



 Austrian
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Agency



LEAD4SHIRAK

ARMENIA/SHIRAK

ADC Contract Number: 6549-00/2020

EU Identification Number: ENI/2020/418-154

ANNUAL REPORT #2

Reporting Period: 01/10/2021-30/09/2022



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Advisory Board
ADA	The Austrian Development Agency
ADA CO	Austrian Development Agency Coordination Office
ADC	Austrian Development Cooperation
CD	Capacity Development
CLLD	Community Led Local Development
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
DoA	Description of Actions
EGSIM	Environment, Gender, Social Impact Management
ELARD	European LAG Association of Rural Development
ENRD	European Network for Rural Development
EU	European Union
EUD	Delegation of the European Union to Armenia
EUR	Euro
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GALAG	Georgian Association of Local Action Groups
GTC	Gyumri Technology Center
IMPACT	Increasing Migrants' Potential to Act for Development of Armenia
IP	Implementation plan
ITT	Indicator Tracking Table
LA	Local Authorities
LAG	Local Action Group
LDS	Local Development Strategy
LEAD	Action Document for Local Empowerment of Actors for Development
LEADER	Links between the rural economy and development actions
MTAI	Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure
NEAR	Directorat General Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OC	Outcomes
PA	Partnership Agreement
RA	Republic of Armenia
SSC	Strategic Steering Committee
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme



Project Synopsis

Project Title	LEAD4Shirak, within Local Empowerment of Actors for Development (LEAD) Programme
ADA Contract Number-	6549-00/2020
EU Identification Number	ENI/2020/418-154
Implementers	Austrian Development Agency (ADA)
Target country(ies) and region(s)	Republic of Armenia (RA) Shirak region
Type of contract	Contribution Agreement
Start of implementation period	01.10.2020
End of implementation period	30.09.2024
Implementation period in months	48 months
Annual report # and Reporting period	Annual report #2 01.10.2021-30.09.2022
Total amount of EU contribution	EUR 3,496,717
ADC co-financing contribution	EUR 1,000,000
Other contributions	N/A
Reported to	Delegation of the European Union to Armenia
Reported by	Office for Technical Cooperation of the Austrian Embassy



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The LEAD4Shirak Project has made considerable progress in the implementation of the LEADER approach in the Shirak region.

Main outcomes achieved in the reporting period are: i) Three Local Action Groups (LAGs) are established covering 47 settlements of the region. In total the LAGs count for 79 LAG members out of those around 30 % are women. ii) The partnership agreements were signed, delivery and steering structure on the LAGs' level are jointly worked out and agreed by LAG members. iii) Each LAG elaborated its participatory Local Development Strategy (LDS) with strategic priorities. iv) 133 expressions of interests were received following the first call for applications under the Project's grant scheme support. v.) Numerous communication & publicity activities ensured the visibility and information dissemination to LAGs and wider communities. vi) Trainings, study and exchange visits to Georgia, Sweden and Czech Republic were organised to increase the understanding of the LEADER approach, its added value and to build international partnerships with LAGs in Europe and the region.

Activities carried out during the reporting period (01.10. 2021 – 30.09. 2022)


Stakeholders became interested in the LEADER activities in the Northern Way and Aragats Valley LAGs in the Shirak region. Hence a call for submission of proposals for a **3rd LAG** was announced. This more competitive process also featured a different approach of LAG formation which is similar in EU Member States. Two groups of settlement submitted well prepared applications and were asked to merge to one LAG resulting in the setup of the **Central LAG of Shirak**.

The setup of the 3rd LAG required an additional baseline assessment of its defined area. The already existing **gender sensitive regional analysis with integrated baseline assessment**, elaborated in 2021, was updated to include the most recent data. Results of the baseline assessment are the basis for an accurate monitoring of the progress of the Project as well as the implementation of the Local Development Strategies of LAGs.

The elaboration of the **Local Development Strategies of LAGs** followed the practical guideline for LDS development elaborated by an experienced LEADER expert. A close work liaison with LAG members and working groups were key elements to ensure ownership and commitment on the local level. Discussions and exchange of ideas among LAG members were facilitated by Project's field advisor. External experts provided technical input on development opportunities in prioritised fields (agriculture, education, tourism) incl. the consideration of cross cutting issues (environment, gender, social inclusion).

The LAGs formation was completed by **signing Partnership Agreements (PA)** by LAG members. It was organised as an official ceremony to underline the commitment of LAG members. The organisational structure and mode of operations of LAGs, as laid down in the Partnership Agreements, is in line with the EU LEADER provisions and supplemented by local needs.

The establishment of the **steering & delivery structure of LAGs** was completed by the election of the LAG board and audit group by the assembly of LAG members. Given the small size of LAGs, the board is also in charge to assess and select project applications for funding. Furthermore, the recruitment of LAG managers, responsible for the operational functioning of the LAGs, was



supported. LAG offices are offered by local authorities, renting contracts are under preparation.

The **grant scheme manual** was developed for two types of projects: i) business development initiatives (profit generating) and ii) community development initiatives (non-profit generating). All way down from the call for applications to the final endorsement of the project applications are defined in the grant manual.

133 expressions of interests (phase 1) were submitted during the **first call for grant applications** from the Northern Way LAG and Aragats Valley LAG. Out of those, 72 were selected to prepare a comprehensive application (phase 2). The submission of expressions of interest is currently open for projects in the Central LAG (3rd LAG). Due to the later establishment of the 3rd LAG, the call for applications was published at a late stage than the call for the first two LAGs.

An **assessment of capacity development needs** was conducted by an external company. Required capacities and skills within the organisational structure of LAGs were identified in a participatory way by facilitating discussions within the LAGs. A comprehensive training plan for members of the LAGs, boards, audit groups and LAG managers was elaborated.

Communication & publicity activities were manifold like organisation of community events to promote LEADER principles (bottom up & partnership), delivery of wide information campaigns for calls for application for 3rd LAG and grant support, design and operating a **public dialogue forum** aired by a local TV station, intensive communication through social media channels. External companies were hired for the **branding of LAGs** incl. logo design and **website** development.

The **first international LEADER conference** in Armenia was organised jointly with UNDP/FAO aiming to increase the knowledge on LEADER and to provide input from the EC and other countries successfully implementing LEADER.


The **Participation in study /exchange visits and in international LEADER events was organised** to Georgia, Sweden and Czech Republic. Partnerships with LAGs across Europe and in the region were established.

Activities planned for the upcoming reporting period (01.10. 2022 - 30.09.2023)

The implementation of the **grant scheme** will be continued by a new call for applications for all three LAGs which is envisaged for the beginning of 2023. Business coaches will further support the elaboration of meaningful business plans for profit generating projects. The similar support was ensured for the community development initiatives conducted by the project team.

Training modules are developed and delivered to strengthen the capacity of LAGs / LAG managers to carry out their assigned functions like information sharing, networking, supporting project development, monitoring the implementation of the LDS.

Communication & visibility activities will target a wider audience depending on the actions agreed to advocate the LEADER approach in Armenia. The EU has initiated national-level and local level advocacy as a joint effort among ADA, UNDP/ FAO and the EU to enhance the awareness of the general population of the benefits of LEADER for Armenia. The communication plan will be adapted accordingly until the next reporting period, as well as local level advocacy plan will be developed accordingly.



The **mid-term evaluation** will be implemented by external evaluators which are selected based on their technical and financial offer.

An exposure trip to Austria including representatives of MTAI, marzpeteran, LAGs in Shirak and team members will increase the understanding of the LEADER approach and its delivery structure on local, regional, and national level.

Currently, LAGs are organised as **informal partnerships** – still lacking own legal personality, which hinders LAGs to apply for funds from any sources (donors, Armenian Government). To overcome this insecurity, the project will encourage LAGs to register as NGOs and obtain legal personality to apply for funds and to and provide services to the locals. The LAGs are also suggesting to have their own offices; the local authorities are ready to provide them land free of charge where the LAGs will be able to construct new buildings to have as an office, as well as to provide specific community services, for example, public libraries, tourism information centres, etc. It is worth to mention that LAGs state registration process will start from Nov., 2022 to May 2023 with the roadmap developed for each LAG taking into account their peculiarities and local context.