



European Rural Parliament 2015 National report for ALBANIA

JULY 2015

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1. The process of cascading of Ideas

In the framework of European Rural Parliament, Quodev, , organized a series of events to cascade ideas and collect inputs from rural people, from international and national organisations working in rural areas in Albania and from public institutions. In addition to the meetings, Quodev used the information from The National Rural Labor Market Study it conducted in December 2013 for UNDP as well as reviewed relevant documents from the Rural Development Strategy 2014- 2020 of Ministry of Agriculture Rural Development and Water administration.

1.1 Community Meetings

Four public events took place in rural communities bringing together an array of local producers of fruits, vegetables, vineyards growers and wine producers as well as people engaged in small livestock business. Given the high level of attendance from men producers, one of the events was organized specifically with women small producer and another meeting was organized young people.

Please refer to the table 1 and chart 1.a and 1.b for a summary of participants' data.

Some of the events were also displayed on FB to get the message through to more people.

1.2 Meeting with organisations working in rural development

In addition to the public events a round of meetings was organized with some of the key stakeholders including some of the international and national organisations that are active in rural and agriculture development in Albania. Meetings were organized with GIZ (GIZ – Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), UNDP (United Nation Development Programme); CBS - Creative Business Solution team, AFTD - Albanian Foundation for Training and Development – a National organization working innovatively on sustainable rural development and offering online training and vide products for a wide specter of agriculture agro processing and typical food; Auleda - Regional Development Agency of the Southern region of Vlore with interesting programme in agriculture processing and regional development; ADAD – an agriculture organisation with focus in mountain areas and in fructiculture development, AKTI – (eng. ARTI) the public Agency for Research, Technology and Innovation (ARTI) is a public, , GADC (Gender Alliance for Development Center) a leading national organization working on Gender Issues; ICLA – Institute for Change and Leadership Albania and Food Revolution and The Albanian Local Capacity Development Foundation working in the northern part of Abania. We also met

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with the head of Albanian Managing Authority in the Albanian Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration.

Table 1. Participants in the ERP meeting in Albania

Participants in ERP meetings	% Female	% Male	< 30 yrs	30-60 yrs	> 60 yrs
	Participants	Participants			
77	38%	62%	27%	66%	6%

Chart 1. Participation in the ERP meetings as per Gender

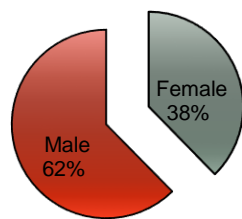
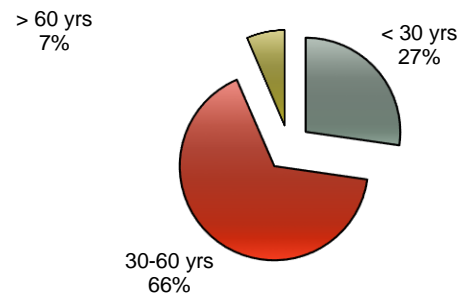


Chart 2. Participation in the ERP meeting as per age groups



1.3 Participation in the meetings for the establishment of Albanian Rural network

In addition to the above activities, with the initiative of IDM (Institute for Democracy and Mediation) a group of 14 Albanian NGOs active in Rural Development including Quodev the National Champion of ERP, two meetings were organised to discuss the establishment of the Albanian National Rural Network. A press release was published (pls. see Annex 1). The next gathering for the establishment of the Albanian Rural Networks is planned to take place in Puke (North Albania) in September 2015. It was agreed that the National Report for EPR would include information on the status of the establishment of the Rural Network in Albania.

2. Key Issues emphasized during meetings

2.1 Job creation and VET for Rural people with specific emphasis on Youth

Job creation and skills development especially of rural youth were key topics discussed in all the meetings for ERP. This is important considering the significant part of Albanian population still living in rural areas 46,5%¹ of population.

Agriculture is the predominant economic activity in rural areas in Albania however even though it has gone through continuous growth, the agriculture sector is organized mostly as

¹ INSTAT Census of Population and Housing 2011

small scale mainly for family farming (average farm size 1,16 ha²) with limited number of activities operating as business. Furthermore, there is limited economic diversity in rural areas as industry, tourism and other services are underdeveloped. Central regions around big towns such as Tirane, Durres, Fier and Elbasan have diversified more on their economic activities in rural areas beyond agriculture into industry, construction, trade, hospitality and restaurants activities and transport and communication compared to the rest of the country. As confirmed by National Rural Labor Market Study Dec 2013, ² non-farm work is quite limited in rural areas however it is even more limited for female; Rural youth are in a particularly vulnerable position in the labor market with low rates of labor force participation and employment.

Participants highlighted the necessity of active policies and actions/measures needed to support and stimulate job creation both within the agriculture sector but especially by supporting the development of nonfarm activities and the service sector in rural communities which at present are underdeveloped. Actions are required to support diversification of rural non-agriculture activities, which foster rural employment innovation and entrepreneurship. These actions should take in consideration the diversity of the context and tailored to maximize upon diverse specific assets, resources and opportunities available in specific rural territories as one measure would not fit all the country which although small display a rich diversity of geographic, natural and cultural heritage assets. Whereas job creation is a key issues, participants also mentioned also the difficulties to find -good specialists even for specific agriculture processes or agro-processing.

Increased efforts are needed to direct rural youth to vocational education in specialized areas of agriculture and growing sectors or rural non-farm activities that require or will require work force in the future specifically in Rural tourism related activities, recreational activities, renewable energy as well as in processing technologies and marketing etc. The premises and especially the curricula of the VET school needs to be improved to respond to needs of businesses in terms of skills and to channel the rural labor force into specialized activities of growing economic sectors relevant to the development of specific rural areas. VET programs should include entrepreneurial skills formation. These are important for young people to open their mind to business opportunities that at present are quite narrow.

2.2 Support Schemes and Small farmers

Albanian agriculture is dominated by small-scale farms. As of to date the grant support for agriculture is issued through the national schemes and the EU and Albanian Gov funded grant schemes of 8.270 000 EUR “IPARD-like” programme to improve agriculture competitiveness. For more info on IPARD-like <http://ipard-like.al> The IPARD- like grants focused more on middle to large-scale agriculture and agro processing enterprises hence the majority of farms in Albania are small-scale family farms. The small size of farms, the unsolved issue of land ownership especially in the North of Albania and the uncompleted process of land registration/certification are some of the problems faced by farmers in accessing financial support.

² INSTAT Agriculture and Livestock statistics 2014

A new programme, SARED (Support for Agriculture and Rural Economic Development) of Danish government co-founded by German Government and implemented by GIZ, provide grants (up to 65% of investment) to farmers for small livestock, fruit trees and nuts, medicinal and aromatic plants, and rural tourism in six mountain regions. The application is aligned with IPARD, the size of grants are smaller thus may be more accessible by small-scale farms, entrepreneurs and coops. It can be complementary to IPARD schemes and can be used as a stepping-stone for small farmers to prepare for IPARD schemes. This programme has however limited geographical coverage and is in its first round of grants. For more info <http://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/294.html>..

The priorities for EU financial assistance through IPA II for Albania for the period are set out in the Indicative Strategy Paper for Albania (2014-2020). The indicative Agriculture and rural development for the period 2014-2020 is 92 Million EUR³. Support schemes (as part of IPARD) are included in these measures: Investments in physical assets of agricultural holdings; Investments in physical assets concerning processing and marketing of agricultural and fishery products; Farm Diversification and Business Development. However as mentioned also in the Indicative Strategy Paper for Albania (2014-2020) "Agricultural funding remains limited, compared to the needs of the sector and to other countries in the region".

Outreaching small scale farmers and rural entrepreneurs will be important for the period during 2015-2020. One of the measures of the ISARD (Inter Sectorial Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development 2014-2020) -Farm diversification and Business Development, can address some of the need to support innovation and risk taking in establishing new, diverse business activities in rural areas and also create new jobs beyond agriculture. In addition to the grant for investment, it is important to offer people especially young men and women farmers, the entrepreneurship skills and mindset needed to innovate and to manage a business activity.

2.3 Local and typical products

Boosting the typical products was one of the issues strongly voiced by several organisations. Some of the issues were: Consumers lack knowledge and information about local and seasonal products and they have even less information about Albanian typical products those linked to tradition and territory and autochthon variety. As such these products do not have an added market value. Producers lack skills and innovation to valorise local and typical products through processing and marketing

Local and Typical products are important assets for local and small rural economies and for enhancing the local attractiveness for locals and tourists alike. It is important for Albanian rural economy to capitalize on its typical products with a multiple aim of Identifying and mapping (inventory); protecting, increasing and promoting. Participants suggested some priority interventions to develop the typical products:

- Scientific research including digitalization and mapping the local and typical food at the national level.

- Investing in protecting and increasing local/typical production
- Information and education campaigns for producers, consumers and business
- Promotion of typical and local products to increase the tourist attraction of rural areas by: i) creation of yearly events calendars based on typical and local products across the territory and throughout the year; ii) Establishment of Typical food routes; iii) promotion of local food as part of the unique local experiences of agritourism and rural tourism packages.
Maximizing on typical food events calendar, food routes and promotion of culinary experiences will help create new jobs and orient labor market in rural communities as well as generate new activities even in periphery, remote and mountain rural communities.
- Reviving the culture of in-farm food processing/preservation and creation of new and interesting food products and promotion of farm sell can attract tourists and locals alike. These are important especially for villages near main towns, for coastal villages or villages in hinterland that are part of touristic routes.

2.4 Cultural and social activities in rural areas

One of the main concern of the group of young people we met during the EPR meetings was the lack of cultural and social activities in rural areas as the call it ‘cultural poverty’. For young activists we met, a priority for rural areas and rural towns are cultural and social activities, new cultural amenities and spaces, events around art, culture and lifestyle that will contribute to better, fuller lives in rural communities beyond the basic economic needs. Open and vitalize the culture centers, create open cinemas, create interesting events related to art nature/outdoor sports, lifestyle, throughout the year, for youngsters and adults alike, are simple things that reverse the cafes culture or the forced apathy of youth in rural and suburban areas.

2.5 Empowering Rural Stakeholders

2.5.1 At the local and regional level

Participants in the meetings raised the issue of farmers voice, their active participation in policies and actions affecting the development of their territories, and the need to organize and strengthen local stakeholders engagement in rural development to dialogue with local and central government. Participants also voiced the needs for dialogue, network, exchange of know how and information amongst them. They especially raised the needs for Local and Regional forums of farmers, local businesses and local stakeholders. They consider local and regional forums are relevant, closer to their needs, and relates well to the specific issues and resources present in the territory. Local and regional level forums are the levels in which they feel they can have a more direct engagement amongst themselves and with local government.

Participants consider these forums are important in the light of the new administrative and territorial reform in Albania (where municipal level include rural and urban territories) especially to ensure that rural development is high in the new municipal level priorities. The organizations in the forms Community Forums (Forum’s approach) and or LAGs (Local

Action Group approach) were considered important to foster local integrated development including rural and urban areas, as well as areas with complementary resources eg hinterland and coastal, mountain and plain as well as to motivate collaboration and synergy amongst local stakeholders being those individuals, businesses, or organizations.

These forms are important as they create a model for consensus around development priorities; Creativity and diversity are especially difficult in a small country like Albania but yet they are crucial to the long-term development. Multi stakeholders' dialogue and micro projects can boost diversity, creativity and inclusion at the very local level in rural communities. They are key to integrated and sustainable development actions at the local levels.

It fits well with Albania's EU path in that the CLLD and Leader approach for 2014-2020. In Albania LAGs was part of the rural development strategy 2007 – 2013. Yet funding and other instruments for supporting LAGS were not made available.

Financing is a key issue. There is hardly financial resource to undertake any significant LAG initiative in particular to finance institutional development and projects at the local level. The National Strategy for Rural Development 2014-2020 include LAGs a one of the priority.

The financing of LAG (by IPARD) as part of the Rural Development strategy is planned to commence in 2016 -2017.

Mentoring especially through European networks such as ELARD ENRD, PREPARE network will hugely benefit LAGs development in Albania especially, in democratic functioning of bottom up partnership as well as in fundraising and funds management. Cross-country exchanges facilitated by ELARD and Prepare can also inject new ideas for diversification of activities and valorization of local assets.

2.5.2 At the national Level

Unlike other Balkan countries, Albania have not established a National Rural Network. National and local NGOs addressed the need for a national rural platform/forum in line with best practice from member states and more recent National Rural Networks established in the other Balkan countries. During may and June, 2015, 14 civil society organizations operating through a bottom-up participatory approach in the field of rural development all over Albania held two meetings organized by IDM (Institute For Democracy and Mediation) to discuss and take the initiative for the establishment of the National Rural Network in Albania. The primary objective of the meetings was to reach and agreement for the establishment of the network; the approval of a road map for the creation of the network and the agreement on the specific objectives of this structure. □ A Technical Group will work on the facilitation of the process towards the formalization of the network was set up. The participants in the meeting agreed on the specific objectives of the Network and approved a series of measures to be undertaken until the establishment of the National Rural Network; The Network is expected to be formalized at the end of September 2015 in a meeting hosted by one of the participants AGROPUKA in Puka a rural district of North Albania. □

Initial Objectives of the Network⁴

- Becoming a focal point for articulating the voice and interests of rural communities near Albanian citizens and governmental agencies that serve these communities; □
- Offering a partner to the government through which the rural communities and organizations that represent them can be consulted; □
- Asking for funding and undertaking complementary initiatives along the initiatives undertaken from member organizations, e.g. promotion of the LEADER/CLLD approach for rural development; □
- Operating in equal conditions with similar networks that exist in more than 20 European countries, including neighboring countries in the Western Balkans, and participating in multilateral activities among these networks promoted mainly from the Network PREPARE;
- Empowering civil society organizations, members of the network, without violating their independence and capacity to direct their own programmes.

2.6 Other themes emerging from the meetings

- Agriculture techniques and Food processing should not harm the environment. □ The importance of food safety and ensuring food safety throughout the process from farm to table. Participants in the meeting emphasized the importance of education and knowledge both on environmental standards and on food safety standards in addition to the need to improve the control. Better links between consumers and producers and cities and rural areas especially focusing on education for the culture of eating healthy and producing healthy.
- The needs for soft interventions and for development programmes in order to outreach women and men in rural areas introducing concepts of farm sell, short processing, sustainable rural tourism, agro/biodiversity but also make them more business oriented and more open to economic cooperation and social entrepreneurship. We were discussing about organisation of small farmers to reduce costs of inputs and to access service, the urgent need to orient them towards products that are appropriate for the territory and market, processing, farm sells and agro tourism to tape to the capital market and to attract families from Tirana to travel, spend money and time with outdoor activities. There is a need for promotion of territories, local products and to educate producers to process, package, farm sell. It can create new activities especially for women while increasing the attractiveness of the area.
- The importance of including Rural areas in National NES (National Employment Services) and National VET services currently almost uncovered.
- Support for flexible mobile processing technologies that are more adequate and efficient for the size of typical small farms in Albania and that can serve to encourage concrete economic cooperation of farmers.

⁴ http://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Press-Release_-National-Rural-Network.pdf