



МРЕЖА ЗА РУРАЛЕН РАЗВОЈ НА РЕПУБЛИКА МАКЕДОНИЈА
RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

**Of the Rural Development Network of the Republic of
Macedonia**

2010 - 2013

including 2010 Action Plan

Skopje, March 2010

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1. INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION

Local development implies rural development or stimulating the economic and societal development in rural areas and communities. This means creating and improving existing conditions of life and work, managing businesses, education, health care, etc., in the context of rural development, but also development of related economic sectors such as agriculture, rural tourism, etc.

Therefore, it is clear that the rural population has organized into different forms of associations, having the civil sector associations as the most dominant. Local interests may best be understood and represented by local actors. Further associating at a level of extended communities on the other hand provides an opportunity for improved cooperation and exchange of information within a wider circle of interested actors.

In May 2004, there was a meeting of the European Movements, where rural development movements, as well as rural development movements were defined as **unification of people from rural areas and their interests, who working together wish to achieve change in those areas**. The movements are structured and mainly positioned at local level, initiated by the local population. They mobilize activities of local economic development. The activities at national and international level are coordinated within joint networks. Hence justifications for establishing rural development network at national level.

The process of accession of a country to the EU, in addition to adoption of EU legislation, also implies adoption of European values and positive experience adapted to local circumstances. Therefore, a Rural Development Network of the Republic of Macedonia is established.

The grounds for network formation are Council Regulation (EC) no. 1698/2005, for support of rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and Council Regulation (EC) no. 1085/2006 from 17 July 2006 for establishing the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, as well as national legislation.

The Rural Development Network takes into account the 2007-2013 National Rural Development Strategy, Law on Agriculture and Rural Development, Law on Local Self-Government and other relevant legislation.

2. RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

The goals of the rural development networks are exchange of information, improved dissemination of information, communication, improved access to all information of all rural development actors in an equal manner and at the same time, due to the complexity of this area and varying character and type of actors (interested entities) in rural development.

Taking into account this assumption, the Rural Development Network of the Republic of Macedonia was established in March 2010, as a result of the initiative of three associations of citizens active in the area of rural development in several aspects.

Establishing the network is aimed at successful implementation of activities for informing interested entities within rural development of the goals and measures of the rural development policies and other relevant development policies at national and European level.

In this sense, communication activities of the network should support and stimulate successful implementation of rural development measures, networking of entities involved in development, exchange of experience and cooperation.

The network will establish two-way communication and will expect feed back from entities communicated, for the purpose of constant improvement of its activity as a prerequisite for meeting utmost goals of the network.

In general the network will include entities from three basic sectors, civil, business and public sectors. The civil sector that consists of association of citizens and their federations, unions, coalitions, etc., has an opportunity to penetrate the deepest within the communities at local level and identify their needs, and, at the same time, to harvest ideas on problem solutions, on grounds of which actual projects may be developed. In addition this sector would play a role of remedy to the public sector in the processes of preparing key laws and documents prescribed in laws. The business sector represented by unions, chambers, associations, federations, etc., should represent interests of businesses that work or have interest within the economic areas related to rural development. This sector will represent businesses in agriculture, forestry, water management, tourism, consulting, but also small and family businesses and individual farmers. The presence of those entities within the network is of particular importance in terms of strategy development, balance of initiatives and presentation of ideas and activities to contribute to poverty alleviation in rural areas and improving welfare for population in these areas. The public sector represented by government institutions at central level, government institutions at local level, as well as their formal and legal associations, representatives of public research and education institutions and representatives of national, regional and local agencies, is an assurance that rural development is compliant and corresponding to other development strategies and plans of the national government as well as regional and local self governments. Finally this will ensure rural development to be part of overall activities related to local and regional sustainable development, and that institutions within this sector support the network and its work within the available resources.

Within this strategy, entities from the three main sectors are allocated in the appropriate target group, the rural network will communicate with.

3. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF WORK OF THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

The work of the network shall be based on good European practice and the LEADER approach.

In its work, the network shall be guided by the following principles:

Sustainable rural development, based on maintaining and development environmental, human, social and creative/production capital;

Support of distinctions of rural areas, which despite the similarities, are actually diverse, and this should be taken into account when planning their future development;

Support of communities within the development processes. Support should be aimed both at those who initiated the processes as well as for those who are late. The latter shall be paid special attention;

Bottom-up approach and wide inclusion of local communities, or the public, in the development processes;

Development of local partnerships and culture of cooperation;

Promotion of networking, cooperation, synergy in development processes, exchange of experience and knowledge;

Support of tradition and promotion of innovation for using traditional values;

Promotion and support of integral actions and sectorial linking upon overtaking by local and national institutions;

Promotion and support of the ownership of local projects by local management and implementation.

4. GOALS AND TASKS OF THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

Association and linkage of organizations from different profiles for the purpose of exchange of opinions, information, ideas, knowledge and experience, as well as stimulation, organization and assistance for activities in the area of rural development;

Stimulation of the development of rural communities and linking different sectors within such communities;

Working on improving the conditions for consistent development of rural areas and improving standard of living in such areas.

Tasks of the Network are the following:

- Establish the system and development of Network;
- Create development strategy and programme for Network;
- Set out priorities for development of agriculture, tourism and other activities in the rural areas and their promotion;
- Following legislation in the area of rural development at national and international level;
- Following and informing about public announcements and tenders of interest to Network members;
- Promotion of acknowledgments on significance of rural development;
- Cooperation with relevant national and local institutions, particularly Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water-economy;
- Cooperation with relevant international institutions, including international organizations in the area of rural development, the European Rural Development Network, as well as EU institutions;
- Exchange of knowledge and experience in the area of rural development;
- Consistent guiding and planning aid and support to be provided within programme activities;
- Support for growth of its own resources in areas where it will act and projects it will get involved with;
- Training of different levels and participants (adult training and education, technical and specialty education, entrepreneurship, etc.), particularly of specialty teams within Network members, on topics related to rural development;

5. COOMUNICATION GOALS

The main intention for communication with target groups in rural development is for them to learn about the Network, the goal of its existence and benefits it 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 goals have been set for achieving major communication:

- I. Introducing the public with the network and its activities;
- II. Stimulating and enhancing participation of different target groups in the network;
- III. Raising awareness of different interested parties on the significance and activities of the Network;
- IV. Providing support for the Network.

In order to meet the goals, communication should be established with different target groups (see Item 6 – 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.

6. TARGET GROUPS

Target groups the strategy refers to are the following:

1. The public and the potential network members;
2. Regular network members;
3. Irregular network members;
4. Network partners;
5. Network users;
6. Government institutions at central and local level.

Below is the template for communication with target groups, 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 effect to be achieved by communication activities.

Table 1 – Template for communication with target groups

| <i>no.</i> | <i>Target group (in order of significance to Network)</i> | <i>Target group description</i> | <i>Communication message directed to target group</i> | <i>Communication channel</i> | <i>Effects of communication activity</i> |
|------------|---|--|--|--|---|
| 1 | General public and potential network members | <p>Entrepreneur organisations from rural areas; Farm businesses, Registered and non-registered individual farm producers.</p> <p>National and local media.</p> | <p>The efficient use of all resources is of key importance to the effectiveness of rural development in the rural areas, therefore entrepreneurs within these areas are expected to contribute largely to this.</p> <p>Achieving efficiency, quality control and certification of products and services of entrepreneurs in rural areas, improves their competitiveness at the domestic and international markets.</p> <p>Active networking, exchange of knowledge, practical experience transfer and dissemination of information provide a base for development of competitive businesses.</p> <p>Information on sources of funding, project, subsidies, etc are essential to maintaining the competitiveness of rural entities.</p> | <p>Website Bulletin Meetings Debates Study visits Workshops Results of surveys Studies</p> | <p>Current and detailed information available on situation, opinions, needs and problems of entities, potential members, partners or network users.</p> <p>Economy in rural areas is more active, flexible and market oriented.</p> <p>Improved information available on modern market trends nationally and internationally.</p> <p>Enhanced capacities of members to achieve modern standards of quality of products and services for the benefit of improved competitiveness.</p> <p>Target group are active participants in network activities.</p> <p>Transparency in working.</p> <p>Capacity to use relevant funding sources improved.</p> |

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|---|---------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| 2 | Regular Network members | Association of citizens or registered profession in the areas of rural development pursuant to the statute of Network. | <p>Network is only accurate and transparent source of regular information on current rural development activities, economic and financial activities, news, incidental and emergency information, etc.</p> <p>Regular information on Network achievements, work of Network bodies, etc.</p> | <p>Website Bulletin Meetings Debates Study visits Workshops Results of surveys Studies</p> | <p>Available up to date information from the target group on situation, opinions, needs and problems that enables more efficient Network functioning.</p> <p>Information available to the target group on activities and operations of Network that would enable more efficient entity functioning.</p> <p>Transparency in working.</p> |
| 3 | Irregular Network members | Natural and legal entities with special merit in the areas the Network deals with. They participate in discussions and debates, and contribute to rural development and to the work of the Network. | Regular information on current activities of the Network, news, other information, etc. | <p>Website Bulletin Meetings Debates Study visits Workshops Results of surveys Studies</p> | <p>Irregular members constructively contribute with their activities to development of Network and the areas where it operates.</p> <p>Information available to the target group on activities and operations of Network that would enable more efficient entity functioning.</p> <p>Transparency in working.</p> |

| | | | | | |
|---|------------------|---|---|--|--|
| 4 | Network partners | Service providers and collaborators of Network. | Regular information on current activities of the Network, news, other information, etc. | Website Bulletin Meetings Debates Study visits Workshops Results of surveys Studies | <p>Information available to the target group on activities and operations of Network that would enable more efficient service provider functioning.</p> <p>Up to date information available from the target group on situation, opinions, needs and problems, for the purpose of efficient implementation of Network activities.</p> <p>Transparency in working.</p> |
| 5 | Network users | Natural and legal entities that use services, or benefits from the Network. | Regular information on current activities of the Network, news, other information, etc. | Website Bulletin Meetings Debates Study visits Workshops Results of surveys Studies | <p>Information to the target group on activities and operations of Network that would enable more efficient Network functioning.</p> <p>Users efficiently use services and benefits offered by the Network according to its internal acts.</p> <p>Enhancing capacities to achieve modern standards of quality of products and services for the benefit of improved competitiveness.</p> <p>Inclusion of target group in activities of Network.</p> <p>Transparency in working.</p> |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|---|--|
| 6 | Government institutions at national and local level related to rural development | <p>Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water-economy</p> <p>Agency for Financial Support of Agriculture and Rural Development (Payment Agency)</p> <p>Units of Local Self-Government (urban units that include rural areas and rural units) and ZELS</p> | <p>Network needs active participation of institutions in the development of the Network, need for regular, prompt and accurate provision of information derived from rural areas.</p> <p>Analysis of information and statistical data derived from rural areas.</p> <p>Interpretation of government policy in support of socio-economic activities in rural areas</p> | <p>Website</p> <p>Bulletin</p> <p>Meetings</p> <p>Debates</p> <p>Study visits</p> <p>Workshops</p> <p>Results of surveys</p> <p>Studies</p> | <p>Information, data, news, etc., the source of which are institutions, are timely available to all interested parties within the Rural Development Network.</p> <p>Information for institutions on activities of the Rural Development Network, as well as the situation, opinions, needs and problems of entities participating in the Network .</p> <p>Transparency in working.</p> |
|---|--|--|---|---|--|

7. COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

The network will develop a basic information package to include design of a logo, defining a brand for the organization; website and basic promotion materials such as leaflets; public information via the media (press and electronic); delivering specific workshops and seminars; public appearances, etc.

In addition, the Network will design special information packages to upgrade the basic, for each separate entity defined in the strategy as a target to be communicated. The contents of the special information packages will depend on Programme Activities in a given time period, and will be defined additionally. Upon design of information packages, the template for communication with target groups, provided in Table 1 (Item 6), shall be taken into account.

The public and the potential members of the Network will be regularly informed on activities in order to provide an opportunity for new members to continuously join the network, by mobilizing them in a way provided in the Statute and other acts of the Network.

Regular and irregular network members, as well as network partners and users will also be regularly informed on activities and stimulated to exchange information about the network, for the purpose of successful completion of network tasks.

Communication packages for central and local level government institutions related to rural development will establish cooperation between the Network and the institutions, and information derived from the partners will become available to their members, users, collaborators, etc.

Communication activities imply use of all communication tools described in Item 8, the method to allow effects set out in the communication template for target groups. This communication strategy is based on the principle of two-way information exchange **network – target group**.

Communication activities in the second quarter of 2010 will be intensely directed to the public and to the potential network members in order to begin the process of membership mobilization. Communication activities in the third quarter will be directed towards stimulating various target groups to actively participate in network activities. The fourth (final) quarter of 2010 implies equal activity both towards the public and other target groups within this communication strategy.

8. COMMUNICATION TOLLS

Communication tools are instruments used for improved understanding and implementation of the communication process. Communication tools are used for stimulation and presentation of mostly textual communication, as well as audio and video communication.

They are used for timely, fast and easy implementation of communication activities.

Communication tools, within implementation of the Communication Strategy, will be used according to needs of network participants and other interested parties.

I. Website

In addition to other items in the Communication Strategy, there is going to be a website as part of the communication tool set, which will contribute as a transparency tool of the Communication Strategy, as well as in distribution of relevant and timely information in different areas and information for the public.

The website will be open and transparent for communication among all network stakeholders, thus contributing for faster, more precise and timely communication.

It will contain all relevant network data, as well as information on the Communication Strategy. They will cover the communication policy, tools, plans, as well as members that constitute the network and other stakeholders.

Also, the website will cover rural development policies, national legislation, national programmes on agriculture and rural development, IPARD information, opportunities for bilateral cooperation, etc.

In addition, the website will contain information such as e-bulletin, links to municipalities, links to government institutions, European institutions, private companies, application forms, etc.

At the same time, there will be interactive Q&A forums as well as space for information and announcements for different events.

The web hosting company will provide a server, administration privileges, uninterrupted physical access to the website, availability of the website, as well as daily update with new data, translation of documents and contents, visit counter, etc. In addition to the website, the Communication Strategy will be implemented by other communication tools.

II. Bulletin

The bulletin is an important tool of the Network in the process of informing the membership and implementation of the Communication Strategy. It will usually contain information on major topics and activities of the network, of interest both to members

and the wider public, but also information only of interest to the membership. For example, new information related to rural development and agriculture (subsidies, IPARD, etc.) will be entered as reading text of interest.

The bulleting will be issued once a month and distributed electronically to the network members, all relevant stakeholders (MAFWE, Payment Agency, and NEA) and other entities and individuals who have presented interest to receive it. It will also be posted at the website of the Network.

The bulletin should provide timely and quality information on the following subject matters:

- Proper announcement of information on activities of the groups, events within the network and its activities
- Announcements on progress made by individuals or working groups within the network
- Reports on conferences and meetings
- Information on steps taken and achievements
- Information on current events
- Information on upcoming events
- Policies of government and the EU related to agriculture and rural development.

III. Events (meetings, debates, study trips, workshops)

Meetings

The goal of the meetings will be according to needs. Very often their goal is to present, review certain issues and adopt a position, or to review a certain problem and find a solution.

Meetings are especially efficient due to direct contact with the other party, and it is good if they can be practices for the purpose of improved description of the work and the goals of the network with potential new members, or in cases of strengthening communication with existing members.

Debates

Debates will be organized to be used by Network members to review significant issues within the Network and the Communication Strategy, for the purpose of improved decision making. Also debates provide opportunities for presentation of different opinions on topics defined and contents of the strategy, which may result in improved ideas, suggestions and conclusions for improving the work of the network.

In addition, debates are a useful communication tool to be used by the Network in discussion certain issues for the purpose of taking a position or decision making with

entities that are not part of the network, but who can influence its work. These mainly will be the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water-economy and other relevant Ministries, as well as the Payment Agency, NEA, and other national institutions.

Debates will be used particularly in periods when key laws are to be adopted, as well as strategies and programmes related to rural development.

Participants in the debates have a right and opportunity to propose issues to be discussed at debates.

Study Trips

Study trips are communication and education tool, to be used by network members for the purpose of improving, reviewing and confirming knowledge and skills acquired in the process of their work. The goal of this tool is enhancing the capacity of the members. Trips are to be organized and implemented in areas with experience in the given topic, so that participants in the network have an opportunity to check acquired knowledge as well as learn new things and new experience within the topic.

Workshops

Workshops are interactive communication tool, and experience shows them to be quite frequent due to effects that may be achieved.

The goal of the workshops is inclusion of members of the network and the wider public.

By the use of workshops, members of the network and other participants will acquire new knowledge, skills, information on the principles, tasks and goals of the Network. At the same time they will learn about the implementation of the Communication Strategy in practice.

The feedback will define how many participants in workshop managed to learn and understand issues discussed.

Workshops will be of informative character, and will include dissemination of information, solutions to certain problems and training delivery.

The workshop will enable mobilization of members in the network, continuous information flow, inclusion in the process and provision of capacity strengthening for participants in the network.

IV. Questionnaires

The questionnaire will be used for direct collection of information. It is a tool where a set of questions are used to collect information from participants. Although mostly used for statistical analysis, questionnaires are sometimes used as research tools. It is best if they are written, but if certain cases require speed, they can be in the form of telephone conversations.

Questionnaires should be used for getting quantitative data in several areas of interest to the members of the network, but also may be used as qualitative data. This tool will enable collection of information regarding knowledge and insight into rural development situation, both for the members of the network as well as wider public. The data collected and research performed will result in situation indicators in areas of interest to the network, and later will be used for defining future steps for increase of efficiency.

V. Studies

Studies are an inevitable tool when implementing the Communication Strategy, and in general when implementing overall strategic commitments of the network. Studies provide information or a reply to certain questions that may significantly enhance efficiency of work of the network. Studies approach certain problems by selection of certain methods, opinions and different levels of analysis. By using the analytic-synthetic approach to situations and problems, studies are capable to offer most adequate and useful solutions.

Studies within strategy implementation, will analyze current situations, and on grounds of data in the analysis, may offer methods and solutions to improve situation or work within the network.

The network will also use participation methods in the development of such studies by comprehensive participation of members, public and relevant stakeholders within the rural areas.

When analyzing the situation, it is quite important to get relevant answers that would simultaneously provide relevant data to offer adequate solutions.

The effect of inclusion of aforementioned stakeholders will contribute to raising the awareness and strengthening the trust among members in the network.

9. EVALUATION OF STRAEGY

For continuous improvement of communication with target groups, evaluation of strategy will be carried out.

The methods of evaluation will be different as follows:

- a . Research of opinions
- b . Media monitoring (announcements, news, etc., financed by the Network of by other sources, related to the network)
- c . Number of telephone calls, applications, etc.
- d . Focus groups
- e . Interviews
- f . Review of communication strategy
- g . Other means

The method to be used will depend on the aspect measured, and the indicative choice is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 - Evaluation template

| No. | Goal of Communication Strategy | Method of evaluation |
|-----|--|----------------------|
| 1 | Introduction of Network and its activities to the public; | a; b; c; f; g |
| 2 | Stimulating and increasing participation of different target groups in the Network; | a; b; c; d; f; g |
| 3 | Raising the awareness of different interested parties on the significance and the activities of the Network; | a; e; f; g |
| 4 | Providing support for the Network. | a; b; c; d; e; f; g |

