

2019-2022

# **[DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA]**

The Development Strategy of the Rural Development Network of the Republic of Macedonia has been drafted for the period 2019-2022, and it sets out directions for action of the organization, taking into account working conditions of the external environment and the needs of the end users.

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## Introduction

The 2019 – 2020 Development Strategy of the Rural Development Network (RDN), is a guide for the organization towards its actions in the upcoming period. By taking into account current needs and potentials for development in the environment, the goal of this Strategy is to identify opportunities and priorities for action and development of the organization, by means of which needs and interests of the rural population in the Republic of Macedonia would be supported.

The Strategy covers 5 thematic areas, namely, after the *introduction*, a description is provided of the methodology used for drafting this document, and *analysis of the current situation* of the environment where the Strategy will be implemented, followed by *main challenges* identified and *affected and interested parties* the organization will focus upon in the upcoming period, and strategic commitments, including vision, mission, and main strategic goals.

In drafting the Strategy, research and analysis by different international organizations, including the progress report for the Republic of Macedonia by the European Commission, as well as priorities identified by the rural development programme (IPARD) have been taken into account. Statistical data from the State Statistical Office and from international sources such as Eurostat and the World Bank data base were used for drafting this document. The Strategy takes into account legislation and national priorities and policies that impact opportunities for development of rural areas. The document was drafted by applying the participative approach, reflecting the needs and the interests for development of the end users, taking into account real opportunities and impact factors from the external environment.

The *vision* of this organization in the upcoming period is the following:

The rural population in the Republic of Macedonia lives and works in an inclusive environment that fosters diversification and sustainability, enabling balanced development and improvement of socio-economic living conditions, as well as preservation of natural wealth and cultural heritage.

In order to achieve the vision, the *mission* of RDN to support action in the period 2019-2022 is the following:

The Rural Development Network of the Republic of North Macedonia builds partnerships and realizes strategic cooperation to influence rural development policies locally and nationally, supports and engages the rural community through activities to build and utilize their abilities, skills and knowledge, and promotes and advocates attitudes that promote conditions for equal development and sustainable use of natural resources.

The Strategy was drafted on grounds of principles of:

- Cooperation,
- Empowerment,
- Social inclusion and equal opportunities
- Equal development
- Diversification, and
- Sustainability.

Following its adoption, this Strategy will serve as a document to guide the focus and the work of the Rural Development Network for the period 2019-2022.

## 1 Methodology

The 2019 – 2020 Development Strategy of the Rural Development Network (RDN), was drafted by the support of We Effect. The Strategy takes into account needs and expectations of end users – the rural population in the Republic of Macedonia, identified in close cooperation with member organizations of the RDN. The document reflects upon opinions and views of member organizations that should be in the focus of operations in the period 2019-2022, for the purpose of supporting and contributing towards achieving the vision of the organization regarding the social status of the rural population in the Republic of Macedonia.

The Strategy refers to the population in all rural areas, regardless of their ethnic or religious background, gender or age, or other grounds of division.

The Strategy is based on data and positions demonstrated at the strategic planning workshop where 37 member organizations of the RDN participated. In the course of this workshop the following was defined:

- Context of Strategy implementation – main challenges in the environment,
- Priorities the RDN should be focused on,
- Vision and mission,
- Strategic goals, and
- Key activities.

In addition, secondary data and analysis in different national and international reports were used for analysis of the environment, including the European Commission Progress Report for the Republic of Macedonia, as well as data provided in the National Strategy and Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development, the IPARD programme and other documents. Also used were statistical data from the State Statistical Office, EuroStat and the World Bank data base, and national policies that regulate the conditions and opportunities for rural development were taken into account – the Law on Agriculture and Rural Development, the Law on Equal Regional Development and other relevant policies.

The process of drafting the Strategy was participative, taking into account positions and needs of affected and interested parties, primarily the end users – the rural population of the Republic of Macedonia. Participants at the workshop took into account views and ideas of member organizations that represent interests and needs of end users. The Strategy is based on the following methodological approach:

- **Local approach** – the process takes into account needs and interests of the local rural population, and is adapted to local conditions for development;
- **Participative approach** – the Strategy reflects expectations of RDN member organizations that represent the interests of the rural population, taking into account opportunities and potential for development;
- **Cooperation** – the RDN will maintain and will initiate new cooperation and partnerships at local, national and international level, in order to reach the priorities and goals of the strategy;
- **Promotion and advocacy** – the RDN will promote good practice for rural and sustainable development and will advocate for positive policies that will allow for equal opportunities for development of the rural population and rural areas.

The Strategy reflects the real needs and priorities, framed according to the conditions in the current environment and available resources.

## 2 Situation analysis

Rural development has been recognized as a significant element with potential to contribute to the overall and sustainable socio-economic development of the Republic of Macedonia. For this purpose, the state has allocated significant funds to support agriculture and rural development. In addition the EU Instrument for Pre-accession – 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme (IPARD 2) is in progress of implementation, including other programmes and measures for direct and indirect support of the development of rural economy and for stimulating better life quality for the rural population.

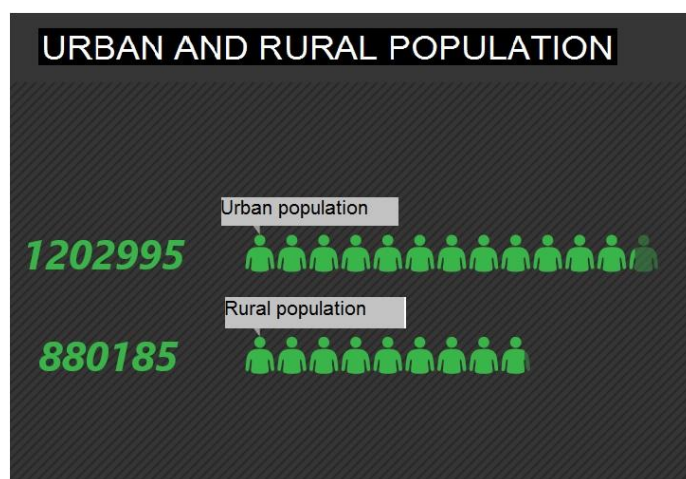
At the same time, the civil society sector has actively contributed, particularly by initiatives to influence and encourage participation in local and national policy making in relation to supporting equal and sustainable rural development.

The Development Strategy of RDN takes into account all such initiatives, as well as the needs and requests of the member organizations, and uses them to base its priorities and directions of action in the period 2019-2022.

### 2.1 Population

An official census of the population has not been carried out in the Republic of Macedonia since 2002; therefore no precise statistical data regarding the size of the rural population exist.

According to World Bank data, 42.25% of the total population in the Republic of Macedonia in 2017 or 880.185 inhabitants of the total estimated 2.083.160 lived in rural areas (Picture 1).



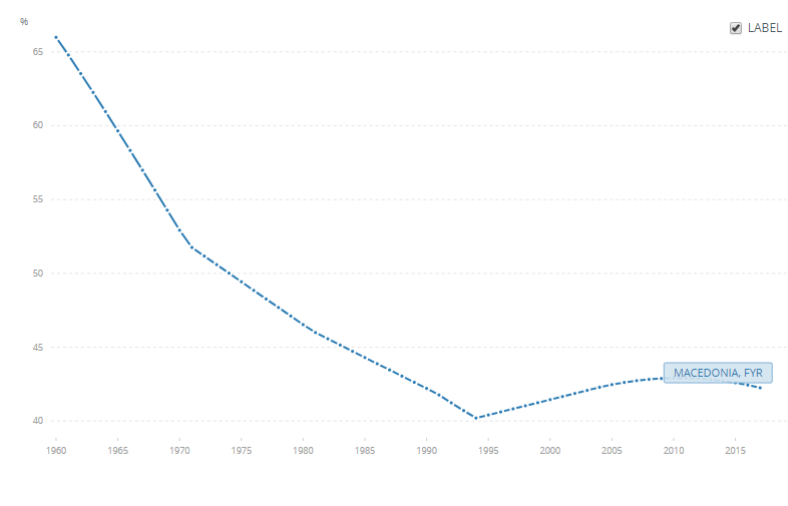
**PICTURE 1: URBAN AND RURAL POPULATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA IN 2017, ACCORDING TO POPULATION ESTIMATES IN THE WORLD BANK DATABASE**

Picture 2 illustrates the changes in the size the rural population in the Republic of Macedonia, as a percentage of the total population in the country, between 1960 and 2017.

It can be noticed in the chart that the size of the rural population was constantly in decline between 1960 and 1944, having reached the lowest percent in 1994 compared to the total

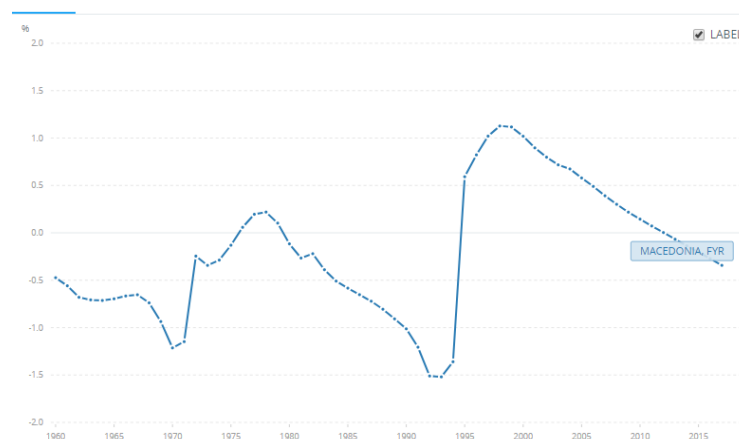
population – only 40.2%. This percentage had been slowly increasing between 1994 and 2010, but has started to decline again in 2010.

This trend could be analysed from several aspects, however, it is largely impacted by development and support policies, which are available but need to be additionally improved and strengthened in order to respond to needs of end users.



**PICTURE 2: RURAL POPULATION (% OF THE TOTAL POPULATION)<sup>1</sup>**

Picture 3 illustrates the birth rate in rural areas. The chart demonstrates a positive birth rate (over zero) between 1995 and 2012, whereas between 2012 and 2017 it demonstrates a negative birth rate (below zero). This is yet another indicator for the need to reform policies that will contribute for population staying, but also having young people returning to rural areas.



**PICTURE 3: BIRTH RATE OF RURAL POPULATION (ANNUAL %)<sup>2</sup>**

## 2.2 Education

There is a lack of official statistical data to define the population according to the degree of education and place of living, in terms of rural in contrast to urban areas. However unofficial

<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?locations=MK&view=chart>

<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZG?locations=MK&view=chart>

data and research data acquired by different organizations confirm that the education degree of the rural population is lower than the urban population.

According to data demonstrated in the IPARD 2 programme, 13.4% of the rural population over 15 years of age has insufficient education or lack of it, 2.6% of the population is illiterate and 10.9% have no primary education. According to the statistical data, illiteracy is higher in women (4.5%) as compared to men (only 1.3 % is illiterate).

Insufficient or inadequate education, along with limited conditions for growth and development, has an additional negative impact on general conditions for socio-economic development of rural areas.

### **2.3 Employment**

Official statistical data show decline in the number of unemployed persons in the state, however, the employment rate of young people, in particular young people in rural areas is very low, leading to migration of the young labour force outside of rural areas, and quite often outside the country.

A large number of young people who stay, work in agriculture, due to insufficient education, or due to limited opportunities for employment. However, according to data of the State Statistical Office, young people and women in agriculture are mostly unpaid family workers, limiting their opportunities for equal inclusion in society, but also impacting their life quality.



### 3 Analysis of the challenges

Challenges identified by the working group at the strategic planning workshop, referring to the general challenge of limited use of opportunities for sustainable rural development and the influence of the RDN over this development are the following:

- Rural development is identified as agricultural development – Agricultural development policies are identified as rural development policies. However, agriculture is only one aspect and potential for rural development, and rural development policies should be wider and integrate several different aspects, allowing for overall and equal development of rural areas, so the RDN should impact and advocate for this as an organized effort.
- Local action of RDN, compared to national action – The Rural Development Network should additionally strengthen and support local member organizations, in terms of influence and participation in local policy making, and use knowledge and information collected on field for advocacy at national level for improving policies and measures for rural development;
- Insufficient coordination between RDN and its members – Coordination procedures between the RDN and its members should strengthen, as well as mechanisms for timely feedback by members in order to improve effectiveness and efficiency, but also to reduce the risk of acting outside priorities and principles of the RDN, or to avoid failure to represent interests of end users;
- Limited capacities and use of opportunities for programme and financial sustainability of members – Sustainability of certain RDN members is still a challenge, so the RDN should strengthened its practices to support sustainability of its member organizations, including mechanisms for efficient share of information, building capacities for use of funds and other activities;

In addition to the above challenges impacting the directions of action of the RDN in the upcoming strategic period, the following should also be taken into account and integrated into the priorities of the organization:

- High natural values that allow for food production and food security for the population, as well as growth of the welfare of producers in conditions of sustainable production which is competitive, but also which safeguards natural resources and the environment. Agriculture and income from farming activity is still a sustainable livelihood source for the rural population in agriculture.
- Women and young people in rural areas – policies for development and support of rural development the RDN will influence and promote, should take into account the gender aspect and opportunities for equal integration in society;
- Diversification in rural areas – the RDN should strengthen its action towards promoting diversification, for the purpose of creating improved conditions for life in rural areas.

In order to have an impact in the stated challenges, the RDN identified the following priorities of action that should be integrated into the strategic goals as guidance in the upcoming period:

<b>Priorities referring to organizational development and strengthening:</b>	<b>Programme priorities (referring to impact on policies and action towards needs of end users):</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better use of European funds,</li> <li>• Building partnerships with international organizations,</li> <li>• Exchange of experience and knowledge with organizations from EU countries,</li> <li>• Identifying and applying positive practice from EU countries, to promote and support rural development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raising the awareness on challenges and the need of acting towards keeping the population in rural areas and impacting the negative migration trend;</li> <li>• Advocacy for improving infrastructure;</li> <li>• Providing support for better use of available EU funds;</li> <li>• Consistent approach and clear definition of criteria for rural development and action towards achieving them;</li> <li>• Harmonizing and improving legislation.</li> </ul>

## 4 Analysis of affected and interested parties

The following are the main stakeholders (interested and affected parties) that the RDN should take into account and include them in its operations, or guide its operation towards in the upcoming period:

- Rural population – The rural population is the end user of the results achieved by the RDN. The goal of organizational activities is to improve living conditions of the rural population by impacting policies and promoting practice and action for using the development potential of rural areas in a sustainable manner and for the purpose of improving socio-economic conditions.
- Members – Member organizations are main RDN stakeholders and it deploys them for acting at local level, advocating for their interests and supporting them at national level. The needs for strengthening member organizations and for improved communication for more effective and efficient work will be properly reflected in the Work Strategy.
- Local authorities – Large part of the action is guided towards involving local authorities and changing their awareness for accepting and undertaking greater responsibility, to improve living conditions in rural areas. Local authorities are themselves a target group for advocacy activities, but also an end user for activities of capacity building to improve the use of EU funds for instance, and for encouraging and supporting rural development.
- National authorities – Policy makers are a significant stakeholder the RDN focuses its activities on, particularly regarding positive policy making as well as measures to support development of rural areas in the Republic of Macedonia;
- Partner organizations and international bodies – The RDN expects these organizations to assist it in strengthening its position in terms of advocacy and influencing local and national policies, by means of learning and transfer of positive practice and experience, as well as common positions regarding certain issues of mutual interest, in order to strengthen the position of negotiations and influence;
- Academic and expert public – The academic and expert community is a significant stakeholder that could contribute with its research and other activities towards building a case and strengthening the position of advocacy and negotiation with decision makers, as well as influencing the policies for rural development.
- Media – Media representatives may contribute largely towards promoting the challenges and needs of the rural population by working on the challenges and the issues the rural population is affected by.
- Civil sector – The civil society sector is a significant ally for networking and cooperation with the RDN to commit itself to solving certain issues, in particular with help of the positive practices the civil sector has been promoting in the past years as a main initiator and driver of social changes.

## 5 Strategic directions

### 5.1 Vision, mission and values of the organization



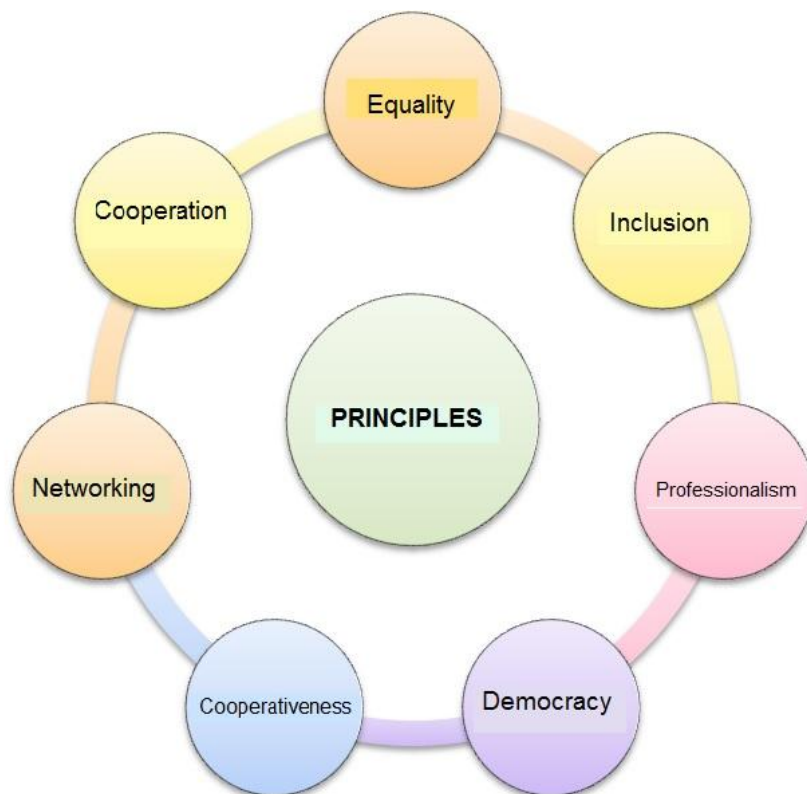
#### VISION

- The rural population in the Republic of Macedonia lives and works in an inclusive environment that fosters diversification and sustainability, enabling balanced development and improvement of socio-economic living conditions, as well as preservation of natural wealth and cultural heritage.



#### MISSION

- The Rural Development Network of the Republic of North Macedonia builds partnerships and realizes strategic cooperation to influence rural development policies locally and nationally, supports and engages the rural community through activities to build and utilize their abilities, skills and knowledge, and promotes and advocates attitudes that promote conditions for equal development and sustainable use of natural resources.



## 5.2 Strategic goals

On grounds of the analysis of the environment expected for the organization to act in in the upcoming period, and taking into account the past experience, relations with affected and interested parties, but primarily the needs of end users and capacities and expectations of the member organizations, the RDN will focus on the following general strategic goals for the period 2019-2022:

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**General goal 1:** Advocacy for rural people before the decision-makers in terms of policy-making for protecting and promoting rights and interests of the rural population, and contributing to equal and sustainable development of rural areas;

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**General goal 2:** Networking and establishing cooperation with external organizations and stakeholders (including the media) to share experiences and good practices, as well as promoting rights and interests of end users

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**General goal 3:** Building our own capacities and capacities of our members, and strengthening operation procedures in order to increase efficiency and effectiveness at work.

Within the framework of the three strategic goals, the following cross-cutting issues to be integrated into each of the goals have been defined:

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Equal representation of young people and women

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Sustainable rural development

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Cooperation and promotion (transparency and accountability)

Therefore, upon achieving the set strategic goals, employees and member organizations of the Network will make assessments and will take into account the impact of planned activities and results on opportunities for: 1) integration and equal representation of women and young people, 2) encouraging sustainable rural development, and 3) building strategic partnerships and cooperation.

### 5.3 Specific goals, indicators and results

Specific goals, expected results and indicators are provided in the table below:

Specific goals:	Indicators:	Expected results:
<b>General goal 1: Advocacy for rural people before the decision-makers in terms of policy-making for protecting and promoting rights and interests of the rural population, and contributing to equal and sustainable development of rural areas</b>		
<b>1. RDN supports and promotes participative building of rural development evidence based policies</b>	# of affected and interested parties that have been approached # of women, young people and other vulnerable categories identified to actively participate in the consultation process for identifying of priorities for advocacy % of the total number of represented stakeholders, belonging to smaller ethnic communities	1.1 A dialogue has been established with local authorities, local business and civil organizations
	# and type of challenges and needs according to type of affected stakeholders, impacting rural development	1.2 Needs of involved stakeholders and their expectations regarding improvement of rural development policies have been identified
	# of defined priorities # of priorities referring to sustainable rural development # of priorities referring to improving the rights or rural women and young people	1.3 Priorities for action (annual/periodical) to be covered in the Advocacy Strategy have been defined and shared with affected and interested parties
<b>2. RDN has clear and functional strategy for advocacy and lobbying regarding priority</b>	# of included representatives of affected and interested parties in the process of drafting the	2.1 Organizing a participative process of drafting the Advocacy Strategy regarding issues on rural development of national interest

<b>national issues on rural development</b>	strategy for advocacy Advocacy Strategy Action Plan for Advocacy Plan for communication of key advocacy messages	2.2 Defined strategy and plan of activities for advocacy, including key messages to communicate
	# of participants # of media that have promoted the strategy # of persons following progress via the social networks and the internet page	2.3 Advocacy Strategy promoted to affected and interested parties that were involved in the drafting process
<b>3. RDN participates in rural development policy making</b>	# and type of completed and promoted analysis, research studies and other documents # of academic and other type of associates with whom practice of cooperation has been established # and type of media that have promoted research studies	3.1 Drafting analyses, research studies and other appropriate material to support evidence based national policy making
	Prepared and promoted policies	3.2 Drafting evidence based policies
	# of working bodies the RDN is a member of # of initiated legal changes before the decision makers	3.3 Participation in work groups and bodies for national rural development policy making
<b>General goal 2: Networking and establishing cooperation with external organizations and stakeholders (including the media) to share experiences and good practices, as well as promoting rights and interests of end users</b>		
<b>4. Cooperation established with international organizations and bodies for exchange of experience and promotion of good practices on improving living conditions for rural population and encouraging sustainable rural development</b>	# organizations from the region cooperation has been established with # of joint projects	4.1 The RDN cooperates with and builds partnerships with rural networks from the countries in the region
	# of international organizations cooperation has been established with # of international organizations the	4.2 The RDN cooperates with and is a member in international organizations that actively participate in improving rural development



	RDN is a member of # joint projects	
<b>5. The RDN has established cooperation with the media and actively promotes its positions and the interests of its members via the traditional and the social media</b>	Strategy for promotion and public relations # of followers at the social media # of posts in the social media # of reactions in the social media	5.1 Strategy on participating in and building cooperation with the traditional media and promotion of the work of the organization drafted and functional
		5.2 Improved use of social media, the internet page and other modern technologies for communication with users and other interested and affected parties and strategic information for the public on issues related to rural development
<b>Genera goal 3: Building our own capacities and capacities of our members, and strengthening operation procedures in order to increase efficiency and effectiveness at work</b>		
<b>6. Building programme capacities of employees and members of the Network</b>	# of trained persons # of applied for and won projects	6.1 Capacities and functional knowledge of employees and members for project cycle management strengthened
	# of trained persons # of raised initiatives for advocacy at national and local level	6.2 Capacities for lobbying, advocacy and networking strengthened
	# of trained persons # of analysis and research studies completed	6.3 Improved knowledge for sustainable development, good practice at EU level, and for research and analysis
<b>7. Improved procedures and capacities for RDN operations and coordination and communication with its members</b>	Procedure for internal communication Plan for internal communication Work plan Work report	7.1 Procedures for internal communication, coordination and information, including those for transparency and accountability improved
	# of trained persons Improved work efficiency	7.2 Strengthened capacities for financial planning and operations
	# of trained persons Monitoring and evaluation plan	7.3 Strengthened capacities for monitoring and evaluation
	# of trained persons for human resource management, work place motivation and other issues	7.4 Improved capacities for human resource management

	related to management and HR Increased efficiency of employees	
	# of trained persons Technology application	7.5 Improved capacities for promotion, visibility and public relations, as well as for application for modern communication technologies