



Report

Twenty-Ninth Session of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) of SEE Countries

Date: 8th - 9th May, 2014
Location: Jahorina, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Organizer: SWG Head Office/Secretariat

Report Prepared by: SWG Head Office/Secretariat

May 2014

I. Purpose of the session:

The 29th session of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in SEE was held in the period 8th -9th May 2014 in Jahorina, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The aim of the session was to discuss the realized activities in the period January – April 2014, upcoming events for 2014 as per the operational plan, and the cooperation with SWG partner institutions. For the closed session the Assembly will discuss regarding the SWG operational structures.

All SWG delegates from the nine SWG member institutions, and the six SWG observer institutions were officially invited to participate on the 29th SWG session.

Representatives from all nine SWG member institutions, participated on the session, discussed, gave recommendations and have taken the decisions listed below.

Representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture of Croatia and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Hungary participated on the session as observers.

Representatives from the Balkan Rural Development Network and initiatives from the SEE region were also present at the meeting.

Representatives from the SWG partner institutions and international organizations German International Cooperation (GIZ), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO UN) and CIHEAM IAMB also participated on the session.

II. MINUTES OF THE SESSION:

SWG Delegates/ Ministry representatives present from:

- Ministry of Agriculture, Rural development and Water Management – Republic of Albania (Mr. Grigor Gjerci; Mr. Teuta Topa and Ms. Brisilda Pullumbi);
- Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations - Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mr. Ljubisha Lalovic);
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mr. Marko Srdic and Mr. Ostojica Sinik);
- Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mr. Pejo Janjic; Mr. Emir Rascic);
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development – Kosovo* (Mr. Bekim Hoxha);
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy – Republic of Macedonia (Ms. Valentina Stojanovic – Tufa; Mr. Ljubo Peno; Ms. Katerina Ivanovska and Ms. Tanja Mihajlovska);
- Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection – Republic of Serbia (Mr. Dragan Mirkovic).

Ministry representatives of the SWG observer institutions present from:

- Ministry of Agriculture - Republic of Croatia (Ms. Nada Trgovcevic Letica, Ms. Davorka Hajdukovic);
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development - Hungary (Mr. Bailant Ilies).

Balkan Rural Development Network:

- National Rural Development Network of Serbia (Mr. Dragan Roganovic; Mr. Slobodan Ljubojevic);
- Rural Development Network of Macedonia (Ms. Aleksandra Todorovska; Mr. Sasho Angelovski);
- National Rural Development Network of Montenegro (Mr. Ratko Batakovic; Ms. Ilinka Beatovic);
- Croatian Rural Development Network (Mr. Matija Zamljancanec);
- Bulgarian National Rural Network (Ms. Mariya Yunakova; Ms. Vyara Stefanova).

Other representatives present at the session were:

- German International Cooperation GIZ (Ms. Alexandra Hilbig)
- CIHEAM IAMB (Mr. Pandeli Pasko)
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations FAO UN (Ms. Katalin Ludvig)

III. Topics discussed at the 29th SWG Session:

The main topics of the session which were discussed are the following:

1. SWG Session with participation of SWG partner institutions and organizations

- Realized activities in the period January – April 2014;
- Planning of other upcoming SWG activities for 2014;
- Cooperation with partner & other international organizations and institutions;

2. Internal Session of the SWG Assembly

- Discussion on potential cross-border areas from SEE for future implementation of the Area Based Development approach;
- Discussion and decisions about membership in the SWG;
- Discussion and decisions on the SWG Financial Planning.

Meeting programme is presented in Annex 1.

DISCUSSIONS:

Mr. Boban Ilic, SWG Secretary General welcomed the participants and opened the 29th SWG Assembly Session.

Mr. Dragan Mirkovic on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection of Serbia holding the SWG Presidency for 2014 moderated the discussions during the 29th SWG Assembly Session.

Conclusion:

The SWG Assembly, assembled on the 29th SWG Session had qualified quorum.

III.1. SWG Session with participation of SWG partner institutions and organizations

III.1.1 Review of the realized activities within the SWG in the period January - April 2014 via SWG Operational Plan

The SWG Secretary General and the staff of the SWG Secretariat/Head Office presented the executed activities in the period January - April 2014 based on the set operational plan of the SWG RRD.

The following activities were executed based on the SWG OP:

- *Global Forum for Food and Agriculture 2014*
 - the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South Eastern Europe and the Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations jointly organized a Regional panel entitled: "Agriculture as key driver for social and economic development in South Eastern Europe". The SWG was also present at the cooperation market on the 17th of January 2014 with a stand and promotional material;
- *Regional Meeting on Raising awareness and promotion of the Best Sustainable Development Practices*
 - the Regional Meeting was held on 10th of February 2014 in Skopje, Macedonia jointly organized by the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in SEE and CIHEAM IAMB. Main focus of the meeting was the Call for Best Sustainable Development Practices which aims at establishing an international scientific network for research and innovation.
- *First coordinative meeting of the public forest enterprises and Ministries of agriculture (forest sector) from South Eastern Europe*
 - the first regional meeting of the PFE and Ministries of agriculture (forestry sector) from SEE countries was held 27th February 2014 in Mavrovo, Macedonia. Output and results of the meeting was formulation of a regional action plan for the institutions dealing with forest management from SEE countries.
- *Working Meeting of the Managing Authorities and IPARD Agencies*
 - working Meeting of the Managing Authorities and IPARD Agencies was held on 11th - 13th March 2014 in Kolashin, Montenegro. The discussion of the meeting was focused on the state of preparedness for IPARD II of the countries with a 2014 budget allocation and their calendar, as well as IPA II Legislation and Follow-up of the October 2013 seminar on 'Streamlining implementation for IPARD 2014-2020' – modifications of the Sectoral Agreement.
- *Slow Food International Workshop "Local Food Matters"*
 - Forum Synergies and Slow Food Bitola in cooperation with PREPARE, Terra Madre Balkans, SWG and the Essedra Project organised a workshop "Local Food Matters – finding the good balance between hygiene rules, small-scale production and quality" on the 20th – 22nd March in Trnovo, Bitola, Macedonia. The aim of the event was to encourage positive legislation and application of the flexibility for artisanal and small scale food products and to provide basis for flexible setup of hygiene regulations in EU accession countries.
- *TAIEX Multi-country travelling workshop in Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia and Concluding Conference*
 - workshop on "Empowering rural stakeholders: Mainstreaming participation of stakeholders in development and implementation of agriculture and rural development policies in the Western Balkans and Turkey" as held in the period 31st March – 2nd April 2014. The concluding conference was held on 8th of April 2014 in Brussels. The aim of this intervention was to promote mutual understanding and cooperation between governments and rural stakeholders, and partnerships between public, private and civil sectors at sub-regional level and to raise awareness of LEADER Local Action Groups on opportunities in relevant policy and decision making on a national level.
- *6th Stakeholders' group meetings in "Drina-Tara", "Drina-Sava", "Prespa" and "Sharra"*
 - the purpose of the meetings that took part in the period 18th March – 26th March, 2014 was to inform the members of the Stakeholder Groups with the details related to the implementation of the second phase of the EU funded project: "Preparation for implementation of Area Based Development Approach in the Western Balkans". The meetings of the SHG in "Drina-Tara" and

“Drina-Sava” cross-border areas were opportunity to discuss the Call for proposals for enhancing of competitiveness through small grants.

- *Workshops: “Partnership and cooperation in joint projects for integrated economic development” within ABDA 3 project*

- the event was tailored for the Stakeholders from “Drina-Sava” and “Drina-Tara” cross-border regions who expressed their interest to participate to the Call for Project proposals launched from April 7th – May 8th 2014 by the SWG Head Office/Secretariat on behalf of the SWG. The main objective was to support the integrated cooperation among the value chain actors to encourage innovation, production of competitive products and improvement of services, development of partnership in the Western Balkans.

- *“Lim-Drina-Sava regatta - 15th Memorial Vitomir Dizdarevic - Admiral Cook”*

- the SWG supported the organization of the traditional manifestation “Lim-Drina-Sava regatta - 15th Memorial Vitomir Dizdarevic - Admiral Cook” organized by Kayak club “Serbian Paddlers” from Serbia. The aim of the manifestation with international character was to promote the advantages of being in nature, promotion of region of rivers Lim, Drina and Sava, promotion of history, culture, tradition, as well as networking, promotion of partnership among people and exchange of cultural and traditional habits.

- *FAO 3rd National Workshops on Streamlining of Agriculture and Rural Development Policies*

- workshops were organized in the period April 8th- 29th, 2014 aimed at presentation and discussion of the results of the Research Teams, particularly on state of art of the countries - situation and trend analysis, comparison with the EU and within the region, gap analysis, APM results and communication & networking campaign.

III.1.2 Presentation and discussion on newly initiated activities in the period January - April 2014

- *South Eastern European Strategy 2020*

- the South East Europe Strategy 2020 entitled “Jobs and Prosperity in a European Prospective” was adopted by the Western Balkan countries in November 2013. The goal of this strategy is for the governments from SEE to embrace the bold policy approaches required to attain the levels of socioeconomic growth necessary to improve the prosperity of all its citizens to facility eventual integration with the European Union.

- SWG as a regional initiative is involved in the SEE Strategy 2020 in the pillar dimension for Environment developing flagship initiatives, indicators and regional action plan in cooperation with Regional Environmental Center and Global Water Partnership.

- via various activities the SWG is also being involved in other pillar dimensions, including Competitiveness and Trade.

- since January 2014 SWG has been participating on the SEE Strategy 2020 board meetings and OECD monitoring workshops.

- *Green Mountain Initiative*

- final conference of the Green Mountain project was held on 20 February 2014 at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels.

- representatives from SWG had a key note speech on sustainable mountain and forest areas in South Eastern Europe, with the focus on Western Balkans.

- SWG and Green Mountain initiative discussed the possibilities for future cooperation and joint actions in the region.

- *Establishing the Advisory Service Network of SEE*

- meeting was held on 24th April, 2014 in Belgrade where the Initiative for establishing the Advisory Services Network of South-East Europe (ASN SEE) was presented.

- main objective of the Network is connecting advisers and advisory organizations on regional level for exchange of knowledge and experience; Improving methodology of agricultural advising and enlarging contribution of advisory work in rural development.

- SWG expressed the willingness of support to this Initiative and offered to administrate the activities of establishing the Network by the end of this year.

III.1.3 Discussions and decisions on upcoming SWG activities for 2014

- *First meeting of the regional expert advisory working group on wine*
 - the SWG assembly has agreed on organizing the first regional expert advisory working group on wine first week of June 2014.
 - the SWG delegates were requested to send contacts to the SWG Secretariat from the responsible persons from the wine from their Ministry in order to agree on the meeting agenda and organize the gathering.
- *30th SWG Assembly Session*
 - discussion and decision was made that the next SWG Assembly Session will be held in September in Bulgaria.
 - SWG Secretariat in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture from Bulgaria will determine the location.
- *Agricultural Policy Forum 2014*
 - the APF 2014 will be held in the period 15th - 17th October 2014 in Serbia. The SWG Secretariat in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture of Serbia will determine the location of the Forum.
 - during the assembly session the delegates discussed the content of the Forum. The concept for the Forum has been agreed to involved the private sector.
 - delegates have been requested to send a list of private companies from their countries which will be invited on the Forum.
- *8th Annual Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture*
 - 8th Annual meeting of the Ministers will be held in the period 12th - 15th November 2014 in Bulgaria. The Ministry of Agriculture from Bulgaria will determine the location and the venue of the meeting.
 - announcements for the meeting to be send by end of June 2014 and official invitations by September 2014.
- *31st SWG Annual Assembly Session*
 - it has been discussed and agreed that the 31st Assembly Session will be held in Italy. The meeting will be jointly organized with CIHEAM Institute.

III.1.7 Discussions on the cooperation with European Commission

Ms. Irena Dzimrevska, SWG Head of Operations presented the process and the achievements in respect to the Area Based Development program through the project on "Preparation for Implementation of the Area Based Development (ABD) Approach in the Western Balkans) - 2nd phase".

The current project focuses on continuation of the preparatory activities for ABDA implementation in the WB cross-border areas through the strengthening of the capacities of regional and local structures.

In addition, in the "Drina-Tara" and "Drina-Sava" cross-border areas a test grant scheme is implemented to support investments related to the improvement of production processes, implementation of improved technology and improvement of quality of products and services.

III.1.4 Discussions on the cooperation with GIZ

Ms. Alexandra Hilbig, Manager of Open Regional Funds For South East Europe shortly presented the objectives of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and the regional cooperation in the South Eastern European Region.

GIZ is also an international organization which has taken a role in the implementation of the set measures within the SEE Strategy 2020.

a) Project Proposals (in negotiation phase)

SWG is currently in negotiation with GIZ for development and implementation of project proposals on:

- *Solid Waste Management in cross-border rural areas of South Eastern European region*

Focuses on two designated pilot cross-border areas, "Sharra mountain" covering rural municipalities among Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo* and the cross-border regions across the Drina delta ("Drina-Sava" cross-border region among Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia and "Drina-Tara" cross-border region among Bosnia, Montenegro and Serbia).

- *Promotion of Trade and Economic Cooperation in Agriculture and Food Sector in SEE*

Focuses on export promotion of agricultural products/companies across SEE region and the EU as well as facilitation of trade among the SEE countries.

Memorandum of Understanding signed between the SWG and CEFTA promoting free trade and competitive economic environment in the agricultural sector.

- *Rural Development through Management of Water and Forest Resources*

Program focuses on 4 sub-components for water and forest management, incorporated via rural development and climate change issues.

b) Implementation of current projects

The implementation of the two currently running projects on "Strengthening capacity building through networking and regional cooperation in the Western Balkan countries and the "Support to the core functions of the SWG - Networking and Dialogue" are in line with the foreseen operational framework and indicators.

III.1.5 Discussions on the cooperation with FAO

On behalf of FAO, Ms. Katalin Ludvig, Rural Development Consultant summarized the cooperation between the SWG and FAO Project on "Streamlining of agriculture and rural development policies of SEE countries for EU accession".

The project is in its finalizing stage, the final regional workshop will be held in June 2014 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The results from the national experts will be presented during the plenary session at the Agricultural Policy Forum 2014. The research data will be published as a study and the printed copies will be available during the APF.

Future cooperation between FAO and SWG is in process of negotiation concerning the TCP proposal on "Support to the implementation of an integrated and innovative economic development approach in Drina-Tara and Drina-Sava".

Details regarding the proposal can be found in Annex II.

III.1.6 Discussions on the cooperation with CIHEAM Institute for Mediterranean Agriculture – Bari (IAMB)

Mr. Pandeli Pasko presented the activities of CIHEAM IAMB and the cooperation between SWG and IAMB in respect to the Feeding Knowledge program.

SWG and CIHEAM are currently in the Second phase of the Feeding Knowledge Programme in the frame of 2015 Milan Universal Exposition.

III.1.8 Presentation on the Advisory Services Network in South Eastern Europe (ASN)

Mr. Milan Husnjak, from the Advisory Services Network in South Eastern Europe (ASN) presented the objectives and aims of the network to the participants.

Details regarding the ASN can be found in Annex III.

III.2 Internal Session of the SWG Assembly

III.2.1 Discussion on possible cross-border areas to be included for the Area Based Development Approach

The SWG Assembly discussed additional possible cross-border areas for implementation of Area Based Development Approach. The following cross-border areas were suggested by the participating SWG delegates:

- Pcinja – Shopska (cross-border area between Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria))
- Skodra – Skadar (cross-border area between Albania and Montenegro)
- Prokletije (cross-border area between Albania, Kosovo* and Montenegro)
- Sandzak (cross-border area between Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- Debar – Peskopi (cross-border area between Macedonia and Albania)
- West Stara Planina (cross-border area between Bulgaria and Serbia)
- Neretva (cross-border area between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia)
- Dinara (cross-border area between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia)
- Una – Sava (cross-border area between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia)
- Lower Danube (cross-border area between Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia)
- Trebinje-Niksic (cross-border area between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro)

The criteria for selection of the cross-border areas should consider the general ABDA criteria, as well as, that the region needs to have at least two countries from the Western Balkan region (EU candidate and potential candidate countries).

The SWG Head Office/ Secretariat will prepare short baseline and overview of each of the proposed cross-border areas. Decision about the three additional cross-border areas in which baseline analysis and strategic planning for ABD will be made during the 30th SWG Assembly Session.

III.2.2 Decision on SWG membership

The Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies of Italy requested to join the SWG as an Observer Institution.

Decision: The SWG Assembly with full consensus has granted the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies of Italy an observer status within the SWG.

III.2.2.1 Discussion regarding the Membership Fee

The SWG Secretary General, Mr. Ilic opened the session for discussion on the payment of the membership fee.

For the year of 2013 three institutions have still to cover delays in payment: Ministry of Agriculture and Food of Bulgaria, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Montenegro and Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

For the payment of the membership fee for 2014 the SWG Head Office/Secretariat has distributed the documents for payment of the fee and the official invoices will be sent to the Ministries via e-mail and by post.

III.2.2.2 Discussions about visibility of SWG and distribution of information

The Secretary General discussed with the SWG Assembly regarding the transparency of information sharing and visibility of the SWG in the member institutions. Many of the Ministry officials are not informed regarding the activities of the SWG as a regional organization covering different topics in respect to rural development. Better exchange and information sharing will improve the implementation and execution of various activities in the region.

Conclusions/Decisions Made:

- The first meeting of the regional expert advisory working group on wine has been discussed and agreed to be held during the first week of June 2014. SWG delegates have been requested to send contacts from persons responsible for the wine sector in their institutions.
- The 30th SWG Assembly Session to be held in Bulgaria in September 2014 and the 31st Annual SWG Assembly Session to be held in December 2014 in Italy in cooperation with CIHEAM.
- Agricultural Policy Forum 2014 to be held in Serbia. The Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection of Serbia and SWG Secretariat will agree on the location and venue. The SWG assembly for the APF 2014 the SWG Assembly has agreed to involve the private sector. SWG delegates should provide to the Secretariat list of companies which will be invited to the Forum. Invitations to be sent by end of June 2014.
- 8th Annual Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from SEE countries will be held in Bulgaria. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food of Bulgaria should decide on the venue and location of the meeting. Announcements for the meeting to be sent by end of June 2014.
- The SWG Assembly has discussed and proposed additional cross-border areas in the South Eastern European Region. Eleven cross-border areas were suggested by the SWG Assembly.
- With consensus the SWG Assembly has granted the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Policies of Italy with an observer status.
- SWG and SWG delegates should strengthen information sharing among the member institutions in respect to the activities and work of the organization.