



The project “**ALTER - Active Local Territories for Economic development of Rural Areas**” is supported by European Commission

Conclusions and recommendation of the first annual thematic meeting between CSO Networks in the applicant countries and countries with relevant experience within the EU

The first annual and thematic meetings between CSO Networks in the applicant countries and countries with relevant experience within the EU organized in Voskopoje (Albania) from 13th to 16th September 2016.

The key conclusions of the gathering were:

- Encouraging the **formation** and activity of civil society organisations (CSOs) at local and regional level it's possible through: development simulative environment for civil society development, stimulating grass/root organisations, shearing power between different sectors, enhancing networking as umbrella for CSO.
- for **strengthening** national networks of Civil Society Organisations and setting its' role in the national processes of rural development it's necessary: to build trust between the members of Networks, ensuring exchange the best practices, connecting common interests of stakeholders, minoring the work techniques and practices and ensuring high level of transparency.
- Building the **organisational capacity** of CSO's and CSO Networks, it's necessary for ensuring adequate work in rural communities and ensuring voice of this communities in different level. Organisational capacities must be improved in several topics: development organisational structure and procedures, members and personal capacities building, ensuring financial stability and ensuring strategic approach in his work.
- **Effective networking** within and between CSOs, include: raising the citizens for inclusive participation; to follow the most current info and the latest trends; to cooperate with people on the field; to have closer communication with different stakeholders and combining capacities of different CSO and development joint actions.
- **For important role** of CSOs and CSO networks in rural and regional development – programmes, projects and day-by-day working, it's necessary to ensure: to have a sense of sustainable rural development, to be neutral, to be professional and to represent the voice of people at the same time, to involve all the stakeholders, to have good cooperation among different stakeholders, to have a part life of NGO's, focusing on increasing human capacity in NGO's, to have influence when preparing strategies/programmes/etc, to have completed legal framework.

- Effective **national level consultative structures and systems** operated by governments, may be used to enable participation by CSOs and CSO networks through: establishing continued dialogue between governments and civil society, using multidisciplinary approaches, improvement of NGO's capacities for more professional approach in dialogue and cooperation with authorities, approach based on the arguments, involvement of professional experts, take a burning point, exchange experience between public consultation systems.
- The **role of local authorities** in rural and regional development, and administrative reform affect that role and the ability of CSOs and CSO Networks to contribute to development processes should have basic principles:
 - To support common INTEREST
 - To provide some FUNDS
 - To be more FLEXIBLE
 - Supporting LOCAL ENVIRONMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT (social, economic, culture, environment)
 - Encouraging & initiating DIALOGS with CSO, PRIVATE sector, as CONSULTATIVE BODIES
 - LONG – TERM FRAMEWORK FOR PARTNERSHIP
- The **ways/technics** for the involvement of rural CSOs and CSO networks in policy making and implementation; establishment and improvement of the dialogue and cooperation between public bodies and CSOs and CSO networks; it's possible based on the **formalisation** of cooperation between sectors through:
 - Establishing Monitoring committees
 - Signing memorandum of understanding between CSO's and Ministries
 - Establishing mechanisms for communication between socio-economic partner and the ministries
 - Establishing standing public discussions within the Ministries.

Also it's possible to use informal approaches and similar experiences existing in the EU and the region:

- Coffee with politicians;
- Use of evidence (i.e. policy papers, research);
- Strategies for policy engagement;
- Engage a systematic capacity building;
- Inclusive work (networking);
- Communication approaches ;
- Organisation National Rural Parliament.

- Building **partnership** between public, private and civil sectors at local, regional and national level, including CLLD, LEADER-type activity;

Experience of LEADER type activities and Community Lead Local Development methodology provide very good effects on the partnership between public, private and civil sectors at local, regional and national level. Also almost all Western Balkan countries CSO started to use existed experiences and LEADER approach in supporting local economic development and improving partnership with two other sectors. Main recommendations for Western Balkan countries and Turkey are:

- Enhancing the ministries to start in early stages of IPARD II implementation with LEADER and CLLD approaches;
 - CSO capacities must be developed to the level to use lead role in promotion and implementation LEADER approaches;
 - Community Lead Local Development methodology could generate synergies between different sectorial policies and different actors relevant for rural development. Also could help for different sectorial actors to understand better rural development policy of EU and complexity of support rural communities in all socio-economic issues;
 - Rural communities could use both approaches as source of decentralisation and own planning;
 - Regional cooperation is fundamental approach of LEADER and CLLD, and also tool for activation all rural stakeholders;
 - It's important to involve marginalized groups from rural communities in planning process and also in implementation actions in local communities;
 - Shearing experience and good practice between Local Action Groups from EU and Western Balkan countries and Turkey have huge perspective and provide opportunity for learning on existing experiences and highlighting respecting local and regional capacities and tradition in planning and implementation rural development measures.
- Raising the **voice of rural people** could be based on the existed experiences and different approaches (i.e. LEADER approach with possibility to ensure voice of rural people through local development strategies or approach of village movements in Scandinavian countries). Also it's recognised three important issues in ensuring voice of rural people: using all possible type events for ensuring voice (fairs, parliaments, etc.), working on "voice sustainability" (training animators → animators on the field → NGO's → authorities) and ensuring lobby and advocacy channels (i.e. networks, forums, councils...).