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Balkan Rural Development Network

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Mreža za ruralni razvoj u Bosni i Hercegovini

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ANRD

A Vision for Rural Europe

The President of the Renew Europe Group, Dacian Ciolos, together with the Agricultural and Rural Convention, ARC2020, organized the event "A vision for rural Europe – Harnessing the potential of rural areas to contribute to a sustainable and prosperous Europe". At the web conference, organized on July 7th, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced an EU wide public consultation on the future of rural areas. This will be a "participatory process" which will be "a great opportunity for rural communities all across our continent to have their say. The COVID-19 pandemic has called into question our direction and we need to see rural as a solution" according to the Renew Europe group. This consultation is expected to begin in the Autumn.

ARC2020 mobilised the civil society component for the rural europe web conference. This saw speakers representing social farming, intergenerational cooperation, sustainable communities, inclusive digitalisation, and aspirations of civil society in EU accession countries.

Petar Gjorgievski (representing the Rural Development Network of North Macedonia and Balkan Rural Development Network) spoke of the western Balkans, and how much the accession states have to offer, not only in agricultural production of the large scale farms but also in the traditional food production, tourism and services of small family farms that cover the majority of rural areas. These rural households are diversified and spread over beautiful and very diverse landscapes presenting a number of opportunities for economic and social growth, also offering a variety of products and services to the consumers.

He focused on moving past the deadlock in the EU integration process, which itself negatively impacts the development of rural areas. The pre-accession process and LEADER measures are good prerequisites but more is needed.

The Event report can be found at: https://www.arc2020.eu/a-vision-for-rural-europe-event-report/?fbclid=IwAR3wM7UdxRKkQRd3vUQBXFkgf1pdhnVye5cUeU0LsIr7f-QIfPIzPbBVDUE

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The members of the BRDN Working Groups trained in fundraising

In the period from 6th to 8th February, in Belgrade, Serbia, training on fundraising skills improvement for the members of the BRDN's Working Groups was held. The goal of this training was to develop skills and practices for effective fundraising with focus on writing of the project proposals for EU funding, as well as exploring other possibilities for obtaining funds, such as corporate and individual support as well as through maintaining Social Enterprise Model. 11 members of the Working Groups, nominated by the BRDN member networks, improved their skills in fundraising as an effort to set up the basis for their future work in supporting BRDN to become strong actor in sustainable rural development in the Western Balkan.

BRDN provided assessment on the gender equality among its member networks

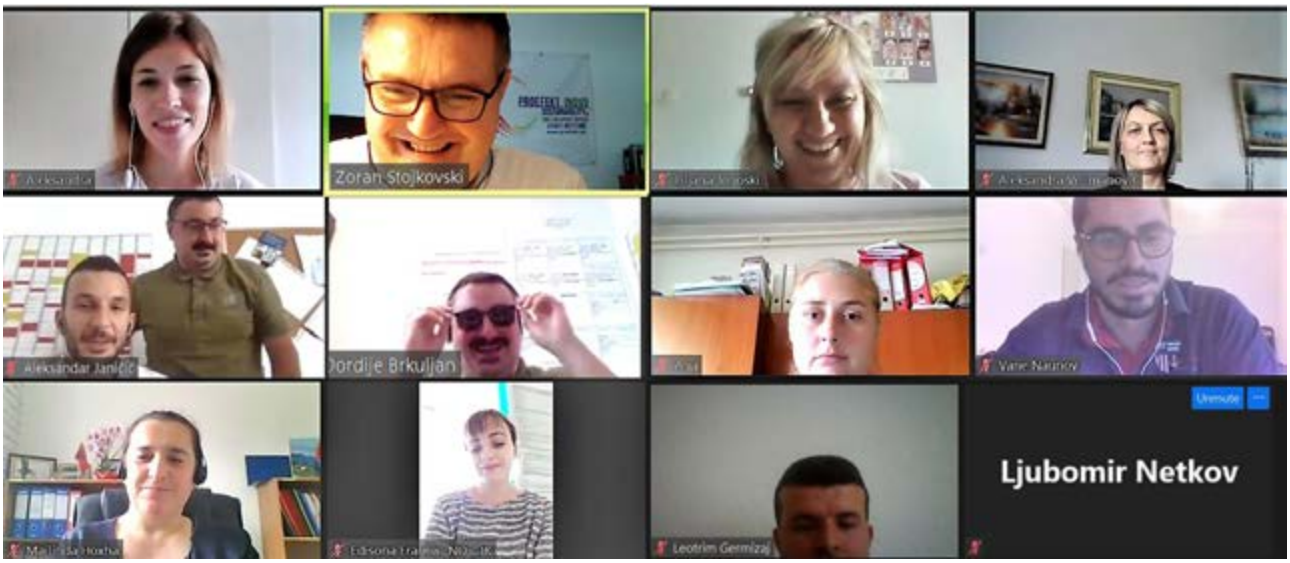
A commitment of the BRDN to promote gender equality in all segments of its operations, from the organizational structure of the network and its members to the planning and implementation of operational activities is expressed in the Communication and Gender Mainstreaming Policy and ACTION PLAN of BRDN prepared by the BRDN's Gender Equality Hub. The policy outlines the Network and its members' direction for gender mainstreaming in all activities, including efforts to analyze and address the specific needs and roles of women and men, appropriate for each intervention.

In direction of improvement of the institutional capacities of BRDN's member networks and enhancing the gender mainstreaming, an assessment of the level of gender equality was conducted among each of the BRDN member networks. The questionnaire was designed to provide capacity assessment at organizational level, evaluating what policies, strategies and procedures are in place to ensure that gender equality and the empowerment of women is involved in the work of the members of Balkan Rural Development Network. The capacity assessment was conducted in all 7 members of BRDN (Rural Development Network of North Macedonia; Network of Organizations for Rural Development of Kosovo; Network for Rural Development of Serbia; Rural development network in Bosnia and Herzegovina; Croatian Network for Rural Development; Network for Rural Development of Montenegro; Albanian Network for Rural Development).

The assessment provided an overview of the level of gender equality on different aspects within the network organizations, giving appropriate suggestions and recommendation for their improvement. The information obtained from this assessment provide useful directions in the future planning of the capacity building activities of BRDN and its members.

Preparation of BRDN's Advocacy and Lobbying Strategy

The members of the BRDN's Working Groups have started to work on development of BRDN's Advocacy and Lobbying Strategy and Action Plan. Advocacy and Lobbying is one of the priority areas of work of BRDN, but there's a need of a clear vision of the advocacy issues on which BRDN will represent its constituents and design future activities. At the 2 hours Zoom meeting, held on June 18th, 2020, the members of the Working Groups discussed about their experiences and different issues they've advocated on, at national level and managed to draft priorities and actions related to advocacy and lobbying for BRDN. Having in mind that the national rural development networks, members of BRDN, are all experienced in this area of work, BRDN just gives them opportunity to raise these issues on regional and EU level, and to be more influential in the process of representing the needs of rural communities in the Western Balkans.



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The consequences of the pandemic for women in rural areas

Due to the pandemic outbreak and the measures provided in the Western Balkan countries, women living in the rural areas have suffered some great consequences as a result of the gender inequality, such as unemployment, increased gender-based violence, increased workload within the households and so on. These are some of the issues that were detected by the BRDN member networks in the rural communities in their country.

The limitations for movement, the conditions for living in the rural areas, the small dwellings in which rural families have been locked, the economic consequences of the pandemic, have probably increased even more the psychological pressure and the domestic violence, so as a result an increase number of gender-based violence cases were detected. Also interrupting interaction with women's groups or other support groups, increase the likelihood of deterioration of their condition and status.

Many women in rural areas lost their jobs. Women didn't not go to the markets to sell their products nor did they have sales directly from the farm, which means that their income was reduced and the economic situation of their small family farms is in crisis. Unfortunately, rural women couldn't adapt their sales electronically because of the lack of computer literacy or internet coverage.

On the other hand, some of the most difficult and underpaid jobs in health care (nurses, cleaners, laundry) are done by women. The majority of women are predominantly employed in the textile industry in clothing factories for which the restrictions given from the competent authorities didn't have any effect. The factories never stopped working, even though the employees worked in groups counting up to 60 women, all within a distance less than a meter. The risk these women are taking is significant, taking into consideration the fact that traditionally, in North Macedonia the households are mainly extended families, which include people in the higher risk group, over the age of 60.

Another sector greatly impacted by this situation is craftmanship, where women are commonly self-employed in hair salons, tailoring salons, catering companies, beauty salons, production of souvenirs, which due to the restrictions were not working for months, even though that is their primary source of income.

Women's workload within the household was increased due to the pandemic and their additional efforts to keep their family health and nutrition proper. Besides the everyday chores and work that women usually fulfill, additional burden are school obligations that their children get. In the situation when kindergartens and schools were not working, the mothers were the ones to help their children with the school work and to communicate with their teachers. Most of these women are lacking computer literacy, so working on the internet was an additional challenge for them, while they were expected to help their children follow online classes.

When speaking of health and social protection, at least in North Macedonia, there is a large number of women who do not have any health insurance which is very important in such situations, and therefore the fear of these women of the pandemic is even bigger. Additionally, when it comes to recommendations for frequent hand washing and maintaining a high level of hygiene in general, this is a problem in certain rural areas where there is still no water and sewerage network, no clean drinking water, etc.

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Legal Comparative Analysis on non-EU Countries Programs and EU CAP

The concept of green entrepreneurship is new to the Balkan countries, and therefore sensitisation and awareness raising that will evoke the interest in the topic, not only of the end beneficiaries, but also of the policy and decision-makers, is very important. Being faced with many diverse challenges, farmers and rural population, as particularly vulnerable group of citizens of the project-represented countries, every day is faced with the challenge of sustainability and providing for based livelihood. Consequently, the investments in environmental protection measures are many times perceived as additional burden that further worsens the fragile financial situation of the households. Hence, there is a need to initiate a change in the mind setting and make the rural population see opportunities in the factors that are currently recognised and described as threats. In order to achieve this, RDN and all partnering networks, as members of BRDN, will work to increase the awareness of the end-beneficiaries and sensitise the general public on the importance of support of the process of green farming and entrepreneurship and sustainable rural diversification. In parallel, the policy and decision makers in the target WB countries need to be sensitized on the importance of the green economy topic for achieving sustainable rural development and urged to undertake specific measures on policy level that would advance green economy and entrepreneurship.

In that direction, the project works on identification, analysis and comparison of the non-EU member countries' legal documents, national programs and measures for agricultural and rural development to the EU CAP, with emphasis on the green economy cross-cutting issues.

This comparative analysis will serve as a base to identify the progress gaps and to precisely illustrate the hindrances, driving forces and boosters that each of the project-represented countries applies on national level, and that supports and facilitates the process of approximation to the EU CAP, particularly in regards to the green economy cross-cutting issues. The analysis will serve as foundation for opening dialogue with the relevant stakeholders and carrying out the environmental and green economy advocacy process planned within the project that should support the countries' approximation to the EU CAP, while engaging the grassroots organizations and encouraging participative rural policy decision-making processes. Croatia will be included and referred to as a benchmarking country in regards to the policy amendments, negotiations and participation in the decision-making process.

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Small grants for support of green economy initiatives

The CSO sector can play significant role in the process of achieving sustainable rural development and give a boost to the transition into development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It can actively advocate for this goal, participate in the decision-making process and influence local and national authorities to create enabling environment for sustainable development and environmental protection with the emphasis on green economy and green entrepreneurship.

Award of small grants for the implementation of initiatives of civil society organizations from the target countries will enable implementation of projects important for local communities and at the same time, strengthening the capacity of smaller civil society organizations through a comprehensive process, including trainings, mentoring activities and practical application of the knowledge gained.

For that aim, NAGE project has published a call for small grants on April 2nd 2020 and awarded in total 36 organizations from the project target countries (North Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina) for the implementation of their initiatives directed towards initiating and piloting green entrepreneurship.

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Green Economy Trainings

During the first half of 2020, within the project Networking and Advocacy for Green Economy – NAGE, trainings related to the green economy and financial management were organized for the grass-root CSOs working in rural areas in North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo.

During February and March, 2020, two trainings on "Green Economy and Entrepreneurship" were organized in North Macedonia for representatives of CSOs from the western and eastern part of the country. The main focus was put on defining and clarifying the concepts of green economy and entrepreneurship, the role of the CSOs in promoting green economy, assessment of green economy in different industries and developing action plan for green business. The goal of the training was to strengthen the capacities of CSOs and the potentials of its members on this current topic, in order to become advocates for introduction of green economy in national agriculture and rural development legislation. This training, was financially supported by the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in SEE.

This type of trainings was also organized in Serbia by the Network for Rural Development of Serbia as one of the NAGE project partners: one training was organized in the period from 13 to 15 March and another training later on in June, 2020. Different aspects related to the green economy and entrepreneurship were presented to CSOs' representatives during these trainings, including:

- clarification of the term ''green economy'',
- description of the state of environment,
- principals of green economy and entrepreneurship,
- green economy and CSOs,
- assessment of green economy policies, modeling and green industry,
- development of an action plan for green economy.

In addition to the theoretical part of the training, the participants in the group work defined the role of CSOs in ''greening'' all spheres of society, assessing green economy policies and modeling the green industry. Great interest from the participants was attained by presentation of some good examples of green economy in Serbia, such as the special nature reserve ''Zasavica'' that has a mini Zoo, eco-touristic facilities (bird watching, driving with boat, photo safari, hiking, educating children and young people…) and the ''Sunny River'' in Gornja Koviljača as an example for development of sustainable tourism through education and valorization of the natural and cultural-historical values of the area.

For the grass-root CSOs in Montenegro, 2 program specific trainings on Green Economy and Entrepreneurship were organized during March, 2020. Both trainings were attended by 23 representatives of CSOs who have some basic knowledge on the topic, but lack in practical use of the knowledge. Even though the size of these organizations and their basic knowledge on the topic does not allow them to have a stronger impact, they have solid foundation for potential work on Green economy and entrepreneurship in their communities.

The Network of Organizations for Rural Development of Kosovo, as NAGE project partner, has successfully conducted a training on topic: 'Financial Management & Procurement' for representatives of grass-root CSOs in Kosovo. Also, during June, 2020, the Network, despite circumstances arising with the coronavirus outbreak, managed to organize 2 trainings on green economy and entrepreneurship, attracting many participants from CSOs that are working in the area of rural development.

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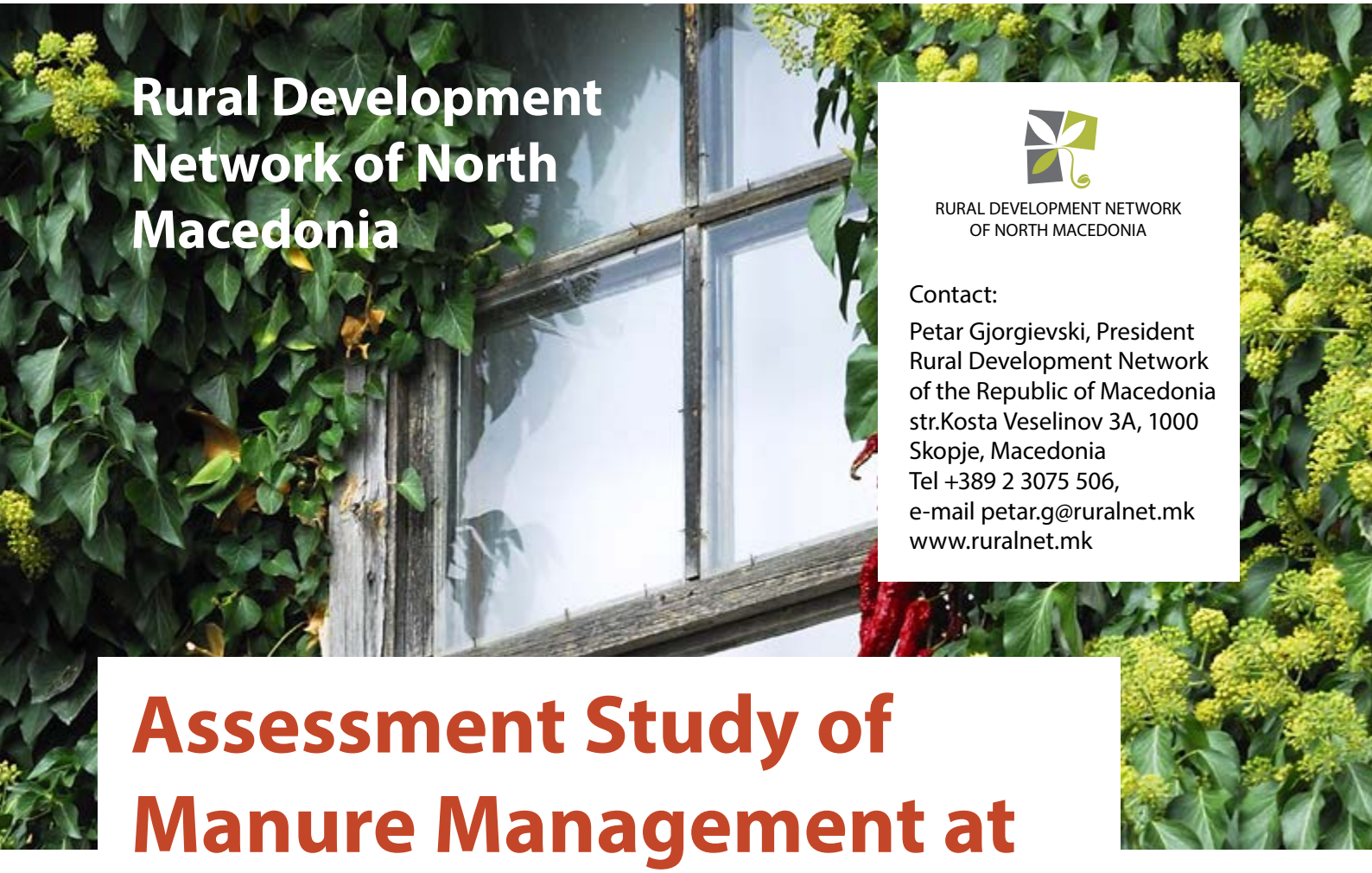

Rural Development Network of North Macedonia

RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK
OF NORTH MACEDONIA

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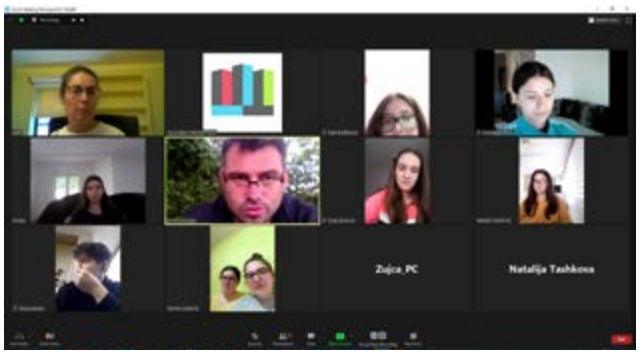
Assessment Study of Manure Management at Small Dairy and Pig Farms

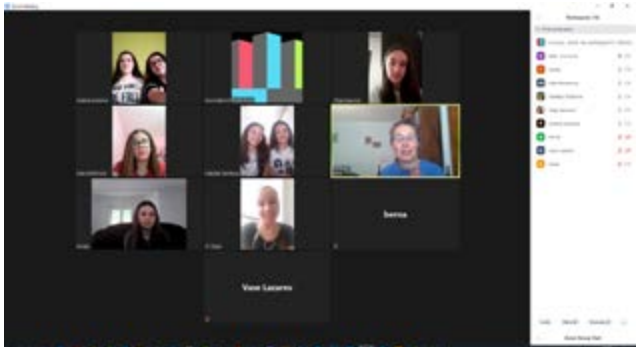
UNDP and the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP) in North Macedonia are heading the project "Fourth National Communication and Third Biennial Report on Climate Change towards UNFCCC". The main goal of the project is to strengthen the base for collecting data, processing data, and strengthening institutional capacities of major national institutions in order to mainstream climate change as a priority in national development strategies, as well as in corresponding sectorial programmes providing financial and technical support in drafting the Fourth National Communication towards the UNFCCC.

Within this project, RDN of NM was engaged to prepare an assessment study of the method of manure management at small dairy and pig farms, in order to observe and assess in more detail greenhouse gases emissions. A firm conclusion can be drawn that farms fail to take special care for a proper manure treatment on farms. Small farmers mainly treat manure in a very traditional way, without care for greenhouse gases emissions, but also the loss of useful substances from it. It is mainly treated as waste, failing to recognize its true beneficial value. Hence, there is a need to define mitigation measures to train farmers how to collect, dispose and use manure correctly, primarily as a recommendation for keeping nutritious matter in manure and its correct use, in order to recognise benefits from additional investments in capital and/or human labour. On the other hand, there is a need also to promote gas plants (digesters) to use manure as source of biogas. This would reduce total CH4 and N2O emission from livestock breeding.

Environmental Study Circle

In the beginning of February 2020, high-school students from Radovish surrounding, helped by the local CSO "KRUNA PLUS", started a Study Circle on environment. A Peace Corps volunteer with an extensive knowledge in the field of environment and climate change was selected to be a leader of the Study Circle, while the co-leader role was rotating among the other members of the group. Fifteen members of the Study Circle met at the high school's library for 6 sessions throughout February and March. The last four sessions were held online due to the coronavirus outbreak and the precaution measures undertaken in the country. The young members of the Study Circle learned and discussed on many topics including ecosystems; solid waste; water and air pollution and climate change. They shared the environmental problems they have at local level, discussing about the major causes for pollution, how they can protect their environment and what types of recycling of the waste they can practice at local level. At one session, they visited the city landfill in Radovish to get acquainted with the different ways of waste disposal and learn whether household waste, especially solid waste (plastic) is being recycled. To get familiar with how wastewater treatment systems work and function, the ways of wastewater treatment, how they are purified and how it all affects the wildlife and the entire ecosystem network, the members of the Study Circle visited the wastewater treatment plant in Radovish. Eager to learn more about air pollution, at one of the sessions, the members of the Study Circle invited an expert on environment and jointly argued about the main air pollutants in the country.





At the last, 10th session, the Environmental Study Circle members discussed about further steps and possibilities for their inclusion in the activities implemented by the CSO "KRUNA PLUS". Having their expectations fulfilled, the members of this group were very interested to further take part in composting trainings in kindergartens and primary schools in the Municipality of Radovish, as well as in designing environment related coloring books, video materials and announcements for composting.

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Revised the Local Development Strategies of the LAGs in Eastern and Southeastern part of the country

By introducing the EU LEADER approach in Eastern and South-eastern Planning Region of N. Macedonia, the Rural Development Network of N. Macedonia, promoted interest within the municipalities and other local actors in recognizing the importance of rural development as a core aspect of local and regional economic development. With RDN's support, Local Action Groups were established, covering 21 municipalities in the Eastern and South-eastern Planning Regions. The local actors were involved in creation of the following Local Action Groups: "Bojmija", "Plackovica", "Belasica-Ograzden" and "Males-Pijanec". Each LAG created the Local Development Strategy (LDS) as a central document, which defines the set of priorities and measures for rural local development based on the needs of the community. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy (MAFWE) of North Macedonia, prepared a LAG register, where

according to the LEADER approach criteria; these LAGs were officially registered. Although, they had prepared LDS, the document was with needed quality. Therefore, with financial support from USAID, RDN of NM provided mentorship and coaching of these LAGs in the processes of analysis, evaluation and revision of their LDSs, using methods that involve the community and strengthen their capacities for future management of the developed and adopted strategies and solutions for development of their communities

7 Projects Awarded to be implemented by RDN's member organizations

RDN of NM through the project for Institutional support of RDN of NM and its members, funded by We Effect, in April, 2020, announced a call for support of small initiatives to be implemented by the member organizations. Seven projects were awarded to be implemented in partnerships of RDN's members, in the following period of five months, among which the projects:

- "Gender Equality – key to economically strong rural community "
- "Choose Healthy - Buy Locally"
- "Malesh-Pijanec is your next destination"
- "Let's improve the existing energy system in our region"
- "Eco playful picture book"
- "Let's discover the nature"
- "Sustainable network of young farmers for revitalization of agriculture and rural areas"

Opportunity for support of Macedonian Local Action Groups through the Technical Support measure

With financial support of the Swedish development organization We Effect, The Rural Development Network of North Macedonia together with the Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy of North Macedonia (MAFWE), organized a meeting with representatives of the Local Action Groups, in order to discuss the opportunities for using support for LEADER from the Technical Assistance measure within the IPARD Program 2014-2020, as well as use of funds from the Program for financial support of rural development of MAFWE. This meeting held on February 19th, was great opportunity for the LAGs to present their work and activities implemented at local level, but also to get actively

involved together with the relevant authorities, in the preparation of action plan for support of LAGs' initiatives through the measure for Technical Assistance within IPARD.

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Albanian Network for Rural Development

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The 2nd Albanian Rural Parliament - The European Perspective of Rural Albania

Quote

"Articulated as an idea in 2016, the "Rural Parliament" was shaped into a project where everyone began to believe. It is now becoming an inclusive practice to promote and undertake the necessary reforms that strive for revitalized and reborn rural areas" Sotiraq HRONI, *Chairman of the Board*

The Albanian Rural Parliament (ARP) is an initiative of the Albanian Network for Rural Development (ANRD) and represents an advocacy, capacity building and networking platform dedicated to rural development. Following the 1st Albanian Rural Parliament (September 2017) and, in response to the current challenges of agricultural and rural development, the ANRD in cooperation with the Agricultural University of Tirana (AUT) originally planned to organize the 2nd Albanian Rural Parliament on April 2-3, 2020, which is postponed in autumn 2020 due to the Covid-19 crisis. [Read More]: https://anrd.al/second-rural-parliament/

Regional Rural Forum of Drin kicks off the journey to the 2nd Albanian Rural Parliament

The Regional Rural Forum of Drin was organized in the framework of the 2nd Albanian Rural Parliament and represents the first out of the four forums that will precede the Parliament. The forum welcomed by AGROPUKA, was organized on March 6, 2020 in the town of Lezha.

The one-day forum saw around 80 participants, representatives of various public institutions, local authorities, civil society organizations, farmers' associations and productive groups, women and youth from rural areas, local entrepreneurs, active citizens and other participants from all over the Drin region, respectively from the counties of Shkodra, Lezha, and Kukës. The Forum was conceived as a combination of the plenary session that broadly addressed the development challenges of the Drin region, agrarian and rural policies, followed with a motivating speech by the guest speaker on social business as an alternative of providing necessary services in rural areas. In the end, simultaneous workshops on the public consultation on the new cross-sectoral strategy of agriculture and rural development were organized, transforming the Forum into a dynamic space of interaction.

Read more: https://anrd.al/news/regional-rural-forum-of-drin-march-2020/

The European Agenda for Rural and Agricultural Development in Albania: Progress and future Challenges

The Albanian Network for Rural Development (ANRD) with the support of the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM), organized on January 15, 2020 at the premises of the EU House the Round Table 'The European Rural and Agricultural Development Agenda in Albania: Progress and Future Challenges '. About 40 participants, including senior representatives, mem-

bers of the IPARD II, key donors, representatives of ANRD member organizations and other active actors of rural and agricultural development attended this roundtable.

The roundtable, as intended, shared the findings and recommendations of the Civil Society Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the National Plan for European Integration (NPEI) | Chapter 11 Agriculture and Rural Development. The monitoring report was drafted during August-December 2019 and aimed to provide an overview of the progress of agricultural policies and rural development in the context of the implementation of the NPEI for the period 2009-2019, with a focus on legal and institutional capacity as well as to provide evidence-based recommendations to encourage public debate on alignment with EU requirements.

Read more] : https://anrd.al/anrd-events/progress-and-future-challenges-in-aligning-the-european-agenda-of-rural-and-agricultural-development-in-albania/

ANRD WORK DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

ANRD continued working remotely during mid-March – April. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis, and in search for new alternative ways of working in pursuit of our mission and in order to sustain the continuity of activity, this year's Assembly was held virtually to discuss, exchange and decide on important issues of the functioning of ANRD and its agenda. The agenda included, among other things, the review and voting of requests of grassroots organizations for membership to ANRD; presentation and approval of the Annual Report on the activities of ANRD and the Financial Report for the period January-December 2019; presentation and approval of the Action Plan for 2020; elections of the Board members for the period 2020-2024. Read more: https://anrd.al/news/general-assembly-of-albanian-network-for-rural-development-was-held-virtually/

Indeed, it has been a time that apart from the challenges, has been ideal to show the important role CSOs play. First, an intensive online consultation process with our member organizations was carried out with the intention to identify needs and problems that rural population were facing as a result of the lockdown measures imposed in the fight against the coronavirus outbreak. An open letter addressed to the Prime Minister of Albania, Mr. Edi Rama on the problems and recommendations to support the residents of rural areas in the emergency situation caused by Covid-19 was prepared and sent.

Rural communities in Albania are experiencing a series of problems caused by the lockdown measures imposed by the Government of Albania in the fight against the coronavirus outbreak. Concerned about the deterioration of the quality of life of farmers and residents of rural areas, the Albanian Network for Rural Development (ANRD) sent an open letter to the Prime Minister, Mr. Edi Rama, to make known the problems caused by lockdown measures limiting the free movement of people and the exercise of economic activities. The letter addresses the main concerns raised by farmers and residents of various rural areas of the country through their organizations, members of the ANRD, and offers recommendations for improving the situation.

"Being aware of the difficult situation and the challenges in this time of crisis, ANRD and member organizations express their readiness to contribute to supporting the improvement of the situation."

[Read https://anrd.al/lajme/leter-e-hapur-mbi-problematikat-dhe-rekomandimet-ne-mbeshtetje-te-banoreve-te-zonave-rurale-ne-situaten-e-krijuar-nga-covid-19/

IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN RURAL AREAS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RURAL YOUTH | May 2020

As part of its thematic work with young people in rural areas, ANRD conducted the webinar "RURAL YOUTH AMID COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND DIGITAL CHALLENGES: How can the European model of the rural development SMART Villages help? through GoogleMeet, on April 28. *The webinar intended to find out how the Covid-19 crisis has affected young people, including young people from hard-to-reach communities, their families and businesses, and the communities where they live. What can be practical solutions to overcome the challenges and problems? How good European models and positive practices can help in addressing these challenges?*

In this context, the European concept of rural development known as Smart Villages was presented as an alternative to addressing some of the challenges. The Smart Villages model can generate benefits for rural communities, particularly the most vulnerable groups, or hard-to-reach communities, especially in times of socio-economic challenges such as the one we are going through.

The document titled '*Impact of Covid-19 pandemic in rural areas from the perspective of rural youth' was* prepared with the input gathered from the webinar. It was shared with other important stakeholders such as policy and decision-makers, donor community supporting rural development and youth, central institutions and municipalities to orient their actions to help address challenges and problems identified. Read more: https://anrd.al/publications/impact-of-covid-19-pandemic-in-rural-areas-from-the-perspective-of-rural-youth-may-2020/

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Sida and We Effect does not necessarily agree with the opinions expressed.