

Outline on realized activities within the SWG in the period May – August 2012

- i. Networking and enhancing regional cooperation
- ii. Capacity Building
- iii. Advocacy and resource mobilization
- iv. Policy analysis
- v. Information exchange and access to knowledge

i. Networking and enhancing regional cooperation

Membership in the SWG Assembly

- Based on the SWG Statute, Article 2 on Member Institutions, the SWG Assembly voted and reached a consensus on providing the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Water-Management and Forestry of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina with full fledged SWG Membership.
- The SWG Assembly granted a status of an observer to the Ministry of Rural Development of Hungary within the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in SEE and to the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection of the Federal Republic of Germany (BMELV) within the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in SEE.

Third Meeting of the Project Steering Group (PSG) of the SWG EC Project Preparation Facility: “Preparation of a Proposal for an Area Based Development in the Western Balkans”, 7th May, 2012, Milocer, Montenegro

- The meeting aimed at discussion and presentation of the working versions of the baseline analysis, strategic framework and action plans of the “Drina- Sava”, “Sharra” and “Prespa” regions;
- needs of the Stakeholders` Groups (SHG) (structure, responsibilities, operations, finances) for implementation of ABD in the regions of “Drina- Tara”, “Drina- Sava”, “Sharra” and “Prespa” regions;
- future activities related preparations for implementation of ABDA in SEE (reflection on the methodology, stakeholders structures, future activities and budgeting, timing, lessons learned so far).

Fourth Meeting of the Stakeholders Groups of the “Sharra-Prespa” cross- border regions within the project “Preparation of a Proposal for an Area Based Development in the Western Balkans”, June 27th and 29th, Tearce and Carev Dvor, Macedonia; 2nd July 2012, Ilok, Croatia

- The three Stakeholders Groups from the “Sharra” “Prespa” and “Drina- Sava” cross-border regions held their 4th meeting in the end of June and beginning of July (The Sharra Stakeholders Group on June 27th, 2012 in the village of Tearce, Macedonia; the Prespa Stakeholders Group on June 29th, 2012 in the village of Carev Dvor, close to Resen, Macedonia; The Drina- Sava Stakeholders Group on July 2nd, 2012 in Ilok, Croatia).
- The main objective of this meetings was the presentation of the draft strategic frameworks and the action plans for regional cooperation for implementation of the ABD in the target areas and formal acceptance of the documents by the Stakeholders Groups (SHG-s).
- Beside the information on the progress made so far, the participants discussed about possibilities for further facilitation and support to the area based development in this pilot region through analysis of the presented/proposed implementing structure, the needs of the Stakeholder`s Group (SHG) (structure, responsibilities, operations, finances) and the Memorandums of Understanding among the participating Municipalities for implementation of ABD in the regions of “Sharra”, “Prespa” and “Drina- Sava” .
- At the same time, the participants proposed some ideas related to setting up working/interest groups and one SHG facilitator for the follow up and facilitation of further activities.

Regional Conference “Role of the Civil Sector in Rural Development of the Western Balkans”, June 6th, 2012, Niksic, Montenegro

- The aim of the Conference was to discuss possibilities and ways for further improvement and implementation of initiatives of the civil society in the rural development sector in the Western Balkans, with special focus on possibilities for realization of cross-border cooperation projects.
- Participants on the Conference - representatives from Non-Governmental and Governmental Organizations, Rural Development Networks from the region (Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia), exchanged experiences and information on the actual regulations for provision of funds for implementation of projects in the rural development sector in the Western Balkans (agriculture and rural tourism) and gave recommendations for preparation of new regulation in relation to financing of projects.
- The Conference resulted with conclusions which refer to provision of support to relevant stakeholders in preparation of necessary documents related to preparation of local rural development strategies, formation of LAGs taking into consideration EU criteria within the LEADER, provision of participation in financing of projects from the EU funds, etc.
- The Conference was concluded with an official signing of a Declaration on foundation of the Rural Development Network of Montenegro.

Parliamentary Seminar “Modernization of Agriculture and Implementation of CAP”, July 7th – 9th, 2012, Sofia, Bulgaria

- Upon invitation from the Regional Secretariat for Parliamentary Cooperation in SEE and the European Parliament, Western Balkan Unit of the Directorate-General for External Policies, the SWG Secretary General participated on the Parliamentary Seminar “Modernization of Agriculture and Implementation of CAP” along with leading specialists from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food of the republic of Bulgaria, representatives of the European Commission and Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in SEE.
- Two important aspects that were brought out on the seminar were the progress of the Western Balkan states in their efforts to harmonize their legislation with EU laws, as well as information from the European Commission about possibilities to have pre-accession assistance in carrying out reforms in the agriculture sector. The SWG Secretary General gave an *overview of the current stage of the reforms undertaken in the agricultural sector in the Western Balkan countries*. Bulgarian experience in the process of EU accession and the implementation of common European policy on agriculture were presented, as well.

40th Traditional Regional Manifestation “Mowing on Rajac” and gathering “Open Door of Srpska Magaza”, July 14th – 15th , 2012, Ljig, Serbia

- The 40th Traditional Regional Manifestation “Mowing on Rajac” is an event of a traditional character organized in honor of the mowers from the rural areas. Large number of competitors from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Croatia and Slovenia participated into the competition in mowing by cutting the mountain grass, wearing traditional clothes, straw hats and colorful embroidered bags on the shoulders.
- The gathering “Open Door of Srpska Magaza” was concluded with an official opening of the plant “Srpska Magaza” (Serbian store) the first in a series, a retail outlet that offers products and services from the rural households. This was done as part of a bilaterail FAO project for Serbia aimed at improving the competitiveness of the rural economies by establishing the new model for linking production, promotion and sales and their products and services in order to improve the farming supply in rural tourism

ii. Capacity Building

“Study Tour on Rural Development”, 14th - 16th May 2012, Brussels, Belgium

- The aim of this Study Tour was to present the EU policy on rural development to representatives of local and regional authorities coming from the Western Balkan countries and to give them the opportunity to exchange their experience and establish closer cooperation. Besides the general information about the functioning and decision-making of the EU, participants on the Study Tour had an opportunity to get introduced to the EU policy on rural development, in particular the Community strategic guidelines for rural development, the support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the financing of the Common Agricultural Policy and the establishing an Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).
- Approximately 35 participants on the Study Tour had an opportunity to meet with members of the Community of Regions working on issues related to rural development and external relations. The participants on the Study Tour were introduced to umbrella organizations working in the field of rural development to exchange views and best practices with their counter parts in EU Member States as well.

3rd Regional Workshop on Rural Development “Best practices in Green Jobs creation for ensuring sustainability of rural households and resource use as a part of Rural Development”, 28th – 30th May, 2012, Prague, the Czech Republic

- The overall purpose of the workshop was the preparation to the coming UN conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), to bring the knowledge and common understanding on green economy policies and practices, with the particular focus on green job creation in the CEE region. The purpose was further on to create the linkages to a sustainable agriculture as the key tool for a sustainable resource use and rural livelihoods, and to identify the recent problems and gaps within a regional economical perspective. The objective of the workshop was to build capacity of the participants, to facilitate the “greener” development of small-scale farming sector in European transition countries.
- Two representatives from the SWG Head Office/Secretariat attended the 3rd Regional Workshop on Rural Development in Prague.

iii. Advocacy and resource mobilization

Meeting of SWG with European Commission Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development and Directorate General for Enlargement, June 1st, 2012

- During the meeting the SWG Secretary General and the team of EC SWG project on Area Based Development (ABD) discussed the proposal for continuation of activities related to ABD implementation in the Western Balkan countries in the period after September 2012.
- Based on the meeting conclusions, project proposal on setting up a structures for implementation of an Area Based Development Approach (ABDA) was submitted to the Directorate General for Enlargement.

Inception mission for the SWG FAO joint project: "Streamlining of agriculture and rural development policies of SEE countries for EU accession" June 18th-21st, 2012, Skopje, Macedonia

- For the needs of starting the implementation of the joint project: "Streamlining of agriculture and rural development policies of SEE countries for EU accession" the SWG and FAO performed the general preparatory activities.
- The project aims at addressing a closer coordination and in the long run a stable relationship between policy makers and academics and between the SEE countries, which is essential for an effective administrative system and an accelerated EU accession process.
- As the outcome of the project, governments of the SEE accession countries will streamline their agriculture and rural development policies with the current and future Common Agriculture Policies of the European Union (CAP).
- The main stakeholders of the project are Ministries of Agriculture of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo*. In particular the project will involve the relevant departments and units that deal directly with creation and implementation of agriculture and rural development policies, as well as policy analysis. The project also involves the academic and research institutions and universities in the SEE region with the capacity of agro-economic analytics.

Planning Workshop: “Follow up activities and initiation of a regional working group on joint water resource and forestry management in South Eastern Europe”, 18th – 19th June 2012, Ohrid, Macedonia

- SWG and the GIZ supported project Climate Change Adaptation in the River Drin Basin (GIZ CCA) jointly organized the planning workshop on Follow up activities and initiation of a regional working group on joint water resource and forestry management in South Eastern Europe.
- The aim of the workshop was to define the future steps out to be taken for the regional coordination of joint water resource and forestry management in the region of South Eastern Europe. This was done through discussions and evaluation of the methods on making the proposed regional working group in becoming visible a leading, pro-active initiative on regional level for joint water resource and forestry management.
- The target group was comprised of representatives of relevant Ministries from the water and forest management sectors, national experts and academics on water and forest management from the SEE countries. International experts from Germany and Slovenia also participated at the workshop.

Completion of SWG GIZ ORF project: “Improving the competitiveness of companies and organizations from South - Eastern Europe in the agricultural and food sector through implementation of food quality standards and increased regional networking”

- Based on the determination of the Western Balkan countries to cooperate amongst themselves and to help each other in the process of EU-accession, as well as to increase economic cooperation and regional trade, the project focused its activities on creation of a platform for discussions and support the implementation of food safety and quality standards, as well as to enhance trade promotion and strengthen business relations among Western Balkan countries.
- The SWG and the project succeeded to establish regional dialogue platform and strengthen regional networks and cooperation of different stakeholders operating in the agro and food sector. Ministry representatives, representatives of business support organizations, national and local producers` associations, companies were assembled together to discuss, exchange experiences and information, plan future professional and business cooperation and perform joint actions.
- According to the monitoring and evaluation, the project succeeded to contribute to the increase of competitiveness of companies and associations operating in the agro and food sector through support to implementation of food safety and quality standards, and through facilitation the establishment and strengthening the regional networking and cooperation. The volume of trade of the project partner companies records increase of 50%.

iv. Policy Analysis

Organization of the Informal - “No tie” Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from South Eastern Europe during the 59th World Ploughing Contest, Biograd na Moru, Republic of Croatia, September 12th -14th, 2012

- On the occasion of the 59th World Ploughing Contest 2012, the Ministry of Agriculture of Croatia and the SWG will host the Informal - “No tie” Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from South Eastern Europe. The aim of the meeting is signing the Memorandum of Understanding for collaboration between the SWG and the World Ploughing Organization (WPO) and discussions for the following Sixth Annual Working Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from SEE which will be held in the November 2012.

**Preparations for organization of the Agricultural Policy Forum 2012:
“Policy perspectives on environmentally sustainable agriculture and
rural development in South Eastern Europe”, 16th – 19th October 2012,
Ohrid, Macedonia**

- Invitations sent in July 2012
- Key not speeches defined
 - Update on developments of IPA and CAP reform post-2013
 - Climate change and agriculture
- Thematic speeches defined:
 - Strengthening of water resource and forest management cooperation in South Eastern Europe;
 - Area Based Development in the cross-border rural areas of the Western Balkans within the framework of territorial and regional cooperation;
 - Gap analysis between EC and SEE countries with special attention to agriculture and rural development policy.

Preparations for 6th Annual Working Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from South-East Europe 2012”, 15th -17th November 2012, Pristina, Kosovo*

- First announcements for the 6th Annual Working Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from South-East Europe were delivered to the Ministers of agriculture from the countries of South-East Europe.
- The aim of the meeting is to discuss future of the regional cooperation and reforms in the sector of agriculture and rural development in the process of EU approximation of the SEE region.

v. Information exchange and access to knowledge

Conference: “Export Possibilities of Organic and Other Crops to Germany” , May 15th, 2012, Novi Sad, Serbia

- The SWG participated at a conference which was organized by GIZ/ACCESS Programme Serbia, Vojvodina Investment Promotion (VIP) and “Serbia Organica”.
- The purpose of the conference was to discuss about: export potentials of organic agricultural products from Serbia, marketing organic crops from Serbia with a special emphasis on the markets from organic protein plants especially soya beans and to share experiences from the region and government support and legal frameworks.
- During the conference representatives from German organic industry presented their export potentials of organic crops from Serbia with emphasis on EU markets for organic protein plants, especially soy beans to Serbian agricultural companies and farmers.

Round Table : "Specific Role of Civil Society in Lobbying and Implementation of National Action Plan for Organic Agriculture on the Western Balkan Region", May 16th, 2012, Novi Sad, Serbia

- The SWG participated and shared experiences related to preparation of strategies and action plans for development of organic agriculture sub-sector on the workshop organized by the Balkan Organic Network, Green Network of Serbia and GIZ/ACCESS Programme Serbia.

OECD Workshop on Fruit and Vegetables Quality and Inspection Service, June 19th- 21st, 2012, Podgorica, Montenegro

- Based on an invitation from the OECD Secretariat, the SWG Secretary General participated on the OECD Workshop on Fruit and Vegetables Quality where the participants discussed topics related to food safety and quality systems and standards, especially in the Fruit and vegetables sector. Information on the fruit and vegetables quality inspection system in the European Union, international standardization for Codex Alimentarius, as well as the OECD Fruit and Vegetables Scheme in a form of an overview on the Scheme and its role in international trade were presented to the participants.
- This Workshop provided a ground for sharing knowledge and experience in relation to Identification of the parameters of quality (varieties, Growing methods and technologies, handling/post harvest), Food safety issues in fruit and vegetables products - Food safety of fruit and vegetables, potatoes (legislation, contaminants), Import controls in the EU – performance, import system, documentation, as well as GMO – official control (authorized and non-authorized events).