

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the Albanian Network for Rural Development in its convention on 28 June 2022.

REVIVAL OF RURAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION OF LEADER APPROACH IN ALBANIA

The Integrated Local Development LEADER Academy – a must to guarantee successful implementation of the community-led local development.

We, thirty member organizations of the General Assembly of the Albanian Network for Rural Development,

Whereas we consider that the adoption of the Law No. 36/2022, “On Organization and Functioning of Local Action Groups (LAGs)” facilitates the application of community-led local development, the European common policy instrument for integrated rural development, otherwise known as the LEADER approach; and ANRD in constant communication with various actors has found that the adoption of the law has encouraged the leadership of local civil society organizations and local self-government units in bottom-up initiatives to establish LAGs and design local development strategies as a means to empower local communities and guide them to integrated development;

Whereas we are enthusiastic about the momentum created by the IPARD III program to engage political will and support and prioritize the implementation of the LEADER approach as a success story of the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy, and Measure 5 of the Program, Implementation of Local Development Strategies – the LEADER Approach, will support this approach with 4.8 million Euros, thus enabling community-led local development and introduce success stories on the implementation of the LEADER approach in Europe for local inspiration;

Whereas we bring to attention one of the demands of the Joint Declaration of the Second Albanian Rural Parliament (held on March 4-5, 2021) “... *We ask for political will to prioritize and support this (LEADER) instrument and to accelerate its effective implementation as an essential factor in improving the lives of the Albanian rural communities, especially in preventing their depopulation and abandonment*”;

Whereas we acknowledge the spirit of cooperation of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development with non-public actors in the consultation on and creation of the sub-legal basis on the organization and functioning of local action groups and its commitment to contributing to processes that help the implementation of the Leader approach;

Whereas we acknowledge that the Leader approach is not all unknown to local development in Albania thanks to the support of the LEADER-type community initiatives undertaken by international donors since the early 2000s, and yet, despite this, because these initiatives were not accompanied by continuous

support to ensure the sustainability of established partnership structures, LEADER did not become an instrument that could help the countryside and rural communities to address problems (depopulation, natural resource management, poverty, developmental disparities, gender inequality, low social capital) that public policies did not effectively address; and express concern about the opportunities lost earlier for a possible national undertaking in the implementation of the LEADER approach, driven by previous government initiatives, such as the 100 Villages Program;

Whereas we express our conviction that the LEADER has the potential to become a public policy that has so far been lacking in the sustainable development, supporting all other policies in the field of employment, gender equality, migration, tourism, environment, local public infrastructure, regional development, etc. , because it creates the right incentives for local actors, especially vulnerable groups of society (women, young people, small farmers, minorities, the unemployed, residents of mountainous areas, etc.) to stay, live and work in their village;

Whereas we rely on the important role of the Albanian Network for Rural Development and its experience, capacities, and the potential to contribute to the successful implementation of the Leader approach: on the networking platforms, contact points of all levels, options for discussion and capacity building, trained human resources, certified team for the LEADER approach, awareness materials and advocacy initiatives made available to help the implementation of the approach, especially in relation to the processes of animation of actors and acquisition of skills; and the organizational structure of ANRD itself creates space for the membership and networking of LAGs;

Whereas we are convinced that the process of local territorial animation for the establishment of tripartite partnerships needs to be encouraged and supported and the complementarity of the Ministry's efforts coupled with the capacities and potential offered by ANRD, as a national network established on the principles of the LEADER approach is vital; that the cooperation between MoARD and ANRD will facilitate the creation of positive models and practices in community-led development, through the preparation of the appropriate ground for the effective implementation of the law and thus the European Leader philosophy for integrated local development; that ANRD expresses its readiness to organize traveling workshops in these LAGs by engaging the relevant actors of different levels, including the Members of the Parliamentary Committee of Production Activity, Trade and Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development staff, the Agency for Agricultural Development, the local self-government units of Albania, the civil society organizations, the private sector and entrepreneurship, the media, academia and other experts, professionals and enthusiasts of rural development;

Now therefore,

We call upon the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to play its catalytic role in mobilizing assistance from various donors to prepare the right ground for the implementation of the approach, including information and capacity building of all stakeholders, technical assistance and adequate infrastructure that supports the successful implementation of the LEADER approach, including the effective enforcement of the law and, therefore, the LEADER measure included in IPARD III, as well as open, transparent and inclusive processes that facilitate the exchange of information and coordinate actors engaged at different levels on an ongoing basis;

We propose and commit to establish the Local Integrated Development LEADER Academy as a resource center for the philosophy of community-led local development and we invite the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to join us in establishing this academy by collaborating and coordinating with donors that support the rural and agricultural sector. This academy will include training modules on capacity building for stakeholders (local self-government units and other public institutions, civil society organizations, entrepreneurs, the business sector, etc.), thematic workshops, technical assistance for the design of local development strategies, projects, and other exchange and networking activities for LEADER. Experts from other European countries, such as Italy, Slovenia and Croatia, can be part of the Academy in order to bring the knowhow and experience of these countries for the implementation of this local development instrument.