

Communication Strategy of Balkan Rural Development Network 2023 - 2027



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Supported by:
The logo for WE EFFECT. It consists of a large, dark blue, stylized letter 'W' followed by the words 'WE EFFECT' in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font.

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I. INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION

General information about Balkan Rural Development Network, basic founding and operation documents

The interest for starting the Balkan Rural Development Network (BRDN) was recognized need by the rural development networks in the Balkans to establish a platform, through which they could regularly exchange information, experience and knowledge, network and cooperate together in order to increase their effectiveness in the work with their constituents on national level, but also to enhance their influence in the rural development at regional and EU level.

In 2011, BRDN started to act as an informal regional platform of NGO-based rural development networks in the Western Balkan (WB), bringing together the rural development networks from North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Albania.

The Rural Development Networks (RDNs), members of BRDN, consist in each country of non-government organizations at national or regional level, which are actively contributing to the rural development processes. Majority of the networks in the Balkan countries as well as their member organizations are registered as civil society organizations. The BRDN through its members represents more than 200 rural development associations from the region.

In August 2020, BRDN was officially registered as regional network of 7 RDNs from the above-mentioned Western Balkan countries, with its seat in Skopje, N. Macedonia. These RDNs, members of BRDN, consist in each country of non-government organizations at national or regional level, which are actively contributing to the rural development processes. BRDN Assembly is the highest Governing Body of BRDN, consisted of all member networks. The BRDN's Secretariat, placed in Skopje, represents the Executive Body of BRDN, responsible for the professional and administrative work of BRDN.

Today and in the future, BRDN is to sustain as an asset for knowledge transfer, and promotion of innovation and best practice examples that would:

- improve the rural development potential of the member countries,
- support the preservation and enhancement of the ecosystems, and
- contribute to efficient utilization of the natural resources and social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development of the Balkan rural areas

Mission of BRDN

Rural areas in the Balkans are prosperous and sustainable, offering fair economic opportunities and livelihood.

Vision of BRDN

BRDN is voice of rural communities by advocating for inclusive rural development policies and supporting development activities, through regional cooperation and strengthening the national rural development networks.

Guiding principles of BRDN

The guiding principles of BRDN that unite the member – organizations in a common mission for integrative rural development in the Balkans region, are:

- Enhancement of dialogue, confidence and cooperation among the members;
- Sustainable development based on preserving and development of the natural resources and living environment;
- Support diversity of the rural areas;
- Bottom-up approach and empowerment of the local rural communities;
- Networking, cooperation, exchange of best practices, experience and knowhow;
- Advocacy, wide stakeholder involvement and cooperation with the academic community;
- Joint implementation of projects;
- Visibility, transparency and work accountability

The aims of BRDN, as defined with the current Statute, are:

- To connect and align different profile organizations for exchange of opinions, information and experiences, as well as implement activities for promotion, organization and assistance in the sphere of rural development;
- Promote rural communities' development and connect the different sectors that function in those communities;
- Work on promotion of the conditions and consistent development of the rural areas and improvement of the quality of life.

By following the guiding working principles, the organization and the work towards fulfilment of the organization's aims, BRDN will support effective utilization of natural and human capital and will contribute to sustainable growth and development of the rural areas. By doing so, it will back-up the empowerment of the rural communities, their participation in policy and decision-making processes, which will, in the long run, improve the social well-being of the rural people from the Balkan region.

Strategic priorities in relation to the communication strategy, public relations and outreach

This communication strategy follows the basic founding documents, mission, vision, aims and principles of BRDN, and takes into account:

- The Statute of the Balkan Rural Development Network (hereafter: BRDN)
- Mission and vision of the BRDN
- Guiding principles of the BRDN
- Aims of BRDN (as defined in the Statute of the network)
- Strategic priorities of BRDN
- Strategic priority action areas of BRDN
- BRDN's Advocacy and Lobbying Strategy and Action Plan

After thorough analysis of organizational strengths and weaknesses, in comparison to the external working environment's opportunities and threats, and considering the past performance and future perspectives for integrative rural development of Balkan rural areas, as well as the power and interest of the organization's stakeholders, the BRDN members defined four priority action areas for strategy implementation period 2018-2022. The strategic priority action areas in which BRDN will develop itself and will work for the best interest of its constituents are:

- Organizational development
- Exchange of experience, knowhow and best practices
- Advocacy and lobbying
- Promotion, visibility and communication
- Gender mainstreaming within BRDN as cross cutting strategic priority will apply on each of the BRDN strategic priorities.
- Under each of these areas, BRDN will act in accordance with its defined values, and towards achieving prosperous and vibrant rural development, and enhanced socio-economic livelihood of the rural communities.

Specific objectives:	Success indicators	Expected Results:
Priority 4: Promotion, visibility and communication		
10. Advancing the promotion, visibility and communication of BRDN.	The network has clear vision of its public image, and approaches its strategically in order to further strengthen and sustain its integrity towards its members and other stakeholders.	10.1 Developed strategy for communication, promotion and visibility of BRDN
	The network is recognized by its constituents, partners and wide stakeholder groups	10.2 Improved organization's brand, visibility and credibility, through structured and systematic communication and enhanced transparency and accountability towards the stakeholders

Public relations

As defined in Point 5 of Strategic plan 2018-22, member organizations have different level of recognition in the member countries. BRDN will aim to increase its recognition, but also help member organizations to increase their visibility.

In order to do so, BRDN will have to actively engage with the media. The Secretariat of BRDN will have the main coordinating role for PR, adopting and mainstreaming communication and visibility guidelines, to help support the activities of BRDN.

As pointed out in the Strategic plan 2018-22, the public relations will be mainstreamed in all strategic priorities and will particularly support the attainment of Strategic priority 4. Promotion, visibility and communication.

However, due to anticipated greater role in advocacy and lobbying, the wider public must be more informed on the work of BRDN and its members, in order to represent a credible partner and stakeholder in rural development in the Balkan region. Moreover, such transparency and active engagement with the public may support BRDN's efforts for financial sustainability as it endeavours to generate donor support.

BRDN will also have to involve both traditional and digital media as tools for public relations (including but not withstanding: informative editions, promotion at events, press-conferences and meeting with media, Facebook and Twitter, Instagram, etc.). BRDN will consider to publish E-Bulletin containing information of its achievements, as well as the achievements of its member-networks, depending on financial opportunities, twice a year. Online ad-hock publications shall include various news, Annual Reports, Fact Sheets and a range of other resources. The communication and visibility plan will define the scope and methods for BRDN public relations.

II.COMMUNICATION PRIORITIES

In order to reach the goals set within the Strategic plan of BRDN, this Communication strategy of BRDN sets 5 communication priorities for its implementation:

- Promoting BRDN as a credible and reliable regional rural development structure/ partner and strengthening its visibility and communication within EU institutions;
- Promoting BRDN as a credible and reliable regional rural development structure and strengthening its visibility and communication with authorities and institutions at the national level through its national rural development networks – members;
- Strengthening and advancing internal communication among the members of BRDN;
- Strengthening BRDN’s visibility and communication with constituencies, current partners, donors and beneficiaries of the network, as well as with potential beneficiaries and partners;
- Strengthening BRDN’s visibility and communication with media and the general public.

III. COMMUNICATION GOALS

The main intention for communication with all target groups in rural development is for them to learn about the Network, the goal of its existence and benefits of offers.

Communication with members and potential members of the Network should also enable information on completed actions and future planned activities of the Network, stimulation for participation of interested parties, recognition of needs of local partners that will enable development of local entities and the Network in the future.

The following communication goals have been set for achieving major communication:

- I. (BRDN – LEADER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN WESTERN BALKAN, A BRIDGE BETWEEN EU INSTITUTIONS, NATIONAL AUTHORITIES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN WB REGION) Introducing EU institutions with the BRDN and its activities and promoting the Network as a leader of rural development in the region, which is able to articulate the needs and priorities of its constituencies (bottom – up) and is able to work with its constituencies in informing and implementing EU policies, programs and support for rural development (top-down)
 - BRDN will communicate with EU institutions and structures that work with rural development in order to introduce them with its capacities as a leader in rural development in the WB region
 - BRDN will engage in active communication with EU institutions and structures that work with rural development and will provide information, data, researches, analysis, policy papers etc. that articulate the needs and the priorities of key target groups in rural development (farmers, agribusiness, tourism businesses, local companies etc.)
 - BRDN will engage in active communication and cooperation with the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South Eastern Europe (SWG) to improve the dialogue with the relevant ministries in the region and increase its participation in the decision making processes in the agriculture and rural development.
 - Through its members BRDN will engage in active communication with key target groups in rural development (farmers, agribusiness, tourism businesses, local companies etc.) in providing them with most up-to-date information, available resources, assistance, capacity building and funding opportunities within EU institutions regarding rural development;
 - Through its members-networks BRDN will engage in active communication with authorities and institutions at the national level that work with rural development and will provide information, data, researches, analysis, policy papers etc. that articulate the needs and the priorities of key target groups in rural development (farmers, agribusiness, tourism businesses, local companies etc.)
 - Through its members BRDN will engage in active communication with key target groups in rural development (farmers, agribusiness, tourism businesses, local companies etc.) in providing them with most up-to-date information, available resources,

assistance, capacity building and funding opportunities within national and local institutions regarding rural development;

II. (BRDN – STRONGER TOGETHER, FOR BETTER RURAL DEVELOPMENT) Strengthening internal communication within members of BRDN and stimulating participation of members of BRDN in public communication;

- BRDN will engage actively in strengthening the capacities and tools for internal communication within the members of BRDN network;
- BRDN will support its members–networks to engage in active communication with their members and constituencies at the local and national level;

III. (BRDN – YOUR VOICE AND DOOR OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT) Introducing the constituencies with the network and its activities and promoting BRDN as a structure which is the leader in articulating their needs and priorities to the institutions on European, national and local level, as well as a leader in providing the constituencies with information, resources and opportunities for their development;

- BRDN and its member – networks will become a focal point for information related to rural development, and will regularly inform their membership about all relevant activities of BRDN, as well as relevant information on rural development on local, national, regional and European level;
- BRDN through its member–networkswill communicate with their membership and provide knowledge, expertise and opportunities for rural development suited to their needs;

IV. (BRDN – LEADER IN INFORMATION, EXPERTISE, KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES RELATED TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN BALKAN REGION) Promoting BRDN within European, regional, national and local media and the general public as a leading source for relevant and up-to-date information regarding rural development in the Balkan region and countries of members of the Network;

- BRDN will engage in active communication with the media and will inform them regularly about all relevant information, events, challenges, opportunities related to rural development that are attractive for their audiences;
- BRDN will strengthen its capacities and platforms for communicating with all target groups through internet and social media;
- BRDN will use public communication to contribute to raising awareness of different interested parties on the significance and activities of the Network, as well as the rural development in general;

In order to meet the goals, communication should be established with different target groups (see Item 4 – target groups) by using proper communication methods suitable for each target group.

Final selection of a method to meet the goals within a given time period (1 year), will be made in the Annual Action Plan to be developed on grounds of this strategy and available resources, or the Network budget.

IV. TARGET GROUPS, MESSAGES, COMMUNICATION CHANNELS, EXPECTED EFFECTS

Target groups the strategy refers to are the following:

1. EU Institutions: European Commission, DIRECTORATE-GENERAL AGRI Agriculture and Rural Development, Agricultural Council, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), The agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP - AGRI), European Rural Development Network, LEADER Community Initiative, etc.
2. Government institutions at national level (Government - department for cooperation with NGOs, Ministries of agriculture, economy, environment, local self-government etc.; municipalities and their departments with authority in rural development, LAGS)
3. BRDN members (7 rural development networks of the Western Balkan countries);
4. Members of Rural Development Networks (RDNs) that are members of BRDN, (over 200 organizations - regular members and users of 7 national networks that are members of BRDN);
5. The media and the general public at regional, national and local level;

In Table 1 below, there is a template for communication with all main target groups included in this Communication strategy, including a description of target group, communication message for each target group and communication channel to be used for each target group. Finally, the template contains the expected effect to be achieved by communication activities.

Table 1 – Template for communication with target groups

n o	Target group (in order of significance to Network)	Target group description	Communication message directed to target group	Communication channel	Effects of communication activity
1	EU Institutions (Decision makers – Heads of institutions, departments, members of bodies etc.)	European Commission, DIRECTORATE-GENERAL AGRI Agriculture and Rural Development, Agricultural Council, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), The agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP – AGRI), European Rural Development Network, LEADER Community Initiative, etc.	<p>BRDN is a holder of all relevant information regarding rural development in the countries of the WB region; BRDN is the largest network for rural development in the WB region, with over 200 member organizations in seven countries, and has the capacity and infrastructure to implement European programs and policies, as well as to inform its constituents on all important developments regarding rural development in the European and regional context;</p> <p>As the largest network for rural development in the WB region, with over 200 member organizations in seven countries, BRDN has the capacity and infrastructure to implement researches, studies, capacity building activities with its constituents and is able to provide relevant data for EU institutions regarding the needs and priorities of its constituents, which is important so that EU institutions can design and create adequate and efficient policies for rural development in the region;</p> <p>BRDN has excellent cooperation with national and local institutions and other relevant partners (businesses, other NGOs) in the WB countries and a vast experience in implementing joint programs that meet the needs of their constituents and contribute to the rural development at local, national and regional level</p>	<p>Website LinkedIn Twitter E mail and E-mail groups Bulletin</p> <p>Conferences Meetings Debates Study visits</p> <p>Workshops</p>	<p>BRDN is recognized by EU institutions as a visible and credible partner, able to work on EU programs and actions on rural development in the region;</p> <p>BRDN is recognized and used by EU institutions as a source of relevant and up-to-date information regarding rural development in the WB countries BRDN has an updated list of key decision makers regarding rural development in the EU institutions and offers them regularly relevant and up-to date information on rural development in the countries of WB region; BRDN has established regular two-way communication with EU institutions and key decision makers on rural development</p>

no	Target group (in order of significance to Network)	Target group description	Communication message directed to target group	Communication channel	Effects of communication activity
2	Government institutions at central and local level National governments in the Western Balkan countries and relevant ministries for agriculture and rural development	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water-economy Agency for Financial Support of Agriculture and Rural Development (Payment Agency) Units of Local Self-Government (urban units that include rural areas and rural units) Department for Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organizations	BRDN is a credible and valuable partner for the national and local authorities in the countries of WBregion for developing efficient cooperation with the non-government sector and local communities regarding rural development; BRDN is the largest network for rural development in the WB region, with over 200 member organizations in seven countries, and has the capacity and infrastructure to implement European, national and local self-government programs and policies and support national and local institutions in implementing policies and actions and informing relevant target groups on all important developments regarding rural development in the European, regional, national and local context; BRDN has the capacity and infrastructure to implement researches, studies, capacity building activities with its constituents and is able to provide	Website LinkedIn Twitter E mail and E-mail groups Bulletin Conferences Meetings Debates Study visits Workshops	BRDN is recognized by national and local institutions as a visible and credible partner, able to work on EU, national and local programs and actions on rural development in the region; Authorities on national and local level recognize the benefits of communicating and cooperating with the Network; BRDN is recognized and used by national and local institutions as a source of relevant and up-to-date information regarding rural development in the WB countries; Authorities on national and local level use the Network as a communication channel with national and local rural development networks and their members (constituents); Authorities on national and local level recognize the Network as a channel for communication with the EU and other national and

no	Target group (in order of significance to Network)	Target group description	Communication message directed to target group	Communication channel	Effects of communication activity
			<p>relevant data for national and local institutions regarding the needs and priorities of its constituents, which is important so that national and local institutions can design and create adequate and efficient policies for rural development;</p> <p>BRDN acts as a constructive and discrete partner of national and local institutions and is able to perform evaluation of effects of legislation, policies, programs, actions, support etc. implemented by national and local institutions and act as their corrector and supporter in improving and advancing mechanisms for rural development;</p>		<p>local governments in the countries of the region;</p> <p>The authorities at national and local level receive regularly from the Network relevant and up-to-date information on rural development in the European, national and local context;</p> <p>Members of the Network are regularly invited and participate in events, policy development and capacity building programs and actions organized by institutions on national and local level;</p> <p>BRDN has established its credibility within national and local institutions by providing active transparency in its work and operations;</p>

no	Target group (in order of significance to Network)	Target group description	Communication message directed to target group	Communi- cation channel	Effects of communication activity
3	BRDN members (Internal communication)	7 Rural Development Networks (RDNs) - members of the BRDN	<p>Together we can achieve more for our native countries and for the whole region; Together we have a greater capacity and credibility in front of EU, national and local institutions; Working together opens new doors of opportunities, support, assistance and funding for all our organizations and members;</p> <p>The joint and unified approach in communication is a proof of good neighbourly relations among our countries, which is one of the important EU values and a prerequisite on a path of joining the EU;</p>	<p>Regular monthly meetings (online) Virtual centre for dissemination of information Team for media and information content and outreach Website(s) Bulletin Social media Study visits Workshops Surveys Studies</p>	<p>Members of the Network have established regular, active and vibrant internal communication; The Network and its members have improved and advanced their communication with EU, national and local institutions; The Network and its members are able to work jointly on producing media and information content relevant for institutions at European, national and local level as well as for their constituents and the general public; The Network enables flow of experience and ideas among its members and constituents and institutions on local, national and European level;</p>

no	Target group (in order of significance to Network)	Target group description	Communication message directed to target group	Communication channel	Effects of communication activity
4	<p>Members of the BRDN member-networks, (over 200 organizations)</p> <p>Grass-root CSOs working in the rural development area</p>	<p>Association of citizens or registered profession in the areas of rural development pursuant to the statute of Network.</p>	<p>The Network is a credible, accurate and transparent source of regular information on current rural development activities, economic and financial activities, news, incidental and emergency information, etc. on European, regional, national and local level; Through its members, their programs, projects and information channels, The Network provides information, resources and assistance that can help its users in their development, growth and sustainability; Working together opens new doors of opportunities, support, assistance and funding for all our organizations and members; BRDN and its members are a voice of their users within institutions at European, national and local level; BRDN provides active networking, exchange of knowledge, practical experience transfer and dissemination of information, which provide a base for development of competitive businesses; BRDN offers information on sources of funding, project, subsidies, etc., which are essential to maintaining the competitiveness of rural entities.</p>	<p>Website(s) Bulletin Virtual centre for dissemination of information E-mail correspondence Direct meetings Debates Study visits Trainings Workshops Promotional events Results of surveys Studies</p>	<p>BRDN is recognized by the users (members) of national networks (BRDN members) as a visible and credible partner, able to work on EU, national and local programs and actions on rural development in the countries of the region; BRDN is able to collect and systematize available up-to-date information from the target groups (users) on situation, opinions, needs and problems that enables more efficient functioning of the Network for meeting its constituents' needs; Information available to the target group on activities and operations of Network that would enable more efficient entity functioning. Users efficiently use services and benefits offered by the Network according to its internal acts. Through its regular information activities, BRDN contributes to enhancing capacities to achieve modern standards of quality of products and services for the benefit of improved competitiveness. BRDN provides active participation and inclusion of its target groups (users) in activities of Network. BRDN has established its credibility within target groups (users) by providing active transparency in its work and operations;</p>

no	Target group (in order of significance to Network)	Target group description	Communication message directed to target group	Communication channel	Effects of communication activity
5	The media and the general public	Regional media National media in 7 WB countries; Local media in all 7 countries of the region;	BRDN is a holder of all relevant information regarding rural development in the countries of the WB region and a valuable source for the media and the public; BRDN is the largest network for rural development in the WB region, with over 200 member organizations in seven countries, and has the capacity and infrastructure to implement European programs and policies and inform the media and the public on all important developments regarding rural development in the European and regional context; BRDN is a partner of European, national and local institutions and is able to perform evaluation of effects of legislation, policies, programs, actions, support etc. implemented by national and local institutions and act as their corrector in the media and the public and supporter in improving and advancing mechanisms for rural development;	Website Bulletin Press releases Reactions Op-eds Participation in media debates, shows, programs etc. Meetings Public events; Study visits Workshops Results of surveys Studies	BRDN provides the media and the public in WB countries with current and detailed information available on situation, opinions, needs and problems of entities, potential members, partners or network users. BRDN, its information channels and communicators are recognized and used regularly by media and the public as a source of relevant and up-to-date information regarding rural development in the WB countries; BRDN has an updated list of media, editors, journalists specialized in reporting on rural development and offers them regularly relevant and up-to date information on rural development in the countries of WB region; BRDN has established its credibility within the media and the public by providing active transparency in its work and operations;

V. COMMUNICATION TOOLS

General guidelines

Usage of these communication tools are crucial for successful implementation of this Communication Strategy. BRDN staff and member-organizations staff whose working duty include public communication, shall play a key role in implementing this strategy and its communication tools in an organized and coordinated way, which is not time consuming and results in maximum effect.

Some of these communication tools will be used to communicate with all target audiences. Such are the website of BRDN, its bulletin and its profiles and pages on social networks, which are put at the centre of this communication strategy and the network's efforts to advance its visibility and communication outreach.

Also, BRDN will produce surveys, researches and studies and use their findings accordingly in communication with all target audiences.

There are some principles that apply to all BRDN's activities that include a communication dimension, regardless of the platform, tool or channel of communication:

- BRDN shall communicate in the language of target groups. For example, BRDN will use English language for representatives of EU institutions; official languages for institutions at national and local level in each of the countries of members of BRDN network; languages that are used by beneficiaries/members of national networks, media and general public in each of the countries where BRDN members come from;
- Language used in the communication must be correct, in terms of typos, correct words and syntax. It speaks of the professionalism and capacity of the Network, as well as of how much value and efforts BRDN puts in communicating with all target audiences;
- Modern communication is two-sided and interactive. BRDN will encourage discussion in all communications with its target audiences. For example, what BRDN writes or posts on the web can be communicated and answered on its communication channels (pages/profiles) on social networks like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram etc. It does not have to be necessarily answered only on BRDN accounts, but also on other platforms where BRDN communications appear, or where topics of BRDN's interest are communicated and discussed;
- There are people within organizations – members of BRDN, as well as within members, partners and collaborators of the Network and each of the national networks with enough followers on social networks to make BRDN's communication and content even more visible. BRDN shall use all resources within the regional and national networks to enhance the visibility of its content and posts. This includes click share/retweet/like/ the content published, in order to contribute to increasing the visibility of the content and demonstrate the quality of coordination and cooperation among BRDN members and their membership in each of the countries;

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- BRDN shall listen to social media conversations, read inside information, comments, and reactions on its posts, analyse, customize, react and communicate accordingly. For example, in this regard, regular keyword research relevant to rural development on the web and social networks shall be applied, and engagement and involvement in interactive communication with other public communicators on the topic shall be applied whenever appropriate;
 - BRDN and its member organizations shall use its communication channels only for the needs of promoting the information, content, findings and stances of the Network, network members and other interested parties in order to achieve its goals. BRDN and its members shall not use their communication channels and tools to promote personal views and opinions of employees.
 - In communicating with all its target audiences, BRDN will use a “keep it simple and smart” approach. Communication has to be relevant, understandable, knowledgeable and meaningful, and adjusted to the needs and interests of all target audiences;

Guidelines for specific communication tools and channels

The following are guidelines, recommendations and tips for each specific communication tool, focused on having an optimal communication impact and outreach by taking into account the resources that are available within BRDN and its member organizations.

Mainstream media

In order to be able to communicate properly with the media, BRDN will engage in learning and capacity building efforts in order to understand the best ways and practices on how to communicate with journalists. Regardless of the medium in question (Press, TV, Radio, internet portals), rural development is a topic that journalists would accept to write about, if BRDN gives them enough material and information worth publishing.

Rural development is an important topic, but it does not enter frequently the agenda of the main newscasts at TV, radio, or the front pages of newspapers and internet portals. However, there are many TV and radio stations at national and local level that have specialized broadcasts for rural development, agriculture, (green) economy, environment, tourism etc., sections within national newspapers, magazines and internet portals that write on these topics, local media, as well as specialized media outlets, which should be the primary target of BRDN’s communication with the media.

Each appearance of BRDN, its members and their member organizations in media is a success. It can be used not only to build partnership and cooperation with them, but also to (re)use this content in communicating with EU institutions, institutions at national and local level, members of BRDN and their national networks, as well as with the general audience on the communication channels of BRDN and its members. All that is needed is a small effort to repackage this content in the language of the adequate target group and the communication channel and platform.

It is of crucial importance to detect media and journalists that are interested in rural development and all of its branches, have updated lists with their correct addresses, e-mails, telephone numbers etc, and send them regularly announcements/invitations to events and public activities of BRDN and its members, press releases, photos and videos of completed activities, success stories and other newsworthy information.

Social media

Social media are a communication tool that can precisely target people that are interested in rural development no matter where they are.

It can play a crucial role in the lobbying process only if it is used as two-way, interactive communication.

It is very important to put links for accessing your social media profiles and pages in a visible place on the websites of BRDN and all its members.

Building a follower base on all social media platforms will increase the transparency and visibility of BRDN. Invite people of interest, advertise your profile with sponsored posts.

LinkedIn

According to the questionnaire created for the needs assessment for the creation of this strategy, BRDN members do not have LinkedIn accounts. In order to increase the visibility of BRDN among EU institutions and representatives, which would also improve visibility among professionals in this field and facilitate lobbying, partnership and cooperation opportunities, it is necessary for each member of BRDN to create an account on this social network and for everyone to state on their account that they are networking as part of BRDN.

The information needed to create a LinkedIn account is already created in the portfolio of each local network, all it takes is to post it also on the newly created profiles.

It is advisable for national networks to suggest to their own member organizations to also open accounts on this network. It is also advisable for employees to have their professional profiles and CVs posted on this network.

Most often, this professional network is used for research on the professional capacities of people and organizations. Anyone who hears about BRDN will check here for the credibility, human resources and activities of the Network.

Twitter

Politicians are on Twitter! The survey among BRDN members found that neither BRDN nor its members use Twitter. Opening a Twitter account is an opportunity for two-way direct communication with EU decision makers, donors, politicians, journalists.

In order for this to work, it is necessary to create a Twitter community of supporters and make a list of people and institutions that work in the fields of BRDN's interest.

Creating such a list requires commitment, but the benefits of such communication far outweigh the benefits of simply sending e-mails and other traditional forms of communication.

In order to maximize the communication effects on this social network and be able to successfully communicate with this tool, it is necessary to make daily or regular keyword searches for topics that are of interest and part of the work of BRDN. People who tweet about these topics should be followed and conversations/interaction should start with them.

For example: "Good activity Mr. @mansuryavas_en, can you give us more information about the "Leading Women in Agriculture and Rural Development "event in Turkey?" We think we can use your experience in the Balkans."

In this way, BRDN will inform relevant institutions, decision makers, officials, experts, potential donors and partners that it exists, that the Network is interested and actively follows the developments and information related to rural development, will inform them about its activities in the field discussed and that it is ready for cooperation.

Instagram

BRDN has Instagram ready to use. Communication through photography, which is a characteristic of this social network, has a huge potential and represents the beauties and usefulness of the activities of the Network and the benefits of its work in the sector in the most visible way.

The areas in which BRDN operates offer many photo opportunities related to the main messages. BRDN will regularly use these opportunities to show the general public and all stakeholders that things in the sector are changing for the better, due in part to BRDN's involvement and activities.

BRDN will use this tool to tell the personal stories and successes of people who benefit from the network's activities.

The effects of networking and activities can be done through comparative photos (for example: the grape grower from MK and SRB in the same pose using the benefits of cooperating with BRDN)

Facebook

The general public is on Facebook. This social network is the most popular in WB countries, and frequently more influential than mainstream media. However, BRDN's presence and influence on FB quite limited, with about 500 people following BRDN's official FB page.

In order to be able to truly reach the general public, BRDN needs to post meaningful content more frequently, use its members to make these posts more visible, but also to plan funds for advertising and sponsoring posts on this social network.

Each post should be short information that leads to BRDN's website. The names of the participants in the activity should be referenced/tagged in the post so that it has a better organic reach.

BRDN shall use this network to inform and tell about activities through visualizations, photos, videos and personal stories that people can identify themselves with. (Example: A story about city lawyers who decided to work on their own organic farm in Croatia)

Website

The website should be the centre of information. All other communication tools and channels should point/link to the website. Bulletins, Facebook profiles, Instagram and Twitter should contain links for "more information" that send audiences to the website of BRDN.

BRDN's website should post content at least several times a week, preferably at least one piece of content every day.

Content should be focused on:

- Activities of BRDN and its member organizations
- Newsworthy activities of members of national networks that are interesting also for the regional/European audience
- Success stories

Activities, events, funding/learning/capacity building opportunities for members and beneficiaries published by relevant EU institutions, mechanisms, donors etc.

Activities, events, funding/learning/capacity building opportunities for members and beneficiaries published by relevant national and local institutions, mechanisms, etc.

Relevant news in the field at European regional and national level, and activities of other relevant entities in the field (businesses, other NGOs, partners, etc.)

BRDN Platform

The BRDN platform is a knowledge hub, intended for the Rural Development Networks in the Balkans through which they could regularly exchange information, knowledge, expertise and opportunities for rural development, in order to increase their effectiveness in working with their constituents on national level.

In order to increase the visits and usage of this hub, BRDN will create short info-teasers and will show the value of the collected knowledge through social media platforms and channels.

Comparative statistics and infographics will be used to make the information more receptive.

Bulletin

The bulletin is an important tool of the Network in the process implementation of the Communication Strategy and informing all key target audiences and the membership about the activities and successes of BRDN and information related to their interest.

Together with the website of BRDN, the bulletin is at the core of communication outreach efforts on all platforms and communication channels used by BRDN and its members.

From the analysis of the bulletins that were published previously by BRDN, it is noticed that there is no exact regular period of publication. It should be taken into account that the accuracy and timeliness in publishing of the bulletin speaks about the organizational capacity of the Network.

In accordance with this, and in accordance with the analysis of the target groups and their communication habits, the BDNN Bulletin will be published once a month, on the BRDN website, on all profiles and pages of the Network and its members (with a link to the website), and will be distributed via email to all target groups.

The BRDN newsletter will draw content from content already posted on the BRDN website. It should not be a new product, but a sublimation of the most important activities and the most attractive content published by BRDN and its members during the month.

The BRDN newsletter does not have to be designed to be printed, it is enough to design the On-line bulletin distributed as one-pager with a link to the story on the BRDN website.

It will usually contain 3 types of information:

1. Major activities of the BRDN and members of the BRDN. Not all previously published content should be also part of the Bulletin, only the content that is most newsworthy and relevant to target audiences;
2. Topics of interest both to members and the wider public, like relevant information related to rural development, agriculture, green economy, rural tourism, etc. (opportunities for subsidies, IPARD, etc.)
3. Human interest stories (success stories) that motivate membership and demonstrate relevance and success of activities carried out by BRDN and its members

Findings of surveys, researches, studies, which are important and relevant for policy makers and institutions at European, national and local level, to donors for designing their support schemes, but also to the membership and constituencies, which can see that BRDN truly represents their voice and needs;

The publishing of the Bulletin should be preceded by a monthly editorial meeting, involving people responsible for public communication in BRDN staff and all member organizations. At the suggestion of the BRDN members communication staff, events/news/content that is interesting for publishing in the Bulletin are chosen and one editor systematizes and adjusts the information to be readable and attractive for the target audiences. This meeting will also be used for mutual informing, planning and coordination of outreach and communication opportunities for the following month.

The editor and responsible communication & outreach staff within BRDN and member organizations then adapts the information for different communication channels according to the specifics of the channel (language, country, target group etc.)

Participation in events, conferences, meetings, debates, study trips, workshops

Events where people meet directly, such as conferences, meetings, debates, study trips, workshops etc., regardless of the topic discussed, are also an excellent opportunity for communication and promoting the activities and successes of BRDN, which can create possibilities for new cooperation, partnerships and activities that serve the constituencies and their benefit.

While participating at this type of events, BRDN representatives and representatives of member-organizations will be organized and prepared, knowledgeable about other participants and their successes and expertise, which is always a good way to start conversations and earn the respect of other participants.

BRDN representatives will always be an active and not a silent participant at these events, always using the opportunity to promote the Network and its members, activities, knowledge, expertise, experience and successes, but also engage in activities listening and learning from others' experiences and expertise.

BRDN representatives will always be prepared with professionally designed promotional material suitable for the type of event/meeting (visit cards, brochures and other promo material including QR codes etc.) and encourage interlocutors/ participants to visit and use communication channels and products of BRDN and its members.

BRDN representatives participating at this type of events shall make short reports about the event (5W – what, who, where, when, why), which will be used by BRDN and its members to generate information content for their communication channels and activity reports;

Meetings

Meetings are a unique opportunity to have a more focused and extensive time with another party (institution, donor, potential business partner etc.) and can be used for promotion and communication, lobbying that can lead towards new cooperation, partnerships and business opportunities. A key for a successful meeting is good communication skills and abilities to present BRDN and its capacities in the best way possible;

Debates

BRDN and its member organizations will continue to organize debates, which are an excellent opportunity to hear the opinions of all interested parties on various topics that are relevant to the work of BRDN, to receive an input needed for taking a position or making a decision, but also an opportunity to promote BRDN, its activities, capacities and expertise, and engage in new potential partnerships and cooperation. Debates are also an opportunity to hear what others think about the work of BRDN and its members, which is valuable input for improvement of BRDN's operations and communication. The most adequate time for organizing debates is in periods when key legislation, policies, support mechanisms, strategies programs etc. by EU, national or local institutions are discussed, designed and adopted.

Study Trips

BRDN will continue to organize and participate in study trips, which work efficiently as an education, but also as a communication tool. Besides having the goal to enhance the

capacity of BRDN and its members by organizing or participating at study trips organized by others in areas with relevant experience and success in a topic that is relevant to BRDN's work, participants coming from BRDN and its members will have an opportunity to communicate and promote the Network, its experience and expertise, its capacity, and engage in exploring opportunities for potential cooperation with other participants/ organizers of the study trip.

Workshops

Workshops, besides as a learning tool, are also a direct and interactive communication tool, which can serve to better inclusion and mobilization of members of the network and other target audiences around concrete activities, and make them more familiar with BRDN's work and capacities.

BRDN will use workshops, to provide new knowledge, skills, information for its members, members of national networks and other participants from other target groups, always having in mind the principles, tasks and goals of the BRDN. These workshops should provide for a continuous flow of information, while some of these workshops will be used to enhance communication and outreach skills of BRDN staff and its member organizations that should serve to a consistent and proper implementation of this Communication Strategy.

Questionnaires

Small online questionnaires will be used for comparative analysis of current issues in the region for rural development. For example, wheat production, new ways / means of pollination, mechanisms for improving capacities for rural tourism, experiences in developing green economy initiatives, effects of subsidies for certain products etc. Comparing these questionnaires will provide a unique and relevant content, which could be used for informing institutions at European and national level, media, brief publication content, relevant conclusions that lead to development of new policies etc.

Studies and researches

Studies and researches are a valuable tool for the Communication Strategy and its implementation. They provide materials, information and findings which are very useful as basis for creation of communication content and posts that demonstrate relevance and expertise of BRDN before the target groups and the general public.

They are useful for designing the strategic documents general strategic approach of BRDN and members of the network.

They also provide an important input for EU, national and local institutions and their approach in creating policies and mechanisms for supporting rural development.

They are also important because they articulate the needs of members of BRDN and their constituencies and membership, which positions BRDN as their voice and advocate in communicating with the institutions, media and the general public.

BRDN will use methods that provide representative participation of its membership and constituencies in the development and production of these of studies, as well as relevant data which lead to creation of solutions that address the needs of beneficiaries and membership in the most efficient way.

VI. EVALUATION OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Evaluation of the strategy is a prerequisite for measuring of its effects, and contributes to continuous improvement of communication with target groups. The methods of evaluation will be different as follows:

- a. Audience surveys (on the web, on social media platforms, or through specialized agencies);
- b. Media monitoring (announcements, news, etc on BRDN and its activities appearing in the media – in house, and/or financed by the Network or by other sources, related to the network)
- c. Analysis of audience reach on BRDN media and communication channels and platforms (Google analytics, FB/Twitter/Instagram, bulletin stats)
- d. Number of sent/received telephone calls, applications to competitions/calls, etc.
- e. Focus groups
- f. Interviews
- g. Review of communication strategy
- h. Other means

The used method will always depend on the aspect that is measured. The indicative choice is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2 – EVALUATION TEMPLATE

No.	Communication Goal	Method of evaluation
	<p>Introducing EU institutions with the BRDN and its activities and promoting the Network as a leader of rural development in the region, which is able to articulate the needs and priorities of its constituencies (bottom – up) and is able to work with its constituencies in informing and implementing EU policies, programs and support for rural development (top-down)</p>	<p>a; b; d; f; g</p>
	<p>Strengthening internal communication within members of BRDN and stimulating participation of members of BRDN in public communication;</p>	<p>a; e; f; g</p>
	<p>Introducing the constituencies with the network and its activities and promoting BRDN as a leader in articulating their needs and priorities to European, national and local institutions, as well as a leader in providing constituencies with information, resources and opportunities for their development;</p>	<p>a; b; c; d; e; f; g</p>
	<p>Promoting BRDN within European, regional, national and local media and the general public as a leading source for relevant and up-to-date information regarding rural development in the WB region and countries of members of the Network;</p>	<p>a; b; c; f</p>

VII. ACTION PLAN

TIMETABLE OF ACTIVITIES FOR 2023

Timetable of Activities for 2023	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Goal 1: Promoting BRDN and its activities within EU institutions;												
Organise annual conference of BRDN						X	X	X	X			
Produce and distribute BRDN bulletin (monthly)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Publish information and media content on website	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Engage in e-mail correspondence with EU institutions	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	
Interactive communication via social networks (Twitter, LinkedIn etc)	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X
Small surveys, needs assessment etc (at least four per year)	X			X			X			X		
Research (at least once a year)										X	X	X
Study (at least once a year)	X	X	X									
Participate in events organized by EU institutions (conferences, seminars, trainings...) - at least four per year		X			X			X			X	
Produce and publish BRDN E-Bulletin						X						X

Goal 2: Strengthening internal communication among members of BRDN												
Training for PR and public communication	X											
Organise information monthly meeting	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Organise workshops on communication issues												
Distribute e-bulletin via the website of the Network	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Update the BRDN knowledge base	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Small surveys, needs assessment etc (at least four per year)	X			X			X			X		
Research (at least once a year)										X	X	X
Study (at least once a year)	X	X	X									

Goal 3: Strengthening communication and promotion of
BRDN among users/members in six countries of WB

Research related to Network activities relevant to users/members		X			X			X			X	
Publish and distribute content related to users' needs (calls for support, subsidies, funding opportunities etc.)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Distribute e-bulletin via the website of the Network	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Trainings	X	X									X	X
Seminars	X	X									X	X
Capacity building	X	X									X	X
Promotional events			X								X	

Goal 4: Promoting BRDN with the media and general public in six WB countries													
Research related to Network activities											X	X	X
Interviews (at least four per year)													
Participation in programs (debates, TV shows, etc. at least once a month)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Write opinions to the editor / columns (at least four per year)			X		X		X		X				
Reactions													
Press releases (at least once a month)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Small surveys, needs assessment etc (at least four per year)	X			X			X				X		
Research (at least once a year)											X	X	X
Study (at least once a year)	X	X	X										

TIMETABLE OF ACTIVITIES FOR 2024

Timetable of Activities for 2024	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Goal 1: Promoting BRDN and its activities within EU institutions;												
Organise annual conference of BRDN						X	X	X	X			
Produce and distribute BRDN bulletin (monthly)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Publish information and media content on website	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Engage in e-mail correspondence with EU institutions	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	
Interactive communication via social networks (Twitter, LinkedIn etc)	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X
Small surveys, needs assessment etc (at least four per year)	X			X			X			X		
Research (at least once a year)										X	X	X
Study (at least once a year)	X	X	X									
Participate in events organized by EU institutions (conferences, seminars, trainings...) - at least four per year		X				X		X			X	

Goal 2: Strengthening internal communication among members of BRDN												
Follow – up (advanced) training for PR and public communication	X											
Organise information monthly meeting	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Organise workshops on communication issues												
Distribute e-bulletin via the website of the Network	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Update the BRDN knowledge base	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Small surveys, needs assessment etc (at least four per year)	X			X			X			X		
Research (at least once a year)										X	X	X
Study (at least once a year)	X	X	X									

Goal 3: Strengthening communication and promotion of
BRDN among users/members in six countries of WB

Research related to Network activities relevant to users/members		X			X			X			X	
Publish and distribute content related to users' needs (calls for support, subsidies, funding opportunities etc.)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Distribute e-bulletin via the website of the Network	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Trainings	X	X									X	X
Seminars	X	X									X	X
Capacity building	X	X									X	X
Promotional events			X								X	

Goal 4: Promoting BRDN with the media and general public in six WB countries												
Research related to Network activities										X	X	X
Interviews (at least four per year)												
Participation in programs (debates, TV shows, etc. at least once a month)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Write opinions to the editor / columns (at least four per year)			X		X		X		X			
Reactions												
Press releases (at least once a month)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Small surveys, needs assessment etc (at least four per year)	X			X			X			X		
Research (at least once a year)										X	X	X
Study (at least once a year)	X	X	X									

* The activities/targets set within this Action Plan shall be implemented by communication officer/president/director of BRDN and communication officers/presidents/directors of 7 member-organizations of BRDN