



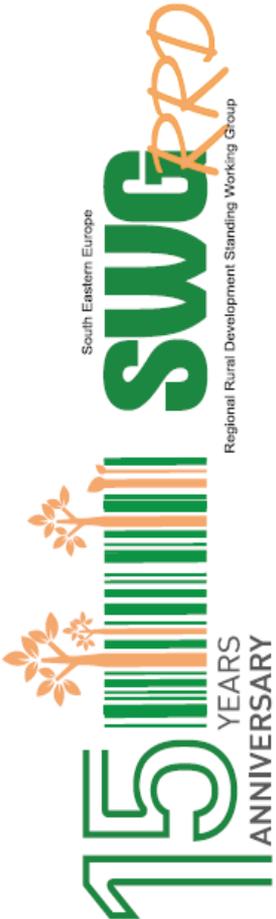
Agricultural Policy Forum 2020

Agriculture and rural development policy in the Western Balkans in times of pandemic

WORKING GROUP 2: LEADER Approach in the *Western Balkans*

16 October 2020
Online meeting

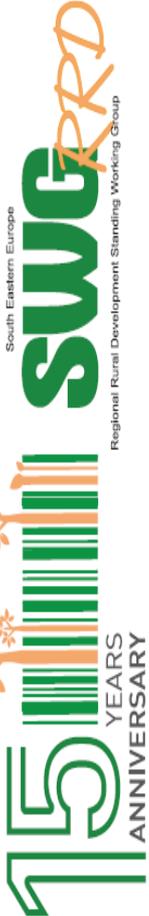
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Main Purpose of the WG



- Address the major challenges for integrating the LEADER approach in the Western Balkan countries/territories through the provision of Road Maps that will serve as a guidance for future activities in the implementation of LEADER in the region.
- Facilitate the process of cooperation, dialogue and exchange of experience among relevant stakeholders involved in design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of LEADER in the WB countries/territories and provision of policy advice to boost capacities to implement LEADER.



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Key Assets/Opportunities

1. Existence of political will among institutions for LEADER accreditation and implementation, as well as legal and institutional setup.
2. National schemes and Technical Assistance Measure of IPARD would support the most urgent financial needs for capacity building, networking and local strategy development.
3. The Covid19 crisis, beside the impact on the recent situation, also bears opportunities for rural areas (short distance commercialisation, domestic tourism, climate-friendly local development strategies, recognition of the essential role of local economy).
4. The bottom-up policies implemented through LEADER programs play a key role in boosting sustainable rural development, especially if the involved LAGs that are based on existing public-private partnerships.

Key Barriers

1. Lack of coordination among Managing Authorities, IPARD Agencies and other relevant sectors.
2. Limited financing and stakeholders engagement.
3. The COVID-19 pandemic heightened barriers and challenges around LEADER implementation.
4. Lack of adequate levels of knowledge and technical skills in LAG management, product quality and safety and knowledge in new technology and market promotion skills.
5. Weak coordination and involvement of various groups of rural stakeholders in building/strengthening sustainable partnerships through the existing Local Action Groups (LAGs).

Ways Forward

1. To upgrade/develop adequate legislation and accelerate the accreditation of LEADER in IPARD.
2. To implement and update the program for investments in technical support of agricultural economies and investments in physical assets in the processing and marketing of agricultural products by supporting LAGs with several new projects, support of the environment and climate change and producers organizations.
3. To increase initiation and attendance of cross-regional cooperation and partnership.
4. To develop civil society and social dialogue within the rural population, facilitate good governance through local partnerships and foster employment and develop human capital.