



Identification, Dissemination and Exchange of good practice in
Local Employment development and promoting better governance

BULGARIA **NATIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK**

General details

Address	Bulgaria, Sofia 1784, zh.k. „Mladost“ I, „Jerusalem“ str., bl. 51, business-building, office 2
Telephone no.	+359 2 9768931
Fax	+359 2 9768930
Email address	mdimova@flgr.bg
Name of Contact	Marina Dimova, Programme Coordinator

Details of activity

Background to the case study	<p>Aims and objectives The creation of a National Rural Development Network in Bulgaria</p> <p>Brief rationale The Concept for the Establishment of a National Rural Development Network in Bulgaria was formulated on the basis of analysis and studies of the experience of existing National Rural Development Networks in Europe, and in consistency with the principle of wide discussions and consultations with the social and economic stakeholders in Bulgaria.</p> <p>Implementing organisation Foundation for Local Government Reform (FLGF), Sofia, Bulgaria</p> <p>Funders Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, Bulgaria</p> <p>When activity started/end date? Starting period: August 2005 End period: December 2005</p> <p>That is the period, during which the Concept has been developed and publicly discussed with the interested actors at the local and regional level.</p>
------------------------------	--



European Commission

Description of activity	<p>Outline of programme / activities and approaches used</p> <p>The first stage of the project implementation process involved an analysis of the information collected on the experience of the National Networks in the Netherlands, Poland and Slovenia, as well as a comparative analysis of the situation in each of these countries, the types of services provided by these organisations, their management and advisory bodies.</p> <p>The analysis served as a backbone and a starting point in the initial stage of the development of a draft Concept for the Establishment of a National Rural Development Network in Bulgaria.</p> <p>FLGR initiated the formation of a Work Advisory Group comprised of representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, experts from organisations and institutions involved in rural development. The workgroup discussed the draft concept for the establishment of a National Rural Development Network and submitted specific proposals and recommendations for its improvement. The workgroup provided for a wider initial discussion of the concept, as well as for the consideration of the points of view of various interested parties, transparency and publicity of the process. The revised and improved concept served as a basis for a wider discussion by the stakeholders during its first official presentation at the First National Seminar on Application of the Leader Approach and Establishment of a National Rural Development Network, held in November, 2005 by the United Nations Development Programme in Bulgaria and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests.</p> <p>The process of wide public discussion of the Concept involved the use of a mechanisms for wider participation of interested parties via Internet forums, more than 15 national and regional information seminars, radio broadcasts, publications, questionnaires sent to more than 170 organisations, municipalities and institutions in the country. The recommendations, comments and amendments to the draft Concept made during the public discussion were analysed and incorporated in the Concept.</p>



Follow up steps and initiative, ensuring the practical realisation of the Concept for the establishment of the National Rural Network in Bulgaria:

A new project initiative has been developed, which will ensure the real creation of the National Network – based on the Concept, as well as provide for large information campaigns, trainings and first national forum to gather all interested potential members of the Network in the country and form the Network. In the beginning of May 2006 a joint project between the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, the UNDP – Bulgaria and the Foundation for Local Government Reform started the implementation of the **“Rural Networking and Preparations for the Application of the LEADER Method in Bulgaria”** project, which expands and further develops the efforts of the Foundation with regard to the establishment and strengthening of the National Rural Network.. **The project also works on the establishment of Local action groups following the model of the EU LEADER+.**

Generally the project has four components:

- Preparations to launch the National Rural Network
- Support the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests in drafting the LEADER measures and implementation mechanisms in the National Strategic Plan for Rural Development 2007 – 2013
- Consolidation of at least 5 LEADER-eligible Local action groups
- Training and hands-on work of Bulgarian LEADER practitioners.

The overall implementation of the project will go through the period May 2006 – March 2008.

Origins – how it came about – bottom up / top down, grew from previous initiative (if so what)

The initiative originally came about from local farmers and NGOs, but has been formulated, supported and financed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests. But the general attitudes towards the idea of establishing a National Rural Development Network have been strongly supported by the local and regional interested actors.



	<p>Who was involved in the design, management and delivery of the programme</p> <p>The Foundation for Local Government Reform has been involved in the overall development of the Concept of the National Rural Network, as well as in its consultation at national, regional and local levels.</p> <p>Recognition – has the programme been recognised as good practice? If so, by whom?</p> <p>So far the process of creation of a common platform for the establishment of the Rural Network provides for a very clear and focused possibility to further organise the national effort and mobilise all interested parties into the Network. It also gives a structured approach related to the future types of services to be provided by the Network to its members and the general capacity building of the Network.</p>
<p>Policy context within which the programme operates</p>	<p>Is there an explicit relationship between policy priorities/ local activities?</p> <p>On the one hand the establishment of such a national rural network is a requirement on behalf of the European Commission for the period 2007 – 2013. At the same time this idea has already been developed and fostered 1 year ago as national priority within the policy implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests. The process of organising and uniting the interests of local people from rural areas has started quite some time ago and many local organisations or farmers put forward this idea on national forums or meetings. In fact the process went both bottom-up (giving birth and recognising the need to create such a National Rural Network) and top-down (providing possibility to create a single structure and rules for the network, consulting it with many interested actors and providing policy support to the idea).</p> <p>Is the policy context supportive / prohibitive?</p> <p>The policy support is very encouraging and provides favourable conditions and options to further establish and strengthen the Network.</p> <p>Has the policy context changed during the life of the activity</p> <p>The policy on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture has been stable and supportive all through the process. One step further: the Ministry, together with UNDP – Bulgaria, has agreed to start a new project initiative, which would ensure the practical</p>



	<p>creation of the Network and provide financial and technical support to its members.</p> <p>Which came first – local activities or policy priorities (i.e. is activity leading or following policy priorities)? The establishment of the National Rural Network in Bulgaria has been a recognised idea on behalf of the local and regional representatives, but somehow the Ministry acted as national coordinator and encouraged and supported the development of the Concept for the Network, following its policy priorities. The fact that the Network is a required element on behalf of the EU with respect to the future membership of Bulgaria makes it more policy-driven than locally initiated and pushed forward.</p>
<p>Geographical focus of the case study</p>	<p>The concept covers the whole territory of Bulgaria – representatives from rural areas will have the chance to join the Network, which will be part of the European Network for Rural Development.</p>
<p>Impact</p>	<p>Outputs – scale and scope of people reached through the programme The concept for the establishment of the National Rural Network is to be applied in the close future. It has been discussed though with various national institutions: the European Commission, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, national institutes and donor organisations. The draft concept has been consulted nation-wide with more than 800 people from the rural areas and comments and recommendations from more than 170 organisations, municipalities and district administrations.</p> <p>Outcomes: <i>at local level – what difference at local level and at regional and/or national level – what difference made?</i> Mobilised the efforts and unified the ideas of the people (farmers, organisations and institutions) regarding a common national platform on rural policy formulation and implementation – as a partner to the national institutions representing the local interests and vision.</p> <p>Any impact at European level? The National Rural Development Network will be part of the European Rural Network, which will comprise all member states national networks.</p>



Partners' details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Agriculture and Forests • UNDP - Bulgaria
-------------------	--

Theme-Specific Questions

Who was targeted by the programme?	Representatives from rural areas in the country – farmers, producers, associations of farmers, businesses involved in farming/agriculture; municipalities, de-concentrated structures of the Ministry of Agriculture at the local and regional level; district administrations; local, regional and national NGOs working in the field of rural development, local sustainable development, environment and nature preservation; associations of municipalities, citizens.
Which levels of government were involved, informed or consulted?	National level has been actively involved – through the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests; district governors and administrations, as well as municipalities were also part of the consultation and information process; de-concentrated structures of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests at regional and municipal levels were included.
What actions resulted in mainstreaming?	All involved institutions at national/regional/local levels took part in the consultation of the draft concept taking time to make specific recommendations and suggest improvements of the concept.
Sustainability	The Concept for the establishment of the National Rural Network has been largely discussed with representatives from the country, national institutions and ministries, as well as with the European Commission. The Ministry of Agriculture would provide also the necessary financial support for the establishment and functioning of the Network through the future implementation of the National Strategic Plan for Rural Development, where within the resources from EU and national funding, 1,5% of the funds for technical assistance would be provided for the National Network through tender procedure.
Successes / lessons learned	<p>What contributed to the programme's success?</p> <p>The project has been encouraged by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests through its general policy support, provision of information and advice and consultation in the process of development of the concept. Contribution and commitment has been given also on behalf of UNDP – Bulgaria through its</p>



“Sustainable Development of Rural Areas in Bulgaria” project, as well as from many municipalities and local/regional NGOs which provided comments and suggestions for the improvement of the concept.

What lessons have been learned

- Mobilisation of national efforts needs time and recognition
- National policy support is extremely important for the success of the idea
- Partnerships involving national/regional/local levels of government and their social and economic partners are of great value and when at place the process has a strong potential for success.

