

Sustainable rural development through the LEADER approach in the Western Balkans and Rural development and civil society action in the Black Sea area

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Vision of the theme

Sustainable rural development through networking and implementation of the LEADER approach in the Western Balkans and Black Sea Countries. The aim of the workshop was to share experiences and discuss how to animate local communities and ensure development of rural areas in these regions.

Main issues – statement:

The countries from the Western Balkans region are welcoming the announced EU strategy and timeframe for successful accession of the WB Region into the EU. We call on the governments of the WB to engage and commit themselves in strengthening the civil society role in the development of the rural areas and to support the regional organisations and Leader type initiatives actively working in the WB region. Strategic priority of the WB countries remains the process of EU accession. Rural communities of the WB are calling upon accelerated and efficient use of IPA funds, more precisely IPARD Programmes. This will assure the alignment and development of the rural areas towards their EU future.

Suggested actions / policy – and who should implement

The governments of the Western Balkans and Black Sea countries should co-operate more with civil society. The National Governments should provide necessary technical and financial means (IPARD Technical Assistance measure; national funds etc) for acquiring necessary knowledge in order to strengthen the capacities of the relevant stakeholders at national and local level for managing LEADER activities.

Local development policies should be implemented with a bottom-up decision-making process allowing for better connection and coordination of diverse rural actors, both in vertical terms (government bodies at different levels - national, regional and local) and in horizontal terms (entrepreneurs, professional associations, farmers, etc.)

The role of networking and the existing civil society networks as providers of assistance in creating capacities about LEADER should be increased. They should act as hubs for raising interest of local actors to be involved in the preparation of a local development strategies and associated projects,.

Diverse models of networking of various local stakeholders (public, civil and business) and participation in joint activities should be practiced; these synergies will promote local initiatives and contribute to increased awareness about the role of local stakeholders in the decision-making processing at local level thus motivating actors from all three sectors to mobilize and take more active participation in the local territories where they operate.

How should ERP work in the future in this theme? What is the role of the ERP partners?

The ERP partners should emphasize the importance and provide proven successful mechanisms to the WB and BS countries how to better empower rural people to participate in designing and implementation of rural development policies and projects as fundament for integration of the various sectors and stakeholders, in order to achieve a long-term sustainable growth in rural areas.

Amendments or messages to the manifesto

N/A

Messages to the Venhorst Declaration

The ERP in the future should encourage the Governments from the Western Balkans and Black Sea countries to support the development of the wider rural economies in preparing rural communities to shape their own future.

Ideas and case-study examples relating to the theme

Exchange of information and transfer of best international practices from EU LAGs. In addition, LEADER like pilot initiatives should be tested by existing LAGs and models of successful tripartite achievements should be replicated leading to increased capacity building of local stakeholders about bottom up, community based actions.