



**Enhancing Sustainable Rural Development  
in the SAP Countries by  
Introducing the LEADER Experience**

**FINAL REPORT**



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*in cooperation with*



## Summary

The ICDT's objective was to transfer EU and more particularly Hungarian experience and best practices associated with a successful EU-wide scheme on local development, and implement the crucial initial phase of a multi-stakeholder capacity-building program to implant the LEADER approach in the Western Balkans. This blueprint can generate lasting effect by spurring development in local communities throughout the region. More specifically, in the framework of this pilot project we aimed to examine in-depth the regional applicability of this model and then transfer expertise to where it is most needed at both the governmental and local levels. To this end, we first organized an opening conference and study tour to create visibility for the idea and sensitize national policymakers and leaders of selected local communities to the advantages and applicability of the proposed methodology, and then conducted an initial "Training for Trainers" workshop to assure the biggest impact and multiplying effect possible. Activities started upon KEP Secretariat approval in January 2008, with the conference/study tour in May and the training in September 2008. These activities have been complemented by the translation of a LEADER manual into Serbian and the preparation of a needs assessment study on the regional applicability of LEADER.

## Background

Regardless of the varying individual status of the target countries in the European Union's Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) – collectively known by the international community as the „Western Balkans" (i.e. Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo under UNSCR 1244), there are certain common regional problems that demand more attention. Strengthening local democracy in general and advancing sustainable rural and agricultural development in particular are among the most important priorities as evidenced also by the amount of EU funding earmarked for support in these areas.

*Whether in the EU or in the Western Balkans, rural development is neither a minor nor a peripheral problem.* Rural development policy is an increasingly important component of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Over half of the EU's population lives in rural areas, which cover 90 % of the EU's territory. In South Eastern Europe in general, agriculture earns 30 % or more of GDP, and a commensurate proportion of the population is rural, varying from 25 to 40 % of the total population. Rural areas are an important vehicle for the preservation of cultural heritage and social values and their development involves significant political issues. Since the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and the beginning of the transition process, the rural situation has deteriorated throughout the region with a large increase in inequality between the urban and the rural areas. The price of industrial development and economic modernization is that the percentage of population living from rural economic activities and agriculture is steadily decreasing. Consequently, the question is how to sustain rural society and communities, how to create new (different) employment opportunities, generate income by enhancing locally value added economy; how to develop education in rural areas and, finally, how to finance this process. These problems bring us to the need for strengthening absorption capacity which goes hand-in-hand with the need for the development of human resources, empowering local communities and strengthening local governance and civil society, which are key ingredients of democratic societies. The approach of *sustainable development* instead of poverty reduction is consciously emphasized, since the former *implies clear political responsibility and pro-active development strategies versus passive measures designed to alleviate problems in the short term. Innovative ideas are thus needed that not only address these issues but identify and make use of comparative local advantages as well.*

LEADER is an innovative approach within EU rural development policy that produces results regardless of climate or the degree of development. Experience has shown that it can make a real difference to the daily lives of people in rural areas by playing an important role in encouraging innovative responses to rural problems. It addresses issues like participatory democracy, specific ways of local governance, cross sector decision-making, bottom-up approach and stretching the definition of accountability. Cooperation and networking are obvious ingredients. In addition, an important objective of the project will be to make its results known nationally and encourage the incorporation of this methodology in national development plans. Both EU IPA and national funds will potentially be available for projects developed based on this methodology.

LEADER needs to be promoted not as a peripheral project for governments to pursue, but as an integral part to the growth of the Western Balkans. Though rural development is the direct goal of the scheme, LEADER will have other positive side-effects, for example, it can contribute to stemming the

migration to cities which can often lead to slums forming in suburban regions of major industrial centers. It must also be raised that LEADER is a relatively inexpensive program compared to many government projects, for example road-building and its implementation would not siphon funds off from these big-volume investments and the EU funds earmarked to support them. Furthermore, with its emphasis on cooperation between local communities to generate mutual benefits it can not only become a good model for reconciliation in the rural areas, but rural development in itself is an excellent opportunity to generate regional cooperation at the regional level. The Hungarian LEADER experience has two important advantages: the program is not only running with great success and is well documented (thus making the experience readily adaptable) but it was adopted in a transitional environment that serves with several additional lessons learned. Our main implementing partner, the Rural Workshop Foundation (RWF) acted as a partner to the Hungarian Government in implementing LEADER in Hungary and is thus one of the best placed institutions to assist in this task. The ICDT, with a track record of having implemented a dozen projects worldwide and in particular by virtue of its contacts and partnerships in the region – established in the course of the implementation of a one-year project dedicated to enhancing Visegrad Group-Western Balkans interregional cooperation – was equally well prepared to oversee and coordinate execution of the project.

### Objectives and target groups

The project's overall objective is to provide a successful blueprint to enhance locally value added economy in order to sustain rural society and communities and thereby serving public interest in the target countries. The specific objective is to empower local rural communities in the Western Balkans by training representatives of national stakeholders, local community leaders and experts in LEADER methodology. They will learn to devise sustainable local development strategies based on participatory principles; to cooperate, devise, get funding for and implement projects in the common interest.

Target groups are: (1) decision makers in the relevant governmental bodies in target countries (i.e. ministries, agencies dealing with rural development and agriculture, EU integration); (2) experts from relevant NGOs and professional associations (i.e. those dealing with rural and local development, chambers of business and commerce, etc.); (3) officials, experts, NGOs and entrepreneurs in local communities. In all, more than a hundred people (experts and officials) can be directly involved in the project, and the beneficiaries affected can eventually number even in the thousands. The trained experts and local communities in the selected target micro regions will be direct beneficiaries of the project, but if the ultimate goal of making the LEADER methodology part of national development plans is reached, the number of populations directly affected can grow exponentially. The objectives and outcomes of a large-scale program to transfer the LEADER methodology are summarized in the table below. The present pilot project served to address project purpose no. 1 and 2 (again, please refer to table below).

Overall objective	Project purposes	Results
Catalyze the building of sustainable local and rural development strategies in the SAP countries by introducing the LEADER experience, with special regard to new member states' (Hungary) experience	1. <i>To sensitize</i> national policymakers/decision makers and local communities to the advantages of and applicability of the proposed methodology	1.1. local conditions for implementation assessed in-depth in each country
		1.2. initial training held for national officials
		1.3. target micro regions selected, 1-3 per country
	2. <i>To mobilize</i> community resources, regional and local networks to transfer knowledge and expertise; build local capacity	2.1. multi-stakeholder partnership development process started and regional project network formed, partner organizations identified; at least 1 NGOs/CSOs per country (1 in each target micro region)
		2.2. regional Training for trainers (ToT) program implemented for at least 2 experts per country (1 per target micro region)
		2.3. local officials and business actors prepared for participation through roundtable discussions
3. <i>To catalyze</i> the building of sustainable local and rural development strategies	3.1. Local Action Groups (LAGs) formed and local development strategies developed in target micro regions	
	3.2. generate and implement pilot projects in target regions	
	3.3. evaluate projects and use feedback to encourage the inclusion of LEADER methodology in national development plans and EU funds to be earmarked in support	

## Partnerships

The Rural Workshop Foundation Hungary (RWF) acted as the ICDT's main professional implementing partner and knowledge donor involved in the project. It provides experts and expertise at all phases of activities. Similarly, the Standing Working Group on Regional Rural Development (SWG) was the ICDT's main partner – and one of the knowledge recipients – in the target countries. Through its expert network in the region, it provided crucial assistance in identifying and recruiting the right partners and people to participate at all levels and phases. The ICDT supervised and coordinate implementation in all phases; its Senior Vice President and lead expert in this field, Mr. Sándor Köles is considered to be one of the foremost experts in community development, cultural enterprises as well as regional and rural development issues in Europe and has served as a consultant and advisor to the European Union and various governments, foundations and private sector organizations.

## Implementation

*Conference and study tour, 19-20 May 2008, Budapest, Hungary*

### Review of the proceedings

A conference and a study tour composed the first phase of the project, taking place on 19-20<sup>th</sup> in May 2008 in Budapest, and a small village in its surroundings, Etyek. The conference started with the opening remarks of Mr. András Pásztóhy, Ministerial Commissioner in the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, who gave a brief introduction to participants on the LEADER approach and gave an overview about the Hungarian rural development scheme. Next, the rotating President of the Standing Working Group, Mr. Grigor Gjeci gave a short speech on this organization. Afterwards, Mr. Sándor Köles, Senior Vice President of the ICDT briefly introduced the participants and the scope of the conference. As he underlined, besides raising awareness among governmental and civil society stakeholders from the region on the potential of LEADER the other main objective of the event was to assess local needs and design the subsequent Training of Trainers (ToT) program accordingly.

The floor was next given to Mr Kaj F. Mortensen, Head of Unit for SAPARD Programmes in the European Commission's DG AGRI, who presented the EU experience on Pre-accession Assistance for agriculture and rural development. His speech focused on pre-accession instruments and structures available for Western Balkan countries in the framework of the IPARD programme. Mr. Mortensen drew attention to the *important differences in implementing IPA between candidate (Croatia and Macedonia) and potential candidate countries (the other countries in the region) but underlined that all of them should make use of the pre-accession period to advance with the necessary preparations for the LEADER programme in all aspects.*

Next, Ms. Márta Márczis, the President of the Hungarian Rural Workshop Foundation took over and shared lessons learned and experiences of the establishment of the so-called PREPARE group, a European rural development network which may also prove valuable for the Balkan countries in their rural development integration preparatory work. Mr. Attila Kovács, Head of Division in the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development referred to Mr. Mortensen's speech and presented how the Hungarian LEADER is functioning in practice. He shared with the audience the Hungarian statistics: in 2007 more than a 100 LAGs (Local Action Groups) were established, playing a key role in building local development partnerships, These LAGs cover more than 2000 towns, thus around 50% of the Hungarian population. Mr. Kjell-Roger Karlsson, Senior Advisor on Regional and Rural Development talked about the major development issues in Albania (fair development of all rural areas, improvement of environmental values, improvement of the quality of life, reduction of poverty), constituting the Albanian Rural Strategy of 2007-2013. He also drew attention to the fact that apart from improving agriculture, rural development has many other aspects which should be dealt with.

Following the lecture of the non-regional speakers, the floor was given to South-East European participants to compare and analyse the situation of their countries on the road to EU integration in the agriculture and rural development sector. Government and civil society representatives from each country presented their views on how they have moved forward on the road of EU integration, dealing with contractual, legal, institutional and financial aspects of the process.

## Summarizing lessons learned

Although at different paces, all countries are moving on the same road towards EU integration and the challenges and objectives they are facing are similar. Therefore the sharing of experiences on a regional level is incredibly useful and necessary. All SAP countries' main objectives are to eventually complete a full integration in the European Union, observing all rights and obeying all obligations it may come with. Obtaining the EU membership without major sectoral disturbances is a key challenge. Therefore, it is essential to solve all structural and development weaknesses of the agriculture and rural development sectors already during the pre-accession period, and to introduce the EU's Common Agriculture Policy (EU CAP) on a gradual basis.

The first Session of the conference was a forum where regional comparisons were made possible.

First, Mr Grigor Gjeci, Rural Development Policy Director in the Albanian Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection shared with the audience how he sees Albania on its way to the EU, concerning the agriculture and rural development sector. The adoption of *legal* and *strategic* documents is an element of all implementation plans. In some countries of the region they have already been adopted, in other countries they still lack the political and professional consensus necessary for ratification or are not yet advanced to the state of adoption. In Albania, both the Law for Agriculture and Rural Development and the National Rural Development Strategy have been adopted in 2007, serving as a basis for further advancements. However, Mr. Gjeci found it distressing that concerning *institutional* structures, still a lot more could be done: at the moment there are only 5 employees working in the Rural Development Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection, which plays a key role in the development of future programmes for the use of Rural Funds. As for the future plans of Albania, Mr. Gjeci mentioned that the next step will be the establishment of the Paying Agency in the institutional framework.

Ms. Renata Rakic, Project Manager in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of Republika Srpska reviewed the situation in her country. From her presentation, participants have learnt that Bosnia and Herzegovina still faces elementary challenges hindering its advancement. The country is still lacking a *legal* and *strategic* base for the reforms: there is no Rural Development Strategy nor on state, nor on entity level. The reason for this is that the legal base of creating a Rural Development Strategy demands the state-level adoption of a Law on Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, which has not taken place yet. Nevertheless, a common framework for the improvement of agriculture, food and rural development sector is planned for the next three years and a strategy on the harmonization of these three sectors has been drafted in 2007 and is currently under discussion.

According to Ms. Jelena Kraljevic, representative of the Croatian Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development's Directorate for Rural Development unit, the main problems in her country are the insufficient diversification of agricultural and non-agricultural income generating activities, the ageing of rural population in the rural areas, and a high number of (semi-)subsistent agriculture. She also talked about the *institutional* framework of Croatian rural development, mentioning that a Directorate for Sustainable Development of Rural Areas has been established in 2003 which serves as the Managing Authority of the SAPARD/IPARD Funds since. Already, calls have been launched for investments in agriculture holdings, and in processing and marketing of agricultural and fishery products. The development of rural infrastructure is also on its way. As for the *legal* aspect, an Agriculture Act and an Act on the State Aid in Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry serve as guidelines for the development, and Croatia is well advanced concerning the strategical aspect as well: the country's Strategy for Rural Development is due to be adopted by the mid-2008. The current proceedings feature the mobilizing of local communities and resources in several rural areas, involving a great number of associations, civil society networks and NGOs.

In her speech, Ms. Gabriela Micevska, Advisor to the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy of Macedonia also emphasized how crucial it is to involve civil societies and also other key stakeholders (banks, advisory services) in the successful implementation of the LEADER projects, which could set off by an informative campaign for all stakeholders, and the joint preparation of *LEADER User's Guide* along with other necessary documents. Ms. Micevska also mentioned, that a basic *strategic* document, the National Program for Rural Development has been adopted, and priority sectors have been defined for the EU IPARD programming. As for the institutional side, she found that the main priority was capacity building, namely providing trainings for the Ministry's, the Managing Authority's and the Monitoring Committee's staff. She also talked about the importance of regional approach and regional cooperation, mentioning Macedonia's fruitful cooperation with Italy in the rural development sector as a positive example.

The Montenegrin representative, Mr. Milan Markovic, Scientific Researcher in the Biotechnical Institute also gave a detailed overview on Montenegro's way towards the EU. Being a country with a high share of agriculture in the national GDP, Montenegro would like to efficiently overcome rural development-related problems, specifically the phenomenon of rural population abandoning distant villages, as well as the issue of limited human resources. Montenegro's Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) has been in force since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2008, and the bodies responsible for its implementation are being established at the moment. The Law on Agriculture and Rural Development is in its drafting phase, and so is the National Program for Rural Development. Montenegro now has to successfully establish a Paying Agency and go through the process strengthening the Rural Development unit in the Ministry of Agriculture, serving as the Managing Authority for rural development policy. Mr. Aleksandar Bogunovic, Head of Department for Rural Development and Advisory Service in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, talked about the situation in Serbia. He informed his colleagues that as for *institutional* development aspects, since 2005, a Rural Development sector is functioning in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management. The Law on Agriculture and Development is also in force, and the Strategic Plan for Rural Development provides the basis for strategic planning and implementation. In Serbia, the creation of a national network has also taken place and potential partners such as NGOs, local municipalities, county representatives and chambers also play an important role in assuring support for rural development. This support is manifest in the dissemination of information's about programmes for support for agriculture and rural development, data collection about rural villages, the creation of LAGs, fund-raising and the allocation of EU funds, assisting in the realization of capacity-building projects.

By analysing the overall regional situation and each country's specific advancements in a discussion at the end of the second Session, the main objectives and challenges for all SAP countries in the agriculture and rural development sector were identified:

*Legal and strategic aspect:*

- The harmonizing of national legislations with the EU *acquis communautaire*.
- Preparing all basic legal and strategic documents which could serve as platforms for the negotiation process.
- Ensuring that the national LEADER implementation plans are developed in cooperation with the relevant stakeholders (e.g. civil society), in order to make sure that the design of the approach matches the demands and the need experienced in rural areas.

*Institutional aspect:*

- Modernizing and strengthening of institutional and administrative capacities for an efficient implementation of the new agricultural policy.
- Overcoming the limits of human resources in some small countries, often being the main cause for the lack of good initiatives and projects in rural areas.

*Economic aspect:*

- Strengthening the ability of Western Balkan countries' agriculture to compete in the integrated regional markets of Southeastern Europe and the EU.
- Optimizing the use of scarce land, forest and water resources.

*Societal aspect:*

- Strengthening public awareness about the importance of the agriculture and rural development sector in the EU integration process.
- Making sure consumers have access to safe and healthy food.
- Improving farmers' incomes.
- Building viable rural communities through sustainable rural development.
- Preparing rural societies for the implementation of the – sometimes very demanding – EU Rural Development Policy.
- Introducing the concept of "sustainable agriculture" (creating a balance between economic growth, environment protection and social policy).

In the afternoon, participants were guided to Etyek, a cosy village at a 20 km-distance from the centre of Budapest. They were hosted at the Kritzer House, a SAPARD programme-financed initiative that now hosts the International Rural Workshop Foundation. Two businessmen and a mayor talked about their LEADER-related experiences in the local development area. Following these presentations, the owner of the local polo club explained how he established his business in this rural area, which – due to its geographical proximity to the capital, beautiful landscape and active community life – has a great touristic potential – according to his opinion. In closing, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the ICDDT and the SWG RRD, providing the basis for future cooperation.

## Conclusions

The next day, on 20<sup>th</sup> May, conclusions were made, lessons learned were summarized and follow-up activities in the future – such as sending all participants conference materials and beginning the preparation for the Training of Trainers due in Autumn 2008 – were identified. According to participants' feedbacks, the conference not only gave a good overview on the situation of Hungarian rural development four years after the country's EU-integration, but also showed it functioning in practice, and made it possible for participants to learn more about Hungarian experiences in an interactive way. Furthermore, the conference also gave a chance for experts coming from the region to discuss how advanced their countries are on the road of integration and to compare and analyze their countries' progress. Finally, the ICDDT expressed its willingness to continue facilitating the regional dialogue, which was welcomed by regional participants.

In his closing speech, Mr. Sándor Köles emphasized that on one hand, it is important to learn the experiences of different models but on the other hand, it is also crucial to develop a country's own rural development model, which takes into consideration the local context and is based on a multi-stakeholder dialogue and partnership. He also highlighted the importance of regional cooperation in rural development by finding the connecting elements. The SWG plays a very important role in this process and Mr. Köles also underlined the ICDDT's willingness to join these efforts.

### *Regional Training of Trainers, Etyek, Hungary 17-20 September 2008*

## Selection of participants

The opening conference was also an appropriate venue to announce further details on the project and invite participating organizations – with special regard to our local lead partner, the SWG – to propose qualified participants for the Training of Trainers (ToT) in the next phase from all the target countries and from the sectors of particular interest, i.e. government (central but also regional and local levels), the private sector (business sphere) and civil society (independent experts, NGO leaders). The ICDDT also put out a call for applications describing the training's background and objectives and containing the instructions to follow for those wishing to apply. In particular, this call made clear to all those interested to apply that the ICDDT seeks to build on the results of this training and work with participants in the longer term.

Applicants were required to submit CVs and brief letters of motivation explaining why they wished to participate and how they would put to use the knowledge acquired. The call was closed at the end of July, and successful applicants were informed in late August-early September. Evaluation criteria included previous experience with similar projects and methodology, level of experience and motivation and language skills (a firm command of English being a necessary precondition as there was no means to permit simultaneous translation at the training and also for future correspondence) as well as nationality and organizational affiliation. We sought to assemble a diverse team that would represent as best as possible the target groups that have to be included for future success (government, civil society and the private sector/business sphere) while also seeking a numerical balance between the countries. In all, 14 participants were selected, in general 2 from each target country (with some exceptions due to last-minute cancellations in case of some governmental representatives). In general, one of these participants represented the public and the other the civil/private sphere. The level of interest regionally was quite high, thus selection could take place from among a satisfactory pool of qualified applicants.

## Contents

Conducted in partnership with the Rural Workshop Foundation, Hungary (RWF), the objective of this regional "Training of Trainers" (ToT) was to train a select group of experts from both the public and civil sector using the latest Hungarian and European experiences and know-how, whose role would then be pivotal in selecting and working with local partners on the ground in later phases of the project. Accordingly, the training not only focused on live experiences and hands-on work but had the objective of making participants skilled in passing their knowledge on as well in their respective countries and communities.

For this reason, the first assignment of participants was to elaborate a "Situation Analysis" (SA) in preparation for the ToT. SA is the starting point of the different steps of a rural development project

cycle and a Local Action Plan. The ToT Experts had worked out the instructions for the assignment. The participants had to describe and analyze the present situation using the relevant indicators of an area selected by themselves, in order to create a “full” picture of the reality of that area. The status of relevant resources and indicators of well-being or problems were mapped. Relevant resources and indicators were related to local resources of sustainable development, as natural resources, human resources, resources of the local economy and the resources needed to achieve sustainable development goals. The welfare of the inhabitants is the utmost goal of all development planning, which is why the “Welfare Pyramid” including relevant welfare components was of specific value to analyze. The participants had elaborated ambitious SAs. As a team exercise for identifying best practices of methodological and technical approaches the different Situation Analysis were discussed and commented on at the ToT.

At the training itself participants received advanced level knowledge on the European/Hungarian LEADER experience mostly through personal accounts from former and current officials and senior experts; including what exactly it is and what makes it different; why and how exactly it is useful; how preparations were made in Hungary at the governmental level for LEADER’s implementation; how local actors’ capacity was built up and local stakeholders were educated and prepared to make use of the methodology, and tie in with regional, national and international networks; how to plan and manage LEADER-based projects; how to coordinate input from and work with the various sectors involved. The four day training (please refer to agenda attached) was completed by preparatory and follow-up assignments, both related to the selection and study of the micro regions to serve as the venue for implementation of LEADER-based pilot projects. Participants were also asked to provide a detailed evaluation of the training’s objectives, contents and results (please refer to training evaluation summary attached). Finally, as called for in the work plan the training manual is also being translated into Serbian.

<i>Follow-up and impact assessment</i>
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Participants had until 15 November to complete the follow-up assignment which is also the condition for reception of certificates marking “official” completion of the training. The topic was to prepare a Local Action Plan for one potential LEADER area in their country, according to the Handbook on the LEADER approach – which specifies that the area must be “small enough to be cohesive and large enough to ensure that development can be generated from within the area, approximately a norm of 10.000 up to 100.000 – and the other criteria learned from the ToT activity. The continuation of joint activities is subject to the amount of funding the ICDT will raise to go toward coaching in selected micro regions for LEADER-based planning activities to begin. At this point however, it is already safe to conclude that upon completion of the training, this project has achieved its main objectives and created impact in the following ways:

- (1) The ICDT has identified and successfully engaged the key local stakeholders to support the “implantation” of the LEADER approach in the Western Balkans;
- (2) More specifically, a select initial group of experts has been trained in the methodology and possesses the sufficient level of knowledge to begin work on LEADER-type projects in their countries. One pilot area per country has been selected and Local Action Plans of good quality have been developed;
- (3) In terms of incorporation of the methodology in national development plans, the project has successfully created the conditions for this process by engaging Ministries and other governmental stakeholders at the appropriate level at the opening conference and inviting governmental representatives to the ToT, one of whose focus was the governmental aspects of introducing LEADER in a country (for example, creation and functioning of a payment agency). While obviously in the purview of National Authorities, this process is now under way, as can be judged from the level of interest showed in particular by the countries closest to accession. Especially in the case of Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia, the level of cooperation was simply excellent. If the ICDT manages to raise the funds for completing the coaching process necessary for the implementation of LAPs, impact will grow exponentially as a successful pilot project would be the most effective means of demonstrating the methodology’s potential.

In general, we can therefore confirm that the main assumption behind the project, i.e. the need for a local development approach and methodology such as LEADER was correct. The interest is especially marked in case of the countries closest to accession (Macedonia, Croatia but also Serbia). At present, the project has already created the following “side effects” which boost its impact considerably:



- ICDT-RWF experts have been invited by the Serbian Ministry of Agriculture to train ministry officials and members of the national rural development network in the LEADER approach and methodology;
- Similarly, the ICDT was asked to provide expertise in Macedonia for the following activities:
  - Review practical activities already undertaken in pilot areas to simulate the LEADER approach;
  - Discuss with national consultants their training needs and those of other Macedonian stakeholders in the area of LEADER and associated rural development skills;
  - Run a participatory workshop with national consultants to address some of their training needs and assist them in being able to satisfy those of some of the other stakeholders;
  - Participate in discussions with government staff who have an interest in promoting LEADER activities (e.g. Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Local Self-Government, Ministry of Economy);
  - Conduct study tours to Hungary by government staff and members of civil society from Macedonia.
- Finally, the ICDT has also been invited to a conference in Vojvodina organized by the Ministry of Agriculture to help introduce the LEADER approach and the work of Local Action Groups (LAG) as well as provide an initial assessment of development opportunities.

Publicity was assured through the project/donor materials distributed to all participants, and through the ICDT and EastAgri websites, complemented by an opportunity to present the project at the EastAgri Annual Meeting 2008.

### Conclusion

While we find these successes encouraging, the ICDT also sees the results of this project as the beginning of a longer term process that can ultimately lead to hundreds of micro- and other regions of different size using this approach to bring improvements to the daily life of people throughout the Western Balkans. "Success begets success" and our task is to build on the momentum we have built. Specifically, this means:

- Following up on the training by keeping the multi-stakeholder partnership development process going and the regional project network formed in this project active, not least through additional training for government experts, local officials and business actors (project purpose number 2 in the table on page 3). The training in Serbia (see above) will be an excellent opportunity in this respect, where we will also assemble ToT participants to address the next steps;
- Most importantly, the ICDT's objective is now to implement the crucial third program purpose (as shown in the table on page 3), namely catalyze the building of sustainable local and rural development strategies, aided by continuous coaching provided to the training's participants and other local experts in the target micro regions. This process has three components:
  - Formation of Local Action Groups (LAGs) and development of local development strategies in target micro regions;
  - Generation and implementation of pilot projects in target regions;
  - Evaluate projects and use feedback to encourage the inclusion of LEADER methodology in national development plans; identify and channel EU funds to be earmarked in support. As explained above, while this process will take time and is contingent on funding, solid foundations have been laid for its success.

Finally, the ICDT plans to rely on current partners – including CEI KEP whose generous support made this worthwhile effort possible – to help continue the process to the benefit of the local communities and, in effect, rural societies throughout the Western Balkans.