

FINAL REPORT

for implementation of the Contract titled:

Development and implementation of pilot actions are foreseen for the training and consulting of beneficiaries involved in the pilot actions. Pilot actions will allow beneficiaries involved to apply and become familiar with the tools of the SmartRural Business Model, Development and implementation of action plans for entrepreneurs and the unemployed in order to implement their business idea; Support on legal, tax and other business sector related issues, Organization of 4 workshops (training material included) for the dissemination to the beneficiaries of the SmartRural model of about 10 participants each. With an option of online realization of the activities in conditions of world pandemic.

Identification number SMART RURAL 05-62/1 from 18.03.2021

prepared by the Contractor - Center for Promotion of Sustainable Agricultural Practices and Rural Development (CeProSARD) in cooperation with the management team from the Contracting Authority - Project SMART RURAL, Center for Development of Pelagonia Region

Introduction

The assignment was implemented in accordance with the Contract and Terms of Reference (ToR) provided with the tender documentation by the Center for Development of Pelagonia Planning region as Contracting Authority (CA) as well as the Methodology and Organization submitted by the CeProSARD as Contractor. The activities took place in the Republic of North Macedonia, in particular the target location Pelagonia planning region. During the execution, the established communication channels were used as well as the available project deliverables and tools.

The overall implementation was based having in mind the current situation in the entrepreneurial sector in the rural areas of Pelagonia planning region and the constraints of the local entrepreneurs for starting businesses for development of the existing enterprises. These include lack of knowledge, awareness and skills of the entrepreneurs themselves on relevant topics in the contemporary market environment, as well as issues of various administrative and financial topics (procedures, legislation, taxes, market conditions, institutional support, funding opportunities, lack of association for joint appearance on the market, etc). In these large rural areas there is urgent need to address the problem of the underdevelopment, unemployment and depopulation with actions that contribute to sustainability.

Objectives

The tasks are in accordance with the Programme objective to enable entrepreneurs to seize and benefit from ICT's potential and to acquire the necessary skills to boost their competitiveness. The assignment provides support to the target group entrepreneurs and individuals who have innovative business ideas, and which due to the general unfavourable economic situation, they cannot implement. They will benefit by enhancing their business capacities & capabilities in innovative opportunities & networking at national & international level. Execution of this assignment contributes to the project objective to enhance the entrepreneurship in rural areas in the BALKAN MED countries through SmartRural model specialization

As required with the Contract, during the implementation of the tasks, emphasis was given on establishing capacity among the final beneficiaries, through training, mentorship, and advice/consultation as well as through dissemination of training materials. The aim was to establish capacity and provide assistance to the stakeholders towards development of the entrepreneurship in the rural areas while incorporating advanced techniques and methodologies.

Purpose

The purpose of the Contract was provision of consultant services in delivery of three activities related to the execution of the following work packages (WPs) of the SmartRural project: WP 4 - Modelling, Policy Making & Pilot Applications and A5. SmartRural Support Centres. In particular: With this assignment the following expertise has been provided: implementation of pilot actions which are foreseen for the training and consulting of beneficiaries involved in the pilot actions to implement the tools of the SmartRural model; development and implementation of action plans for entrepreneurs and the unemployed in order to implement their business idea including support on legal, tax and other business sector related issues; and organization of 4 workshops (electronic training material included) for the dissemination to the beneficiaries of the SmartRural model. The workshops were attended by more than 10 participants each

Having in mind the current pandemic situation the tasks were carried out on-line via the ZOOM platform which enabled conditions for safe and practical execution of the tasks.

Results

The assignment resulted with:

1. Implementation of pilot actions for familiarization of the final beneficiaries (3 cases) with the tools of the SmartRural Business Model through consulting and training;
2. Support to entrepreneurs/unemployed in development of action plans for their business idea including support on legal, tax and other business sector related issues; and

3. Organization of 4 online workshops (10+ participants/workshop) for dissemination of the SmartRural model, including preparation of the training material

Contract management

For all matters related to the implementation of the Contract, the Contractor directly communicated with the CA. The Contract implementation was monitored by Director of Centre for Development of Pelagonia Region.

Facilities and backstopping

CeProSARD used its technical and professional resources to support the successful implementation of the activities which were subject to this Contract. The team engaged on this Contract utilized the organization's fully equipped premises, accompanying/technical resources and IT equipment.

Our team used its over a decade-long experience in capacity building, organizing various workshops, seminars and training; education of various stakeholders groups especially of rural population, young entrepreneurs and farmers, representatives of the business sector, CSOs, representatives of the institutions of all levels.

All activities were successfully implemented on-line due to the COvid-19 pandemic. We used our significant previous experience in organization of on-line meetings and events for which an IT and Communication Officer in the organization was assigned.

Staff

The tasks were implemented by four key experts with expended experience in the area of which two hold PhD in economics and agricultural economics. They were adequately supported by other CeProSAD staff in order to ensure they concentrate on their primary responsibilities. All key experts had the necessary qualifications, skills and experience as stipulated with the ToR. CVs of the Key experts with qualifications as required with the tender documentation were provided with the tender documentation submitted by CeProSARD. The team of key experts consisted of the following specialists:

Key expert 1: Team leader/ Head Expert responsible for the implementation of the contract and for the work of the team consisted out of 3 relevant experts

Key expert 2: Expert Development and implementation of Pilot actions for the training and consulting of beneficiaries involved in the pilot actions. Pilot actions will allow beneficiaries involved to apply and become familiar with the tools of the SmartRural Business Model

Key expert 3 Development and implementation of action plans for entrepreneurs and the unemployed in

order to implement their business idea; 2. Support on legal, tax and other business sector related issues

Key expert 4 - Expert on Organization of 4 workshops (electronic training material included) for the dissemination to the beneficiaries of the SmartRural model. of about 10 participants each

Logistic and timing

In order to execute the activities in timely and quality manner, the Contractor prepared a Timetable of work at the very beginning of the implementation of the tasks. It comprised the overall duration of the Contract of 40 days, starting from the date of signature by both parties on 19.04.2021. The Timetable has been prepared following the ToR prepared by the CA and the proposed O&M submitted by the Contractor, accordingly. It includes: timing, sequence and duration of the proposed tasks, taking into account travel time (where appropriate), identification and timing, and envisaged resources to be mobilised. The timing, sequence and duration of the proposed tasks are presented per deliverable in the table. The Timetable of work is presented in Annex A.

Specific work executed

I. DELIVERABLE 4.3 PILOT APPLICATIONS: SPECIFICATIONS & GUIDELINES

Deliverable 4.3 “Pilot Applications of the Business Model” is part of the WP4 “Modelling, Policy Making & Pilot Applications”. As foreseen it included implementation of three pilot actions in the Republic of North Macedonia (Pelagonia planning region).

Potential participants of the pilot applications were:

- Individuals or organizations of legal status that wish to be active in the rural entrepreneurial sector of the Intervention Area for the first time.
- Individuals or organizations of legal status that are already active in the rural entrepreneurial sector of the Intervention Area.

The stages of implemented in the following stages:

1. Preparatory Activities (Preparation Plan, Establishment of Regulations, Invitation for Participation)
2. Training of Participants (Training for the SmartRural Model).
3. Recording of Needs (Recording of the needs of the participants).
4. Customized Action Plan (Synthesis of a strategic plan, according to the training and needs).

1. Preparatory activities – plan, regulations, invitation

Preparation of plan

This was the initial activity and was presented in the overall Timetable of works which includes: timing, sequence and duration of the proposed tasks, taking into account travel time (where appropriate), identification and timing, and envisaged resources to be mobilised. The timing, sequence and duration of the proposed tasks are presented per deliverable in the table. Timetable of work is presented in Annex A.

Establishment of regulations

The regulations (Annex I a) were prepared using the recommendations from the Methodology developed by the project partner Bulgaria Economic Forum.

Publishing the Invitation

Official invitation for the target groups to apply for participation was published online (web & Facebook). This publication encourages all interested bodies to take part, while presenting the evaluation and selection criteria.

http://www.ceprosard.org.mk/MK/Aktuelnosti_info.aspx?cid=608
<https://www.facebook.com/CeProSARD/posts/4287465284606469>.

Published invitation is available in Annex I b. The model of the application form is available in Annex I c.

Evaluating the Submissions

The received applications/information about the applicants were organized in a register (Annex I d) and evaluation procedure took place in order to produce the final list of participants (Annex I e). In accordance with the project document, in total, three selected individuals (3 men) participated in the pilot applications since only men submitted applications in accordance with the procedures for this Call.

2. Training of Participants

The selected applicants received training in order to get acquainted with the SmartRural Model and as well as on the thematic objectives of the SmartRural Model. The Online Distance Learning Platform was presented as well as a Training Package was prepared for the beneficiaries (Annex I f). For the purposes of the pilot applications, on-line meetings were organized with each beneficiary separately (Annex I g-i), to cultivate business culture and modern management issues, which will follow the business standards and market trends recorded in the Region.

3. Recording of Needs

In order to have a clear indication of the profile of rural entrepreneurs that participate in the pilots, information on their needs were gathered and evaluated. The results of such evaluation indicated their specific needs and goals for potential investments, as well as the current problems related to their

business activity.

4. Customized Action Plan

Based on the collected data of the SmartRural Model, the best options for the participants were presented in customized Action plans (available in Annex I j-l) which includes issues related to the preparation of an initial business plan (activity, required investments, indicative budget, etc.), funding possibilities, etc. The Action Plan was specified per pilot application, according to the data of each case. The pilot applications were on the following topics: 1. Production of organic juices in Germijan (Municipality of Novaci); 2. Promotion of rural tourism through investment in new ethno restaurant and accommodation facilities in the village of Bukovo (Bitola); and 3. Modernization and extension of existing pig farm in the village of Mogila (Municipality of Mogila). Business strategy issues were also examined, organization issues, management-utilization of human resources issues, restructuring-productivity improvement issues procedure.

II. DELIVERABLE 5.8.5 “WORKSHOPS”

In the context of the Deliverable 5.8.5 “Workshops”, 4 workshops (training material included) for the dissemination to the beneficiaries of the SmartRural model were organized, with more than 10 participants each (plus the representatives of the project team and consultant/trainers).

Preparation for the Workshops

In order to conduct successful workshops, thorough plan as initial activity preceded and was presented in the overall Timetable of works which includes: timing, sequence and duration of the proposed tasks, taking into account travel time (where appropriate), identification and timing, and envisaged resources to be mobilised. They were presented per deliverable in the Timetable of work Annex A

The process of organizing and implementing the workshops was structured in three stages:

- Stage 1: Workshop Implementation Plan
- Stage 2: Implementation
- Stage 3: Evaluation

Stage 1: Workshop Implementation Plan

The Plan included:

- Promotion for open participation - how the general public will be informed and apply for participation in the Workshops. Invitations were published on-line on website and Facebook for all 4 workshops:

Invitation Workshop 1 (6 May 2021):

http://www.ceprosard.org.mk/MK/Aktuelnosti_info.aspx?cid=600

<https://www.facebook.com/CeProSARD/posts/4254583721227959>

Invitation Workshop 2 (12 May 2021):

http://www.ceprosard.org.mk/MK/Aktuelnosti_info.aspx?cid=604

<https://www.facebook.com/CeProSARD/posts/4277771335575864>

Invitation Workshop 3 (18 May 2021):

http://www.ceprosard.org.mk/MK/Aktuelnosti_info.aspx?cid=610

<https://www.facebook.com/CeProSARD/posts/4300285003324497>

Invitation Workshop 4 (26 May 2021):

http://www.ceprosard.org.mk/MK/Aktuelnosti_info.aspx?cid=612

<https://www.facebook.com/CeProSARD/posts/4335856633100667>

Published invitations are available in Annex II a-d). The model of the application form is available in Annex II e.

All applicants that registered and fulfilled the participation criteria were accepted due to the possibility for larger number of attendants at on-line events via the ZOOM platform.

Information about the workshops were distributed also by e-mail to stakeholders from the databases of the Centre for Development of the Pelagonia planning region and CeProSARD, as well to the three LAGs in the Pelagonia planning region, National Farmers Federation, Rural Development Network, etc.

- Communication with Lecturers - suitable Trainers and Lecturers that have relevant knowledge in relation to the Project's objectives and thematic.
- Venue Configuration Plan – The on-line ZOOM Platform was selected as most appropriate “space” to respond to the needs of the participants in circumstances of COvid-a9 pandemic.
- Dissemination of material – training materials produced for the purposes of the training were dissemination electronically (via e-mail) to the participants after each workshop.
- Equipment & Audiovisual media – appropriate IT equipment was used, as well as video recordings and photography during the Workshops.
- Timeline - proper implementation dates for the Workshops were set, taking into account the

timeframe for implementation of this contract The workshops were organized on weekly basis (one per week during May 2021, in particular on 6 May, 12 May, 1 May and 26 May.

Stage 2: Implementation

- The following selection criteria applied
 - For the Trainers:
 - The age of the participants.
 - The training course is aimed towards adults.
 - The indicated interest towards the Project's activities and thematic.
 - The compliance with a first come first served approach.
 - For the Trainees:
 - The age of the participants.
 - The training course is aimed towards adults.
 - The indicated previous training experience.
 - The indicated relevant experience with the Project's activities and thematic.
- Training Methods

Proper training methods were defined and used by the trainers and lecturers during the Workshops, such as (indicatively):

- Suggestive Teaching: This is the traditional method of teaching in which a teacher/professor presents a predefined set of information through means of presentations, projections etc. This method is essential as there needs to be an individual that acts as the centrepiece of attention and guides the training.

- Q&A – Discussion/Brainstorming: As the participants of the workshops will be exclusively adults it is essential to allow them space to engage and actively participate in the process. Thus, it will be necessary to allocate time for questions, discussions and idea sharing on the various presented topics.

- Case Study - Working Group: The examination of a case study an engaging activity that enacts critical thinking via the presentation of tangible examples while at the same time it motivates working group and sharing ideas.

- Chunking: This is the technique of breaking complex topics into more understandable and memorable “chucks” of information, which will form a larger idea.

- Training Techniques

For the presentation of the topics, a mixture of techniques was used by the Lecturers, such as:

- Lectures (Theoretical Report by the Trainers)
- Demonstration (Presentation of the Thematic Sections)
- Practical Activities (Collaborative Activities and Exercises).

- Subject Modules

During the Workshops, the Themes of the Training Material of the SmartRural Project were thoroughly covered.

- *Subject Module 1: The Business Activity in Rural Areas*

1. Introduction to European Rural Areas (This Section aims to introduce the trainees to entrepreneurial issues in rural areas).

1.1. The European Rural Areas.

1.2. Globalization and its consequences for small and medium-sized enterprises in the European countryside.

2. European rural development policies today

2.1. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

2.2. Policies to enhance entrepreneurship in the countryside.

3. Entrepreneurship in the Rural Areas

3.1. Characteristics of Rural Entrepreneurship.

3.2. New technologies, innovation and their relation to rural development.

4. Entrepreneurship in the Intervention Area and in the Greek countryside

4.1. New trends in entrepreneurship issues in the countryside.

4.2. Development issues in the case study.

4.3. Lignite energy production decommissioning.

5. The SmartRural Project

5.1. Presentation of the SmartRural Project.

5.2. The potential of the SmartRural project to contribute to the development of entrepreneurship in the countryside.

5.3. Introductory presentation of the SmartRural Business Model and its tools.

- *Subject Module 2: Exploitation of the SmartRural Business Model and its Tools to Enhance the Competitiveness of Small and Medium Enterprises.*

1. Thematic Section I: The SmartRural Model and its Tools.

1.1. SmartRural Business Development Guide.

1.2. "Business Welcome": Report of policy recommendations.

1.3. GIS system for rural business areas.

1.4. SmartRural centers and services provided.

1.5. SmartRural network and synergy development capabilities.

2. Thematic II Implementation of the SmartRural Business Model.

2.1. How to utilize the SmartRural Business Model.

2.2. SmartRural Business Model Case Studies.

Agendas of the workshops are available in Annex II f-i)

The design and implementation of the on-line Workshops was based on the modern e-learning application ZOOM that supports real-time visual and audio communication between users on different locations.

The learning process started at a predetermined time and students followed their teacher in real time. The prerequisite for visual communication was for the trainer to have the necessary equipment to allow the images to be transmitted over the Internet to the pupils who are watching it, as well as the pupils themselves to have access to the devices that use high-speed Internet connection.

In case of verbal communication, the equipment needed by the teacher is simpler and the internet connections do not need to be so high. In addition to the real-time discussion appropriate module was developed, that supports videoconferencing between the teacher and the students.

The steps that were taken regarding the implementation of the on-line Workshops are the following:

- Defining Technical Control: person responsible for handling the technical requirements of the digital classes.
- Defining the Online Platform that will be used (Zoom)

- Incorporating the SartRural Platform in the digital training sessions.
- Enabling the involvement of users - trainees.
- Sharing the Internet Platform, as a link, to users - trainees.
- Starting the real-time e-learning.

In the context of the above, the digital module allowed the following:

- High resolution video.
- Full screen support.
- Support for exclusive real-time discussion for conference call participants.
- Screen-sharing service.
- Teacher conference call management services, such as:
 - Mute or unmute user.
 - Add or remove user from the conference call.
 - Ability to support multiple video conferences at the same time.
 - Ability to watch multiple video conferences simultaneously.
 - Ability to share a calendar.
 - Ability to record the conference call.
 - Ability to access and view the recorded videoconferencing.

List of participants and photos from the workshops are available in Annex II j-m). The training materials are available in Annex II n (zip file). Register of applicants is available in Annex II o. In total 20 individuals registered for the workshops, of which, 12 men and 8 women. The attendance was between 15 – 22 persons/workshop (including the team).

Stage 3: Evaluation

The evaluation was carried out after each workshop. It included the following questions:

1= No Opinion, 2=Strongly Disagree, 3=Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree	
The workshop lived up to my expectations	
The content was helpful	
The format was enjoyable	
The lecturer had a good understanding of the topics	

The lecturer dealt with the subject in a clear and easily understandable manner	
The length of the seminar was appropriate	
The course has helped me fulfill my learning goals	

The results from the evaluation are presented in Annex II p. The evaluation templates are available in Annex II q.

III. DELIVERABLE 5.8.4 DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION PLANS FOR ENTREPRENEURS

Development and implementation of Action Plans for entrepreneurs and unemployed was performed in three cases of selected participants in Pelagonia planning region in order to implement their business idea, provide support on legal, tax and other business sector related issues.

Potential participants of the pilot applications were:

- Entrepreneurs already active in the rural entrepreneurial sector of the Intervention Area.
- Unemployed individuals that wish to be active in the rural entrepreneurial sector of the Intervention Area for the first time.

The Deliverable was implemented in the following stages:

1. Preparatory Activities (Preparation Plan, Establishment of Regulations, Invitation for Participation).
2. Selection of participants (3 participants)
3. Analysis of the participants needs
4. Giving the participants counselling services in regards of legal, tax and other business related issues – mentor support
5. Preparation of Customized Action Plan for the entrepreneurs and the unemployed in order to implement their business idea.

1. Preparatory activities – plan, regulations, invitation

Preparation of plan

This initial activity was presented in the Timetable of works and includes: timing, sequence and duration of the proposed tasks, taking into account travel time (where appropriate), identification and timing, and envisaged resources to be mobilised. The timing, sequence and duration of the proposed tasks are presented per deliverable in the table. The Timetable of work is presented in Annex A

Establishment of regulations

The regulations were prepared similarly to the ones for the deliverable 4.3 “Pilot Applications of the Business Model” based on the experience from the Methodology developed for it by the project partner Bulgaria Economic Forum (Annex III a)

Publishing the Invitation

Invitation for the target groups to apply for participation was published online (web & Facebook). It encouraged the interested bodies to take part, while presenting the evaluation and selection criteria.

http://www.ceprosard.org.mk/MK/Aktuelnosti_info.aspx?cid=611

<https://www.facebook.com/CeProSARD/posts/4309744775711853>

Invitation is available in Annex III b. Application form is available in Annex III c.

2. Selection of participants

The received applications/information about the applicants were organized in a register (Annex III d). In total four individuals registered for the action plans, of which 2 men and 2 women. Evaluation procedure took place in order to produce the final list of participants (Annex III e). In accordance with the project document, in total, three selected individuals (two women and one man) participated in the activity for development of action plans.

3. Analysis of the participants needs

In order to have a clear indication of the profile of rural entrepreneurs that participate in the pilots, information on their needs were gathered and evaluated. Such evaluation indicated their specific needs and goals for potential investments, as well as the current problems related to their business activity.

4. Giving the participants counseling services in regards of legal, tax and other business related issues – mentor support

The selected applicants received counselling services in regards of legal, tax and other business related issues – mentor support. For these purposes, on-line meetings via the ZOOM platform were organized with each beneficiary separately (Annex III f).

5. Customized Action Plan

Based on the collected data, the best options for the participants were presented in customized Action plans (Annex III g-i) which includes issues related to the preparation of an initial business plan (activity, required investments, indicative budget, etc.), funding possibilities, etc. The Action Plan was specified per



pilot application, according to the data of each case. The topics of the Action plans were: 1. Promotion of rural tourism through utilization and extension of the existing sheep farm in the village of Suvodol (Municipality of Demir Hisar); 2. Production of healthy/organic meal product from cereals and seeds – village of Slavej (Municipality of Prilep), and 3. Bee keeping and production of honey in the village of Brailovo (Municipality of Dolneni). Business strategy issues were also examined, organization issues, management-utilization of human resources issues, restructuring-productivity improvement issues procedure.

Skopje, 30.05.2021

For the Contractor



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