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LOCAL ACTION GROUPS (LAGS) AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE PROCESS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ROMANIA

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Summary: *The development of rural areas in Romania is quite low compared with what rural environment means in countries that have benefited from the Rural Development Program since 1991, when the measure started, it was dedicated to member states of the European Union. The problems of required rural infrastructure to ensure a minimum for decent living conditions still exist, and the only thing that could contribute to the development of rural areas is the involvement of local actors through the Local Action Groups.*
In 2015, we will draw a line and see how it contributed to the rural development program of National Rural Development Program 2007-2013. It is noticeable that Romanian farms begin to grow slowly and try to align with European standards found in developed countries in the European Union. However, the process should be continued, which is why PNDR 2014-2020 continues the development direction of the Romanian village placing more emphasis on the LEADER measure, which implies a more active involvement of local actors in supporting and developing the Romanian village.

Keywords: *Local Action Groups, LEADER , Rural Development*

INTRODUCTION

The LEADER axis through Local Action Groups has been an important tool for proper rural development in Romania, with the possibility of accessing irredeemable funds in the programming period 2007 - 2013. In the previous National Rural Development Program, the impact of this measure has led to training of 163 local action groups, covering an area of 142,000 km². Also the training process of these LAGs is affected by the number of inhabitants subjects of the Local Development Strategy, which must be between 10,000 and 100,000. This strategy may be included and towns whose inhabitants population must be maximm 20,000 inhabitants.

Essentially, LAGs represent an active public-private partnership that brings together the various actors in the rural areas aimed at developing their whole. Also, the share of private sector actors need to be over 51%. The Leader measure subdivision consists of 4 other sub-measures, the first one is represented by sub-measure 19.1 - "Preparatory Support " offering support for developing / preparation of local development strategy (LDS). The sub-measure 19.2 (Support to the implementation of actions under the local development strategy) offers support regarding the implementation of what has been developed under the LDS, which will support local development and potential. It also seeks to improve competitiveness of natural environment, quality of life and diversification of the economy and combating poverty and social exclusion.

Interterritorial cooperation will be possible through the sub-measure 19.3 - "Preparation and implementation of cooperative activity of LAGs" aimed to improve local perspectives and strategies and better access to the information, the ability to interact with other regions or countries. The last sub-measure that complements the Leader measure is 19.4 - "Support for operating expenses and animation", providing support for managing these LAGs that require professional management with financial allocations properly designed.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The researches were based on information that refer to Local Action Groups by the data

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obtained from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, data that may indicate the evolution and the impact of LAGs in.Romania.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

If at the end of 2011, the number of Local Action Groups rises to 81 and covers a number of 1007 villages, with a total area of over 82,000 square kilometers and 3.5 million inhabitants, at the end of 2013 it amounted a number of 94 LAGs, covering a number of 1144 villages, with an area of over 95,000 square kilometers and with over 4 million inhabitants.

Table no. 1.

LAGs situation in North-West development region for 2013

Nr. crt.	County	No. LAGs	LAGs covering villages	Total area km²	No. Inhabitants
1.	Bihor	2	28	1.977	132.578
2.	Bistrița-Năsăud	2	21	1.106	96.497
3.	Cluj	4	51	4.123	153.319
4.	Maramureș	2	27	1.986	105.332
5.	Satu-Mare	3	43	2.489	143.242
6.	Sălaj	2	22	1.364	58.967
Total		15	192	13.044	689.935

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development;

According to Table. 1. we can see that the largest county, both in terms of area and number of inhabitants in the North-West region, that the Local Action Groups are covering, is Cluj. It has most LAGs (4 in total), which manages to cover 51 villages. Another important county for the same aspects is Satu-Mare, which is the second after Cluj in area and number of inhabitants, but has three LAGs able to cover 43 villages. The number of inhabitants and the total area that covers these LAGs amounts to around 700,000 inhabitants, 13.044 km².

Table no. 2.

The situation of LAGs in the central development region in 2013

Nr. crt.	County	No. LAGs	LAGs covering villages	Total area km²	No. Inhabitants
1.	Alba	3	45	3.132	117.249
2.	Brașov	2	22	1.686	72.681
3.	Covasna	2	25	2.197	78.912
4.	Harghita	4	54	5.606	184.320
5.	Mureș	4	48	2.517	153.203
6.	Sibiu	3	42	3.478	131.147
Total		18	236	18.615	737.512

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development;

In the central region, the leading counties are Harghita and Mures with 4 LAGs, of which the first mentioned county covers 54 villages, the county of Mures manages to cover 48 villages. The total number of villages benefiting from the support of the LAG stands at 236, and in terms of area and total population for the region stands at 18 615 km², respectively 737 000 inhabitants.

Table no. 3.

The situation of LAGs in South-Muntenia development region in 2013

Nr.crt.	County	No. LAGs	LAGs covering villages	Total area km²	No. Inhabitants
1.	Argeș	3	39	3.495	136.547
2.	Călărași	1	12	937	37.699
3.	Dâmbovița	6	23	1.288	99.632
4.	Giurgiu	1	2	280	11.833
5.	Ialomița	3	51	4.165	202.656
6.	Prahova	3	21	950	129.789
7.	Teleorman	1	17	1.032	42.468

Total	18	165	12.146	660.624

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development;

Ialomita county has only three LAGs, compared with the county Dambovița (which has 6 LAGs), but manages to cover an area almost four times bigger and has over two times more inhabitants compared to the other one. The total number of people benefiting from these LAGs in the South region is over 660,000 and covers an area of over 12 thousand km².

Table no. 4.

The situation of LAGs in the Western development region in 2013

Nr. crt.	County	No. LAGs	LAGs covering villages	Total area km²	No. Inhabitants
1.	Arad	4	57	5.377	202.958
2.	Caraș-Severin	1	13	2.011	39.980
3.	Hunedoara	2	38	3.832	79.393
4.	Timiș	3	42	3.972	134.179
Total		10	150	15.192	456.510

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development;

The western development region has 10 LAGs, but Arad receives four LAGs, which manage to cover the 57 villages, which are made up of more than 200,000 inhabitants and an area of 5,300 km². In this region the 10 LAGs covering over 150 villages with over 450,000 inhabitants and 15,000 km² surface.

Table no. 5.

Situation of LAGs in the North-East development region in 2013

Nr. crt.	County	No. LAGs	LAGs covering villages	Total area km²	No. Inhabitants
1.	Bacău	2	20	2.371	117.539
2.	Botoșani	2	24	1.415	110.213
3.	Iași	1	11	737	45.861
4.	Neamț	2	21	2.544	112.182
5.	Suceava	2	24	3.764	71.393
6.	Vaslui	3	49	3.200	164.755
Total		12	149	14.031	621.943

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development;

Vaslui County holds the most LAGs in the North-East development region, covering 49 villages, with an area of 3,200 km² and a total of over 160 thousand inhabitants. Regarding the surface it is exceeded by Suceava, where the two LAGs covering over 3,700 km², but the number of villages covered is smaller, only 24, and the number of residents who are already covered LAGs are at half the number Vaslui County residents.

Table no. 6.

Situation of LAGs in the South-East development region in 2013

Nr. crt.	County	No. LAGs	LAGs covering villages	Total area km²	No. Inhabitants
1.	Brăila	1	11	848	35.169
2.	Buzău	3	35	2.955	131.184
3.	Constanța	3	27	2.923	99.590
4.	Galați	1	16	991	68.712
5.	Tulcea	2	12	2.452	45.229
6.	Vrancea	3	37	3.033	152.984
Total		13	138	13.202	532.868

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development;

In Table. 6, which refers to the situation of LAGs in the South East development region, we cand see that most counties with LAGs are Buzau, Vrancea and Constanta, all boasting three Local Action Groups. Vrancea county covers most villages (37), distributed over an area of 3,000 km² and

more than 150 thousand inhabitants. This region accounted a total of 13 LAGs covering 138 villages, with an area of 13,202 km² and a population of 532 868 number.

Table no. 7.

Situation of LAGs in the South-West Oltenia development region in 2013

Nr. crt.	County	No. LAGs	LAGs covering villages	Total area km²	No. Inhabintants
1.	Dolj	4	57	4.212	230.608
2.	Gorj	1	9	872	36.991
3.	Mehedinți	1	21	1.572	49.142
4.	Olt	1	16	902	48.323
5.	Vâlcea	1	11	1.545	32.623
Total		8	114	9.104	397.687

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development;

The region with the fewest LAGs is the South-West, totaling a number of 8 LAGs, covering 114 villages, with an area of 9104 km² and a total of 397 687 inhabitants.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Establishing the Local Action Groups had registered an upward trend since 2011, increasing from 81 to 94 LAGs in 2013 and 2015 recorded a total of 163 LAGs, covering an area of 142,000 km². However, by the end of 2016 it is estimated that the LAGs will reach 200, covering over 90% of the area declared eligible for this support.

At the end of 2013 the best performing region in terms of the number of LAGs, villages, inhabitants and covered area was the central region with a total of 18 local action groups, 236 villages covered an area of over 18,000 km² and more than 730 thousand inhabitants. On the opposite is South-West Oltenia with just 8 LAGs covering 114 villages, with an area less than 9,000 square kilometers and 400,000 inhabitants.

Moreover, the new National Program for Development, through the LEADER measure should help regions with a smaller number of such local action groups, which have a low number of villages and inhabitants who have benefited from the support provided by these LAGs. Most likely through a more active involvement of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, reflected in a promotion and a clear explanation of the benefits that these Local Action Groups can bring to rural environment, could lead to an entire absorption of these Leader funds allocated to these measures, which will be reflected in the development of these regions of the country while trying an alignment of Romanian rural areas in the Western European countries that have benefited from these measures far ahead of us and applied them more effectively.

It is very important the number of LAGs covering Romania's area and population, but the most important aspect is that these Local Action Groups, should develop a strategy in line with the realities and needs identified in the region and especially to be implemented a more accurate manner.

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