach***
 - A desk review of legal and policy documents
 - Results and assessments carried out within SWG, FAO and UNDP projects (2017-2019)

Policy, regulatory and funding frameworks for LEADER - like initiatives

- **Policy frameworks in place**

- The national strategic and programming documents for RD have been fully developed in all countries
- Significant **progress in aligning long-term policy objectives and administrative infrastructures** to those of the EU CAP
- The alignment of agricultural policy measures, including **LEADER support, is less clearly addressed**
 - In none of the countries is the LEADER measure accredited for the IPARD support

- **Implementing rules and regulations**

- In most countries **regulatory frameworks are not finalized and/or are not in place yet**
- Guidelines for LAG formation, LDS preparation and procedures for project selection and approval , are still not developed in most countries
 - The existing LAG-like partnerships operate in accordance with the national Laws on Associations (excl. Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia)
 - The rulebooks on local development strategies are developed in Kosovo , North Macedonia and Serbia (in progress)

Policy, regulatory and funding frameworks for LEADER - like initiatives

- **Institutions**

- The national ministries of agriculture are the main authorities dealing with LEADER-like activities
- Other entities mandated to manage certain activities related to LEADER
 - RDA in Albania and Serbia - running the networking activities, eligible to elaborate and to implement LDSs
 - In Bosnia and Herzegovina the main responsibility lies with the cantonal ministries
 - In Serbia, the Provincial Secretariat of AP Vojvodina coordinating the work of LAGs on its territory
- Institutional **capacities are low**, both in terms of number of staff and skills to deal with LEADER

- **Funding**

- Modest local budgets, donors
- **First national calls** launched in North Macedonia, Kosovo* and Serbia

Policy, regulatory and funding frameworks for LEADER - like initiatives

Country/ territory	Policy framework in place	Regulatory framework and rulebooks in place		Government funding LEADER – like support	Capacities	
		selection of LAGs	LDSs		Institutions	LAG-like partnerships
Albania	Yes	No	No	No	Staff shortages	4 partnerships, operate as CSOs
Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina	At national, but not on entity level;	There is no institution in charge of LAGs registration (at any level of governance)	No	No		3 partnerships, operate as CSOs (9,4% of territory, 8,0% of the total population)
Republic of Srpska	Yes	No	No	No		3 partnerships, operate as CSOs (27,61% of territory, 37,2% of the total population)
Kosovo*	Yes	Yes	Yes	EUR 2,4 mill (planned budget for 2014-2020)		30 LAGs, formally established; 12 in active status (55% of territory, over 50% of population)
North Macedonia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		13 partnerships, registered in 2018; 9 supported in 2019
Montenegro	Yes	No	No	No		still don't have any
Serbia	Yes	Yes	In progress	Yes		20 partnerships, evaluation is in progress

The case of Serbia - Setting up the structures and processes

- **Sowing the seeds**

- The first initiative was launched by Ministry of Agriculture (2005)
 - The Network for RD was established as an umbrella association of 16 regional offices

- **Various donor, bilateral and cross border projects**

- Networking, capacity building, small grants
- EU project *The LEADER Project Initiative Serbia* (2011-2013) contributed to the strengthening the human, technical, organizational and financial capacities of MAFWM;
- 21 potential LAGs have been identified, trained, guided in the process of drafting LDSs

- **„Explosion“ of local rural development strategies**

- Different methodologies, names/focuses, time frames, structure... but, the common objectives
 - infrastructure, agriculture, SMEs & entrepreneurship, tourism, environmental protection
- Active and motivated CSOs and individuals
 - participation in the strategy-making phase, but not in implementation and monitoring

The case of Serbia - Policy shifts and discontinuity

- **Discontinuity of funding support**

- The first initiative aimed at raising the awareness on LEADER was launched by MAEP (2005);
- The funding was cut off in 2010, and donor support downsized (2014)

- **Loss of capacities**

- Turnover of high and middle staff, no a critical mass of trained personnel with core competencies
- Many local partnerships ceased to exist
 - partners continued to apply for different projects independently;
 - formation of the local „project class“
- Lack of understanding, knowledge and experience to establish synergy across the key domains, priorities and target groups

- **Back on the track**

- The first national call for financing/co-financing of CSOs launched in 2019
- 20 applications submitted
- Evaluation is in progress

The case of Serbia – current state of local/rural development planning

- **A „new round“ of local strategic documents - less enthusiastic, more technical**
 - There was no impact and outcome evaluations of previous strategies; results were not appropriately communicated with stakeholders
 - The lack of prioritization in the allocation of budget funds; overly ambitious action plans
 - The territorial capital/potentials and challenges are poorly reflected; over-reliance on farm investment
- **Locally funded projects - limited by budget, narrow in scope**
 - Limited potential of partnerships in generating and programming more innovative, more relevant and suitable project ideas
 - Lack a comprehensive focus on the specific territorial context
- **The participatory decision – making issue!**
 - Only 30% of LSGUs involved CSOs in preparation of local strategies (2014)
 - 84 percent of Serbian citizens know nothing about the local budget (2019)

LEADER in Western Balkans - Challenges to face

- **Strengthen institutional capacities**
 - Increase the number of staff;
 - Capacity building for administering the procedures for the LEADER measure
- **Improve policy, legal and regulatory frameworks**
 - Ensure policy continuity and sustained funding
 - Setting up the necessary regulations and procedures for LEADER measure as part of both national and EU IPARD programmes
- **Empower local stakeholders**
 - Policy-making process at subnational level needs to be improved and made more transparent and inclusive
 - (Re)building the trust; mobilization/motivation for public participation
 - Strengthen human capacities for managing the LAGs and for implementing LDSs
 - Permanent mentoring and coaching support

Thank you for your attention!

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