



Sustainable Agriculture
and Rural Development
MOUNTAIN POLICY PROJECT



SARD-M Policy Assessments in the Balkans

The South-Eastern Europe (Balkans), SEE (Balkans) is considered one of the richest areas within Europe as regards natural habitats and biological diversity, with unique mountain areas, karst phenomena, lakes and rivers ranging from the Adriatic Coast up to the Dinaric Alps and Carpathian Mountains. This region, in its broadest geographical definition, has a combined area of 550,000 square km, and a population of around 53 million.

The Balkan mountains, on a smaller area, cross 8 national borders: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, FYR (Former Yugoslav Republic of) Macedonia, Greece, Montenegro and Serbia. Over the last twenty years, these countries, except Greece, have experienced periods of high instability, war, economic crisis and transition towards a market economy and EU integration. While Greece and Slovenia are full EU members, Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007, Croatia is currently negotiating its accession, FYR Macedonia got EU candidate status in 2005, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Albania are negotiating association agreements with EU.

The region is under strong economic development pressure, and the need to generate income and improve the living standards of the population is leading to the growing exploitation of natural resources. Agricultural, Environmental and Rural Development policies and institutions have suffered a long period of eclipse and are now being rebuilt, although with varying results.

Albania, Bulgaria, FYR Macedonia

- **Albania:** The mountain areas in Albania are a very important part because they occupy more than 60% of the whole country; 35% of the Albanian population work and live in these areas. Accordingly, the land used for agriculture is often quite sloping, with only about 44% of the agricultural land having a slope of less than 5%. Arable land constitutes approximately 24% (700,000 ha) of Albania's land area, pasture 15% (425,000 ha), and forest about 36% (1 million ha).

The agricultural sector in Albania experienced dramatic changes during the transition. After the collapse of the command economy, the redistribution of land to private ownership created more than 400,000 small family farms with an average land ownership of around 1.3 ha. In some hill and mountain areas, farm size is even smaller, at around 0.2 ha. By 1993, the sector had recovered from its large decline, and by 1996, agricultural output had increased by 37% the level in 1989. Since 1998, agriculture has growth rates close to 5 % annually. The agriculture sector remains of major importance to the economy as a whole, as well as forests.

- **Bulgaria:** The mountain areas cover 45 % of the territory of Bulgaria with more than 120 peaks with heights over 2000 m a.s.l. altitude. The mountain areas are rich in natural resources: 82 % forests, 71 % of pasture areas, 65 % of tobacco fields and potatoes, etc. are located in these regions.

The country's agricultural land is 5.72 million ha, or 51.6% of Bulgaria's total area. 4% of it are perennial crops (grapes, tobacco) 34% are grassland. In 2003, there were about 7000 agricultural holdings, managed by legal entities (including cooperatives) with an average of 290 ha per holding. At the same time, 1.35 million people were engaged in agricultural activities, of which 72% in farms less than 1 ha. The surface of forest is 4.07 million ha (mainly high stems forests). Virgin forest in Bulgaria's mountains is 103 350 ha.

Their future management and usage are a sensitive issue. They are an important genetic resource.



- **The FYR Macedonia** is also a mountainous and hilly country. Mountain and semi-mountain areas comprise around 80% of the national territory, with 30% of the Macedonian population. There are 52 peaks with heights over 2000 meters a.s.l. Total agricultural land amounted to around 1.26million ha in 2004 (or less than 50% of the total area of the country): 44% arable agricultural land, 55% pastures. Concerning the farm structure, individual farmers own or rent approximately 80 percent of all arable land. The remaining 20 percent are owned by the state and rented to agricultural companies. The majority of pastureland is also owned by the state and managed by public enterprises. Historically seen, livestock breeding is the dominant activity of the individual agricultural sector, except the pig breeding that used to be carried out on large state farms. Despite its economic and social advantages as well as its contribution to the sustaining of rural communities, agriculture has largely contributed to soil, water and air pollution and biodiversity destruction as a result of unfavourable production practices and land use. The total area under mountainous forests in the country is 0.95 million ha (37% of the country).

Diverse entry points of policy assessments

In **Albania**, the Government has made a priority out of horticulture and livestock development, including small ruminants: the aim was to understand how this policy is matching SARD principles. In **Bulgaria**, the experience mainly gained through the formulation of the major strategic document was assessed, as well the few years experience in implementation mainly into rural areas. And in **FYR Macedonia**, the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning was preparing the National Strategy for Sustainable Development: this led to the selection of this entry point.

Some similarities between the three countries

Positive aspects

- All 3 countries are mainly agricultural producers, relying mainly on small and poor farms; but the European Union is very active and contributes strongly to economic and social development, as well as to environment protection.
- Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, reforms have gone ahead, land has been partly returned, and the levels of production exceed now by far those before 1989.
- Biodiversity is remarkable, forest resources are overall significant.

Gaps

- Practically all the countries have neglected **mountain specificities** in the design and implementation of sustainable agricultural and rural development.
- Even if policies are being built, taking notably form of programmes, on the other hand institutions' human and financial resources are limited; capacities are not sufficient. Citizens are not involved in any basis organisation, nor NGO.
- Processes: overall, cooperation between municipalities or between ministries' departments is not sufficient; consultation of stake holders is also not sufficient.

Recommendations

The cooperation process or the so-called "South East European (Balkans) Framework Convention" started in 2005 should go ahead, in order to ensure conservation and a sustainable future for the region, seen as a common ecosystem. Parties should agree to establish a comprehensive policy towards this end, and endeavour to cooperate in several areas of common interest, including biodiversity, agriculture and rural development, forest land use, management of water resources, transport, tourism, cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, energy and spatial planning.

Policies

1. Support pilot value chain to set examples of mountainous areas development: Interventions in mountainous areas should embrace complete value chains (inputs, farming, processing, transport and marketing) rather than parts of the chains. Support to pilot value chains development for limited sectors with comparative advantages to set examples, may prove to have a beneficial multiplying effect.
2. Improve access and ownership security to land resources: Transfer of rights to forest and pastures is a major factor contributing to improving the economic, social and environment situation.
3. Give higher priority to human resource development, equity and women's issues to make SARD-M policies more inclusive.
4. Harmonisation with EU SARD policy: Gradual harmonisation of the national policies measures in support of the EU policies, is of great importance for further rural and sustainable development in the mountain regions in compliance with the National Program for EU Integration and the Action Plan for European Partnership Development.
5. Support the development of brands and protected designations of origin, and their marketing.

Institutions

6. Enhance the capacities and coordination of public sectoral agencies/departments dealing with SARD policy making and implementation as an important requirement for SARD-M.
7. Empower mountain people through education, strengthening bargaining capacities and needed autonomy to enhance SARD-M.
8. (in Albania) Support the establishment of an association of Parliamentary Members elected from mountainous areas.
9. (in FYR Macedonia): specific Agency for Mountain Development.

Processes

10. Create a comprehensive database and analytical studies to assist sound and integrated policy making for SARD-M / Development of an information system for addressing further needs for the improvement of the sustainability of the mountain regions.



11. Improvement of participatory processes: Enhance interactions between stakeholders at different levels, through:
 - Increase of public awareness and support of the concept of sustainable development;
 - Establishment of basic links for partnership among all stakeholders (government; business sector and NGOs);
 - Provision of a more intense public education and awareness raising process;
 - Frequent research and information exchange;
 - Provision of consistency for the budget, capacities and strategic priorities.
12. Reform institutions to enhance local participation in policy making/ implementation, implying genuine decentralisation.
13. Upgrade local/grassroots level awareness and capacity building to improve involvement of local stakeholders/communities in policy-programme formulation and implementation through a bottom-up approach.
14. Rationalise resource allocation and investment priorities for mountains vis-à-vis lowland economies, with clear understanding of mountain specificities.
15. Improve resource mobilisation to reduce donor-dependency and harness public-private complementarities in promoting SARD-M.
16. Strengthen mutual sharing and systematic synthesis of past development/policy intervention experiences and build the future approaches based on successful experiences to make the SARD-M approach more dynamic and effective.

Proposals for Follow-up Activities

Develop effective valorisation of environmental services and positive externalities:

- Protection of Natural Heritage and Wildlife
- Preservation of Cultural Heritage
- Carbon sequestration
- Sustainable water management policies
- Preservation of biodiversity
- Help to adapt / mitigate climate change.

Contact Information



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