

**Evaluation of the “Support to Agriculture and Rural Development”
SARD Programme in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district and
neighbouring communities**

Report (III) Final Evaluation

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Abbreviations:

ATU	Administrative Territorial Unit
BA	Business Association
BSI	Business support infrastructure
CDP	Country Development Programme
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EB	European Business Association
ENPARD	European Neighbourhood Partnership Agriculture Rural Development
EU	European Union
EUD	European Union Delegation
EU MS	European Union Member States
GIZ	Gesellschaft für International Zusammenarbeit
HRBA	Human rights-based approach
IMC	Inter-municipal co-operation
LAG	Local Action Group
LEADER	Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale
LDS	Local Development Strategy
LPA	Local Public Authority
MARDE	Ministry of Agriculture Regional Development and Environment
NARDS	National Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy
NGO	Nongovernmental organisation
ODIMM	Organisation for SMEs Sector Development
RBISC	Regional Business Information and Service Centre
RD	Rural Development
SARD	Support for Agriculture and Rural Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIP	Small infrastructure project
SO	Specific objective
SME	Small medium sized enterprise
SWOT	Strength, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
ToR	Terms for Reference
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

1 Executive Summary

The Support for Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD) aimed at fostering confidence building measures by targeting regions and territorial units with special status. The overall objective was to increase development opportunities for the population of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district as well as neighbouring communities. Both areas are facing weak economic sector mostly depending on agricultural production, outdated public infrastructure and high outmigration due to lack of jobs in rural areas.

SARD was part of the EU Budget Support Programme to the Government of Moldova under the European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD). It was closely aligned with ENPARD interventions related to increase the competitiveness of the agri-food sector, sustainable management of natural resources and to improve conditions of living and working in rural areas. SARD had a budget available of 6,5 mill. EUR for a 3 years period 2016-2018. The implementation incl. entire project management and financial recording was organised by the SARD project team under UNDP with local coordinators in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district. A Steering Committee, called Board, representing the EU Delegation, UNDP, MARDE, AIPA, Executives of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district, ODIMM, EBA, was established to decide on strategic directions and overseeing progress of implementation.

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation looks to effects achieved by the interventions as well as to relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the programme design and implementation arrangements. To estimate effects the theory-based impact evaluation (“theory of change”) approach is applied. Beside quantifiable causal effects, aspects like “how” and “under what conditions” interventions work are analysed. Moreover, whether the programme addressed specifically women, youth, minorities, vulnerable groups, disabled persons. Data were collected from secondary and primary sources. Latter ones through semi structured interviews with beneficiaries, stakeholders, partners and SARD implementation team based on interview guidelines.

Overall Programme Evaluation

A strong commitment from Executive Committee of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district were given to SARD activities. Furthermore, the dialogue between the regions and the national authorities were enhanced on political and technical level. The LEADER Coordination Committee was established on national level on the initiative of SARD as well as LAGs’ Association and National Rural Network.

Several mayors stated that the cooperation and coordination between communes were significantly increased. Relations with neighbouring communities were reactivated by LEADER and IMC. Trust between communes with different ethnics (Gagauzian, Bulgarian, Moldovan) were strengthened.

SARD programme design and implementation show high *relevance* to address identified needs regarding empowering local people, improving service delivery of Local Public Authorities (LPAs), fostering economic development and intermunicipal cooperation and to create jobs. Human Right Based Approach was applied in programme design and implementation by focusing on reducing inequality and discrimination of women, youth, minorities, disabled persons and enhancing participation and inclusion of those. The programme’s objectives and outputs are relevant to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) identified under Country Development Programme (CDP) for the Republic of Moldova.

A high level of *efficiency* of SARD is given specifically related to costs per new job created (5,900 EUR), costs per trainee under 3-5-weeks entrepreneurship & employability trainings (488 EUR/trainee), high leverage (60%) of private contribution in SME support and overall project management & administration of 18 % of total budget taking into account high complexity and application & payment

organisation for 41 public infrastructure projects. Original budget was leveraged by 73% with an increased contribution from local and regional authorities.

A high degree of achievements regarding set targets could be reached, partly even more than planned. Like number of jobs created 250 (planned 100), revenues from sales of SMEs was 51% higher as planned, 292 trainees passed successfully trainings under Syslab Centre Comrat (planned 60), joint events organised 204 (planned 50), 41 communes could benefit from small infrastructure investments (planned 20). Following the *effectiveness* of SARD can be assessed as high.

The **sustainability** of SARD is ensured by several aspects. The combination of investment support with trainings, advisory and coaching of Local Public Authorities, small and medium sized enterprises contributed to capacity building for future activities. Several donors (EU, UNDP, Polish Solidarity Fund) are continuing the support for LPA, LAGs and SMEs. The Syslab Center Comrat has been partly integrated in the business association established under SARD and partly in the Regional Business Information and Service Centre (RBISC). Sustainability is also ensured by the involvement of MARDE in the overall steering of SARD but also on the technical level like for LEADER. Applying the HRBA in design and implementation of SARD activities ensures sustainability of local development. Protection of environment is a priority particular under IMC projects and small infrastructure projects.

Evaluation of Activities

The SARD activities were structured in 3 components: i) enhanced dialogue and community empowerment, ii) local entrepreneurship and development of SMEs and iii) small scale infrastructure refurbishment and promotion of IMCs. Each component comprised a series of activities with defined outputs and results. Main achievements are presented in the following:

Along the introduction of the **EU LEADER approach** a series of events took place on local, regional and national level incl. study visits to EU MS, awareness raising and mobilisation of local population. In total 3,815 participants (55% women) were involved incl. strategy and action plan development. 8 LAGs were established covering 44 localities out of this 7 Moldavian neighbouring villages. Impactful results were achieved by increasing democratic processes, degree of participation and consultation with rural people. 105 projects were realized with an impact on local business development, supporting social infrastructure for disabled children and youth, house for elderly people, income generation for rural women etc. LAGs include also neighbouring communities to facilitate cooperation and joint development. Generally, the LEADER approach was assessed as very successful tool to encourage cooperation and coordination of communities forming a LAG. The introduction of the LEADER approach under SARD stimulated the establishment of LAGs throughout the entire country. Practical experiences gained are transferred to LAGs in other regions.

30 SMEs, newly established and already existing, were selected for financial support. SMEs from different sector benefitted like agri-food, rural tourism, tailor workshops, manufacturing. Beside investment support advisory service for business planning and coaching of operation were organised. 179 new jobs were created, the public support was significantly leveraged by 60 % private contribution of SMEs and revenues from sales were much above planned (+ 51%) and reached an increase of 16 % from 2017 to 2018. Deadweight cannot be stated as most SMEs rely on provided support.

Syslab Center Comrat became part of SARD as training provider for employability and entrepreneurship. Operational costs and equipment were funded under SARD. In total 292 trainees passed successfully the trainings, the employment rate reached 98 %. Out of the entrepreneurship training 33 start ups were established creating 71 jobs (partly not full time). Trainees appreciated the high quality of trainings becoming better prepared to apply for a job. Additional IT skills were improved. After class coaching of trainees contributed to the high success rate in employment.

To improve the **business infrastructure** for economic development business weeks and business forums were organised with support of SARD. Two cross sectoral business associations were established in ATU Gagauzia and Taralchia district already counting 32 members.

Small scale infrastructure projects were supported in all 41 communities of the area. Socio economic development strategies were elaborated in participatory manner specifically taking into account to empower women, youth, minorities, disabled persons to participate in the process incl. public hearings. Various types of projects were financed to improve rural infrastructure (local roads, kindergartens, cultural centres, water sanitation, water supply) with impactful result on improving rural livelihood and environmental situation. Additional support was provided to LPAs to improve their service delivery by e.g. renovating house of majority (meeting rooms, public area, accessibility for disabled persons). Contribution from local & regional governments leveraged required contribution of min. 20% to >50%.

7 inter-municipal clusters (IMC) were established for the purpose of solid waste disposal in cluster villages and neighbouring communities. Support was provided to purchase trucks for solid waste disposal and containers. The current unclear legal situation for the establishment of IMC enterprises and long process of changing people's minds regarding waste collection hinders full operation of all 7 IMC clusters. At this stage 2 IMC clusters are operational (Congaz, Vinogradovca) while the remaining 5 clusters will start their services by 2019.

Recommendations

Recommendations addressed to UNDP

Regarding future programme designs less complexity in terms of type of interventions is recommended which could increase the efficiency of implementation. To use the experiences and procedures in place from AIPA for management and control of financial support instead of building own application & payment & control systems by sub-contractors or project team could help to save resources.

Support to SMEs could be linked to obligatory trainings on basic business administration, marketing, accountancy. Formalized trainings could be organized and individual advisory and coaching is limited to specific topics. In this way the successful combination of providing investment support and advisory / coaching can be continued with an increased efficiency.

Recommendations addressed to local and national governments

It is recommended that the gained capacity and technical understanding of LPAs in terms of technical project planning, budgeting, public procurement, asset and financial management are continued by regular trainings to update know ledge with recent requirements. In this way LPAs can continuously increase their capacity of investment and financial management.

The National Government is recommended to enables LAGs to become eligible for receiving financial support from the National Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy. It is highly recommended to clarify the current legislation in force regarding the establishing and registration of IMC enterprises. Furthermore, in the course of the financial decentralisation, LPAs should get the opportunity to set charges for use of public services like solid waste disposal. More generally the fiscal autonomy of local governments needs to be strengthened and lowering the dependency from state budget. LPAs could manage their budget for small infrastructure projects and maintenance work.

2 Context of the Evaluation

2.1 UNDP Country Programme document for the Republic of Moldova 2018-2020

The UNDP Country Programme 2018-2020 is based on a broad-based stakeholder consultation and was developed in line with national priorities and country's national strategies. Further efforts are made to pursue the European vector, achieving the SDG and to follow up the UNDAF 2018-2022 reg. diminishing poverty and corruption, reducing inequalities, establishing rule of law and fostering human rights and gender equality. The Country Programme is based on three pillars as follows:

Pillar 1 Governance, Human Rights and Gender Equality: Capacities of governments (national and local incl. assembly of ATU Gagauzia) will be enhanced to better address needs of those underrepresented in policy formulation and decision-making processes. In this way specific attention is given to empowerment of women, youth, minorities and disabled persons, improving advocacy and policy dialogue with those.

Pillar 2 Sustainable and inclusive growth is targeted to integrity-based business development supported by transparent, accountable and efficient service provisions. The new strategy for employment will combine efforts from UNDP, international organisations and Moldovan Governments to create an enabling environment for formal and innovative jobs. Specific attention is given to groups with low access to the labour market like women, minorities, youth, disabled persons.

Pillar 3 Climate change, environment and energy: Aims to strengthen the Governments' adaptive capacity regarding climate change and natural disasters. Resilient urban development is aimed by gender responsive and environmentally sensitive urban and spatial plans and fostering low carbon economy by innovative processes. Municipal infrastructure and waste management (incl. hazardous waste) are specifically highlighted for interventions as well as the creation of new jobs following the generation of renewable energy.

Each of three pillars addresses specific SDGs. The linkage of SARD programme's objectives with these SDGs is illustrated under sub chapter 5.2.1. "Relevance reg. SDGs".

2.2 European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD)

General aim of ENPARD is assisting the Government of Moldova in eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable and inclusive growth, to consolidate and improve democratic and economic governance and to foster confidence building by targeting regions with tense relationship with central authorities. Specific interventions under ENPARD are:

- Providing financial support to achieve policy objectives related to agriculture and rural development
- Promotion of agriculture and rural development policies and reform processes
- Improving service delivery and governance in agriculture and rural development
- Sustainable management of natural resources, biodiversity and water
- Fostering improved relationship between regions with specific status and central government

Support under ENPARD takes the form of budget support and complementarity support. The Sector Reform Contract (SRC) states the disbursements of funds to Moldova in dependence on the achievement of performance indicators. The SARD programme is part of the wider ENPARD Budget Support Programme, hereby a strong linkage is given between ENPARD intervention directions and SARD programmes' activities.

2.3 Country Strategy Documents

National Regional Development Strategy

The strategy provides a detailed socio-economic analysis of the development regions of Moldova which includes specific data and information on ATU Gagauzia reg. demographic and economic development trends. Of specific interest are aspects like a downtrend in economic investments (-8%), decrease of job positions in enterprises (-3.6%) and significant decrease of number of students in primary and secondary schools (-19%). To promote regional development the strategy targets 3 priorities:

- i) Ensured access of quality of services
- ii) Sustainable economic development
- iii) Improved governance in regional development

All three priorities are also addressed by SARD by offering support to LPAs to improve their services for communities and business sectors, to up-date communes' LDSs and to stimulate participation.

National Decentralisation Strategy

The National Decentralisation Strategy aims to build capacity of LPAs in line with the decentralisation reform process to increase their capability reg. financial and asset management. The overall objective is to boost local development processes and territorial co-operations. LPAs should have legal levers to stimulate business start-ups, job creation, providing advisory and trainings and establishing appropriate business infrastructure. Along the decentralisation reform process, LPAs should obtain autonomy to use tax revenues, receiving loans for investments, using local assets, land and buildings for interventions on local level. New forms of co-operations among like inter municipal co-operations, metropolitan areas or micro regions should be established to streamline resources and capacities for local development processes. Similarly, SARD was fostering capacity building of LPAs in local development and LEADER approach. Support is provided to improve service delivery to communities and businesses by trainings and small grants. LPAs received technical support to prepare small scale infrastructure projects and to establish inter-municipal co-operations.

National Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy 2014-2020

The National Agriculture and Rural Development (NARD) Strategy 2014-2020 identifies in its SWOT analysis most important aspects of development needs in agriculture and rural development. Development priorities are given to three main objectives related to i) increase agri-food competitiveness, ii) sustainable management of natural resources and iii) increase living standards in rural areas. SARD programme is strongly linked to the three main objectives under the NARDS and provided support incl. capacity building related to increase competitiveness of agri-food and rural enterprises and to improve the living standards in rural areas. Natural resource management is specifically targeted by small scale infrastructure projects and IMC projects aiming at improving the environmental situation.

Waste management Strategy 2013-2027

Proper waste management should be extended to rural areas by investments in containers and means of transport. Intercommunity landfills and waste management plans organising collection and treatment of waste (incl. dangerous waste) should help to introduce efficient waste management system incl. promotion and implementation of selective collection of waste. Awareness raising among households, enterprises and LPAs is required. SARD programme's activities related to the set-up IMC clusters for solid waste disposal and providing support for the purchase of equipment is closely linked to the Waste management Strategy 2013-2017.

Republic Moldova's Water Supply and Sanitation Strategy

Given the high share of rural localities (66%) with non-access to centralized water supply and water sanitation infrastructure a high need is given to improve the situation in rural areas. Existing infrastructure is often obsolete or non-operational, thereof investments in new infrastructure or

renovation of existing ones is needed. The strategy proposes to set up co-operations between communes and inter-municipalities entities could function as water operating companies in charge of managing and operation water supply and waste water collection / sanitation. Respective tariff systems have to be introduced to cover costs and to provide quality service. SARD programme contributed to the achievements of the Water Supply and Sanitation strategy by giving priority to small scale infrastructure projects targeted to water supply and sanitation as an essential factor to improve livelihood in rural areas.

2.4 Donor projects (selection)

Support to Local Public Authorities in ATU Gagauzia (SLPA)

is EU funded project being implemented in 2017-2019. The overall objective is to support and empower local authorities of ATU Gagauzia to implement and monitor development priorities in cooperation with Moldovan central authorities. The project strengthens the policy dialogue facilitation measures, promotion of good governance and socio-economic development of ATU Gagauzia. Implementation body is the Executive Committee of ATU Gagauzia. Among many of activities, support is aimed at improving local service provision and upgrade basic infrastructure in 20 municipalities, enhancing cooperation across the targeted districts, in line with local development strategies for enhanced regional and rural development.

Establishing Regional Business Information and Support Centre for the Gagauzia Region

is an EU funded project within Mayors for Economic Growth (M4EG) Pioneer Project, implemented in 2018 – 2020. The project's main goal is to improve the quality of life of Gagauzia's citizens by creating jobs, reducing migration and encouraging the region's overall economic development. The project develops a sustainable business support network of regional business advisory and support platforms. This network includes two main elements: a Regional Business Information and Support Centre (RBISC), and three local walk-in hubs. The Centre functions in 5 main directions: regulatory and institutional frameworks, human capital development, access to finance, external positioning and marketing. The entrepreneurship training of Syslab Comrat Centre will become part of RBISC services.

Gagauzian Modernization Convention – GAMCON

is an EU funded project in ATU Gagauzia.. Overall objective is to increase participation of civil society in public policy formulation and implementation, while focusing on confidence building measures between ATU Gagauzia and central government and promoting synergies between public and private sectors to enhance consensus building and mutual progress. The implementation is structured along three pillars: Towards modern Gagauzia, Active Youth – GYLP and Local development support. The main idea is to support particular ideas and initiatives of local activists and CSOs. Calls for proposal are organised aiming directly at small-scale projects.

Migration and Local Development

The project is implemented throughout Moldova (including ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district) by UNDP Moldova with the support of Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The main objective is to assist communities affected by migration to benefit from improved essential local services (namely water and sanitation, health, social and education services), and have access to income-generating opportunities (employment reintegration and business development support). Overall, 40 villages and cities from the Republic of Moldova are part of the project (25 communities - in phase I, and 15 communities - in phase II). Two villages from Gagauzia (Congaz and Copceac) and one commune from Taraclia district (Vinogradovca) are part of the project.

3 Baseline situation

Population and labour resources

In 2016 the population of ATU Gagauzia amounted 152,200 inhabitants with a share of 59.4% living in rural areas, Taraclia district counted 43,563 inhabitants with a share of 51.1% living in rural areas. The ATU Gagauzia is characterized by dense network of settlements, with a predominance of large rural settlements: on average 3,314 inhabitants. The share of population in working age amount 64.8% of the which reflecting a relatively high level of labour resources. The unemployment rate in Gagauzia reached 3.4% in 2015, well below the national average of 4.9%. The registered unemployed amounted to 1,086 people in Taraclia district in 2015.

Infrastructure and accessibility to public services

In 2016, the density of public roads was 24.8 km / 100 km² which is well below the national **average**. Also, compared to other regions, Gagauzia records the smallest network of local roads. The condition of local roads in the Taraclia district is much worse than the national ones. Insignificant funds were allocated for the rehabilitation of local roads, which led to their damage and complication of access to rural settlements in both areas.

The density of the **aqueduct networks** in Gagauzia is 46.7 km / 100km², and significant below the national average. A significant difference between urban and rural localities is given. While in urban areas the aqueduct is 83% of the habitable surface, the share is 63% in rural localities. Comparing the inter-district indicators of provision of housing stock with water supply, the Taraclia district exceeds the regional average level, but is inferior to the national level. The water quality is very low.

The **water sewerage network** of both areas is underdeveloped. This results from the low level of connectivity of the households to the sewerage services as well as the poor technologies applied for the treatment of waste water. The share of households with access to sewerage systems in Gagauzia was 16.5%, compared to 53.2% average of the country. Prior to the implementation of the SARD programme a sewage system existed only in 2 towns of Taraclia district (Taraclia city and Tvarditsa).

By 2016 in Gagauzia, the **infrastructure of solid waste management** was not developed. There is still a high level of pollution of soils, waters caused mainly by non-environmentally friendly habits and poorly developed infrastructure for the collection of solid and liquid wastes. There are about 300 tons of solid household waste in the region each day, which are currently collected and stored in about 65 landfills (garbage dumps) located on the outskirts of the localities. Most of these landfills are unauthorized. Taraclia district has an underdeveloped infrastructure for waste management, a centralized collection of household waste in rural areas is absent.

Agricultural sector and industry

In recent years, agricultural enterprises of ATU Gagauzia could better benefit from financing opportunities for the sector. Since 2007, the share of subsidies allocated to the agricultural sector in Gagauzia has increased by 2 times. In Taraclia district, the agricultural sector provides not only food security, but also determines the social shape of the district, as well as the standard of living of more than 65% of the population employed in the agricultural and industrial complex.

The food processing industry in Gagauzia has traditional ties with the agri-food sector of the region. The share of the food industry in the total industry of the region increased from 42.8% in 2011 to 49.8% in 2013. Some sub-sectors of the region, for instance wine production, have a significant share in the production of agro-industrial products in the country.

Entrepreneurship

The number of registered enterprises in Gagauzia steadily increased in the period 2010-2014 (an average of 2% per year), but decreased in 2015 by 2.7%, indicating a deterioration in the conditions for doing business during the economic crisis. By end of 2015, about 7,185 economic agents were registered in

the ATU Gagauzia. Out of those 91.2% belong to the SME sector. Despite the fact that in 2010-2015, the number of enterprises in the Taraclia district increased by 15%, at the same time the number of jobs decreased by a quarter, in particular in small and medium enterprises by 14%.

SMEs in ATU Gagauzia have been faced many problems in their activities related to both the quality of the business environment and internal problems, which is confirmed by survey data undertaken under the request of IDIS Viitorul in October 2016. About 41% of surveyed enterprises indicated intense competition as the main deterrent for business expansion, 31% high taxes, 26% lack of financing, 23% high prices for raw materials, 19% lack of labour force due to the outflow of people from the country and high interest on loans, 16% - the lack of technology.

Tourism development

Analysing the tourism industry of the ATU Gagauzia, it can be concluded that the region has quite a significant tourist potential, but the degree of its development is extremely low. Unused resources provide real opportunities for the development of tourism in the region, as well as for the creation of new jobs, as tourism is a complex activity and a link for many related industries (transport, agricultural and food enterprises, cultural institutions, crafts, etc.).

Taraclia district is one of the most attractive tourist areas, where there is a special tourist potential for the development of the tourism industry, primarily domestic and inbound. As a good example could serve Balaban Lake with a unique favourable wind rose.

4 Methodological Approach

The following chapter provides an abstract of the evaluation methodology as presented in Report 1 (presented in Annex 2) with additional explanation on sampling of interview partners. The guidelines for semi structured interviews are presented in Annex 2.

4.1 Purpose of the evaluation

Purpose of the evaluation is to assess whether the SARD programme met its overall objectives and the desired impacts. The evaluation looks at lessons learnt from the implementation approach and achieved results for future designs of similar programmes. Moreover, the evaluation will enable evaluators to develop practical oriented recommendations.

4.2 Scope of evaluation

The scope of the evaluation is targeted to:

- examine the extent to which SARD was relevant in the context of socio-economic situation, Sustainable Development Goals and HRBA.
- assess how far women, vulnerable groups, minorities and disabled persons have become involved and their needs were addressed in respective actions
- analyse the achievement of programmes’ objectives
- identify factors having an influence on performances of programme implementation
- assess the efficiency of the implementation system
- estimate the effects achieved in respect of the objectives of the programme and its activities, respectively, using the relevant result and impact indicators mandated by the SARD programme and other relevant evaluation guidelines as applicable
- develop lessons learnt and recommendations for further capacity development

The interventions of the SARD programme are assessed by answers to the evaluation questions. For this purpose, the evaluation frame was designed including a set of evaluation questions which should help to answer intervention specific questions. **Cross cutting issues** like gender equality, minorities, disabled persons, vulnerable groups of society, environmental aspects, level of innovation are covered. To estimate effects the theory-based impact evaluation (“theory of change”) approach is applied. Beside quantifiable causal effects, aspects like “how” and “under what conditions” interventions work / or do not work are analysed. The question whether interventions worked as expected to product desired effects is primarily assessed. This approach does not mainly result in quantified estimate of the impact, it produces a narrative.

4.3 . Data sources and statistics

Data collection is organised from primary and secondary data sources. All relevant existing data, documents and analyses are used as source for the evaluation work incl. national & sector strategies, national statistics, regional strategies & programmes, progress & monitoring reports were reviewed. Important for primary and secondary data and information is the reliability of the data. To ensure data credibility specific attention is put on source and validity of data and information.

Primary data collection was organised in form of face to face interviews based on semi structured interview guidelines with:

- EU Delegation of Moldova (representative dealing with SARD programme)
- Senior management of UNDP
- SARD programme managers (team leader, component leader, public procurement)

Stakeholders/ partners

- Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment/ Unit for Rural Development
- Regional and local authorities’ representatives (ATU Gagauzia, district Taraclia)

- SYSLAB Centre Comrat
- Subcontractors of SARD: Business Consulting Institute, Institute for Urban Development and Pro Consulting, technical engineers

Project beneficiaries

- Local Action Groups
- Trainees for employment and entrepreneurship (incl. start up support)
- Small & medium sized enterprises
- Municipal representatives benefitting from inter-municipal cooperation activities
- Communes benefitting from small infrastructure projects
- Communes benefitting from support to LPAs / institutional support project
- Representatives of business support infrastructure,

4.4 Evaluation outline

The evaluation looked to priority and specific problems concerning confidence building measures for sustainable development in agriculture and rural areas and attempted to quantify what has been achieved. The collected data & information is structured along the main activities under each of the 3 components of SARD. The evaluation of SARD activities included following steps:

- Brief overview of main intention of activities based on baseline & needs identified
- Objectives – targets – achievements (deviation)
- Design / planning of activity
- Appraisal of implementation mechanism
- Assessment of effects
- Answering to relevant evaluation questions

The evaluation approach included a series of evaluation questions which were answered by using the data and information received from the provided documents and completed by collection of information and data during interviews. Interviews with programme managers, stakeholders and beneficiaries are used to collect primary data (qualitative and quantitative). Specific attention was put to collect respective information on gender equality, minorities, vulnerable groups and disabled persons.

Sampling approach

A sample of 10 % of beneficiaries was selected but at least 1 interview was held per activity. Exception was the number of trainees for employment, a sample of 3 successful trainees was taken. When taking the sample, the geographical location (north / south), number of projects (more projects from ATU Gagauzia and less in Taralica district) and type of projects were considered. The latter criteria were related to SME grants provided to i) agri-food sector, ii) manufacturing and iii) service sector. The intention was to visit SME projects of various types and ones operated by women. The actual number of interviews with mayors (7 instead of 4) was higher as originally planned. Interviewed mayors could cover SME projects, small grants for improving service delivery and also IMC cluster projects.

No. Beneficiaries	No. Interviews.....
41 SIP and 7 IMC clusters	7 with Mayors (1 woman)
30 SME grant schemes	4 with SMEs' managers (2 women)
186 trainees of SYSLAB employment training	3 interviews with trainees (2 women)
8 LAGs	2 LAG Presidents
<u>2 business associations</u>	<u>1 business association.....</u>
Total	17 interviews with beneficiaries

Additionally, interviews were organised with the subcontractors of SARD programme responsible for the implementation of parts of activities like:

- Pro-Consulting SRL responsible for the implementation of SME support scheme
- Institute for Urban Development: responsible for IMC cluster study and to support the establishment and running of 7 IMC clusters and community profiling / socio economic development strategies
- Business Consulting Institute: responsible for community profiling / socio economic development strategies
- International expert on LEADER implementation
- Polish Solidarity Fund working on LEADER implementation

Interviews with selected stakeholders were organised with MARDE representatives (State Secretary, Head of Depart. of RD), Governor and deputy Governor of ATU Gagauzia, President of Taraclia district.

The list of persons (beneficiaries, stakeholders, sub-contractors) interviewed is attached in Annex 1 of this report.

Meetings for interviews were well organised by the SARD management and ideally held on the project sites. All interviews took place from 3rd-8th December 2018. Guides were developed for the semi structured interviews to ensure the collection of information & data from primary sources to complement the existing secondary data from annual progress reports, project data base, studies etc. Each interview guide includes a set of pre-determined questions with enough space for additional information. It was intended to collect experiences and impressions regarding the impact of SARD in terms of trust building in the targeted regions, empowering rural communities, economic development, improved service delivery, improved cooperation between local and national level.

Limitations of the evaluation work

Results and impacts have not been yet materialized for some programme's activities which is particularly true for IMC projects. The delay is mostly obvious by the rather high complexity of IMC projects, unclear legal situation to register IMC enterprises and scepticisms of rural households. As IMC projects have just started or will start by 2019 intended impacts on an improved environmental situation in villages or cost savings due to cooperation projects are not yet given and an assessment was not possible at this stage.

Given the short time period of the SARD programme (3 years) the monitoring period after investment of e.g. SME projects is rather short to assess whether planned achievements could be realized. Specifically, the conditions to create a min. number of jobs seems to be rather short to assess whether number of jobs were created and are safeguarded.

SARD has established a sound monitoring system which suits very well the data collections on input / output and results achieved throughout the programme implementation period. The system is accurate and has well defined indicators which provide disaggregated data on number of participants incl. share of women / number of events undertaken etc. No data occur in monitoring reports reg. the number / share of participants from minorities (e.g. Roma), disabled persons or vulnerable groups which were addressed in local development processes but data on participants are not specifically disaggregated to these groups.

5 Overall Evaluation of SARD programme

5.1 Objectives of SARD

The objectives of SARD are clearly defined in the intervention logic and are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Overall, specific objectives and budget planned / spent

Level	Objectives	Budget plan EUR	Budget spent EUR
Overall objectiv	To foster confidence building in the Republic Moldova by targeting regions + territorial administrative units with special status.		
Component 1/ Specific objectives	Comp. 1. Enhanced dialogue and community empowerment: 1.1. Enhanced cooperation between national + local authorities 1.2. Strengthened and empowered local communities actively participate in decision making + development process	754,00	705,170
Component 2/ Specific objectives	Comp. 2. Promotion of local entrepreneurship 2.1. Local entrepreneurship and SME development 2.2. Promoting employability +entrepreneurship by SYSLAB Comrat	640,000 258,762	607,360 226,019
Component 3/ Specific objectives	Comp. 3. Small-scale infrastructure and promotion of inter municipal cooperation 3.1. Improved quality of municipal services 3.1. Small-scale infrastructure projects	3,242,000	3,723,389
Others	Project management Facilities and administration	1,606,238	1,224,586
Total		6,500,000	6,486,524

Source: SARD Programme 2016-2018, Final Report SARD, Nov. 2018

5.2 General assessment of programme achievements

Trust building

SARD overall objective was to build trust between localities of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district and neighbouring communities. In this respect the LEADER approach specifically contributed to build or renew relations between the communes in targeted regions and neighbouring communities from Cahul and Cantemir as stated by all 7 mayors interviewed. In course of the local development process starting with awareness raising, capacity building of local communities to signing partnership agreements for setting up of LAGs the boundaries between Russian, Romanian and Bulgarian speaking participants were diminished. The inclusive and participatory approach has been enhancing g integrative development across regional borders. A good sense of cooperation and trust building has been achieved. IMC activities cover also cross-communities' co-operations, out of the 46 participating communes, 11 are "Moldovan" communes. The series of joint events (study visits, information sharing, community meetings, seminars, conferences) contributed significantly to trust building and enhancing co-operations.

Empowering local people

SARD programme has put efforts in awareness raisin and training to empower and involve local people with specific attention on inclusion of women, young rural dwellers, vulnerable groups. The development process of LDS and LAG strategies was based on a participatory inclusive approach giving local communities a strong voice along the entire process from identifying strength, weaknesses, needs and proposing development priorities, action planning and selection of projects for funding. LPAs were trained to build stronger relations with their communities in ways of consultation and public debates. Provided support to local people to become actively involved resulted in high participation in SARD activities.

Improved cooperation between national and regional level

The counterparts on national level, like the head of the Department of Rural Development and Policy, stated specifically that trainings, guidance documents and proposals are helpful and are integrated in the national work e.g. the introduction of the LEADER approach. The support provided by SARD in course of the modification of the Law on Subsidies for the implementation of the National Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy was particularly highlighted by the head of Department. Staff members of MARDE had also the opportunity to participate in study visits to EU MS and candidate country for capacity building of Rural Development Policy design and implementation with specific focus also on LEADER. MADRE and AIPA staff members could benefit from certified trainings provided by SARD experts.

In terms of improved cooperation between MARDE and the two regions the establishment of the LEADER Coordination Committee and the recently set up of LAG's Association are promoting coordination and cooperation between national, regional and local level. Given the fact that ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district are much more advanced in realizing the LEADER approach due to SARD, other regions can learn from their experiences and the national level can build its support for rural development (not only LEADER) on SARD experiences.

Cross cutting and Gender issues

Equal opportunities

SARD activities took specific attention on women's empowerment, involvement and participation in strategic development processes as well as in selection of projects for grant support. The scoring system of the SME grant scheme has foreseen to allocate more scores to projects submitted by women or young persons. In this way women and young people should be motivated to invest in new or existing businesses. Following this approach **equal opportunities of women and youth** were targeted by promoting their participation in development opportunities.

SARD supported projects, like in Chirsov village, by providing workshop equipment for the Centre working with disabled children and youth established. Local public authorities' houses in villages were equipped with accessible entrances for older and **disabled persons** in course of their refurbishment. Other projects were specifically targeted to **rural women** to generate own income from small business e.g. by supplying a small tailor workshop or small scaled kitchen offering warm meals. Given the overall objective of SARD to promote confidence building in the targeted areas many activities (establishment of LAGs under LEADER, IMC clusters) were designed to integrate neighbouring communities of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district aiming at overcoming **barriers of different ethnic groups** and managing development processes between three languages (Gagauzian, Bulgarian and Russian) as mentioned by mayors as well as LEADER experts and beneficiaries.

Environmental standards are still under development in Moldova specifically when it comes to implementation. A significant impact can be achieved by the IMC projects intending to close many unauthorised landfills in outskirts of villages as stated by mayors and IMC cluster experts. With support of IMC these illegal landfills are closed, and the collected solid waste is stored on legal landfills complying with environmental standards. The IMC projects foresee a regular waste collection from households, public institutions and enterprises in the villages which will be equipped with waste containers for storage of waste before disposal. Investments in small infrastructure (e.g. water sanitation, drinking water supply) improve the environmental situation in rural areas.

Innovation¹ was specifically fostered by the micro grant support provided by Syslab Center Comrat selecting most innovative projects. Also the LEADER approach is targeted to create innovative activities for businesses, local communities and social activities. The level of innovation is demonstrated by the wide range of various business ideas or community activities from briquet production out of agricultural waste, tailoring traditional costumes, workshop equipment for repairing clothes and furniture where specifically disabled young people can be trained and work and building a house for elderly people open for all LAG villages.

5.3 Relevance

The relevance was examined considering the project design to cope with i) identified strength & weaknesses and needs of the targeted area, ii) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of United Nations (UN) and iii) Human Right Based Approach (HRBA).

Relevance of SARD programme to address strength & weaknesses and need identified in the targeted regions.

The SARD programme includes a brief situation analysis of the area covered and identifies development priorities but does not contain a SWOT or needs assessment. The SARD programme refers to SWOT analysis and needs identified under several other national strategies like National Regional Development Strategy, National Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy, National Decentralization Strategy, National Waste Management Strategy. These documents were analysed for the assessment of the relevance of the SARD programme's design to cope with those identified needs in addition to own defined priorities. For this purpose, a matrix is developed as a tool to connect specific objectives of the 3 SARD components incl. proposed interventions with identified needs / opportunities of reviewed strategies. The relation is scored in strong – middle – low impact as illustrated in Table 2 (see page 19).

to the evaluators' opinion, the design of the SARD programme is highly relevant for both regions, ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district. Supporting the economic sector combined with business start-ups, trainings, improving public infrastructure and involving local communities in a multisectoral approach are key elements of development processes on local and regional level. Given the smart combination of these elements, SARD activities were clearly targeted to the development needs of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district. Following, the SARD activities had a strong relevance to foster economic and integrated local development, trust building and improving the co-operation on local, regional and national level by taking into account gender equality and needs of vulnerable groups, minorities and disabled persons.

Relevance of SARD programme in relation to the UN Sustainable Development Goals

The relevance of the SARD programme was also examined by linking targets and indicators with the SDGs of UN. The UNDP Country Development Programme defines under the three development priorities linkages to the 11 SDGs. For this purpose, a matrix was developed illustrating an assessment to which extent SARD programmes' overall and specific objectives (incl. indicators) are linked to the SDGs defined in the CDP for Moldova. In addition to the 11 defined SDGs of the CDP Moldova, SDG no 6 on "clean water and sanitation" was selected as relevant for component 3 of SARD. The matrix is presented as Table 3 (page 20) and reflects the evaluators' opinion on the extent of linkages.

Concluding from this exercise a strong relevance of SARD overall and specific objectives as defined in the logical framework is given specifically related to no poverty (SDG 1) gender

¹ Innovation on local level is considered to introduce some new activities and approaches which did not exist before the intervention. It is not meant to introduce a global innovation

equality (SDG 5), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), industry & innovation & infrastructure (SDG 9), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), reducing inequalities (SDG 10) and peace & justice & strong institutions (SDG 16). Less linkage can be seen between SARD programme interventions to climate action (SDG 13) and responsible consumption & production (SDG 12).

Table 2: Matrix of analysing the relevance of SARD with development needs of the area

Selection of needs/ opportunities under national strategies	Participation of local/regional level in national policy design	Strengthening &empowering of LAP in policy implementation	Inter-municipal cooperation mechanism	Creation of jobs in rural areas	Economic development in rural areas	Know ledge transfer to foster employment & entrepreneurship	Strengthening business infrastructure	Improving social services (health in communes	Construction & repairing physical infrastructure	Empowering & involvement of local people in local development	Sustainable management of natural resources	Increasing capacities in project development for Reg. Dev., + ARD support schemes
Task level objectives/ activities of SARD												
Enhanced cooperation on ARD between national authorities and local authorities: reviewing policy documents, LDS development, defining projects, joint activities	xxx ²	xxx	xx	xx	xxx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	x	xx
Strengthened and empowered local communities actively participate in decision making process: community capacity development, LEADER establishment	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx		xx	xx	xxx		xx
Local entrepreneurship and SME development: trainings, support to business associations / LPAs, start-up grants for SMEs	x	x	x	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	X	X	xx	xx	xx
Promoted employability/ culture of entrepreneurship through Comrat SYSLAB Centre: training of job seekers, start-ups, train the trainer, grant competition,	X			xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	x	x	xx	xx	xx
Improved access and quality of municipal service provision, as prioritized by LDS Training of LPAs, small grant support to LPAs to improve service delivery	X	xxx	xxx	x	xx	x	xx	xxx	xxx	xx	x	xx
Small scale infrastructure projects Development & implementation of infrastructure projects, fostering inter municipal cooperation,	X	xx	xx	xxx	xxx	x	xxx	xx	xxx	x	xx	xx

² xxx: strong impact, xx: middle, x: low

Table 3: Matrix of analysing the relevance of SARD programme design with SDGs

Sustainable Development Goals	1 No Poverty	4 Quality education	5 Gender equality	6 Clean water sanitation	8 Decent work, economic growth	9 Industry, innovation, infrastructure	10 Reduced inequality	11 Sustainable cities and communities	12 Responsible consumption and production	13 Climate action	15 Life on land	16 Peace, justice strong institutions
Overall / Specific Objectives (SO) / related indicators												
Overall Objective: To foster confidence building by targeting regions with specific status; People from Gagauzia, Taraclia + neighbouring communities benefit from improved development opportunities incl. NARDS	xxx ³	xx	xxx	xx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xx	xxx	xxx
Officially registered unemployed reduced (%) 1,200 persons benefit from improved services Successful implementation of ARDS in region	xxx	xxx	xxx	xx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xx	xx	xx	xxx
Specific Objective (SO): Enhanced dialogue & community empowerment												
50 joint activities organised on local regional, national level (seminars, workshops, study visits) with mixed balanced participation	xx	xxx	xxx	x	xxx	xx	xx	xxx	xx	x	xx	xxx
Comprehensive community participatory capacity development conducted in 30 communities	xxx	xxx	xxx	xx	xx	xx	xxx	xxx	xx	x	xxx	xxx
Improved cooperation between local authorities, businesses and civil society organisations	xxx	xx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xx	xx	xx	xxx
SO: Local entrepreneurship SME development												
Strengthened rural business support infrastructure	xxx	xxx	xxx		xxx	xxx	xx	xxx	xxx	x	xx	xxx
Functional SYSLAB Centre, entrepreneurship & employability training, sharing best practices	xx	xxx	xxx		xxx	xx	xxx	xx	xx	x	x	xx
SO: Small scale infrastructure projects, promotion inter-municipal cooperation												
20 small scale infrastructure projects implemented	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx
7 models of intermunicipal local public services created (at least one connecting communities across ATU)	x xx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx

³ xxx: strong impact, xx: middle, x: low

Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA)

Activities of SARD programme all way down from community mobilisation, enhancing dialogue and organising community meetings and joint events (study visits, information sharing), designing and implementation of grant supports took into account main principles of the Human Rights Based approach. In this sense rural people were recognised as key actors in local development by identifying their needs and being involved in strategic and action planning. The HRBA was applied in the overall community awareness raising, mobilisation process as well as throughout profiling and strategy development process in course of the elaboration of the socio-economic development strategies for 41 localities. Design of trainings and grant scheme support under SARD were targeted to close gaps of disparity and to promote, equality and accountability.

By introducing the EU LEADER approach and establishing 8 Local Action Groups (LAGs) SARD essentially contributed to promote main principles of HRBA like dignity and worth of every person by giving everybody in the community a voice and chance to become involved. This approach was facilitated by a wide range of activities on information sharing events, trainings and community meetings to foster dialogue between public authorities and local people. Especially marginalized groups (e.g. minorities, socially excluded people) have participated and became involved.

5.4 Efficiency

Efficiency looks to the resources employed and the results achieved. Resources spent were related to achieved outputs. Generally, the efficiency can be assessed as high by the evaluators. The following table provides calculations of the efficiency under the 3 Components.

Table 4: Calculation of efficiency for activities under 3 Components⁴

Component / objectives	Output / costs	Efficiency
Component 1 / Enhanced dialogue and community empowerment		
1.1 Joint events (study visits, seminars etc),	6 study visits to EU MS, costs: 122,254 EUR for 72 participants (61% women) 8 in country study visits costs: 12,381 EUR for 308 participants (58% women)	20,375 EUR /study visit EU MS 1,697 EUR/participant to EU MS 1,547 EUR /study visit 40 EUR /participant
1.2 Community empowerment & mobilisation in 41 localities, improved services (micro grant)	Update/ development of 41 LDS = 55,648 EUR Mobilisation & empowerment +micro grant for 41 LPAs Total: 409,678 EUR, number of participants / beneficiaries: 3,815	1,357 EUR / LDS 9,992 EUR /LPA 107,12 EUR / participant
Component 2 / Promoting local entrepreneurship and SMEs development		
2.1 Business infrastructure + internat, expert	Set up 2 business associations, training, total costs 60,438 EUR	30,219 EUR / business association incl. costs for experts
2.2 Syslab Centre Comrat	Total costs for salaries, equipment, running costs (minus micro grant) = 143,519 EUR 294 trainees Total micro grant 33 start ups à 2,500 EUR= 82,500 EUR Number created jobs by start-up =71 (incl. part time)	488 EUR / trainee in average of 3- or 5-weeks training 2,357 EUR/job (based on assumption that 50% are part time jobs)
2.3.SME grant support	Total investment (private + public) =1,057,276 EUR, 179 jobs created	60 % leveraging public support by additional private spending 5,900 EUR / formal FTE job

⁴ Calculation of efficiency of SARD activities is based on preliminary figures provided in Nov. 2018

Component 3 / Small scale infrastructure and promotion inter-municipal cooperation		
3.1 Small scale infrastructure projects	Total amount: SARD+ 20 % local contribution =2,415,736 EUR + additional regional/local contribution of 1,765,365 EUR= 4,181,101 EUR beneficiaries: 155,102 (50 %women)	73 % leveraging original budget by additional local & regional spending Costs / beneficiary: 27 EUR
3.3 IMC based on most advanced in Comrat	Total support 108,000 EUR + 20 % local contribution= 129,600 EUR Benefitting population (status 12/2018): 1,600 households,15 legal entities, 15 enterprises	Costs of equipment / household + entities (without operation costs) = 80 EUR should be reduced in 2019 when services is extended to 2 more communities and more households will take part in service
Project Management/ administration, facilities	1,224,586 EUR	ca. 18 % of total budget

Source: Financial monitoring, Final report, SARD 2018

Efficiency of the overall programme implementation management can be stated as an outcome of the evaluators' examinations. The costs initially planned for project management, technical guidance, were reduced by about 400,000 EUR (see Table 4 above) due to arrangements in staffing modalities. This amount was reallocated to Component 3 small infrastructure projects (SIPs) resulting in an increased available amount. The share of project management & administration costs is about 18 % of total budget. This % could be assessed as rather high (comparable projects spent 10-15 % for project management & administration costs) considering that some services were outsourced to private consultancy companies. Taking into account that the SARD core team had to establish and manage the SIP support scheme working with 41 LPAs and to coordinate the implementation of a complex programme with many different activities the expenses for project management & administration were efficiently used and are justified.

Looking to the efficiency of some activities in more details as presented in the table 4 above: Study visits to EU MS amount about 1,697 EUR / participant, which is rather high. This amount has also to be seen in the light, that some study visits took place in EU MS (Italy, Portugal, Germany, Austria) with high costs for accommodation, food and transportation. Given the very advanced implementation of LEADER in these EU MS, it is justified to visit these countries to learn from long-term practical experiences and know how in addition to new EU MS LEADER approach. In country study visits were highly efficient (40 EUR / participant) and facilitated the exchange of experiences.

The costs for creation of one formal full-time job under SME grant support costed about 5,600 EUR which is assessed as highly efficient. The costs/ job created under the microgrant of Syslab entrepreneurship training are nearly 50% lower although the jobs created are part time jobs and/ or seasonal jobs. Interesting is also the increase of private contributions of SMEs to 60% (required 20 %) leveraging the public support significantly.

The costs calculated / trainee (average of 3-or 5 weeks training) amount 488 EUR which proves good efficiency given the after-class mentoring and coaching of trainees causing additional efforts from Syslab trainers.

Expenses of about 4,6 mill. EUR (SARD+ regional & local contribution) could improve the livelihood of 155,102 local people by implementing small-scale infrastructure projects. SARD support was leveraged by 73 % by additional local & regional contributions to original budget. About 27 EUR / inhabitant were spent.

The costs of IMC investment (without operational costs) is 80 EUR / household or entity which is rather high. Although the IMC project is still at its beginning and more households will use the service of solid waste disposal and costs of investments and operational costs can be split among more service users which will increase the efficiency.

5.5 Effectiveness

Effectiveness of SARD is related to which extend the programme interventions supported the achievements of the programme's objectives. Evaluators' opinion is that SARD's interventions contributed to overall and specific objectives acc. to the intervention logic resulting in a high effectiveness. Given the wide field of general and specific objectives the design of programme required a mixture of various interventions to capture the targeted directions of the SARD programme.

Component 1 / Enhanced dialogue and community empowerment: 204 joint activities on trust building measure were implemented while 50 events were planned. From community capacity building and mobilisation all 41 localities could benefit instead of originally planned 30.

8 Local Action Groups under the LEADER approach were established and are operational as planned, number of trained local people is 3,815 (55 % women).

Component 2/ SME development and promoted entrepreneurship: SARD could contribute significantly to the creation of 250 new jobs (planned 100) under SME development and micro-grant support. The number of trainees of Syslab Centre Comrat reached 292 (planned 60), employability success rate is nearly 96 % (planned 60%).

While project activities to strengthen the business-infrastructure were expected to achieve more results beside the establishment of 2 business associations and organisation of business weeks.

Component 3 Small scale infrastructure: The number of communes with improved public infrastructure could be increased from planned 20 to 41 by a strong financial commitment from regional authorities and also reallocation of SARD budget. 7 IMC clusters were established as planned.

5.6 Sustainability

High attention was put throughout the design of activities and implementation arrangements to make achievements sustainable following SARD management. This is given by a wide range of capacity building events on local and regional level for small & medium sized enterprises, LPAs and civil society members. The aim was to increase the capacity of private and public sector to manage and participate in local development and to access funds for future projects. As regards investment projects economic viability, technical feasibility, asset and financial management were key elements in selection and providing additional support going beyond completion of the investment project. Many activities (e.g. SME SIP, IMC support) provided additional coaching, mentoring and advisory service during first phases of operations of new business and investments. During interviews beneficiaries highly appreciated this approach combining investment support with advisory service, support in procurement of equipment, coaching and training resulted in an increased capacity. In this way beneficiaries could learn from this support for implementation and operation of current and future projects.

SARD's intensive support in preparing applications, technical design, business planning, procurement organisation was designed in a way that beneficiaries had the chance to increase their capacity to approach other funds in the future. Technical drawings for SIP projects were designed to include already more infrastructure investments beyond SARD support.

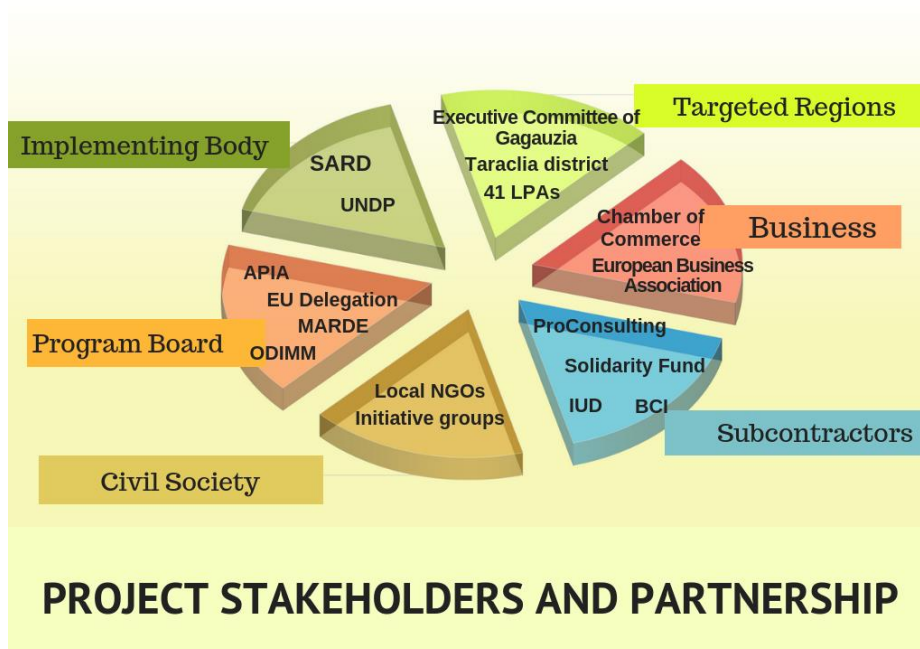
Given the continuous support from various donors, LEADER is continued after SARD programme's closure. As stated by the representative of the EU Delegation, further support for LAGs will be provided by a new programme "Modernisation of rural areas" starting in year 2019. The Polish Solidarity Fund will also continue its support for LAGs in Moldova. The EU supports under the programme "Mayors for Economic Growth" the Regional Business Information and Support Centre, situated in Comrat, continuing trainings for start-up businesses. The EU programme "Support to Local Public Authorities in ATU Gagauzia" provides support for LPAs to improve infrastructure of localities. Regarding future support, the action plan of the

NARDS 2017-2022 was amended by RD measures like i) village renewal, ii) diversification of rural economy and iii) improving public rural infrastructure offering financial support for further investments.

5.7 Stakeholder Mapping

SARD programme was implemented by involving various stakeholders on the local, regional and national level having different functions and providing input to the implementation. The following figure illustrates the partners and stakeholders involved:

Figure 1 Project stakeholders and partnership



5.8 Monitoring and Evaluation design

SARD has a solid intervention logic which is well structured with indicators at each level. Selected indicators are mostly SMART (simple, measurable, achievable, realistic, time bound). Three specific objectives are defined corresponding to the 3 components of the programme; each component has 2 results. The intervention logic consistent and well-articulated.

SARD management established a sound monitoring system by collection of relevant data and information for ongoing monitoring on progress of the implementation. The monitoring system included also the status of implementation of projects which received financial support under SARD activity. Sub contracted companies had to regularly report on their activities with respective outputs and results achieved. Quarterly and annual progress reports on implementation status of the programme were prepared incl. financial monitoring. Facts and figures were substantiated by descriptions providing also qualitative information. The monitoring system provides sound data and information for the final evaluation exercise. Lacking is a breakdown of participants in events by representatives of minorities, disabled persons and other vulnerable groups of society beside share of women and youth.

6 Evaluation of Activities

Component 1 Enhanced dialogue and community empowerment

6.1 LEADER

Objective

Overall aim was to foster democratic processes on local level by enabling social communities, business sector and local public authorities to become jointly involved in local development process based on common interests. Specific intentions were given i) to raise awareness, mobilize and provide trainings on the EU LEADER approach, ii) putting LEADER in practice by setting up and operationalize 8 LAGs and iii) to promote the LEADER approach on the national level.

Design of activity

The introduction of the LEADER approach included various sub activities related to a smooth start of LEADER in the targeted regions, to inform, train and involve local people in the development process and to elaborate an overall frame for the LEADER implementation on the national level benefitting from the lessons learnt under SARD. The activities included:

- Awareness raising, mobilisation informing, training of local people and institutions enabling them to actively become involved in local development processes by promoting a participatory bottom up approach
- Defining LAGs' territories, signing territorial partnership agreements incl. approval by LAGs' councils
- Working groups for LAGs' 5 years strategies
- Grant agreement for financing selected LAGs, signed by accountable body
- Study visits, information sharing events, community meetings, public debates, website
- Local, regional, national events like national LEADER Forum, facilitation of contacts with regional authorities (Bashkan), additional trainings for national / regional public authorities on LEADER approach.
- Legal study on registration and operation of LAGs to support MARDE
- Set up of institutional structure on the national level like LEADER Coordination Committee under the advocacy of MARDE, Associations of LAGs, National Rural Development Network

Implementation

The introduction of the LEADER approach and setup of 8 pilot LAGs were accompanied by a series of events like workshops, trainings, study visits, community meetings, information sharing events etc. In this way local people and institutions could be informed, understand and becoming involved in local development processes. Given the wide range of activities for the introduction of LEADER and setting up 8 pilot LAGs additional expertise was required. An international LEADER expert was contracted to provide methodical guidance and technical support on the overall process of LEADER introduction.

Additionally, the local branch of the Polish Solidarity Fund was contracted to facilitate mobilisation of local communities and providing technical assistance in the strategic planning process of LAGs as well as coaching for community communication and establishing partnerships. Both, the international expert, overseeing the entire process, and the Polish Solidarity Fund worked on the local level and in close cooperation with SARD management. The LEADER implementation was mainly done 3 phases

- i) Setting up approach defined based on guidelines and best practices, facilitation of community mobilisation and communication, capacity building
- ii) Signing of partnership agreements by members, establishing LAG bodies (LAG board, selection council, audit council, accountable body)
- iii) Call for applications and selection of projects

Given the unclear legal provisions for the registration and operation of LAGs the decision was taken to establish LAGs as partnerships with an accountable body responsible for administrative and financial management incl. appointing LAG management.

Achievements

- 8 pilot LAGs established by signing partnership agreements, covering 44 localities of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district, incl. 7 Moldavian localities from Cahul, Cantemir and Basarabeasca districts
- About 141,484 inhabitants in 44 localities are part of a LAG
- 40,000 USD grant support / LAG to cover operational costs and supporting projects
- 105 projects selected and implemented (out of 235 applications) by LAGs
- Structure and governance of LAGs established
- Handbook as guidance documents to introduce LEADER on the local level developed for sharing on national level
- Study on legal provision for registration and operation of LAGs in Moldova prepared and shared with MARDE
- Creation and support LEADER website, legal support to set Association of LAGs
- 2 partnership agreement signed for transnational projects (“Balkan cheese”, “Rural tourism”)
- Series of events took place on local, regional and national level incl. study visits to EU MS with 3,815 participants (share of women 55%) see Table 5.

Table 5 Overview on LEADER events number of participants

Type of event	Target group	No of participants (no female /male)	Purpose
8 study visits to EU MS + Serbia	MARDE, RDAs, regional authorities, LPAs, businesses, community members	72 (43/29)	Learning from best practices
2 SARD LEADER conferences	LAG representatives from Moldova	610 (368/242)	Visibility, networking
LEADER information sharing events	Representatives of local, regional public administrations, businesses, civil communities	187 (110/77)	Information exchanges, lessons learnt
5 Local, regional, national events	National, regional, local stakeholders	110 (76/34)	LEADER promotion
Certified training	Representatives of MARDE, AIPA, RDAs	37 (26/11)	Capacity development
Discussion with Bashkan, President of Taraclia	Bashkan office, LAG representatives, LPAs	30 (18/12)	Informing, achieving commitment
Opening event of LAG office (Eco Bugeac)	LAG members, regional authorities,	65 (28/37)	Informing, activation of local community
Session on LEADER experiences	Representatives of RDA of Gagauzia	15 (4/11)	Information sharing, experiences
95 Community meetings reg. call for proposals “Towards prospering Villages”	Local communities, civil society, business sector, LPAs	2,541 (1,350/1,191)	fact finding missions, local events reg. call for proposals
7 Strategic planning regional events	Regional and local representatives	148 (86/62)	Workshops, focus groups discussions

Source: SARD final report, 2018

Impact:Share of population covered by LAGs:

Out of the total population of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district (205,900) about 61 % are part of a LAGs. From the 7 neighbouring villages (Moldavian) about 15,040 inhabitants are covered by a LAG.

Increased awareness and understanding among civil society, LPAs and economic sector built on own endogenous potentials to identify and appreciate local values, culture and traditions for the benefit of development. The process and approach taken ensures a comprehensive awareness raising and capacity building enabling local communities incl. civil society, business sector and LPAs from different villages to design and implement their local priorities for a balanced territorial development. Specifically, women, youth, minorities and disabled persons were empowered to become involved in the bottom up approach.

Set up of institutional structure on the national level like LEADER Coordination Committee under the advocacy of MARDE, Associations of LAGs, National Rural Development Network and elaborating a legal analysis on the best way to register and operate LAGs for the benefit of the entire country.

Enhancing cooperation and trust building between communes / villages

As stated by the international LEADER experts working intensively with communities, language barriers were obvious at the beginning of first community meetings leading to Russian / Bulgarian /Romanian speaking groups. Facilitating the bottom up approach and common idea of local development under the LEADER, participants grow together, and language barriers became less important. Mayors of Congaz, Carbalia, Budai (members of LAGs with Moldavian villages) confirmed during interviews that barriers and sceptics were broken throughout the joint work on strategies of LAGs, action planning and “old” relations could be reactivated.

Interviews were conducted with 6 mayors regarding their experience with the LEADER approach. Common tenor of mayors was “LEADER is fostering cooperation NOT competition”. This is specifically proven by implementing first LEADER projects. Sharing of available limited resources (40,000 USD / LAG) was jointly agreed. Size and type of projects varied by LAG. Some LAGs have selected different types of small / micro projects of private sector (e.g. small kitchen, workshops) and small commune projects. While another LAG decided to use available funds for one joint project (e.g. building of house for elderly). In this way the local contribution was leveraged by additional funding from a donor. All communes of this LAG have, depending on their number of inhabitants, shares of room in the house for elderly persons.

Answer to evaluation questions:

To which extent have supported activities increased capacities of rural actors to preparing, developing local development strategies and activities?

Number / type of information and trainings events to promote participation in local development: In total 95 community meetings, 8 study visits and series of trainings, took place for the purpose of capacity development incl. study visits, conferences, community meetings, trainings, workshops, information sharing events to foster understanding and becoming involved in local development.

Share of participants with raised awareness / know ledge (%): LAG members and MADRE representatives stated explicitly that the provided trainings, study visits,

information sharing events increased the capacity of local people for a successful introduction and operation of LEADER. The overall result of a questionnaire filled in by participants of a study visit to Poland illustrates that for 57 % of participants the information gained was above expectations and 43 % of participants the study visit met expectations.

Share of various sector representatives involved in preparation of development strategies: Balanced composition of civil society representatives, business sector and public authorities became involved in the development of LAGs' strategies

Share of women involved (%): The share of women involved in all type of events under LEADER is about 55 %

To which extent local development strategies were implemented?

Number / type of projects selected / implemented under LAG strategy:

So far 105 projects were selected and are implemented under the 8 LAGs. Types of projects vary from infrastructure projects, supporting social institutions (centre for handicapped children), cultural projects (purchase of traditional costumes for folk dancing / singing groups), micro projects in private sector (equipping small kitchen, tailor workshop) to bigger commune investments (e.g. house for elderly persons).

The implementation of LAGs' strategies will further be promoted by e.g. EU programme "Modernisation of rural areas" being launched in 2019 with a budget of about 1 mill. EUR. The Polish Solidarity Fund will continue its support for LAGs in Moldova by supporting implementation of projects and LAGs' operations. Eastern European Foundation is providing funds accessible for LAGs. Furthermore, ATU Gagauzia has already announced to further support the LAGs and a coordination unit will be established to coordinate activities for LAGs. The Dep. of RD and Policy under MARDE is continuing its efforts to make LAGs eligible for receiving support under the NARDS.

Composition and decision-making process in selection council of LAGs

Composition and tasks of selection council are defined in the partnership agreement; the selection council is composed out of civil society, business sector representatives having 50%+1 votes and public authorities' representatives having 49% votes.

Component 2 Local entrepreneurship and small and medium sized enterprises development

6.2 Business support infrastructure

Objectives

The specific objective of this activity under Component 2 of the SARD programme was to develop Business Support Infrastructure (BSI) supporting rural development, to promote economic development of the targeted region, to improve quality of the business and investment climate.

Design of activity

To better identify priority actions for supporting economic development of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district, as well as neighbouring communities, a review (capacity development and needs assessment) of existing business support infrastructure was conducted. Based on these findings an intervention package to enhance the capacity of the regional business support infrastructure was developed. Additionally, at least 2 sector business associations should be established as part of the intervention package measures. A range of events, most of them organized for the first time in the targeted regions, aimed at supporting LPAs in the promotion of investment opportunities, and strengthen LPAs capacities to interact with businesses and local community members.

Implementation

In course of conducting the review on the existing business support infrastructure in 2016, business support organizations, SMEs, LPAs and their economic and agriculture departments were interviewed. Basically, the findings of the review, revealed that the BSI is at an early stage of development with few active organizations, especially in Taraclia district. A regular and close dialogue between regional/local authorities and private business community was lacking and an effective business association does not exist.

Based on the mentioned findings an *Intervention Measures Package* was developed to upgrade the BSI in the targeted regions. As a priority measure, SARD programme provided technical and grant assistance for establishment and start up activities of 2 cross-sectoral Business Associations in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district.

The actual launching process to support creation of at least two associations started in 2017. SARD assisted authorities from Gagauzia and Taraclia in the organization of a four days-long business event “Business Week Gagauzia and Taraclia 2017”. The event was the starting point for initiating two cross-sectoral business associations (BA). Later in 2018, the associations were registered and started their official activities. Governing bodies of the associations were elected, and management hired and trained. SARD provided start-up grant operational support.

Members of BAs received methodological and training support from Czech experts in Moldova, followed by study trips of associations’ members and managers to EU MS.

A new initiative was launched in 2017, “*Agribusiness week*”, where local businesses have the possibility to learn about development opportunities from national support organizations and donor support programs, as well export mediators.

Achievements

- 2 Business Associations (BA) were established in 2018. Gagauzia BA “NEXT” has 20 members. Taraclia BA has 12 members. Governing bodies were elected, management hired and trained. SARD provided start-up grant operational support.

- BA “NEXT” has successfully applied for support (60,000 EUR) for implementation of EU-Funded Eastern Partnership Programme to establish regional Business Hub.
- 7 trainings on business associations principles, strategies, organizational and operational formats to 32 representatives of SMEs – potential members of 2 BAs.
- One-day training seminar on time management, task prioritization for economics department of Gagauzian executive body (Bashcanat);
- Gagauzia Investment Forum, “Invest Gagauzia 2016” enhanced agreements on investment projects of 1 mill. USD.
- “Invest Gagauzia 2016” gathered more than 300 participants from over 20 countries.
- “Invest Gagauzia 2017” gathered more than 500 participants from 16 countries.
- Business Week Gagauzia and Taraclia 2017 and 2018, with 371 participants, of which 139 were women.

Impact

Organising Gagauzia Investment Forum, “Invest Gagauzia”

The website of the forum was re-designed and the slogan Gagauzia 360° was added as a symbol of openness to the three main markets: EU, Turkey and Middle East, and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Invest Gagauzia 2016, 2017 and 2018 represented a remarkable occasion to remind the world about the manufacturing and trade opportunities which this small area can offer. At Gagauzia Investment Forum 2017 the newly supported SMEs had a very good possibility to present their projects and share their experiences during panel discussions.

Business Week Gagauzia and Taraclia

The events served as a unique opportunity for local businesses to learn from national support organizations and donor programs, as well as export mediators about development opportunities and to establish new partnerships. The events were positively assessed by both, Gagauzia and Taraclia SMEs, representatives of national donor programmes and nationwide business associations, that led to a decision to conduct similar conferences on an annual basis. Business weeks conducted in 2017 and 2018, contributed to a better dialogue and cooperation.

Answers of evaluation questions:

1. To which extent know ledge base was developed in rural areas?

1.1. To which extent business support infrastructure became better targeted to foster rural economic development?

Trainings and survey results are taken into account when designing the services for BA. Following the interview with BA Gagauzia “Next”, services are targeted to retail, service, production, transport, tourism and agricultural sectors. For specific advisory service technical consultants are hired e.g. introduction of quality assurance systems in food production.

1.2. To which extent business consultant increased their capacity?

Increase of level of service orientation of business support infrastructure incl. knowledge sharing tools to promote economic development: 2 newly created Business Associations started to offer business consultancy in the targeted regions. Trainings were organised on services of BAs for potential members incl. organisational and operational formats of services to enhance subscribing membership in BAs. One-day training seminar on time management and task prioritization for staff of economics department of the Gagauzian executive body (Bashcanat);

Number of people/businesses benefiting from business support infrastructure: According to the final report 1,163 persons benefited from business support infrastructure.

Number of improved tools for interaction, networking, communication with rural community and businesses: With direct assistance of the SARD following events were organized becoming tool for interaction, networking, communication with rural community and businesses:

- Creation of Business Associations
- Organising Gagauzia Investment Forum, “Invest Gagauzia” annually
- Organising Business Week Gagauzia and Taraclia

2. To which extent local public administration improved interaction with rural communities and businesses?

Number of improved tools for interaction, networking, communication with rural community and businesses: “Agribusiness week”, was launched in 2017 as a new initiative. Continuing this initiative will improve interaction, networking, communication, putting rural business in contact with potential clients and will create new opportunities for expanding to new markets.

6.3 Small and medium sized enterprise development

Objectives

The specific objective was the promotion of local entrepreneurship and business development. Financial support was provided to SMEs to stimulate economic development and creation of new jobs in the targeted regions with specific attention to support businesses operated by women and young people.

Design of activity

The activity comprised investment support to SMEs incl. technical advice, business consultancy, training and coaching for existing or start-up SMEs. By applying this approach, beneficiaries were intensively supported in project implementation, procurement of equipment and after investment in coaching of the project operation. The financial support was a non-refundable grant with an aid rate of max. 80 % of the approved investment and obligatory min. private contribution of 20 % from beneficiaries’ side. In order to minimize the risk of failures, the max. amount committed to start ups was 10,000 USD (8,333 EUR) while existing companies with a business history could gain a grant up to max. 20,000 USD (16,666 EUR).

Additionally, capacity building in business planning and administration were part of the activities. Moreover, SMEs could benefit from an accompanying coaching at the start of project operation. The coaching targeted business development, market entrance, compliance with national standards (e.g food safety standards), formalised entrepreneurship and registration of business etc. Due to limits of available funds from SARD grant support, consultancy was provided to identify additional funding sources (e.g. ODIMM, USAID) and to prepare applications for these sources.

Implementation arrangements

The implementation of the activity was subcontracted to a consultancy firm (Pro-Consulting SRL) in charge for the entire development of the implementation mechanism along information delivery to potential applicants, organising call for applications, registration and administrative checks of applications and preliminary selection of the projects. Final decisions on selection of projects were taken by SARD programme Board based on the eligibility checks and selection system of Pro-Consulting. An entire implementation system was developed from application registration to payment execution and approved by SARD. On behalf of the beneficiaries, procurement processes were organised to collect commercial offers. A three-party contract was concluded between beneficiary -supplier- Pro-Consulting. Based on those the private contribution was directly made to supplier from beneficiaries while Pro-Consulting contributed with the committed public support. Applicants had to prove their financial capability to provide

the private contribution (20 % of SARD support) by a respective bank certificate. The bank approval had to be issued again before execution of the payment to the supplier to ensure beneficiaries' commitment. Following administrative controls also site visits were envisaged to check on spot the conditions of the investments.

In course of the calls for applications wide information dissemination was organised using local and social medias (TV, newspapers, face book) as well as four district events took place to inform potential applicants on opportunities and conditions. To support the application preparation a guideline for filling in application forms, describing scope of projects, number of created jobs etc. and a checklist of supporting documents (registration documents, balance sheets) were developed. The grant support was implemented by organising 2 call for applications in May 2016 and March 2017. The period of applying from launching the call was 1month for the 1st call while for the 2nd call applications could be submitted within a 3 months period.

Applicants developed rather simple applications incl. a basic business plan while a comprehensive business plan was developed after approval of the investment project and commitment of support with the assistance from Pro-Consulting. The assistance included also project management during the investment implementation incl. financial management and coaching after investment closing until the closure of the grant contract.

Achievements

Table 6 provides an overview of 1st and 2nd call on number of beneficiaries, financial support and private contribution of beneficiaries. In average of all 30 beneficiaries the private contribution reached up to 60% of the total investment amounts. Concluding the SARD support was significantly leveraged by additional private financial contributions.

Table 6: Number of applications, beneficiaries, public and private contribution

	Number of applications	Number of approved projects	Committed amount by SARD in USD	Private contribution in MDL	Total investment in MDL	Share of private contribution to total investment
1 st + 2 nd call	150	30	437,091	12,763,718	21,145,538	60%

Source: Monitoring tables, Pro-Consulting 2018

Additional funding resources were approached for 9 beneficiaries to complete or extend their investment projects. At this stage 6 SMEs received additional 64,000 USD and 3 other SMEs are awaiting a support of 27,000 USD.

Table 7: Number of jobs created

	Number of jobs planned	Number of jobs created	Number of jobs women	Number of jobs men
1 st + 2 nd call	157	179	78	101

Source: Monitoring tables, Pro-Consulting 2018

Impact

Interviews with 6 selected beneficiaries were carried out. 5 of them stated that without the SARD support they could not have effort the investment from own financial sources. According to these interviews only one entrepreneur would have done the investment without SARD support in any case. Following the deadweight effect⁵ of the SME support scheme can be assessed as minor.

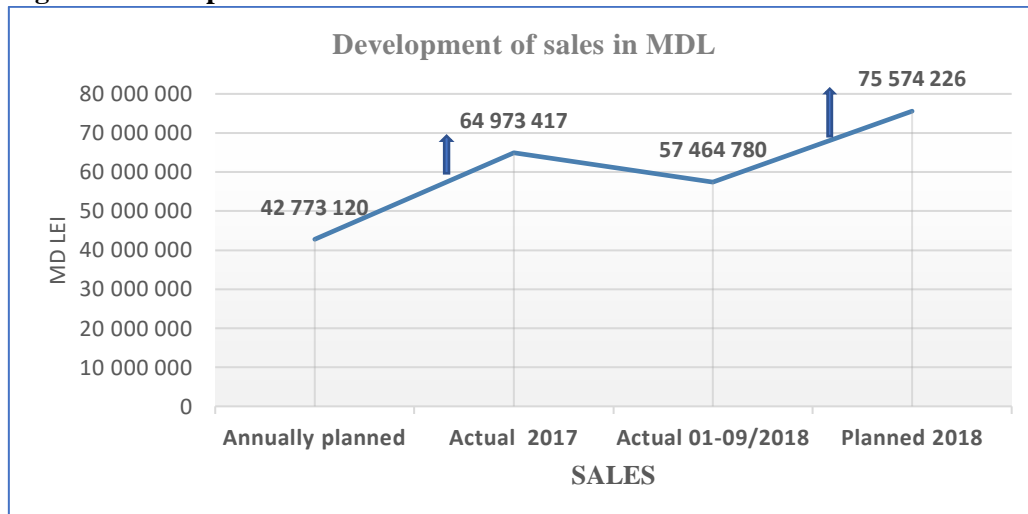
Leveraging of SARD support

Specifically, interesting is the achieved leverage effect of the provided investment support. Public support under SARD was limited to up 20,000 USD (16,666 EUR) for already existing SMEs and up to 10,000 USD (13,333 EUR) for start-up businesses. The total support provided to 30 SME beneficiaries amounted about 437,000 USD, the private contribution to the committed support was min. 20 %. As the total investment of some projects was extended, the private contribution reached up to 60% to purchase further equipment e.g. buying a tractor to collect agricultural waste for briquet production.

Development of sales

The supported SMEs show significant higher revenues from sales as annually planned (42.773 mill. MDL) and stated in the applications. In year 2017, the sales reached 64.973 mill. MDL which is 51% higher as planned. For year 2018 revenues from sales are forecasted up to 75.574 mill. MDL. It is highly possible, the forecast for 2018 is achieved, given the positive development of the first three quarters of year 2018 already amounting 57.464 mill. MDL. Concluding the revenues from sales / year are significantly higher than planned and show additionally increase of about 16 % from 2017 to 2018.

Figure 2 Development of sales



Source: Pro-consulting, 2018

Formal jobs created

As an impact of the support, 179 jobs were created including also the project owners working as managers in newly established companies. The created jobs are based on formal labour contracts concluded between SMEs and employees and cover also payment of social and health insurance. The creation of at least 3 formal jobs was a precondition to receive support. In this way

- ⁵ deadweight effect that would have occurred anyway by beneficiaries who get support for activities which they would have implemented also in the absence of support

employees will have a more secure position and are not fully depending on ad hoc jobs and ensure more continuous salaries.

Business development and capacity building

Following the 6 interviews with supported SMEs the financial and technical support provided by SARD was highly appreciated. Specifically, the combination of investment support in hardware and technical and advisory support led to economically successful projects as displayed in figure 1 on development of sales. Specific technical support was provided e.g. for agro-food companies aiming at complying with food safety standards as required by the National Food Safety Agency.

Answers to Evaluation Questions

To which extent new rural businesses enhanced economic development in rural areas?

Number/type of new businesses: 30 business received grant support, type of businesses: manifold types of businesses were supported like agro-food companies, rural tourism, bakeries, briquet production from organic waste, tractor productions, tailor workshops etc.

Number of new jobs created and or safeguarded existing ones: 179 (78 for women) new formal jobs were created based on labour contracts between employees and employer

Increased income development from new business activities (%): Revenues from sales were 51% higher as planned in 2017 and increased to 2018 for another 16 %.

Share of products complying with EU standards for exports (%): with regard to the agro-food sector the project supported modern technology, receiving certificates from national food safety agency needs still to be managed.

6.4 Promoted Employability and Entrepreneurship through Comrat Regional Syslab Centre

Objective

The objective was to supply Comrat Regional Syslab Centre with technical equipment, furniture and to use the technical capacity to implement trainings on employability and entrepreneurship were implemented. After completion the trainings, trainees should find an adequate job or trainees form entrepreneurship training aiming could start an own business. In this way, job opportunities should be created on the local level generating income for local people and avoiding out migration of rural areas.

Design of Activity

The activity had three components

- Support to operation of Comrat Regional Syslab Centre
- Employability training for job seekers and coaching
- Entrepreneurship training and microgrant for innovative start-ups and coaching

The resources (trainers and facilities) of Syslab Centre were used to implement trainings for job seekers and persons wanting to set up their own businesses. Syslab Centre received support for salaries of 4.5 staff members (4 trainers+ part time accountant in 2018) and furniture, PCs for staff and trainees.

Employability training was targeted to young graduates from local Universities to increase their chances of finding a job in the region and avoiding their out migration from the region or even leaving the country. Additionally, young people returning back to the region attended the trainings to get prepared for a job in the region. The training curricula was targeted to personal development, increasing capability of team work, to cope with interview situations, building confidence in own strength, and improving IT skills.

Entrepreneurship training was targeted to persons interested in setting up an own business. The trainings lasted 5 weeks, training curricula included trainings on business administration incl. development of business plan which could be submitted for micro grant support. The self-employment component was combined with a competition for micro grant (3000 USD/beneficiary) for most innovative business ideas.

Implementation

Employability training: In close cooperation with local Universities contacts with graduates were established and trainings offered by Syslab. A further cooperation was established with the Unemployment Agency signing a memorandum of understanding between the Agency and Syslab/UNDP aiming at informing job seekers on Syslab employability training opportunities. After completion of the training each trainee received coaching support during the interview phase with potential employers throughout 3 months.

Entrepreneurship training: 106 trainees passed successfully trainings. 7 rounds of call for applications for micro grants were organised by Syslab Centre. Following 55 applications were submitted and 33 microgrants were committed, hereby the selection was done by representatives of Syslab/SARD/UNDP. Applications had to present their business idea, envisaged results, business plan (developed during training). Granting support was conditioned to create 2 jobs (based on labour contracts) hereby seasonal jobs and part time were accepted. Procurement of equipment had to be organised by applicants, control of bank statements for actual transfer of money to supplier and on spot controls to check installation / supply of equipment was carried out by Syslab staff.

Achievements

Syslab Centre Comrat could become fully operational with support of SARD (covering operational costs, trainings, facilities) and contributed efficiently to SARD business development activities and up grading regional business infrastructure.

- 186 trainees of employability out of those 178 employed
- 106 trainees of entrepreneurship training
- 33 microgrants à 3,000 USD (2,500 EUR) for innovative business ideas committed
- 71 new jobs created under micro grant scheme

Impact

The out migration from the regions will decline by training young graduates from Universities and connecting them with employers looking for employees with higher educational degree. In this way the brain drain from the region has been decreased. The success rate of trainees of employability training to find a job is 96 %.

33 trainees of entrepreneurship and could gain micro grants to realize their innovative business ideas contributing to the overall economic development of the regions. In total 71 new jobs were created by start-up businesses supporting to achieve a decrease of the unemployment in the region. Syslab training and coaching approach is transferred to “Next”, Business Association established with support by SARD and to the newly established “Regional Business Information and Support Centre” under the Executive Committee of ATU Gagauzia.

Answering evaluation questions

1. *To which extent trainings for employability and entrepreneurship supported professionals in finding new jobs or establishing new business?*

1.1. To which extent the training was assessed as useful for being prepared for new job or setting up new business?

Number of trainees completed training course and found a job or established new business:

186 trainees completed employability training, out of those 178 found job
106 trainees completed entrepreneurship training and 33 received micro grant for innovative business ideas

Decrease of unemployment rate (%)

Success rate of employment training is 95 % meaning that out of 186 trainees 178 were employed and 71 jobs (incl. part time and seasonal) were created under micro grant schemes.

Degree of sustained know ledge creation (%)

Interviews with 3 successful trainees show that the know ledge gained during trainings was very practical orientated thereof was well understood and a useful in daily job. Assessments of trainings display a high degree of know ledge creation, and the continuous coaching is helping to sustain gained capabilities and know ledge.

Level of usefulness of trainings received in professional life

3 successful trainees under employment stated in interviews a high level of usefulness of provided trainings, equipping them with more confidence in their capabilities coping with interview situations by simulation of interviews, improving their IT skills. Specifically coaching after completing of trainings was assessed as very useful support when preparing for interviews or job applications.

2. *To which extent innovation was promoted? (cross cutting question)*

Innovation level of new business idea (%): Innovation is considered as not worldwide innovation rather an innovation for ATU Gagauzia or Taraclia district. 33 start-up businesses presented innovative ideas which are new for the targeted regions.

Component 3: Small-Scale Infrastructure Refurbishment and Promotion of Inter-Municipal Cooperation

6.5 Small infrastructure projects (SIPs), support to improve service delivery of LPAs

Objectives

The component 3 was aimed at improving local service provision and upgrading basic infrastructure in the Gagauzia and Taraclia districts, enhancing cooperation across the targeted districts, in line with the LDSs for enhanced rural development. Specific objective was to improve basic local services within 20 communities through implementation of small-scale infrastructure projects.

Design of activity

The pre-condition in applying for SIPs required that the project is linked with one priority of Local Development Strategy (LDS). These strategies were developed in a community participatory way based on capacity development. The activities included:

- i) set up local project implementation “Local Task Force”;
- ii) development of community profile;
- iii) elaboration/updating “Local Socio-economic Development Strategies” (LDS) in a participative and inclusive manner;
- iv) community mobilization for empowerment of targeted community groups;
- v) training LPA and civil society organisations in fundraising and resource mobilization;
- vi) support the local participatory group and LPA to write project proposals according to LDS.

Targeted localities benefitted from improving local infrastructure. Based on a competition, the implementation of SIPs was planned for 20 communities. The programme provided up to max. 100,000 USD (83,333 EUR), while the applicants were required a minimum of 20% of local contribution.

Implementation

A decision was taken on supporting all 41 localities instead of 20. In addition, a decision was taken to allocate institutional support grants of 5,000 USD (4,600 EUR) for every mayorality to support upgrading of LPAs capacities in service delivery.

The community participatory capacity development process was conducted by 2 consulting companies (Business Consulting Institute/BCI and Institute for Urban Development/IUD) and 3 individual national consultants. At this stage of development, communities were supported in organizing transparent, participatory and inclusive local planning. The main result of this process was 41 LDS covering a 5 years period 2017-2022 and all localities.

LPAs were assisted in elaboration of project proposals for small institutional support grants. Through these grants LPAs were given the possibility to improve local services. The small grants covered costs for purchasing equipment and soft, furniture, and the construction works. Both consultancy companies engaged to support the development of LDS, were subcontracted to support the preparation of small grant support.

In order to launch the competition for SIPs, a guideline was developed defining selection criteria and types of eligible investments. Under the request of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia, a Board decision was taken to provide support to all communities of the targeted regions (instead of 20 initially planned). All the communities had to transfer their own contribution to the SARD/UNDP account.

To mention that in comparison with the implementation of all other support grants (subcontracted to companies) the implementation of the infrastructural projects at all stages was ensured by the SARD programme team. This activity included: design, tender procedures, contracting of construction companies, and technical monitoring and supervision of works.

Special attention was paid to technical aspects of the projects. According to the engineer - project team, they got involved in the process by the end of the development of local development strategies. Several technical evaluation stages were performed by the engineers, which covered the process from the stage of concept note to the final evaluation. Part of the projects needed detailed structural designs. For that purpose, 7 design companies were selected to elaborate 25 designs. An important role of the technical consultants was to calculate and check the costs included in design and to recommend a rational solution.

Achievements

Following the decision of the SARD Program Board to conduct community capacity development activities in all targeted territory (41 communities instead of 20 initially planned) and to offer SIP grants to all target communities the achievements significantly increased.

Table 8 Number of Local Task Force teams created and number of SIP projects implemented

Type of event	Target group	No of participants/ beneficiaries (female /male)	Purpose
Establishing Local Task Force teams (LTFs)	41 communities	3,162 (1,904/1,258)	Facilitation of public participation in strategic planning
Implementation of SIP projects	41 projects	155,102 (77,653/77,449)	Improving local service provision and upgrading basic infrastructure

Source: Monitoring reports, final report SARD, 2018

- 41 LPAs, and 20 NGOs/CSOs were assisted to identify funds for additional local development initiatives (projects) responding to the identified development priorities in LDSs;
- 41 community profiles developed
- 41 LDSs elaborated/updated, of which 31 – developed and 10 – updated;
- 41 communities increased quality of service delivery through institutional support grants (, 600 EUR/each);
- Community participatory capacity development trainings conducted in 41 communities (topics: fundraising, project management and project proposals development; public property management, and provision of public services);
- In-country study visits on sharing best practices among LPAs representatives on community mobilization, fundraising, waste management;
- Realization of the local awareness-raising and community mobilization campaign
- 25 detailed structural designs developed

Impact

The decision to support projects within SIPs call for application from all 41 communities increased the initially planned number of the projects to be supported and respectively, eliminated the competition. Regional and local governments representatives stated that the support provided for small infrastructure projects was a big opportunity for improved public services. Implementing SIP projects only in 20 localities, would have led to unforeseen challenges for the Program. Thus, this decision could be viewed rather from the perspective of the program achievements for SARD objectives as well as of benefits for the communities' development of the regions.

By offering support to all 41 target communities increased the cost sharing contribution from regional and local public authorities. Their shares exceeded 50 %, with some projects above 80 % amounting ca. 2,4 mill. EUR. Part of those 25 structural designs developed covered elaboration of technical documentation for whole part of works, although for the implementation of SIP project the need was just for one particular part of design. In this way communities received a prepared document for further works and saved funds.

Answer to evaluation questions:

To which extent have supported activities increased capacities of rural actors to preparing, developing local development strategies and activities?

As result of the conducted process toward community participatory capacity development 41 community profiles were completed. At the same time 31 new LDSs were developed, while 10 were updated. All of the strategies were approved by Local Councils by the end of 2016.

To which extent local development strategies were implemented?

During the interview, mayor of Carbalia village from Gagauzia region, mentioned that the local capacity in strategic planning and implementation of the strategy as result of the participation in SARD program have significantly improved. As result, the local strategic action plan is being implemented in proportion of 80%. In other localities part of planned actions have been implemented due to SIPs grants as well as due to institutional support grants. To mention that all 41 localities were assisted in developing and submitting additional project proposals to other donors.

To which extent have improved infrastructure improved competitiveness and quality of life of rural areas?

Totally, quite a large amount of population, covering almost 100% of the targeted regions benefited of a better life conditions in rural conditions, which is 155,102 people, among them 77,653 are women and 77,449 – men.

The range of SIPs includes:

- 13 water supply and sewage system renovation projects
- 7 kindergartens and school repairs projects
- 5 street lighting projects
- 7 social municipal facilities (sport halls, culture houses) repair projects
- 5 road and sidewalks reparation projects
- 3 solid waste management projects
- 1 riverbed cleaning project
-

To what extent have institutional support grants contributed to better public services provided by local authority and have improved the access to these services of vulnerable groups?

Usually, grant programmes do not support reconstructions and provision of equipment for mayoralty's buildings. In this regard, allocation of institutional support grants for every mayoralty was highly appreciated by mayors. During the interviews they mentioned that most of the mayoralty premises haven't been reconstructed and provided with furniture and equipment even for 50 years.

6.6 Inter-municipal Cooperation (IMC)

Objective

The objective was to improve the public services for rural population by enhanced cooperation of municipalities and increasing quality and efficiency of these services. The aim was also to provide training to develop partnerships, selecting most appropriate model of cooperation and to effectively manage and maintain the public services under the established municipal clusters.

Design of activity

The activity targeted to support 7 clusters to pilot forms of inter-municipal cooperation for common services. Specifically, the collection of solid waste was identified as model for setting up and operating IMC clusters in the two targeted regions. The design of the activity took into account a preliminary study analysing and providing recommendations in which way the IMC should be best structured, clusters be established, and which consultancy / advisory activities are required to initiate the IMC idea on local level. It was intended to rely on the LPAs right to establish joint municipal enterprises. SARD was referring to already lessons learnt regarding inter-municipal cooperation in Moldova recommending using already existing communal operators rather than to establish institutionalised organisation.

Grant support of 130,000 USD/ IMC (108,000 EUR/IMC) was provided by SARD to 7 IMC clusters for the purchase of 18 t waste disposal trucks, waste containers (plastic and metal) and boom lift trucks for the maintenance of local roads (2 IMC clusters). Each IMC had to provide own contribution of 20 % to the committed SARD support. The IMC activity is strongly related to the activities of SARD on the community profiling and LDS. The 7 IMC clusters cover 46 communities, whereas 11 are located outside of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district.

Implementation

A consultancy company was contracted in charge of the implementation of the IMC activities on local level. At the initial stage a study was elaborated to evaluate the potential of improved public service delivery by inter-municipal cooperation.

Following public debates 7 IMC clusters were established for the disposal of solid waste. Feasibility studies for each IMC cluster were developed on technical, economical, geographical feasibility. Association agreements were signed by communes, the application for support in purchasing of equipment for solid waste collection was prepared and submitted on behalf of the cluster leading commune. Waste disposal trucks and waste containers are handed over to service providers (enterprise). Those enterprises have been established either by one commune or have several founders (members of the IMC cluster).

Current status:

3 IMC projects are operational:

- Congaz IMC: 4 localities receive service covering 1,600 households (30%), 15 legal entities (80%) and 15 enterprises (12 %), 2 localities will start in 2019
- Vinogradovca: all 7 localities receive service; 1,512 households (45%), 66 legal entities (80%)
- Svetlii IMC: 2 localities receive service:483 households (63 %), 12 legal entities (100%), 5 localities will start in 2019

Remaining 4 IMCs (Comrat, Ceadir Lunga, Vulcanesti, Taraclia) are in launching status with an intended start in 2019. Whereas Comrat city is already working with the waste disposal equipment covering 100 % its population and street lightening maintenance is provided also in 3 localities of Comrat IMC.

In practice the implementation of IMC projects is slowed down due to several factors:

- Unclear legal provisions regarding the establishment of municipal enterprises. The adoption of the respective Law on State and Municipal Enterprises (December 2017) stipulates that only one administrative unit can act as founder while other legal provisions allow several founders. This unclear legal framework led to the situation that the registration of some IMC enterprises was refused.
- Given the sensitivity of local population regarding additional costs, the tariff setting for services of solid waste collection was done in a very modest way e.g. 5 MDL/ person but not more than 29 MDL / household. Given the scepticism of rural households to sign a contract, the introduction of a local tax on sanitation is planned to cover costs of solid waste disposal. In order to increase the commitment of people some mayors connected further

infrastructure investments (e.g. improvement of village roads) with the readiness of households to sign contracts for waste collection.

The IMC activity was providing specific support to the technical design and organise public procurement on behalf of the 7 IMCs. In addition, ongoing monitoring, coaching and capacity building is undertaken for LPAs.

Achievements

- 7 IMC clusters established including 46 localities in total, hereby 4 IMC clusters include 11 neighbouring communes across ATU Gagauzia and Taralica district.
- 184,235 inhabitants can benefit from organised solid waste collection
- 7 studies for each IMC elaborated on technical, demographical, financial, economic feasibility
- Information campaign, survey on tariff sensibility - analysis of 12,000 questionnaires
- Grant support (130, 000 USD/ IMC) for purchase of waste disposal trucks, dustbins in 7 IMCs, + equipment for local road maintenance for 2 IMCs
- 3 IMCs operational, 4 IMCs in launching status to start in 2019 (Comrat working in)
- Several events (trainings, study visits) were organised as illustrated in the following table 9

Table 9: Types of events and number of participants under IMC

Type of event / no of events	No participants (female/male)	Purpose
8 in country study visits	308 (178/130)	Information sharing events, learning from most successful IMC projects, incl. training on project management
1 study visit to Romania	20 (5/15)	Learning from best practices on inter-municipal cooperation
11 trainings on IMC introduction, practices in 46 targeted LPAs	128 (79/49)	Increase know ledge on steps, principles and operations of IMC
Total: 20 events (trainings, study visits)	456 (262/194)	

Source: Monitoring reports, final report SARD, 2018

Impact

Awareness raising, and capacity development of LPAs were achieved as conditions for successful inter-municipal co-operations for an efficient service delivery. LPAs were trained in operation of IMC projects (financial / asset management, logistics, contract discipline). The willingness of cooperation among communes has been fostered based incl. cooperation with neighbouring communes (11) participating in the 4 IMC clusters as stated by interviewed mayors.

The collection of solid waste has already started in IMCs whereas some communities are not yet supplied with waste containers. Given the bad situation of some of communal roads a proper use of the waste disposal trucks implicates further improvements of local roads for additional benefit of rural households.

Households of communes were informed by a campaign, a survey reg. tariff setting was conducted, level of knowledge on new service could be disseminated to population intended to benefit from improved service.

The implementation of the 7 IMCs is still at the beginning and needs some more time, whereas two IMCs (Comrat and Congaz) are more advanced. Both, ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district authorities, have well understood the advantages and importance of an efficient service delivery by inter-municipal co-operations and are supporting IMC activities

The national level is requested to clarify the current unclear legal situation regarding the setup of municipal enterprise by different founders as well as regarding the obligatory solid waste collection.

In this respect the IMC activities and practical implementation have an impact on the adoption of a stimulating legal framework on the government side and enabling a sound implementation of IMC projects in the entire country. A specific regulatory framework for solid waste disposal from households and enterprises needs to be adopted.

Answer to evaluation questions

1. To which extent inter municipal cooperation activities are enhanced and are continued?

1.1. To which extent services of inter municipal co-operations are accessible and safeguarded for communities?

Association agreements were signed with all participating communes of each of the 7 IMC clusters ensuring that all participating communes can benefit from waste disposal service. So far, not all communes have managed to provide contracts of households with inter-municipal enterprise for waste collection. Furthermore, waste containers were not yet supplied to all communes which delays the service access in some communes

- *Number of communities actual benefitting from IMC:* It is planned that 46 communities (184,325 inhabitants) will benefit from the supported purchase of waste disposal trucks and dustbins.
- *Level of economic self-sustaining of IMC projects (%):* At this early stage of IMCs' operation, the economic self-sustaining cannot be assessed as contracts with households for waste collection have still to be signed. Reg. the feasibility studies, developed for each of the 7 IMC clusters, economic self-sustaining is targeted once the projects have become fully operational and a min. number of contracts with households, public institutions, enterprises are concluded. The mayor of one of the most advanced IMC clusters (Congaz) stated that economic self-sustaining is not yet reached but costs are covered by other service revenues (water sanitation, water supply).
- *Savings through cost efficiency) for purchase and maintenance of shared investment (EUR):* cannot be answered at this stage of implementation

1.2. To what extent have cooperation projects contributed to continue co-operations among municipalities?

- *Best practice examples are shared via information channels / network activities:* Study visits to EU MS as well as in the country were organised for learning from best practices. Experiences from 7 IMC cluster set ups and becoming operational are shared with regional and national stakeholders and public authorities. Specific attention is put to raise awareness on a regulatory framework reg. inter-municipal enterprises and obligatory waste collection for households and enterprises. An overall assessment of 20 IMCs established over last decade is under implementation to come up with lessons learnt and recommendations for further promotion of IMC projects.
- *Share of continued co-operations between municipalities (%):* Given the unclear legal framework of setting up inter-municipal cooperation enterprises, a clear regulatory framework needs to be adopted before LPAs are ready to continue with other co-operations. Although co-operations among communes becoming more and more an usance of managing local public services.

7 Recommendations

7.1. Recommendations addressed to Government

Regulatory framework

An important aspect regarding sustainability of the SARD activities is related to the need of adjustments of the current legal framework or adoption of new laws. Given the unclarity regarding establishing inter-municipal enterprises and the legal status of LAGs, the national level is forced to come up with appropriate adjustments of the regulatory framework. In this way informing and providing technical support to the Government be continued as started under SARD.

Fiscal autonomy

In line with action plan on fiscal decentralization of the National Decentralization Strategy more fiscal autonomy of local governments is highly recommended. Currently LPAs depend on transfers from state budget and have little fiscal autonomy. Even for small infrastructure investments and maintenance work local governments do not have enough financial sources. Although ATU Gagauzia has due to its autonomous status more flexibility of its finances. More fiscal autonomy can reduce the political influence on allocation of state budget to local governments and will increase the accountability of LPAs and local councils to their own population. Ways of implementing more fiscal autonomy are given by introducing fixed tax shares which allowing communes to set special taxes for investing in local infrastructure of communes' services and to set user charges for public utilities (e.g. drinking water, sewage, waste disposal). Which has a positive impact on IMC to change from contract-based services with individual households to a local tax. The latter option is already applied in some IMC clusters.

LEADER

To further support the introduction of the LEADER approach the government is recommended to take actions to introduce the LEADER approach in the current action plan of NARDS 2017-2022 in order to enable LAGs to be supported from the respective funds for agriculture and rural development. Given the fact that the LAGs are established and operated acc. to EU provisions there should be no hindrance to include LEADER under the newly designed rural development measures. The newly established Association of LAGs, representing Moldovan LAGs, should further promote the introduction of LEADER and the legal solution for LAGs to benefit from NARDS action plan.

The Association should become the champion for LEADER and needs to continuously develop technical capacity to act as partner for e.g. MARDE. The same should be achieved for IMC clusters to request adjustments of existing legal framework and to bring clarity

As the LEADER approach and capacity of LAGs are well advanced, due to SARD programme, other regions should have to opportunity to benefit and learn from the practical experiences of the 8 pilot LAGs. To promote LEADER approach and know ledge transfer respective information sharing events or trainings in the 8 pilot LAGs could be organised.

Sustaining and building of capacities of Local Public Authorities and SMEs

Private companies and LPAs have benefitted from SARD investment support and intensive tailored advisory service to develop project applications, business plans, project management of investment implementation as well as financial and asset management etc. Key is to retain and and further build capacities of LPAs and private businesses by promoting continuous capacity building. Not only successful applying for funds is a factor of sustainability also the increased

understanding of self-sustaining of public services and private businesses are essential for an economic sustainable growth. Hereby, the national and regional governments are recommended to establish training opportunities and information sharing networks for the private and public sector on how funds can be identified and accessed. Trainings and tools for successful project management incl. maintenance are required.

7.2. Recommendations addressed to UNDP

Programming and Implementation

The programme contained a series of different type of interventions which led to a complex implementation system which required to contract private sector consultancy which had to establish a system for e.g. management of SME support. The system covers all way down from application processing to payment execution incl. on spot checks and providing consultancy / training. A similar system had to be established for the implementation management of small infrastructure projects under the direct implementation management of SARD team. Both implementation systems required resources to design and operationalize all steps from application completeness checks to final payments.

Fewer types of interventions could achieve an increase of efficiency of the programme implementation. This becomes even more obvious given the tight time framework for the implementation and establishing respective implementation mechanism. The tight time framework resulted in rather short periods for application preparation (e.g. 1st call for SME support which was only 1 month). Summarizing either less different types of interventions or prolonging the implementation of this type of projects could improve the efficiency of the programme intervention. Future programme implementations should also be built on existing capacities created.

It is well understood that the management of SME support scheme could be implemented only with external support by hiring a private consultancy firm. For the future it could be considered instead of contracting a private consultancy for the management of the entire application, contracting, and payment execution process to use the procedures of AIPA. Having in mind that AIPA benefitted from an EU financed Twinning project with Austrian / Polish Paying Agency for developing and implementation of implementation procedures of rural development measures this capacity could be used. The additional support provided in form of consultancy for procurement and coaching could still be conducted by private sector consultants.

7.3. Recommendations addressed to Government and UNDP

Support to SMEs

SME support was provided to various types of projects and to existing businesses and start-ups. Additionally, SME benefitted from individual advisory and coaching project preparation, implementation and operation. As some basic know ledge on e.g. business administration, accountancy, labour contracts, legal frame for operation a business, project management are required for each beneficiary it could be considered to link the SME support for investments with attending of tailored training sessions on common topics of interest for all SMEs. In this way, the efforts and time to coach and advice each beneficiary individually could be limited to specific topics and general subjects are trained by formalized group trainings.

The hired consultancy company provided consultancy to develop the business plans with beneficiaries of the grant support for SMEs taking into account the economic results of the investment. While the application required only a very simple business plan as many applicants did not have the capacity to develop more complex business plans. The question arises how the

economic viability of the investment could be assessed without a forecast on the performance (return on investments) of new investments. Therefore, it is recommended to require a more elaborated and detailed business plan as part of the application before public support is committed. The development of a business plan, as part of the application, could be also supported by accepting the consultancy costs for development of business plan as eligible expenditure of the entire investment up to a certain max. amount based on market prices for business development.

A criterion for project eligibility, the compliance with national standards (environment, food safety, animal welfare, occupational safety - so far existing) be introduced to ensure that the public support goes to those companies complying with national requirements. Respective documents from responsible authorities (e.g. environmental agency, food safety agency) are submitted as part of the application. Important is to have a clear understanding on purpose of involved technical bodies and to get their commitment to issue such certificates to applicants.

8 Annex 1: List of persons interviewed in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>
ATU Gagauzia, Vladimir Cara, SARD local coordinator	
Executive Committee of Gagauzia	
Irina Vlah	Governor (Başcan) of ATU Gagauzia
Vadim Ceban	First Deputy of Governor ATU Gagauzia
Syslab Comrat	
Svetlana Gheorghieva	Project coordinator
Aliona Cara	Employment program / Career Advisor
Maria Puluciu	Entrepreneurship Advisor
Valentina Varban	Office Assistant
Comrat Business Association “NEXT”	
Ivan Cambur	Executive Director AGB «NEXT»
Zaharii Dolomanji	PR officer
Alexandara Milcan	Accountant
Ludmila Ganeli	Assistant
Briquette production / Start Up	
Grigorii Cîssa	Owner, beneficiary of SME grant
Agro-touristic complex “Gagauz Sofrasi”	
Ana Statova	Owner, beneficiary of SME grant
Larisa Statova	Administrator
Congaz village	
Mihail Esir	Mayor
Carbalia village	
Constantin Gaidarji	Mayor
Natalia Curdov	Local Council secretary
Tomai village	
Fiodor Topchu	Mayor
Chirsova village	
Sapunji Serghei	Mayor
Ecaterina arabadji	Centre for integration of children with disabilities
Taraclia district, Irina Derivolcova, SARD local coordinator	
Taraclia district Council	
Chiril Tatarli	Head of Taraclia district
Taraclia town	
Serghei Filipov	Mayor
Slav&Ka mini-tailoring / Start Up	
Ludmila Bişir	Owner, beneficiary of SME grant
Cheese production “Major Auto”	
Tanov Evgheni	Owner, beneficiary of SME grant
Budai village	
Galina Terzi	Mayor
Aluatu village	
Anatolie Bobici	Mayor
UNDP Moldova Country Office	
Valeria Ieseanu	Assistant Resident Representative/Head of Programme
Andrei Darie	Programme Specialist/Cluster Lead/Inclusive Growth
Olesea Cazacu	Programme Analyst/Inclusive Growth
EU Delegation in Moldova	
Iva Stamenova	Project Manager for Agriculture, Rural Development and Food Safety
Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment	
Iurie Uşurelu	Secretary General of State
Galina Petrachi	Head of Department of Rural Development Policies and Programs

Panagiotis Patras	Key Expert in Rural Development, Project: Technical Assistance for the Implementation of Sector Reform Contract
"Solidarity Fund PL" in Moldova	
Tomasz Horbowski	Director
Marina Albu	LEADER project coordinator
ProConsulting	
Anatol Paladi	Director
Daniela Cecari	Consultant
Institute for Urban Development	
Veaceslav Bulat	Director
Business Consulting Institute	
Liviu Andriuta	Executive Director

9 Annex 2: Guidelines for semi structured interviews

i) EUD, UNDP and SARD programme management

- Did SARD programme perform as planned? Could the overall objective of “trust building in the targeted regions with special status” be achieved?
- Could cooperation and dialogue between national and regional authorities of targeted regions be enhanced by SARD activities (common events, improving service delivery of LPA incl. community capacity building, LEADER etc)?
- Is there an increased access of local rural actors of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district to schemes provided under NARD Strategy?
- Are there intentions from national government side to enforce cooperation and consultation with regions (in general) and particular with ATU Gagauzia / Taraclia district
- How far LPAs could increase their capacity for improved service delivery and build / manage co-operations with other communes?
- How far economic development and job creation could be promoted due activities of SARD? (incl. advisory service to businesses + start-ups)
- Briefly summarize main success factors of SARD?
- What main problems you encountered during implementation and how they could be overcome?
- How do you assess the sustainability of SARD (after closure) in terms of economic development, continuous intermunicipal co-operations, performance of supported SMEs? Financial support for LAGs‘ projects, projects of communes’ LDSs?

Specific questions to SARD management:

- How far environmental aspects were considered in selection process of projects (e.g. awareness raising of local people for selected waste collection) in addition to solid waste collection trucks. Environmental aspects reg. organisation of events?
- How far the vulnerable groups were considered in selection projects, participants in study visits / trainings?
- How far innovative approaches were taken into account in project selection etc?

ii) Stakeholders e.g. Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment, AIPA, Executive Committee of ATU Gagauzia, SYSLAB Comrat Centre

- Could main objectives of SARD to promote “trust building in the targeted regions with special status” be achieved?
- Could cooperation and dialogue between national and regional authorities of targeted regions be enhanced through SARD activities?
- How far are regional / local needs reflected in strategy design / action planning? How far consultation processes are implemented with regional authorities?
- Are regional authorities represented in monitoring committee of NARD strategy?
- What mechanism is in place to avoid double funding of projects?
- Is there an increased access of local rural actors of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district to schemes provided under NARD strategy?
- Are there intentions from Ministry /AIPA side to enforce cooperation and consultation with regions (in general) and particular with ATU Gagauzia / Taraclia district?
- How far LPAs could increase their capacity for improved service delivery and build / manage co-operations with other communes?

- How far economic development in general and specifically in agri-food, job creation and appropriate salary level could be achieved due activities of SARD?
- Briefly summarize main success factors of SARD
- What main problems you encountered during implementation and how they could be overcome?
- How do you assess the sustainability of SARD (after closure) in terms of economic development, continuous intermunicipal co-operations, performance of supported SMEs

iii) Specific questions to beneficiaries of SME support

- Did you undergo an entrepreneurship training under SYSLAB Comrat Centre?
- Does the offered support (type of support, aid intensity) address your needs in relation to your investment plan?
- How do you assess the process of applying and receiving support under SARD?
- How do you assess the technical / coaching support received during application preparation and implementation of project?
- Would you have done the investment in your SME without financial support? Which other funds did you apply for?
- Could you share planned economic development of your entity like revenue development (current – over next 2-3 years), new investment plans etc?
- Number of new jobs created, or existing ones safeguarded (over next 2-3 years), average salary level of employees?
- Main hurdles in planning and implementing the investment project (e.g. own financial sources)?
- Did you introduce new (innovative) business ideas? Is your business export orientated? How far particular production standards are followed?
- How would you assess the cooperation between LPAs and business sectors reg. supporting business infrastructure in communes, solving of particular problems etc.
- How would you assess the service provides by existing business infrastructure reg. support to explore new markets and related conditions, consumer information, labelling, standards, legal issues etc?

iv) Specific questions to LPAs on small scaled infrastructure projects and inter-municipal cooperation projects

- Do up date / adjustment of local development strategies better address the needs of local people incl. vulnerable people? Do the up dated local development strategies increase the chances of receiving support from regional / national level? How do you define interfaces with LAGs's strategies?
- How many projects of local development strategies were implemented?
- How do you assess the process of applying and receiving support under SARD programme? Could you build capacity to develop application in the future?
- How do you assess the technical / coaching support received during application preparation and implementation of project?
- What is most obvious impact of the investment in your public infrastructure? How many people are benefitting?
- Would you have done the investment without financial support? Which other funds did you apply for?

In case commune is part of cluster for IMC project:

- What are the advantages of IMC projects in terms of cost savings, improved service etc?

- How are the services of inter municipal co-operations are accessible and safeguarded for communities?
 - Will the IMC continue and be extended for other cooperation projects?
- v) **Specific questions to beneficiaries of Syslab Centre Comrat training on entrepreneurship and employability**
- How far could trainings for employability and entrepreneurship support application for a new job/ or establishing a new business (skills in business administration, financial planning etc.)
 - Regarding new businesses how far innovative business ideas could be realized with support of training?
- vi) **Specific questions to staff members of SYSLAP Comrat Centre**
- Were post training questionnaires filled in by trainees to assess level of know ledge transfer, usefulness of trainings etc. and what are the results
 - What are most important factors hampering job seekers to find new jobs?
 - What are most important factors setting up of new businesses / or expanding existing business activities? How far can training / coaching support to overcome these hurdles?
 - Do companies need more support regarding new business opportunities/ export markets/ technical specifications/ quality standards etc?
 - How far is sector specific training offered e.g. for agri-food sector on new agricultural practices etc?
- vii) **Specific questions to LAGs**
- How do you assess provided community capacity building and empowering activities to inform and involve rural people in local development processes? Is active participation sustained by awareness / knowledge of rural communities and recognised by LPAs?
 - How far are LAG strategies aligned with local development strategies of communes? Which coordination mechanism are in place between LAG projects and projects under commune strategies?
 - What is the governance structure of LAGs (management, board...) and decision-making process?
 - Future of LEADER in Moldova, how far national governments supports LEADER and taking examples from LEADER approach initiated under SARD?