



Government of the Republic of Bulgaria

Ministry of Agriculture and Forests

United Nations Development Programme

PROJECT TITLE

**Rural Networking and Preparations for Application of the Leader Method in
Bulgaria
– the “Rural Network and Leader” (RNL) Project**

Brief Project Description

The project contributes to decentralization, good local governance, social capital building and poverty reduction in Bulgaria’s rural regions by supporting the country’s preparations to absorb assistance from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development upon accession to the European Union. The project will raise the awareness and will strengthen the capacities of rural communities and stakeholders for planning and using financial resources through networking, as well as through design and implementation of integrated local area development strategies. At the same time, the project will enhance the inter-municipal cooperation, especially among smaller municipalities, and will facilitate the creation of horizontal links among rural actors, including public-private partnerships. The project will target grass-root level activation in five geographical areas.

The project expands and furthers the efforts and results achieved by the joint Project “Sustainable Development of Rural Areas” of UNDP and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests for establishment of 11 Local Action Groups following the model of the *EU Leader + Initiative for Development of Rural Regions*. In addition, the project builds on the work carried out by the Foundation for Local Government Reform with regard to the formation of the *National Rural Development Network*.

The project has four components, which will evolve simultaneously in the period March 2006 – February 2008:

- Component 1: Preparations to launch the National Rural Development Network;
- Component 2: Support to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests in drafting the Leader measures and implementation mechanisms in the National Programme for Rural Development for 2007-2013;
- Component 3: Consolidation of at least 5 Leader-eligible Local Action Groups;
- Component 4: Training and hands-on work of Bulgarian Leader practitioners.

The planned project outputs are EU-accession driven, and their long-term sustainability will be a natural effect of Bulgaria’s forthcoming EU-member status.

SECTION I – NARRATIVE

Part I.1 Situation Analysis

Context

The benefits of Bulgaria's steady economic growth in recent years and the positive effects of the reform driven by the country's EU-accession agenda are unevenly spread across the national territory, and between urban and rural areas. The latter constitute over 80 % of the country's total area and are the home of more than 40 % of its total population.

As an EU Member State from 1 January 2007 onwards, Bulgaria will have to conduct the EU rural development policy, in order to achieve the strategic objectives for development of rural regions in the Union. Two of the relevant policy tools are the Leader method and rural networking.

The fourth generation of Leader¹ will take place in the new EU programming cycle (2007-2013) in the form of an approach, applicable to the implementation of measures along all three priority axes of the EU rural development policy²: (1) improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors, (2) improving the environment and the countryside, (3) improving the quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy.

Bulgaria will also have to establish a National Rural Development Network³, grouping the organizations and administrations involved in rural development and serving as a platform for transfer of information, exchange of good practices and training.

Bulgaria will have access to EU co-funding for Leader implementation and for rural networking in the framework of its National Rural Development Programme for 2007-2013, which will be drafted and approved in the course of 2006.

Problems to Be Addressed

As visible from the experience of Leader I, Leader II and Leader+ since 1991, and as pointed out in the Project Mid-term External Evaluation Report⁴ of the joint project of UNDP and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests "Sustainable Development of Rural Areas" (2003-2006), the successful application of Leader, as well as rural networking in any country require targeted and long preparations at the central, regional and local level. In addition, a critical mass of domestic hands-on experience needs to be accumulated before the Leader and rural networking methods can start producing visible development results.

¹ Leader ("links between actions for the development of the rural economy") was launched as a Community Initiative for Rural Development in 1991, with the aim of improving the development potential of rural areas and promoting measures of special interest, such as an integrated and bottom-up approach to development, and intra-territorial and cross-border cooperation. Leader is currently in its third phase, 2000-2006, known as "Leader +".

² As defined in Council Regulation (EC) No 1698 / 2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

³ As per the Regulation cited in Footnote 2 above.

⁴ "Establishment and Operations of Local Leader Groups – Recommendations for Implementation of the Leader+ Initiative in Bulgaria", UNDP, 2005

The proposed project will strive to overcome the lack of Leader-specific expertise and nationwide experience with Leader in Bulgaria, as well as the skepticism arising from this lack regarding the potential of Leader for the development of Bulgaria's rural regions.

By supporting the consolidation and operations of Leader-eligible Local Action Groups in five sites, the project will address the insufficient grass-root activation in Bulgaria's rural regions, which results in a prevailing absence of knowledge and understanding about the current and envisaged national policy for development of rural regions and the respective policy tools and development opportunities. The project will help mitigate the upcoming problem of weak absorption of EU funds upon accession of the country to the EU by preparing stakeholders at the central, regional and local level to apply the Leader approach.

Through encouraging in a structured way the formation of the National Rural Development Network, the project will promote a wide spread, and reciprocal sharing of information and best practices between the center and the periphery, the upper and the lower levels of governance, and between territories. This will contribute to overcome the current state of isolation and passive behavior of most rural stakeholders in Bulgaria. A survey carried out by the Foundation for Local Government Reform in 2005 demonstrated that there are positive attitudes and readiness among the stakeholders at local, regional and national level for the creation and strengthening of the national rural network.

In addition, the project will assist the experts at the Rural Development Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests to shape the national vision for Leader and to formulate the institutional framework and mechanisms for its application, in a constructive and timely dialogue with the representatives of local-level stakeholders.

The concepts of Leader and rural networking are very new for Bulgaria. This is why the critical mass of specialized experts and practitioners, which is available in countries that are already EU Member States, is non-existent in Bulgaria. The project will help build the capacity of a core group of experts and moderators, who would be able to later on promote the good use of Leader and of the rural network nationwide.

National Institutional and Legal Framework

The definition of "rural regions" in the EU is a national prerogative, and is key in conducting each Member State's rural development policy. Bulgaria's first definition of "rural regions" is contained in the National Plan for Development of Agriculture and Rural Regions for 2000-2006⁵: "any municipality with a population in its biggest town of less than 30,000 and average population density of less than 150 people per 1 km²". According to this definition, 231 out of all 264 Bulgarian municipalities are rural. A debate on the necessity to re-define the criteria for rural regions has been evolving with a higher or lesser intensity in recent years.

As per Regulation No 130 / 28 June 2005 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Rural Development Directorate (RDD) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests (MAF) will be the Managing Authority of the future National Programme for Rural Development for 2007-2013. The State Fund Agriculture will act as Paying Agency.

Based on a decision of the Coordination Council on the Preparation of Bulgaria's National Development Plan for 2007-2013, the Minister of Agriculture and Forests appointed an

⁵ The Plan was prepared for the needs of implementation in Bulgaria of the EU's Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (SAPARD)

inter-agency working group in September 2004, which elaborated a draft National Strategy Plan for Rural Development for 2007-2013. The MAF submitted the plan for review by the European Commission in December 2005.

The Strategy Plan will be the basis for preparation in 2006 of the National Programme for Rural Development for 2007-2013, which will lay down the actions, institutional framework, financial parameters, implementation arrangements and types of beneficiaries of the two rural development tools – Leader and the national rural network – whose preparation the proposed project will assist in the EU pre-accession and early post-accession phases.

The Foundation for Local Government Reform (FLGR), which will be acting as official Project Partner, is an independent professional center registered as a non-profit organization in Bulgaria and operating since May 1995 in the areas of local democracy and self-governance, municipal-level capacity building, partnerships building, consulting and training for local-level stakeholders.

Intended Project Beneficiaries:

- individual and organized stakeholders living on the territory of the 5 project sites;
- the Local Action Groups to be supported in the five project sites;
- the local authorities in the five project sites;
- the Rural Development Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests;
- a core group of national Leader practitioners;
- Bulgaria's rural development stakeholders at the local, district and central levels at large.

Part I.2 Strategy

National Strategy

The national agricultural development policy for 2007-2013 places a strong emphasis on rural development – the so called II pillar of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, which has been taking body since 1999. The principles to be applied are decentralization, partnership, bottom-up planning and integration of the actions.

The draft National Strategy Plan for Rural Development for 2007-2013 (December 2005) states that Bulgaria's rural development policy after 2007 will feature a rising importance of the Leader approach as an instrument for decentralized governance and integrated rural development. The Plan recognizes that the achievement of Bulgaria's rural development policy goals calls for involvement and participation of the people, and for capacity building at the local level, targeted at the preparation and implementation of local development strategies.

In addition, the draft Plan declares that encouraging the dialogue and cooperation among the various local actors involved in rural development is an important step in the strengthening of Bulgaria's civil society and the building of working partnerships at the local level.

According to the Plan, Bulgaria's National Programme for Rural Development 2007-2013 will include the following Leader-specific actions, to be funded from national resources and from EU co-funding:

- preparation of local area development strategies,
- constitution and strengthening of Local Action Groups,
- implementation of the local area development strategies,
- inter-territorial, as well as trans-national cooperation.

Project Strategy

Bulgaria's very first steps in preparation for Leader and rural networking were made through Project "Sustainable Development of Rural Areas" (the SRD Project)⁶. Already in 2004, and even more so in 2005, the SRD Project produced valuable practical insights ("domestic experience") into the preparations at national and local level that must precede the launch of the future EU co-funded Leader and rural network measures.

The SRD Project works on a pilot basis in eleven small rural municipalities with the objective to foster cooperation and partnerships among the municipal administrations, the farmers, the entrepreneurs, the NGOs, the cooperatives and the citizens at large within the respective municipalities. A Local Leader Group (LLG) was set up in each municipality in 2003, and was registered as an NGO in public benefit in 2004. The LLGs prepared municipal sustainable development strategies, and started their implementation with funding from the MAF and with their own municipal and/or private resources in the framework of the project. Networking among the LLGs, targeted at exchange of experience in rural development was also initiated with SRD Project support.

Some of the key recommendations of the report⁷ from the project external mid-term evaluation conducted in 2005 were that in order to prepare for absorption of EU rural development funds using the Leader methodology, Bulgaria needs to implement as early as possible the following preparatory activities:

- consolidation and capacity building of Leader-eligible Local Action Groups (LAGs) and transfer of their knowledge to other regions of the country;
- training of a core group of Leader practitioners, able to facilitate and support the local-level preparations to absorb funds through Leader upon Bulgaria's accession to the EU;
- active involvement of the local population, business and institutions, from both urban and village settlements, into the work of the LAGs;
- structured training of the LAGs in community work and project cycle management;
- broad-based information campaign on Leader and the work of the LAGs;
- promotion of rural networking as a powerful tool for overcoming the problems of isolation, marginalization and lack of local capacities.

Based on the above recommendations, the strategy of the new project will be to activate rural development stakeholders countrywide as much as possible, raising their general knowledge and understanding of the EU's and the national rural development policies for 2007-2013 and alerting them towards the potential benefits of the National Rural

⁶ The SRD Project is a joint initiative of the MAF and UNDP taking place in the period 2003-2006. See more at: www.srd-bg.org or through the UNDP Bulgaria web site www.undp.bg

⁷ www.undp.bg: "Establishment and Operations of Local Leader Groups – Recommendations for Implementation of the Leader+ Initiative in Bulgaria", UNDP, 2005

Development Network (NRDN), as well as towards the important role of Local Action Groups (Leader) in rural development in general and in the network's functioning in particular.

The project will promote a partnership platform among structures supported by UNDP (Local Action Groups, JOBS Project Business Centers, Chitalishte, the Chitalishte Development Foundation, Capacity 21 Project organizations), the MAF, the Foundation for Local Government Reform (FLGR), the Swiss Development Cooperation Office in Bulgaria (the FORUM Programme) and entities supported by other donors for forming the initial base of the future NRDN. At the same time, the project will provide technical support for the preparation of the legal aspects of the NRDN: articles of formation, rules of procedure, tender package for selection of the NRDN's running structures⁸.

The project's NRDN preparation activities in 2006 will build on the work carried out and results achieved by the FLGR in 2005, which elaborated a "Concept for the Establishment of a National Rural Development Network in Bulgaria" under public order of the MAF. The FLGR analyzed the experience of rural networks in the Netherlands, Poland and Slovenia, carried out consultations with potential members of Bulgaria's NRDN and led the work of an inter-agency Advisory Group (involving representatives of the MAF, UNDP, and the Bulgarian Association of Regional Development Agencies). The Advisory Group provided recommendations to the draft NRDN Concept, which was presented for a public discussion at the First National Seminar on Application of the Leader Approach and Establishment of a National Rural Development Network, organized in November 2005 by UNDP and the MAF. Further, the process of public discussion of the NRDN Concept evolved through the FLGR's Internet Forum, 14 regional seminars organized by the FLGR and the MAF, radio broadcasts, publications, and questionnaires sent to more than 170 organisations, municipalities and institutions in the country. The NRDN Concept was finalized and submitted for comments to the European Commission in December 2005⁹.

According to the proposed NRDN Concept, the mission of the Bulgarian rural network would be to consolidate all organisations and individuals involved at the different levels of rural development in Bulgaria. The network's purpose would be to (1) inform and educate its members, (2) to act as a counterpart in the provision of support to the integrated development of rural areas and in the implementation of specific rural development projects, and (3) to represent its members nationally and internationally. The NRDN would bring together local, regional or national non-profit organisations and their networks; the existing and the newly-formed Local Action Groups; national and regional associations of municipalities; NGOs in the field of sustainable local and rural development; as well as associations of producers and industry organisations and associations. Therefore, a series of structured coordination and preparation activities would be extremely important before the launch of the NRDN, in the form of awareness-raising and design of the NRDN's organizational set-up and rules of procedure.

In parallel to the NRDN formation effort, the project will build on and strengthen the capacity of the established 11 Leader Groups in Trun, Vurshtes, Yakoruda, Gurmen, Belitsa, Satovcha, Madjarovo, Kirkovo, Ardino, Ivaylovgrad and Topolovgrad, and will facilitate the expansion of their best practices into other Bulgarian municipalities in five focus areas. The project will promote inter-municipal and inter-territorial cooperation as much as possible, in order to establish Leader-eligible organizations (Local Action Groups

⁸ Referred to in Article 68, Paragraph 2(a) of Council Regulation no 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

⁹ See text at: www.flgr.bg

– LAGs) and help them to address development issues on larger territories. The project will support the LAGs in formulating their strategies and plans, so that the latter can be ready for submission when the MAF announces the first call for Leader applications after Bulgaria's accession to the EU. Special attention will be placed on sensitizing the municipal authorities about the development potential of the public-private partnerships triggered by the Leader approach.

Following the SRD Project evaluation report's recommendation to keep applying the hands-on project cycle management as a key capacity building tool for the LAGs, the project will enable the functioning of a Grants Fund in 2007. The Grants Fund will provide co-financing for projects aligned with the LAG priorities and plans. The resources for the Grants Fund will be ensured from the MAF budget and from the municipal budgets, providing an opportunity for these key partner institutions to practice the partnership and resource-sharing principles even before the launch of the EU-supported Leader in Bulgaria.

While supporting the consolidation and capacity building of LAGs, the project will organize formal training and hands-on practice in the field for a group of Leader practitioners (moderators), who will work with the LAGs (2-3 moderators per group). Later on, these trained people will constitute Bulgaria's core experts group in Leader and will be able to support the implementation of Leader nationwide. The Leader moderators will grow professionally together with the LAGs that they will help identify, form, institutionalize and operate. The learning-by-doing, or trial and error path to be followed by each moderator while working in the field, will be steered from Sofia through careful monitoring of the moderators' work and outputs, judged against the objective performance of each particular LAG. Ongoing advisory support from Sofia and peer coaching will be ensured for the moderators throughout the project life.

Last but not least, the strategy of the project will be to assist the MAF's Rural Development Directorate in finding and using international and national expertise in the course of drafting and finalizing throughout 2006 the Leader-related measures and implementation mechanisms in the National Programme for Rural Development 2007-2013. All positive and negative lessons learnt and practices from the SRD Project, as well as from other relevant community mobilization donor-supported projects in Bulgaria, will be taken into consideration. The drafting of Leader measures and implementation mechanisms will benefit from a continuous validation of the proposals at the local level – in the five project sites.

The project will cooperate and share best practices with donors and local organizations dedicated to promoting the Leader approach in Bulgaria, such as the Swiss-supported Citizen Forums (FORUM Programme) and FORUM-Leader groups to be established in 2006 and onwards.

Rationale for UNDP Assistance

Through various projects (JOBS, Chitalishte, Capacity 21, Model Municipality) UNDP Bulgaria has accumulated a vast experience and a lot of expertise in work at the local level - with the municipal authorities, the NGOs, the private sector and the communities at large. Recently, UNDP has been promoting the principle of partnership in local and district-level planning preparations for absorption of EU Structural Funds. UNDP's experience of more than 10 years and in more than 2/3 of Bulgaria's municipalities in support of good local governance, stakeholder involvement in strategic planning, grass-root capacity building

and social capital development will be of special value when providing support for rural networking and application of the Leader methodology in the country.

UNDP Bulgaria started introducing the concept of integrated and sustainable development in rural areas already in 2003, with the joint UNDP/MAF Project “Sustainable Development of Rural Areas”, which has been successful in building expertise and social capital for rural development, and has generated unique country-specific knowledge on the potential of and challenges to Leader and the rural network in Bulgaria.

In addition, UNDP has been implementing the GEF-funded Rhodope Project¹⁰, one of whose objectives is to integrate nature conservation concerns into the territorial and productive sectors planning within the Rhodope Region. This project will be actively promoting the Leader methodology with a focus on environmental protection in the Rhodope (a rural area occupying 10% of the national territory) in the period 2006-2009. Synergies between the Rhodope Project, the SRD Project and the present project are being and will be promoted in a structured way.

Alignment of the Project with the UNDP Bulgaria 2006-2009 Country Programme

The project is part of UNDP Bulgaria’s efforts to foster democratic governance. It will contribute to achieve planned Outcome 2 of the UNDP Bulgaria 2006-2009 Country Programme (CP):

“Local and regional governance strengthened through greater civil society and private sector participation in the formulation of development policies and plans”.

The results of the project will feed directly into the planned Output 2.1 of the CP, namely:

“Participatory formulation of integrated rural development policies and plans supported” (Indicator: number of policies and plans supported; Baseline: 12 (2004); Target for 2009: 30 plans supported).

Project Components, Main Activities and Geographical Scope

Component 1: Preparations for the National Rural Development Network (NRDN)

At the local-level, the project will foster grass-root activation by raising awareness about the benefits of rural networking and by clarifying the opportunities opened up by Leader. The already existing 11 Local Leader Groups, as well as the new Local Action Groups to be formed with project support, will be among the natural key local-level partners in the preparations for the NRDN and in its promotion.

The NRDN awareness raising and promotion activities will include workshops at the local level, conducted by the Foundation for Local Government Reform in coordination with the Project Management Unit, aimed at:

- educating local stakeholders at large in topics related to the EU and national rural development policy for 2007-2013;
- dissemination of the experience of Bulgarian and foreign Leader groups;
- demonstration of the benefits derived from rural networking in the field;

¹⁰ “Conservation of Globally Significant Biodiversity on the Landscape of Bulgaria’s Rhodope Mountains”, UNDP/GEF Project, executed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, 2004-2009. More details at: www.rodope.org

- discussions on the legal aspects, modus operandi, action plan and services to be provided by the NRDN structure(s);
- sensitizing the municipal authorities and the private sector about the potential of Leader in rural and local development.

At the central level, a Rural Network Action Group (RNAG) – a voluntary, open, informal coalition among the most active institutions and organizations with regard to the future NRDN - will be set up at the project outset. The RNAG will provide the inter-agency advocacy platform for NRDN preparations. The RNAG will involve the MAF, the FLGR, the UNDP-supported structures in the field (Local Leader Groups, JOBS Business Centers, etc.), the Chitalishte Development Network¹¹, the Swiss-supported Citizen Forums and other donors and national entities interested in the formation of the NRDN. The RNAG will constitute an environment for consultations related to the future NRDN. The RNAG members will also advocate for Bulgarian stakeholder contacts with rural networks in EU Members States and with the new European Rural Development Network.

The project will also provide support for drafting detailed articles of formation and rules of procedure for the future NRDN, and for elaboration of the tender documentation for selection of the NRDN's running structures by the MAF.

The above-listed activities at the local and central level will lead to a National Conference for launching the formation of the NRDN. The conference will be organized by the FLGR in the fall of 2006.

This Component will be implemented nationwide as much as possible, within the limitations of the planned project budget.

Component 2: Support to MAF's Rural Development Directorate to draft the Leader-related measures and implementation arrangements in the National Programme for Rural Development 2007-2013

On the one hand, this component will provide national and international consulting services as requested by the MAF and in very close coordination with the activities and outputs of the ongoing Phare Twinning Project, which is ensuring overall support to MAF's Rural Development Directorate for drafting the National Programme for Rural Development for 2007-2013.

On the other hand, this component will enable consultations with stakeholders and local-level validations of the draft measures and implementation arrangements related to the Leader approach.

The output of this component will be a proposal, ready for undergoing the MAF's internal comments procedure, for:

- institutional framework for application of the Leader approach in Bulgaria;
- overall Leader administration and financial flows;
- procedures and criteria for selection of Local Action Groups;
- monitoring and evaluation procedures for Leader at the central and local level.

This Component will be implemented at the central level. The field validations of the draft Leader measures and implementation mechanisms will be conducted in the five project

¹¹ As of January 2006, the Chitalishte Development Network, whose secretariat is the Chitalishte Development Foundation, comprises 295 Chitalishte-members. See more at: www.chitalishte.bg

areas - Eastern Rhodope, Western Rhodope, Strandja-Sakar, West Bulgaria and North-West Bulgaria.

Component 3: Consolidation of at least 5 Leader-eligible Local Action Groups (LAGs)

This component will build on the previous and ongoing MAF/UNDP support for establishment and operations of 11 Local Leader Groups (LLGs) in the Eastern Rhodope (Ardino, Kirkovo, Madjarovo, Ivailovgrad), Western Rhodope (Yakoruda, Gurmen, Satovcha, Belitsa), Strandja-Sakar (Topolovgrad), Central-West Bulgaria (Trun), and North-West Bulgaria (Vurshets).

With the help of moderators (see Component 4 below) and ad-hoc consultants, the project will support stakeholders at the local level to: organize among themselves; determine the territory of new Local Action Groups (LAGs) to be formed; involve the municipal authorities; elaborate the LAG strategies and plans; trace the options for inter-territorial and cross-border cooperation; formulate project applications to the Grants Fund in 2007.

The export of the LAG experience to other territories in Bulgaria will be actively sought, including through the National Rural Development Network and its precursors.

The project will aim to consolidate at least 5 Leader-eligible LAGs. These could be “entirely new” LAGs – that is, LAGs covering areas outside those of the SRD Project LLG municipalities within the five project sites, OR they could be “partially new” LAGs, whose areas would include the old LLG areas and, therefore, the old LLGs themselves, with their physical and human assets (staff, premises, etc.).

The RNL Project will support the consolidation of entirely new and partially new LAGs throughout its duration, as well as the functioning of Leader-eligible SRD Project LLGs upon the completion of the SRD Project.

The LAGs / LLGs to receive expert and financial support from the project, as well as to be eligible for the Grants Fund in 2007, will be approved on a first-come-first-served basis by the Project Steering Committee, based on the quality of their stakeholder composition, their draft strategies and the readiness of their respective municipal authorities to participate in the LAG and to cost-share the Grants Fund.

This Component will be implemented in the five project sites, which will be the administrative districts of the 11 already established LLGs and any other adjacent territories from neighboring administrative districts, as could be determined by stakeholders at the local level.

Component 4: Training and hands-on practical work of Leader practitioners

This component will evolve in parallel to Component 3 above and will be closely coordinated with it, since the Leader practitioners (moderators) will undergo formal training but will also work in the field, facilitating the formation and operations of LAGs on the territory of the five project sites.

The best performing individuals during the formal training phase will act as lead moderators (1 for each LAG). They will be accompanied by assistant moderators proceeding from the same group of Leader trainees. Efforts will be made to involve as

many moderators originating from the project areas as possible, so that the know-how people are available locally on a permanent and long-term basis.

The mechanism for certification of the Leader practitioners by the MAF will be discussed and approved by the Project Steering Committee in the second half of 2006 or the first half of 2007. The certified experts will be expected to facilitate the massive nationwide preparation of LAG applications and LAG work upon Bulgaria's accession to the EU. A Leader Practitioner's Manual for Bulgaria will be elaborated in 2007, based on the experience with the LAG consolidation and the field work of the Leader practitioners in 2006, and upon adoption of the National Programme for Rural Development 2007-2013.

The PMU and its consultants, in cooperation with experts from MAF's RDD, will provide coaching support to the moderators on a continuous basis during their work in the field.

This Component will be implemented in the five project sites for the moderators' field work, and at the central level for the moderators' formal training, appraisal and certification.