



Albanian Network for Rural Development
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Toward a new rural agenda – regional workshops

Context

In the frame of the project “The rural people speak! Convene the 1st Albanian Rural Parliament”, two regional workshops titled “Towards a new Rural agenda” were carried out during July 2017. The workshops have been envisaged in the context of the first Albanian Rural Parliament (ARP) 2017, which represents an advocacy, capacity building and networking initiative dedicated to rural development.

The workshops followed the kick-off event of the ARP, which took place on 14 April 2017 at the premises of the Agriculture University of Tirana. The regional workshop was chosen as the method allowing us to meet, inform and consult local actors such as local public authorities, CSOs, farmers’ associations, rural entrepreneurs, local people etc. regarding the advocacy platform i.e rural parliament, challenges and critical issues of rural development.

The workshops aimed to consult with local stakeholders the platform of rural development challenges and among others highlighting the regional differences and specificities of rural development. The workshops lead to an ‘upward cascade of ideas’ which truly draw upon the concerns and hopes of rural people. These ideas could then be synthesized at national level, convening the First Albanian Rural Parliament in September 2017.

In total, six regional workshops were carried out, covering the whole territory of Albania, and bringing together nearly 220 participants.

The workshop included the following main sessions:

- Presentation on the Rural Parliament as an advocacy, capacity building and networking event for rural development;
- Presentation on the region development area: an overview on the challenges and opportunities for rural development;
- Applying LEADER approach in addressing challenges and development of potentials in rural areas
- Challenges in rural development and recommendations for improved rural development policies.

The participants **highlighted the following pressing issues of rural development** that need consideration by decision and policy makers, which strongly confirm

1. Highly fragmented agricultural land; unproductive and unused land; and Land property titles;

The picture of the rural space of the country shows a very large number of small farms, fragmented in small plots: 89% of farms are less than 2 ha, the average size is 1.20 ha, in small plots with an average of 0.26 ha. In this context, a basic



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unsolved problem is the land ownership registration, which blocks the market and prevents farmers' land investments.

Source: Advocacy Plan (ANRD, 2016)

2. Limited access of farmers and rural residents to credit and financial services

Another issue is a normal access to the financial institutions for farmers and rural inhabitants and particularly the "rural credit facilities" which are a normal wide use in EU countries. The few pilot experiences of rural credit facilities in Albania have been developed successfully, but usual credit lines are far from rural areas also for too high interest rates and credit remains mainly concentrated in urban areas and very few rural families can hope to get funds from banks.

Source: Advocacy Plan (ANRD, 2016)

3. Low level of collaboration among entities, associations and institutions

Effective rural development requires partnership between the public sector-civil society-academic community. Better systems of consultation to enable the participation of non-public actors in shaping rural development policy and the promotion of evidence-based policymaking. The need for such consultation and exchange spaces of information and experiences was confirmed by participants who shared examples of different empirical studies which were not being considered by decision makers;

Source: Key Highlights of the ARP kick-off event (ANRD, 2017)

4. Unsustained LEADER LAGs established in frame of different development projects. One of the main weaknesses of such partnership structure has been **the lack of mutual trust among local actors.**

5. Low engagement/interest of youth in agriculture;

Studies and researches stress the low level of socio-economic status of rural population, especially women and youth, while both groups have great potential to contribute to rural development. The untapped capacities and unrecognized potential of both groups call for dynamic policy approaches which are youth and women-oriented.

Source: ARP concept (ANRD 2016)

6. Inadequate and poor rural infrastructure and public services;

As in the other Western Balkan countries, also in Albania 'rural' is often a synonym for backwardness and poverty. The situation of poor rural infrastructures and services maintains a significant urban-rural divide. Many rural territories, especially in the mountains, are marginalised lacking adequate roads, health and school services, electricity supply. This impacts directly on the quality of life of rural communities and it makes impossible to have proper access to markets. A positive recent tendency is that the rural tourism and the rediscovery of traditional cuisine have begun to offer an alternative, which offers to some rural families better incomes, but above all helps to get better the esteem towards the rural world.

Source: Advocacy Plan (ANRD, 2016)

7. A lack of appropriate agro-processing facilities (stores, renovation technology, processing capability, packaging, logistics and delivery speed); A lack of organization between actors



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in the food supply chain and information exchange among the participants in the chain; lower price of agricultural products; unidentified market.

8. Despite positive development in agriculture due to farmers' leadership, a more strengthened role should be taken by institutions. Their leadership is very important, too. Farmers need support to bring positive and sustainable change at local level.
9. Municipalities need to be equipped with the skills, knowledge and understanding of the LEADER approach.
10. Municipalities need adequate resources to be able to fulfill their assigned functions and responsibilities regarding rural development.
11. Rural development should be oriented towards area-based development which is integrated, involves cross-sectoral partnership and multi stakeholders as well. The interest to the LEADER approach implementation should be increased in parallel with provision of support for the creation of partnerships between sectors for introducing Leader/CLLD;

Policy recommendations:

The main policy recommendations proposed in both workshops are related with legal framework revision and improvements. Such a revision should focus on an evaluation on where we are now, what we have done so far? Where we are heading to? What should be changed in order to approximate the policies and legislation with the EU *acquis communautaire*.

- To revise and improve the Law No. 7501 "On the Land"
- To revise and improve the Law No. 9817 on agriculture and rural development.
- To revise and improve the Cooperative Law;
- To enable the creation and functioning of the Local action groups through preparation of the legal framework for the LEADER approach implementation in Albania;
- To orient the local actors throughout Albania to embark on LEADER LAGs initiatives through offering preparatory studies on cohesiveness of the areas and local nucleus which represent possible territories for the future LEADER LAGs.
- Creating partnerships among different social and economic operators represents a functional responsibility of Regional Development Agencies. Therefore lobbying for the LEADER implementation in Albania will strengthen the advocacy efforts of ANRD and its members in this regard.