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External Review of the project "Linking nature protection and sustainable rural development"

Final report



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Abbreviations

APB	Association of Parks in Bulgaria
BALSB	Bulgarian Association of the Local Sheep Breeds
BBF	Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation
BILSP	Balkan Institute for Labour and Social Policy
Bioselena	Foundation for Organic Agriculture Bioselena
BSPB	Bulgarian Society for Protection of Birds
CBD	Convention on Biodiversity (1992 Rio de Janeiro)
CBNP	Central Balkan National Park
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
CSF	Civil Society Fund of the Bulgarian-Swiss Cooperation Programme
CSO	Civil society organization
EASR	Executive Agency for Selection and Reproduction in Stock-Farming
ENGO	Environmental non-governmental organization
EU	European Union
FB	Facebook
FG	Focus group
FIs	Financial Instruments
HNV	High Nature Value
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Food
MLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
MJ	Ministry of Justice
MoEW	Ministry of Environment and Water
NCU	National Coordination Unit
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OM	Outcome Mapping
PA	Protected Area
PES	Payments for ecosystem services
PR	Public Relations/media
PMB	Project Management Board
REDD	Réseau Echanges et Développement Durable
RDP	Rural Development Plan
SC	Steering Committee
SP	Strategic Platform
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SIB	Swiss Intermediate Body
SWOT	Strength-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (analysis tool)
TOR	Terms of Reference
WSP	Western Stara Planina
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

Executive summary

Introduction

"Linking nature protection and sustainable rural development" is a project implemented between 2012 and 2017 in Bulgaria. It was financed through Switzerland's contribution to EU enlargement under the thematic fund to strengthen civil society. A consortium of Bulgarian and Swiss NGOs active in nature protection and sustainable rural development was formed to implement the project. Most of them have already worked together before the project's start. The aim of the project was to promote sustainable use and long-term preservation of high nature value rural areas while enhancing the opportunities for local population to make their living with sustainable business models. The project also contains a component on informing and enhancing the understanding of the general public about the role of nature and resources protection for the country in the long-run. Observing the minimal legally required involvement of the public authorities in the environmental sector in the context of economic transition, the project focused on collaboration with civil society organisations that were already active in the field. The goal was to strengthen their role as actors of development and participation and to enhance their influence on policy-making.

Task and methods of the review

The purpose of the present review is to assess the achievements of the project regarding the initially set objectives and how well the novel approach of combining nature protection and economic activities worked. As the review takes place before the effective end of the project, the focus is on relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability questions. An impact evaluation can only be conducted at a later stage and is not the purpose of this review.

The review was conducted with a combination of methods such as document review, participative workshops, semi-structured interviews and group discussions. To enable discussions among beneficiaries, elements of the Most Significant Change approach was used as well as the Strength-Weakness-Opportunity-Threat method. The team of reviewers finally interviewed almost 100 persons among the project implementers, donor representatives, project beneficiaries, national and local stakeholders. In addition, it collected supplementary information from analysis of literature, web-sources and internal project documentation.

Results

In the area of nature protection/environment, the project contributed to the development of a legislation for Payment for Ecosystem Service schemes, a new mechanism to enhance natural resources protection. Project activities had an important influence on the management of natural resources in High Nature Value Territories. As an example, nature and national park administrations benefitted from targeted training that enabled them to develop better management plans and reduce conflicts about grassland allocation. The project contributed to the sustainable management of High Nature Value Territories. However, there is still room for closer monitoring and improvement of measures in terms of ensuring the nature-friendly management.

The project supported local businesses and communities to develop business activities that are in line with natural resources protection. Most of the supported businesses, including on-farm processing and direct sales, are too new to assess the socio-economic results achieved by them. The enterprises that are in business for more than one or two years however show very good tendencies and the entrepreneurs are very optimistic seeing the demand for their products and services grow. The targeted support of the project partners for setting up the businesses is very much appreciated. The different approaches in terms of financing now need to be evaluated and the best ones used for upscaling of the activities and reaching a higher number of farmers and private sector actors involved in natural resources protection.

That business activities can enhance the support for nature protection was a new experience for nature protection oriented NGOs. At the end of the project, they fully embrace the approach and see the benefit of linking opportunities for local economic development with nature protection. At least among project partners and involved parties (such as participants in volunteer teams), enhanced understanding of the need to ensure sustainable, equitable and nature-friendly development can be observed.

Another key outcome of the project is the influence on legislation development in the area of nature protection and local business development. The project partners were instrumental in providing timely inputs in the policy dialogue.

The approach through civil society was decisive for the project results. The NGOs were credible partners to project beneficiaries and the public administration. They were able to considerably influence new legislation for enhanced biodiversity conservation and better business opportunities. Through training to the public administration, they made the public employees understand the need of enabling small businesses in rural areas and the kind of support this needs.

The civil society initiative allowed for testing new natural resources schemes and new approaches with children programs. The project provided critical support to those initiatives. In addition, the involved groups and organisations of civil society coming from different angles like nature protection and organic agriculture learned from each other and provided these learnings to the wider society through their communication efforts. Participants' numbers at awareness events that were organised for different public (children, university, general public) and through various means (public events, support to volunteers, print and web media) indicates growing interest in the theme.

Overall, the project was successfully implemented and, where measurable, the output indicators were reached. It had, in the framework of five years of implementation in a challenging external context, considerable influence on nature resources protection in Bulgaria and the development of small-scale businesses in rural areas. The project effectively contributed to achieving the overall objective of the Civil Society Fund. The achieved institutional strengthening of the partner NGOs and the For the Nature coalition is a solid prerequisite for sustaining the role of ENGOs in the long-term. The level of dependency on international donors is still considerable, as adequate access to national funding is missing.

Lessons learnt

Summing up some lessons learnt, the project was very ambitious in developing new funding instruments such as PES and the combination of small farm businesses and natural resource protection. The novel approaches provided a unique learning opportunity for the consortium partners as well as the public administration and the beneficiaries.

The combination of different forms of learning (training, study trips and learning-by-doing) contributed to changing the way of thinking at the level of the administration for adopting adequate legislation, and at the level of the businesses for its proper implementation.

The project proved that changing the attitudes and the policies is possible even in unstable external environment (e.g. government changes). The key success factors are knowledge and expertise (of the project team), strategy for achieving policy change (when, what and with whom/at what level) and persistence.

Also, it was decisive for the success of the project to work in parallel on community level and legislative level– the local-level work provided credibility to work at policy level; while the work at policy level was important to improve efficiency and sustainability of efforts at the local level.

The flexible rules and requirements for providing support to innovative and sustainable businesses in the rural areas encouraged the beneficiaries with nature-friendly business ideas and dedication to start innovative businesses and to plan for long-term development (in contrast to the EU funds).

A project of such scale and scope generates from its start an increasing volume of knowledge (both content and management-wise). Its on-going collection and systematic analysis are prerequisites for the accomplishment of the project objectives both in the short-term and in the longer perspective.

Each of the NGOs could operate in their field of experience, which helped for their recognition locally and thematically. This was decisive in the policy dialogue regarding nature protection. In the media in turn, it the weight of the For Nature Coalition was important, potentially also in the negative way: being big enough to be an enemy.

Recommendations

For the last period of the project, the review team recommends, in addition to timely finalization of the ongoing activities, to invest in communication of the project's results to the public and make use of the results to further enhance policy dialogue. It is also recommended to closely monitor financial flows.

If there should be a transition period between this and a next project, it is recommended to ensure selected activities to continue, such as the advisory services to farming businesses and monitoring the performance of the Financial Instruments, as far as budgets of stakeholders allow.

For a potential next phase of the project, following key points are summed up here:

- Reconsider the chosen approach for natural resources protection through private initiatives based on the feasibility to generate income and to contribute to nature conservation simultaneously
- Support local NGOs or community organisations to build financing models for protected areas and/or natural resource management, and make sure an exit strategy is in place from the start
- Support farmers with nature-friendly farming systems to join forces to improve market power
- Upscale with a view to specific training for both entrepreneurs in farming with non-rural background and the traditional rural population
- Continue policy dialogue for practicable solutions for local pro-biodiversity businesses
- Enhance collaboration with and training for the public sector agencies in view of an exit strategy
- Sustain and further develop the work with children and students
- Develop a consistent project monitoring system with measurable indicators and use a planning method that helps detect gaps early
- Simplify management structure (in particular at strategic level)
- Define a communication strategy with clearly assigned tasks to shorten reaction time and increase effectiveness of the response.

In summary, it is proposed to continue the program but strengthen and/or adapt it in specific areas, such as approaches to private sector financing, communication and in some parts management. In order not to endanger the present achievements, it is highly recommended to continue the support in the area linking natural resources protection and local economic development.

Acknowledgement

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background: Nature conservation and rural development in Bulgaria

Bulgaria's biodiversity richness comprises an exceptional variety of mountainous and lowland, forest, grassland and riparian species, habitats and landscapes spread throughout the country. A small share of them – a core of only 5% of the national territory is protected under the national Protected Areas Act as national and nature parks, protected sites, reserves, etc. A larger share, close to 35%, is designated as sites of European conservation importance as Natura 2000 zones upon Bulgaria's accession to the EU in 2007. There is a further share of unprotected territories of High Nature Value (HNV) farmlands and forests within Bulgaria's rural areas, which contribute to the national natural diversity and conservation importance.

Bulgaria's biodiversity richness has always been a source of national pride and admiration. However, its protection and conservation is often considered either a luxury or burdensome - limiting development and too expensive to afford. The paradigm that nature conservation can enable and support prosperity by incorporating nature needs in the daily business operations is not yet mainstream. The real life stories exemplifying it are still considered "innovations" in recent European policy jargon. Promoting such innovative and nature friendly approaches and businesses is in the focus of the European Innovation Partnership in Agriculture and Rural Development and the European Natura 2000 Awards.

During the concept and development phases of the project "Linking nature protection and sustainable rural development" (2010-2012), the main efforts at national level were still focused on the designation of Natura 2000 sites – adopting the orders with the legal boundaries of each site. The practical functioning of the Natura 2000 network was not yet on the public authorities' agenda. It led to concerns that it would bring additional restrictions in the Natura 2000 areas without any benefits to local people and businesses. It was also a period when agri-environmental support was introduced to High Nature Value farmlands under the National Rural Development Programmes for the 2007-2013 period. However, due to very restrictive interpretation of the definition of "permanent pastures" most of the farmers applying for this support were penalized for having too many scrubs or trees on their pastures – otherwise said – for having too much nature on their High Nature Value farmlands. At the same time, livestock farmers were not allowed to process their milk and meat products on the farm before 2010 when Ordinance 26 was adopted. When it was adopted and much welcomed in 2010, it turned out it was too restrictive for small-scale farmers to benefit from it. Overall, the period was abundant with examples of incomplete and/or insufficient implementation of the concepts and approaches for nature conservation and small business development introduced with the accession to the EU.

Civil society organizations had a key role in both designating the Natura 2000 zones in Bulgaria and in promoting the nature friendly business paradigm in the society. Working around the country during the Natura 2000 sites designation process, they were able to observe and sense the dissatisfaction of local people, businesses and administration. They had the direct contact with citizens in both urban and rural areas and policy makers at national level, which enabled them to see the needs at local level and the gaps in legislation. Moreover, environmental NGOs had the nature conservation knowledge of what was beneficial to biodiversity and which types of activities could be detrimental and should be avoided. The "For the Nature" coalition is an example of the active citizenship and willingness to protect nature and ensure its conservation throughout time. The "Clean food, fair livelihood" coalition advocated for the rights of local producers to process their produce on the farms and to benefit from the added value of it as well as the rights of consumers to enjoy farm and artisan food products of their choice. The positions of both civil society coalitions had supportive as well as discontented audiences that evolved with them throughout the period.

The lack of clarity and understanding of the practical implementation of Natura 2000 network in Bulgaria, and the ongoing accumulation of tension in both rural and urban areas around it, formed the baseline motivation and justification for the project development and implementation. The nature conservation NGOs from the project consortium made a step to find together sustainable solutions for funding of biodiversity management, including testing models for voluntary contributions for the use of protected areas and ecosystem services; supporting pro-biodiversity business and value-added products from HNV systems; promoting models for public participation in nature conservation decision making, including work with children, students and young researchers and reinforcing the nature conservation community; as well as mainstreaming all that in the national policies and legislation.

1.2 The project

The project "Linking Nature protection and sustainable rural development" utilises two mutually complementing and reinforcing approaches to achieve its overall objective, which stands for

"Linking biodiversity protection and rural development in High Nature Value Territories by sustainable market mechanisms and reinforced public participation".

The first approach is directed at reinforcing the role of civil society in policy dialogue as an important development factor; while the second approach is focused on enhancing biodiversity protection and sustainable development of areas with high nature value by using market mechanisms in Bulgaria. These approaches are further divided in four specific objectives and three operational components. They are implemented by six (initially 7) Bulgarian partner organisations and

three (initially planned 4) Swiss partner organisations in two project regions and selected urban centres, with the objective to ultimately reach national and European levels. In practice, the project could rather be called a programme for its scope (figure 1). The project/programme utilises three groups of umbrella mechanism, each group interacting with the other two, to enable the achievement of its overall objective. One umbrella group is related to the capacity building and awareness raising mechanism to strengthen public participation in decision making for nature conservation and rural development in HNV territories. There are a multitude of activities such as training and technical support provision, capacity building and networking, setting up of the Children Nature Academy and supporting university student's theses, organising and participating in festivals and various events. The other group of umbrella mechanisms is related to biodiversity conservation comprising effective management of protected areas; nature-friendly management of HNV farming and forest areas as well as preservation of local breeds of farm animals. The biodiversity conservation mechanisms in the project are utilised to "translate" biodiversity protection needs and opportunities into the market-based mechanisms. Some the market-based mechanisms are innovative for the Bulgarian context such the direct sales of farm-processed food products or biodiversity-friendly tourism. Others are innovative at European level such as the sustainable funding schemes - Payments for Ecosystem Services, Financial Instruments and support to Pro-Biodiversity Businesses. Mainstreaming the project findings and results into the national legal framework is an underlining aspect for ensuring its longer-term sustainability.

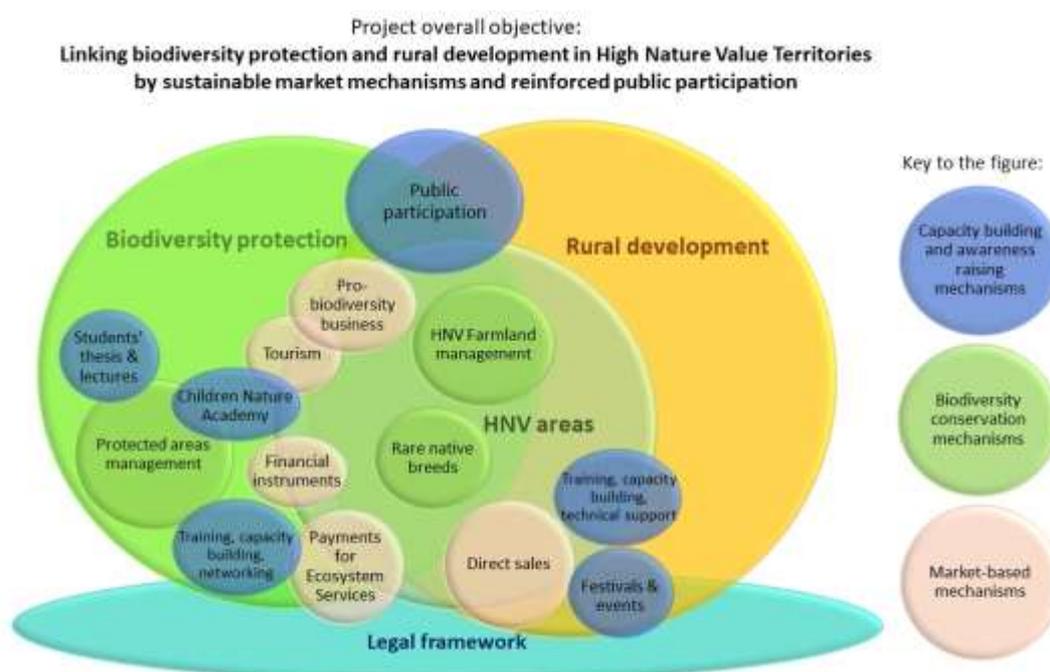


Figure 1: Mechanisms used by the project in the fields of biodiversity protection, rural development and HNV areas.

Key developmental challenges addressed by the project

At its start, the project has identified three key developmental challenges in Bulgaria related to nature conservation and sustainable development of rural areas that it wanted to address in the implementation period:

1. **Lack of adequate tools and mechanisms for effective enforcement of the relevant legislation to guarantee sustainable use and long-term preservation of rural area.** The selected project approach to address this gap was to improve the effectiveness of protected areas (PAs) management as well as by increasing the revenues to PAs by piloting schemes for payments for ecosystem services (PES schemes).

The project activities were implemented in four PAs (two in each project region) of different categories – one national park – Central Balkans, two nature parks – Balgarka and Vrachanski Balkan, and one Natura 2000 site – Zapadna Stara Planina i Predbalkan.

The objective of developing and testing PES schemes was to understand under which conditions they can contribute to nature protection. Concretely, how effective they can be in engaging stakeholders to financially contribute for the sustainable management of natural resources such as protected areas, grass lands, watersheds and/or forests.

2. **Inadequate use of the HNV territories by local communities as a source of income to mitigate the socio-economic misbalances and disadvantages of rural regions.** The project approach to this gap was to develop models of sustainable use of resources for increasing the income of local communities and business.

The focus was on facilitating the introduction of biodiversity friendly farming practices both by making sure that the National Rural Development Programme for the period 2014-2020 provided support for them and by developing the market for products from HNV territories. The market support to farmers was in several forms: grants to improve the on-farm hygiene conditions, technical and marketing support, advisory and consultation support, etc.

3. **Differing understanding of the importance of the nature protection between the general public and the decision makers.** To gain support for nature protection, the project included a significant communication and civil society component.

The project included intensive work with media and journalists and a number of actions aimed at increased involvement of citizens NGOs, support to citizens in conflict cases, attracting young people to the nature protection cause, etc. A particular focus was put upon the strengthening of the "For the Nature" coalition of 22 NGOs and civil non-formal groups.

The project started in 2012 and is due to be finalised in September 2017, after a one-year non-cost extension. It is part of the cohesion contribution of Switzerland to the enlarged EU. A grant of CHF 4.2 Mio was allocated to the project from the thematic fund "Civil Society Participation"; the Bulgarian partners contributed CHF 590'000.-

1.3 Rationale of the external review

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Swiss Intermediate Body (SIB) wish to get an external perspective and independent assessment of the project with a summative and a formative element. Considering that the 5-years project will end a few months after the External Review, the focus of the review are:

1. Overall implementation, replication value and sustainability of results of the project (summative element);
2. Lessons learnt and best practices obtained during the period of project implementation that can be considered for future projects in Bulgaria and elsewhere (formative element).

Besides the assessment of project objectives' achievement, key questions are:

- To what extent the project was able to demonstrate that local business can benefit from nature protection and vice-versa,
- To what extent the approach to involve and work through civil society to achieve the objectives was well chosen and effective,
- How effective the implementation through a large consortium of Bulgarian and Swiss NGOs was.

The External Review is structured according the evaluation criteria of relevance, effectivity, efficiency and sustainability. According to the formative element, it deducts lessons learnt and recommendations from the data collected.

1.4 Methodology of the review

The methodology of the review consisted mainly of three methods, from which the data was triangulated to draw the results as described in section 2. The three main methods were revision of written material, workshops and a field mission with group discussions, interviews and site visits.

According to the objective of the review (assessment of changes at outcome level), the form of internal monitoring and the large geographical distribution of project activities, the focus of data collection was on qualitative information. Therefore, one of the limitations of the review is the low statistical value of information collected. The reviewers tried to mitigate this referring to additional material or documentation available from sources outside the project. Generally, another limitation was the lack of time and human resources to assess such a large project.

1.4.1 Revision of written material

The review team consulted a number of project internal documents as well as external sources and ordered results according to questions related to project governance and management; policy dialogue, legislative amendments and acceptability; environmental results and ecosystem service; and agriculture and marketing instruments. To assess the attitudes of society towards environmental NGOs and their cause, a sociological review carried out in the framework of the project in 2017 was used as well as the focus group interviews from 2013. The studies are methodologically not compatible, but main trends of opinions could be described. However, it was not possible to assess the changes in the attitudes of the communities in the project locations, which can be attributed to the project activities on the local level.

A list of consulted documents is to be found in the appendix.

1.4.2 Workshops

A key part of the review was the internal evaluation workshop. This workshop was conducted with representatives from all the consortium members, Bulgarian and Swiss. The self-evaluation was prepared and facilitated by the review team. It was conducted with participatory methods like world-café, flipchart-chat and final discussion round, which facilitated discussion among the persons responsible for project implementation. The workshop addressed questions regarding the internal management as well as, in a 2nd part, questions regarding the view of participants regarding the results of the project.

The review also presented the interim results after the field mission in a structured de-briefing session. The participants were also the representatives of consortium members, as well as steering committee members. The validation workshop included a presentation of the preliminary results as well as a plenary discussion of these. Preliminary results were validated and some pertinent questions discussed.

1.4.3 Field mission

The field mission was another key element of the review in terms of data collection as well as exchange on preliminary results among the review team. During the field mission, the team interviewed 69 persons. The final program of the mission can be found in the appendix.

Main elements of the mission were group discussions, semi-structured interviews, SWOT analysis and site visits. For the group discussions and interviews, the review team had prepared specific interview guidelines per target group (consortium, entrepreneurs and local businesses, farmers, government institutions, local authorities, park administrations, NGOs/volunteers/media). SWOT analysis were conducted with a number of businesses supported by the project.

In addition to group interviews, the review team also captured some stories of interviewees, in which they explain what changes the project brought about for them. These elements of "most significant change" (MSC) was used in the validation workshop and is also used in this report to illustrate results of the project in the own words of project beneficiaries or stakeholders.

The site visits, besides collecting more information from interviews, contributed importantly for the team to understand the context of the activities of the project.

In addition to the field mission, the team also conducted interviews with the consortium members and the SIB. A complete list of interviews can be found in the appendix.

2 Results of the evaluation

2.1 Relevance

2.1.1 General relevance

The project "Linking nature protection and sustainable rural development" departs from the idea that biodiversity or nature conservation is to be understood in its human environment. In other words, to protect nature "with" the people and not "against" or without them. It is a common recent trend in the "conservationist" literature that nature protection cannot be thought without the people around or in a habitat to be protected, even more so if poverty is acute (e.g. community-based conservation). Within this background, the approaches utilized by the consortium for finding sustainable funding solutions for biodiversity conservation such as Payments for ecosystem services (PES) or designing financial instruments for nature conservation and supporting Pro-Biodiversity Businesses were piloted in the Bulgarian situation.

Bulgaria in general has the lowest average per capita income in the EU, and the project regions are among the poorest regions of Europe¹. The peripheral regions where the project was active have been stroke by massive outmigration since transition led to the collapse of local industries. The remaining population has little opportunities to make a living. Unemployment rate is high especially among youth. One of the priorities of local administrations is therefore to create employment. Their hopes for creating employment however, as became clear from the interviews during the review, rely mainly on tourism development. For some municipality representatives, the idea is to build tourism infrastructure similar to ski centres like Bansko. The idea of alternative ways of development is not in their priorities.

The project addressed this problem by promoting and providing financial support to local small-scale businesses in the sectors of farming, wild fruits and herbs processing, nature-friendly tourism and education initiatives. Thus, it contributed to maintaining employment and/or creating new job opportunities in rural areas but also provided examples for more sustainable models for local development based on the nature values of the territory.

In addition, some of the habitats in the region are to be preserved only if they are maintained as the landscapes that evolved through human action during centuries. The Convention on Biodiversity states that agro-biodiversity is an integral part of biodiversity (CBD, Art 2, ff.). Landscapes such as extensive pastures should thus be maintained, which can only happen if local agro-ecological methods are kept up. This is the idea of the High Nature Value (HNV) farmlands, where small-scale farming is the main economic activity and its traditions a key factor for nature conservation.

Furthermore, the EU environmental policy and Natura 2000 directives in particular require that nature conservation needs and concerns are integrated in all sectoral policies and programmes. The project translated this requirement into specific amendments to the national legislation (laws, ordinances and orders) about nature conservation, forestry and farmland management, local development plans, etc. The underlining component for mainstreaming project findings and results into national legislation and policy documents was particularly relevant because legislation in Bulgaria is subject to ongoing changes – for example, the Law on the Ownership and Use of Agricultural Land is amended annually or even bi-annually. Any change may lead to a negative outcome for nature conservation. Therefore, it was important to have the expertise and human capacity to monitor the legal changes to prevent negative influence as well as to translate the project outcomes into proposals for legal amendments to ensure sustainability of project results.

In terms of organised civil society, the Bulgarian NGOs face a number of challenges, i.e. low levels of public engagement and sustainable influence on decision making, insufficient public understanding of about their role in development, weak internal consolidation, low media interest, limited financing and low public image. While in certain areas as the provision of social services NGOs have established a working model of cooperation with central and local public administration, in others they are still met with mistrust or indifference by the authorities. In the case of ENGOs the situation is even harder due to the detrimental public image consistently created by media and influenced by companies whose economic interests clash with environmental protection. From these perspectives, the support of the project within the Civil Society Fund was relevant decision, as it aims at promoting the civil society's contribution as important actor of development and participation.

2.1.2 Coherence of the approach

2.1.2.1 Coherence of the approach for the preservation of HNV areas

The project considers High Nature Value areas in the widest sense encompassing both forests and farmlands within and outside protected areas. This approach is encouraged by the European rural development policy. The recent regulation on rural development 1305/2013 makes it one of its priorities "(4) restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/awards/2016-edition/winners/socio-economic-benefit/index_en.htm

agriculture and forestry, with a focus on the following areas: (a) biodiversity, including in Natura 2000 areas, and in areas facing natural or other specific constraints, and high nature value farming, as well as the state of European landscapes".

The project approach covering ecosystem services, protected areas in Natura 2000 network, rare breeds as part of agrobiodiversity, etc. is coherent to the national and European priorities and policies.

2.1.2.2 Coherence of the approach towards small farmer businesses in HNV areas

According to Velikov (2013, p.154 ff.), agriculture in Bulgaria in general still produces highly under its potential, which is a threat to the whole economy. To restore the potential, small-holder farms have a crucial role, as they still build the cornerstone of local development in Bulgaria. They also have a future in supplying products where the EU relies on imported goods, such as sheep and goat milk, essential oil and medicinal plants, herbs and spices, etc. To transform the rural economy, elements mentioned are also on-farm processing, local marketing and the development of rural tourism.

As the project areas concern parts of the country where small-holder farming prevails, the strategy chosen is therefore relevant. In addition, farmers still lack adequate advisory services and are thus in need of support by NGOs.

Still referring to Velikov, an increased demand of consumers for healthy food is observed. The trend was influenced by "information campaigns and the NGOs in the sector" (2013, p. 81). Instead of importing organic food, it is therefore smarter to foster national production of it. The increasing demand was confirmed during the review by farmers who are, after a first step, already seeking for an enlargement of their production. Particularly the farmers' markets have helped to increase sales.

The project uses the underlying hypothesis that for nature protection, strong allies in the local population are needed, so that they understand and help protect the local environment against short-term interests (building industry, logging, etc.). The story in Box 1 shows that the project was able to gain such allies as a first step.

In planning to support local business to "provide good quality products and services" that make the importance of nature evident, the project in general selected a pertinent approach in the view of the reviewers. As the general economic and social environment in Bulgaria has evolved, but not changed, the approach is still relevant for the future. In section 2.4, it is assessed how far the concrete measures taken may be qualified as sustainable.

"Yes, I changed a lot through this project. Before, I didn't see that wild rosehips were cut. Before, I would complain about bugs, now I see it's good they're here. The local people started seeing me as an expert in nature – recently one of them asked why some migratory birds are not back yet (smiling). That is part of my change that I went through from formerly disposing of explosive ammunitions to being a self-entrepreneur with 3 permanent employees and some seasonal ones to pick wild fruit for my jams."

Box 1: Entrepreneur supported by the project in Western Stara Planina

2.1.2.3 Coherence of the approach through reinforcing civil society organizations and response to the smear campaign

Implementation through a consortium and selection of the partners

The project is implemented by a consortium of 5 Bulgarian NGOs (APB, BBF, Bioselena, BSPB and WWF), the Bulgarian Executive Agency for Selection and Reproduction in Stock-Farming (EASR) at MAF and 3 Swiss organizations (Pro Natura, REDD and SVS BirdLife). The composition of the consortium was a result of extensive planning process in 2011 and 2012. It involved other NGOs that discontinued their participation. At the start of the project the consortium included a 6th Bulgarian NGO, BALS, which left in the first project year due to lack of capacity.

The Bulgarian NGO partners are among the best-known, focused and outspoken organizations, engaged in both environmental issues and strengthening the civil society sector in general. With the exception of Bioselena, which is focused almost exclusively on agriculture development, the organizations are (a) among the most active and visible in the field of nature conservation, (b) legally registered as operating in public benefit and (c) founders of the *For the Nature* coalition. All NGOs have experience in legislation analysis and drafting.

The organizations differed significantly in terms of scale and experience with Bulgarian-Swiss funding programmes:

Average annual budget in EUR	APB	Bioselena	BBF	WWF	BSPB
2009–2011	31,000	72,000	201,000	411,000	710,000
Experience with BG-Swiss funding programmes					
Before 2012	no	yes	yes	limited	limited

Table 1: Annual budgets in euro and experience with Bulgarian-Swiss funding programmes of the Bulgarian NGO partners

EASR is the Bulgarian State administration responsible for conducting the state policy in the field of breeding and management and conservation of genetic resources. Its key responsibilities were the launch of a web-based register of indigenous breeds and the establishment of National Genetic Laboratory for DNA analyses. EASR was also responsible for securing the co-financing of 8.1% of the total project value.

The active Swiss partner organizations, REDD, ProNatura and SVS/BirdLife, have been involved in similar project activities in Eastern Europe and in particular in Bulgaria. Well before 2012, they run collaborations with some of the Bulgarian partners in the area of nature conservation, biodiversity, sustainable agriculture and rare breeds' preservation. ProNatura and SVS/BirdLife Suisse are among the most prominent and large NGOs in Switzerland, with activities on national and international level, in particular for advocacy. REDD is a small organisation, specialised in providing consultancy on value chain development and long-term expertise in training and project organisation. **In summary, the Swiss partner organisations were well equipped to carry out the project and were assigned to the components best suited their experience.** The SAVE Foundation has dropped out of the project as a partner, but contributed as experts at the start of the project, for which they were also well positioned.

For all but one of the Bulgarian NGOs, the individual thematic areas of work and the corresponding activities within the project were not new. The exception was APB, which before the project had not been involved in fostering economic activities within protected areas.

As the distribution of work and responsibilities was planned in advance, the individual roles in the project implementation period were not an issue for the NGOs. This was confirmed by project partners, institutional counterparts and local beneficiaries. The team members deployed for the different tasks were widely regarded as knowledgeable, supportive, friendly and efficient.

The interviews with the project beneficiaries and institutions show that in almost all of the cases, they linked the project with only the NGO they have worked with. The beneficiaries at the local level had often not even heard of the other members of the consortium. The representatives of public institutions, although more aware about the project and the fact that it is implemented by a group of organizations, knew and were confident in commenting only on those they have collaborated with.

To a large extent, the low visibility of the consortium as such was a result of the project implementation design, i.e. the decision to maintain the individual NGOs image and identity. Therefore, the opportunities for receiving support were promoted locally by the individual partners. The visibility measures of the supported businesses followed this decision too – only the name of the NGO managing the corresponding scheme was highlighted, together with the project title and source of funding.

Apart from the obvious benefit for the implementing partners, this approach was appropriate for advancing the public understanding and acceptance of the role of NGOs at the local level – it was much easier for the beneficiaries to understand the causes and the specificities of NGO work (and compare them to those of public administration) from the direct interaction with them. For the institutions that had no previous experience in collaborating with NGOs it helped building trust and identifying concrete areas of practical benefit. For reaching out to society at large, the implementing partners did not need a common brand as their individual and cooperative efforts are adequately reinforced by their membership in the For the Nature coalition.

This approach was relevant for achieving the project objectives. At the local level, the approach had the downside of fragmented information flow. The interviewed representatives of the local authorities, park administrations and most of the beneficiaries, knowledgeable about a certain activity implemented in their municipalities, were unaware about (the) other forms of support offered by the project. We consider this as missed opportunities to up-scale activities and raise more support for the business opportunities from potentially critical stakeholders.

It is difficult to judge whether the "6+3" composition was adequate as number of partners, because the project was not a result of an open call for proposals but of a cooperative planning effort of these same organizations. From this perspective, the question "could it have been done better by a larger/smaller group" is irrelevant. The large number of partners did cause some difficulties in the first half of the project implementation period. They were commented mainly during the self-evaluation session, related to coordination, communication and decision making, and are addressed in the chapter 2.3 of this report. As the following quotation shows, the learning effect of the partnership is highly appreciated.

"For the Bulgarian ENGO community this was the first truly large-scale and multidimensional project. It took the partners outside of their traditional comfort zones. It taught them how to apply new approaches, develop new capacities, know their peers better and learn from their experience."

Box 2: The leader of a project implementing partner

Implementation through NGOs

All interviews demonstrated that the approach of implementing the project through reinforcing civil society organizations was the most relevant one for achieving its objectives. While this attitude could be expected from the partners themselves, of particular value were the opinions of the beneficiaries and the involved institutions. None of the respondents showed preference for an implementation model through public administration bodies. The following key benefits of working with NGOs that could not be provided by other players can be identified as unique and crucial for the success of the project:

- NGOs were really close to the farmers. They knew and understood their needs and challenges in details. Efficient field-work of similar scope is impossible for any public administration. The NGOs practically represented the farmers to the involved institutions;
- NGOs were better accepted and trusted by the local businesses. Public administration officials are often regarded with suspect, as they are associated with control and sanctions;
- NGOs maintained very intensive and informal communication both with the beneficiaries and with the institutions. They were concrete in their questions, comments and proposal for solutions for specific cases;
- In addition to the above, the NGOs offered timely and quality support that for the beneficiaries was totally different from what they received from public administration bodies. As a farmer respondent put it, "we received the necessary information always on time and sometimes in advance";
- For the NGO teams working on the project was a personal cause and not just proper implementation of planned activities. They cared equally about the nature conservation, the adequate and supportive legal framework and the concrete needs of the businesses;
- Unlike public administration bodies that are specialized in narrow fields of responsibilities, NGOs demonstrated understanding of multiple aspects of nature conservation, supported by their international network;
- NGOs were instrumental for innovations in rural development in Bulgaria and ensuring wide outreach to their potential beneficiaries and clients (*e.g.* the revised Ordinance 26, the Genetic Lab, the products of the supported farmers and businesses);
- The NGO manner of work demonstrated to public administration that their controlling function is not confined to sanctioning – it is better exerted when it includes advice and support. Similarly, the administration is more efficient when providing adequate instructions and not just referring the applicants to normative documents.

It is important to note that the above advantages of NGOs were shared also by representatives of public administration who were critical to certain actions of NGOs in the nature conservation field. Of particular value for all respondents was the combination of on-site support, demonstration of effects and contribution to legislation changes² (see OI 6 and OI 20 in Appendix 1).

The stronger role of the NGOs in this project is a result both of their capacities and effectiveness and of the reluctance of the Government, more specifically the Ministry of Environment and Water (MoEW), to involve as a partner. While the cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food (MAF) was truly productive, the relations with MoEW remained difficult and there was no shared ownership of the project results. It may be expected that the closer involvement of public administration, especially at the higher political level, will remain an issue as some governments are increasingly neglecting NGOs as partners and demonstrate little or no support for their development. Thus, for example, 2 years after the start of Operational Programme Environment 2014–2020, there are no calls for proposals under the Biodiversity Priority open for NGOs and it is unclear if there will be any in 2018.

Effects of the anti-ENGO campaign

One of the critical challenges to Bulgarian NGOs, especially those in the fields of anti-corruption, good governance, human rights and environmental protection is the years-long black PR campaign sustained by a group of media widely considered as controlled by oligarchic circles³. The media attacks on NGOs became very intensive after 2014. The range of accusations, direct or implicit, is broad: economic self-interest, mismanagement of funds, clientelism, serving foreign, i.e. anti-Bulgarian interests, hindering local economic development, political ambitions, etc. Most often, the target of the campaign is the *For the Nature* coalition and its members, but it also aims at related organizations, ENGO leaders, donors, etc. The traditional NGO response of demonstrating and promoting concrete results, facts and figures, has little effect on the intensity or the essence of the campaign; moreover NGOs are often refused the right to an answer in the same media that has originally published a critical material. The thorough analysis of the anti-ENGO campaign and what triggers the attacks, as well as the public attitudes to NGOs, are a matter of another serious research. The Consortium itself has done a lot in this respect, and other organizations are studying the issues in the larger context of their specific areas of work. For the purpose of this review, we will briefly comment on the following:

- **Effects on the consortium members.** The campaign was a mobilization rather than discouraging factor for the NGOs. At the same time, it did cause (a) frustration and pressure in terms of additional workload and time for ade-

² The important role of NGOs in policy dialogue is also supported and illustrated in report of Velikov 2013, p. 109ff.

³ See 2017 World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without Borders, <https://rsf.org/en/bulgaria>

quate response, including lengthy audits from state control institutions, (b) deterioration of the relations with governmental institutions, especially with the MOEW and (c) slight decrease in the membership of one of the partners. With APB, whose Chairman is among the most attacked ENGO leaders, the access to public funding is practically closed.

- **Effects on project beneficiaries and counterparts.** The beneficiaries are clearly divided in their opinions in two groups. The larger one consists of those who are unaware of the media attacks. The others are those who have come across negative publications but regard them as absolutely unjustified. Only one out of the 28 respondents shared he had "some suspicions" that the preferences of ENGOs to favour defending one cause over another may be financially motivated. The representatives of institutional counterparts were quite aware about the attacks on ENGOs. While, with a single exception, none of them explicitly agreed with the accusations, there was a shared disapproval of certain ENGO actions, which were regarded as extreme, showing only one side of the issue and/or not offering alternative solutions. About half of the respondents shared that at times they have had suspicions about the motivation of ENGOs.
- **Effects on public attitudes.** Upon the background of the massive anti ENGO campaign the available data from most recent quantitative research⁴ shows that the level of public trust in ENGOs is high – 64% as compared to 33% for NGOs in general. There is no research on the concrete reasons for trust or otherwise in ENGOs, but the focus groups organized in 2013 in the framework of the project provide some insights. On the negative side are unclear messages on behalf of the ENGOs, extremity in actions and suspected hidden motives. On the positive side is the potential of ENGOs or at least some of them to defend authentic citizens' interests. Between the two poles of opinion, it is most obvious that while most of the focus groups' participants find the eco-protests too extreme, they would join them if their civic interests are at stake.
- **Response of the consortium.** The proper response to the anti-ENGO campaign was thoroughly debated within the consortium and the *For the Nature* coalition, as well as with SDC and SIB. The strategy chosen was to focus on demonstrating results and promoting the benefits of the project in terms of both conservation and local economic development. As mentioned, this did not affect the campaign, but it had three definite positive effects. First, it created a consistent positive information background. There was an abundance of data for practically all aspects of the project, accessible both online (partners websites, FB pages and media) and offline (newspapers and magazines, farmers markets, public events, *etc.*). Secondly, it attracted new partners and collaborators. Of particular value here are the memorandum of cooperation signed in 2014 between *For the Nature* coalition and 5 tourism associations and the admission of APB as a member of the Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association – the largest organization of Bulgarian employers. Thirdly, it attracted a group of professional journalist with genuine interest and appreciation both of the project and the implementing NGOs. As shared by all project partners, what have been missing and would have been of great support was the public involvement of SDC and SIB in responding to the anti-ENGO campaign.
- **Role of SIB.** The proper reaction to the anti-NGO campaign has been a serious concern for SIB. After consultations with NGOs and SDC, instead of directly responding to the attacks, a special large-scale project (1.5 years, above CHF 200,000.-) was launched in 2016 aimed at a massive campaign for visibility of the benefits of the Swiss-Bulgarian Cooperation Programme.

2.1.2.4 Lessons learnt regarding relevance

The implementation through a consortium of civil society organizations was well chosen considering the minimal involvement of the government in the environmental sector. Each of the NGOs operating in their field of experience helped for their recognition locally and thematically, which made them a respected partner for policy dialogue. The weight of the *For Nature* coalition, however, also made them a potential target for negative press, which should be addressed by a communication strategy in the future.

2.2 Effectiveness

2.2.1 Assessment of project results

A detailed assessment of project results according to the project logframe is presented in Appendix 1.

The project's overall objective "to link biodiversity protection and rural development in High Nature Value territories by sustainable market mechanisms and reinforced public participation" was dependent on the achievement of four specific objectives (discussed below). Above all, it was related to mind-changing or paradigm shift that nature conservation and (rural) development can reinforce each other rather than being a problem or restriction. The project results and the interviews with project beneficiaries and stakeholders revealed that such mind-changing processes have happened across the board: first, in the consortium partners who state that they understand better the needs of small/rural businesses and/or the influence of farmers' activities on HNV grasslands; then, public authorities who see how food hygiene requirements can be implemented to the benefit of farmers without compromising the hygiene standards; to local businesses adopting

⁴ *Assessment of the changes as a result of the implementation of For the Balkan and the People project*, 2017, and [The Active NGOs in Bulgaria](#), Open Society Institute, 2017.

a nature-friendly management approach; to protected areas administrations stating that their role was "to work with local people and community, otherwise, we cannot speak about nature conservation", etc. These mental changes provide the basis for linking biodiversity protection and rural development through the utilized approaches, methods and tools, described in the following according to the project objectives.

1. Provide tools and mechanisms for effective enforcement of the relevant legislation to guarantee sustainable use and long-term preservation of High Nature Value territories

The tools and mechanisms utilized by the project for preserving the integrity of high nature value territories comprised Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes and extensive management of HNV grasslands as well as training, capacity building and networking for effective management of protected areas.

- The project team piloted 4 private schemes for sustainable financing of ecosystem services and natural resources management implemented in Western Stara Planina and Vrachanski Balkan, and Central Balkans project regions. The schemes attracted support from both local and national businesses, thus helping raising awareness and increasing commitment to sustainable use and preservation of HNV areas. The total funding generated by the four private PES schemes was 15 118.65 BGN in the period 2014-2016. The funding did not go to the protected areas administrations but was delivered via a local NGO working with the protected area (PA).
- The project also contributed to the development of 2 public-funded national schemes in the forestry sector by advocacy and expert support for including the relevant measure in the National Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and the development of the ordinance for the implementation of the PES concept in the Forestry Law. Although they are not yet implemented, even the consideration of the PES concept by the public authorities is a very positive development.
- The project tested Financial Instruments (FIs), where support was provided to 5 pro-biodiversity businesses according to specified criteria, which will donate back 20% of the annual profits for activities in protected areas. The first funding generated by the FIs is expected in April 2018. The minimum amounts to be donated back from the 5 supported business amount to 8450 BGN per year for a period of 5 years or a total of 42 250 BGN.
- Both models - PES schemes and FIs - are innovative in the Bulgarian context and would require action by the leading organisations after the project ends in September 2017 for ensuring complete implementation and sustainability of results.
- The project supported 28 livestock farmers who use pastures, meadows and meri (former common lands) in the two project regions and influenced the management practices of over 50 users of the grasslands in Central Balkans National park under the Pastoralism agri-environment scheme. However, there is no systematic information on the specific grasslands management practices that is maintained by the project team.
- The project organized 5 annual trainings, each of them 5-day long. A total of 256 participants in the trainings from over 90 different institutions (park directorates, NGOs, government structures, businesses and academia working in the field of nature resources and PA management). 100 lecturers have been delivered on 130 topics among which: Funding schemes in protected areas, Delegated budgets for PAs, Payments for ecosystem services, Crimes against Nature, Organic Products and Food-Delivery Cooperatives, EU Funds related to nature resource and PA management, Contemporary Communication Practices and Communication Campaigns, etc.
- The main benefits⁵ from the protected areas management training relate to: New professional knowledge and skills (for 80% of the participants); New contacts (76.4%); Opportunities for discussions with colleagues (76.4%); Ideas for new activities (61.8%) and Comparing professional activities with the current state in other organisations and institutions (60%). This project focus (activity and outcomes) was highly appreciated by the interviewed beneficiaries.

2. Develop models of sustainable use of rural areas and improving the socio-economic context by increasing incomes of local communities and businesses

The models of sustainable use of rural areas promoted by the project were support for pro-biodiversity businesses (PBBs) and farm businesses adding value to products and services from HNV areas, including preservation of local breeds as an important part of the HNV diversity and establishment of sustainable marketing channels. Additionally, the project developed a business strategy for the management of Uzana Children Nature Academy.

- The project supported 8 PBBs in the two project regions – 5 in WSP Natura 2000 area and 3 in Central Balkans region. The technical and administrative support provided to the applicants and then beneficiaries was highly appreciated by all interviewed (7 out of 8). This enabled them to prepare good proposals that were approved, and then to report them both financially and technically. The comparison between the PBBs funding approach (administration) and other (notably EU funded) schemes was clearly in favour of PBBs.
- The livestock farms in dairy and meat production supported by the project are 28. Out of them 19, dairy farms are in the project regions and 9 outside. 12 are officially registered and 16 are in a process of registration. 11 dairy farms participated in the farmers' markets organized by the project in 2017.

⁵ The assessment of the enhanced knowledge on protected areas management is based on a survey, organized by APB in 2017. 141 people out of the 188 (75%) that participated in the first 4 trainings responded.

- There are only 8 dairy producers from the region of Central Balkans, which is surprising having in mind that there are over 50 livestock farmers using the pastures of the National Park. The low level of interest for registration for direct sales deserves additional attention (study) in view of upscaling this activity in HNV territories.
- There are no meat products from grazing livestock and related HNV farming systems that were registered with support from the project. In general, this is more difficult, because of the need for a certified slaughtering house.
- At the same time, the project contribution for improving the system/legislation for dairy products registration for direct sales is highly appreciated by both the farmers implementing it and the responsible public administration – Bulgarian Food Safety Agency and MAF. Which makes it another landmark of the project.
- The project followed two paths for supporting the preservation of local breeds. One was to make sure that governments' support for rare breeds from the agri-environmental measure of the National Rural Development Programme continued in the 2014-2020 period. This was achieved successfully. However, the available support already in the previous EU programming period and the increasing number of animals of rare breeds required more robust criteria for determining the breed of the animals. Thus, the project efforts to develop specific genetic fingerprints for 27 rare breeds was led by the only public sector partner – the Executive Agency for Livestock Selection and Reproduction. The DNA analysis of cattle breeds is most advanced, the DNA analysis of sheep, goats, horses and buffalo breeds are lagging behind. The main reasons were the late financial contribution from the national government for the establishment of the laboratory (only in 2016) and technical demands for the sheep and goat breeds.
- The project was very successful in addressing one of the most significant problems for farmers - to sell their products (in general and as indicated in the group interviews during the field mission). The project initiated and developed four marketing channels: (1) Farmers markets on a weekly basis – in Borovo and other locations in Sofia; (2) Festival markets – Easter, Christmas, other events; (3) Online platform "Food from the Balkan"; and (4) Direct sales from the farms. The number of farmers at farmers' and festival markets has doubled from the project start (from 8 to 17); the number of products – tripled (from 7 to 24); and the revenues quadrupled (from over 4000 BGN to over 16000 BGN).
- The establishment of the Children Nature Academy followed a business model from the very beginning – from the selection of the location and premises via the public-private partnership between the BBF and Gabrovo municipality to the development and adoption of the business strategy and operational plan for its management. The ambition of the Academy management and team is indicated by the number of visits and income generation plan. Since it was adopted in autumn 2016, it is too early to assess sustainability of results. There is also no direct evidence of the effects of Uzana Children Nature Academy upon its visitors and participants – only on-the-spot studies of their satisfaction with the organizational aspects of the Academy were carried out. A promising approach are the evolving partnerships with other NGOs in the education and nature protection fields for the wider promotion of the Academy to attract more children.

3. Increase understanding of the importance of the sustainable development and protection of rural areas

The approaches for enhancing public participation in nature conservation management comprised developing and implementing specific models for adaptive conservation management in Central Balkans National Park; training, consultations and technical support to farmers, PBBs as well as public administration. The wider aims for raising public awareness and appreciation of products, services and conservation of HNV territories was reached via a multitude of activities related to online (websites and FB), press, radio and TV publications and campaigns, including National Award Media Campaign; as well as organization and participation in festivals, open days, green days, HNV food tasting, etc.

- An adaptive conservation management methodology was applied in CBNP. The gathering of farmers, park administration and external NGO was beneficial for improved communication between the parties as well as for increased understanding of each other's perspectives on the issue. This led to a reduction of grassland allocation conflicts and improved understanding of the conservation needs of the protected area. The approach and the results/agreement on grasslands conservation objectives was integrated in the new management plan of the CBNP. The approach and the results/agreement on grasslands conservation objectives was integrated in the new management plan of the CBNP.
- The enhanced knowledge for on-farm production and PBBs was another very successful result of the project. The interviewed farmers and businesses recognized the contribution of the project team to make them understand the requirements and to implement them better in their premises. Both groups of beneficiaries underlined the need for continuation of this type of training.
- The staff of the BFSA and MAF Livestock Breeding directorate recognized the trainings and experience exchange trips to Switzerland as mind-changing for their understanding and treatment of the on-farm processing. One of the respondents shared: "Before the answer to the question 'Can I sell milk directly' was 'Yes, see Regulation (EC) No 853/2004'. Now, we say: 'Yes, you have these options, you should do this and that'".
- The National Award Media Campaign raised the profile and image of PBBs and conservation organizations and was appreciated by media, beneficiaries, and consortium partners alike.

- The targeted number of 100 000 people in both live and virtual events was out-reached already in the second year of the project implementation.
- The consortium members organized and participated in a variety of meetings at local level. However, the lack of a systematic monitoring system does not allow to generate more detailed and meaningful information about the effectiveness of promoting local decision making forums.
- A special target group of the project were the young conservation leaders. Over 25 lectures on topics related to nature protection were delivered each year, attended by a total of over 1000 students. They were delivered routinely in two universities in Sofia, and by special invitation – in universities in Burgas, Plovdiv and Shumen. In addition to the lectures, 4 educational students' camps were organised for 20-30 people each and 16 students were supported with scholarships for their diploma theses. The interviews with students indicated that the greatest contribution of the lectures and the students' camps was linking practical experience with academic knowledge. It enhanced understanding the key role of the NGOs and citizens, together with the public administration, in the nature conservation domain. For the beneficiaries of the scholarships for diploma theses, the support was a rare opportunity to contribute to the research on topics narrowly focused on specific aspects of nature protection in Bulgaria. Of particular importance is the strong belief of the students involved in the project that there is a viable nature protection community in Bulgaria, getting together present and future professionals, NGOs and citizens.

4. Guarantee long-term sustainability of programme results by mainstreaming its outputs into the relevant legislation

- The project was effective in mainstreaming findings and results into relevant national legislative acts. The consortium partners together with other members of For the Nature Coalition influenced 11 laws, 27 ordinances and 20 policy documents⁶.
- Two proposals for changes (in 2014 and 2015) respectively were submitted and discussed with BFSA and MAF about Ordinance 26/2010 on direct sales regulations. The proposed changes in Ordinance 26 were very important for simplifying the application procedures for farmers. As a result of the changes, the number of registered dairy farmers has increased significantly to over 70 at national level.
- The project team was (and still is) directly involved in the drafting of the Ordinance for the implementation of the PES schemes according to the Forestry Act, art.249. This is another key outcome of the project implementation – the timely and targeted amendments to the existing legislation to reduce the threats to biodiversity and to introduce the concept of PES schemes.
- A specific contribution by the project was the advocacy for the continuation of the Organic Farming, Pastoralism, Rare breeds and HNV Farming support as well as the introduction of Forest-environment payments and Natura 2000 compensatory payments for forests in the National Rural Development Plan for the period 2014-2020.

2.2.2 Strengthening the For the Nature coalition and increasing the support to nature conservation

The rationale for supporting the strengthening of the coalition was increasing the consolidation of the environmental sector towards more effective influence in policy-making, attracting more citizens as supporters of nature conservation, maintaining a powerful promotion tool and creating a strong prerequisite for the sustainability of the project results.

Created in 2007, the coalition is the most active and influential civic player in the field of environmental protection, its main focus of work being the effective enforcement of the relevant national policies and legislation. In the Bulgarian NGO community the coalition is among the few models of effective large-scale network, and the project partners are among its most active members. The coalition is a non-formal association of 25 member organizations and over 50 friends – NGOs, companies and citizens.

The project successfully contributed in five critical organizational development areas in which difficulties were experienced before 2012: strategic planning, internal coordination and communications, management of human resources (mostly volunteers) and public outreach.

Over 30 meetings of the coalition were held during the project period, dedicated to a large range of topics, *e.g.* strategic development, annual planning, coordinating common positions on important policy developments, meetings with supporters and volunteers. The list of volunteers was regularly updated and distributed in 20 groups to organize volunteer support according to their competences. The management of the coalition website and FB page as key outreach mechanisms were structured in terms of contents and distribution of members' responsibilities for uploading it.

The support for the coalition ensured:

⁶ Not all of them are reported in the Annual reports. The information was provided by project partners in the process of their drafting of a compendium with key project influences.

- **Continuous monitoring of policies and legislation** drafting and implementation. This included all related public administrations at the central and regional levels. The monitoring was not centralized but carried out by members of the teams of different member organizations.
- **Continuous policy work.** Within the project timeframe the coalition influenced the amendments of 11 laws, 27 ordinances and 20 policy documents⁷;
- **Quick response in cases of violations.** The coalition or project partners on behalf of the coalition reacted (with signals to institutions, press-releases, advocacy, expert support to local groups, etc.) in over 40 conflict cases. The work on numerous cases created, on its behalf, solid evidence to support following policy actions.
- **Further consolidation of the environmental sector.** The coalition is considered by all project partners as representing the most active segment of the environmental NGO sector. While the diversity of the members and friends both in terms of organizational set-up and scope of activity did not allow for informed common positions of *all of them* on outstanding issues, the community consistently supported its members. Thus even individual NGOs' positions were signed as "on behalf of *For the Nature* coalition".
- **Attracting more citizens to the nature conservation cause.** The FB page followers increased over 4 times in the project period – from 7,000 in 2012 to 31,000 in 2017. The protests in 2013 (against construction in Pirin and the Black Sea coast) and 2015 (against construction in 3 PAs) mobilized thousands of people. The November 2016 "Save Pirin" campaign gathered over 100,000 letters of support.

A definite success of the project and the coalition was that it managed to maintain a pool of volunteers dedicated to the nature protection cause and not to a concrete NGO. Their number is above 300, 100 out of which are regularly involved in different actions.

Another project highlight is the marked increase in the activity of local citizens in contacting the coalition and individual project partners with signals for conservation violations and/or with questions and requests for advice. This increase is a clear demonstration of the ability of the partners to respond to concrete local needs, solve concrete issues and strengthen the trust of individual people not directly involved in nature conservation activities.

2.2.3 Scope and outreach in comparison to similar projects

In the framework of this review, the team was asked to comment on the scope and outreach of comparable projects on national and/or EU scale, where possible. As an in-depth study on the achievements of the different projects is not feasible within this review, we highlight elements that are of interest for the project in a potential next phase.

As a similar project to the discussed one, the project "**HNVF – Rural Development and High Nature Value Farmlands in Romania**" could be mentioned, though shorter (3 years) and with roughly a fourth of the budget (CHF 1'245'712.-). The overall outcome was: "Improved economic viability of local livelihoods from High Nature Value farmlands in Romania through protecting the agri-environmental benefits." The scope of the project was smaller content-wise, focussing mainly on HNV farmers/producers and on providing instruments for them to get better access to agri-environmental subsidies and to improve marketing of their products. On the contrary, the geographical scope was larger from the start, comprising 6 pilot regions in the northern part of the country (including Transylvania).

Within its policy component, the project influenced a specific measure on HNV farming, supporting importantly the opportunities for HNV farming. Policy influence was evidence based on intense lobbying, helped by original studies on value chains from HNV areas and marketing.

The project focussed on training "community facilitators" instead of working directly with farmers. 15 community facilitators were trained in the 6 pilot regions. This way, around 800 farmers were informed/trained. No direct comparison regarding results on the level of farms is therefore possible. As part of the project, an exit strategy was designed so that community facilitators could search for new sources of funding after the end of the project.

The project's aim was to provide the basis for better HNV management and better marketing of HNV products. In this regard, a collective logo was elaborated. No official trademark registration was done in order to keep the internal control slight and costs for it low. Despite the mistrust in Rumania against collective organisation of farmers, the project achieved the foundation of 1 cooperative and one female farmers' association. An SMS information tool was built as well as an online shop. Farmers' markets were reinforced and other marketing tools such as a van equipped to serve as mobile shop of HNV products.

In **Poland**, a similar project was called "**Natura 2000 species diversity**". It had a budget of 2.853 Mio. CHF over 5 years (till June 2017). The focus of this project was rather on research and education, so that it cannot be compared to the Bulgarian project in terms of results at the level of businesses and farm support. However, interesting is the approach

⁷ Not all of them are reported in the Annual reports. The information was provided by project partners in the process of their drafting of a compendium with key project influences.

through the comparison of different agricultural practices and agri-environmental schemes on biodiversity (Organic farming; Extensive permanent grassland; Protection of endangered bird species and habitats outside Natura 2000; Protection of endangered species of birds and habitats in Natura 2000 areas) and subsequent dissemination of results.

Another project in Poland, also under the Swiss EU-enlargement fund, concentrated on linking nature park management with sustainable tourism ("The **People-Friendly Carpathians**"), including information and communication on eco-friendly investments. It was a rather small (<1 Mio. CHF) project of four years (2011-2015). The "Green Investment Service Centre" still continues with funding from a foundation, a small own revenue and contribution of volunteers. It provides advisory services for businesses that want to operate in Natura2000 areas and thus are regulated by respective norms. In 2016, services were provided to businesses in regional promotion, tourism, architectural services and local production⁸.

Two of the Consortium partners (BSBP and WWF DCP) worked previously on **projects of similar focus in different parts of Bulgaria** funded from a different donor. The present project builds considerably on the experience of these and other previous projects. So the support of HNV farmers for the legal registration for direct sales, the design of private PES schemes, the involvement of local businesses as well as the need to change and/or amend the existing legal framework were tested in other times and funded by other donors, which makes them difficult to compare to the current project.

Project Title	Project duration	Total budget	Number of project areas	Focus	Implementing partner	Donor
BG: Conservation of globally important biodiversity in high nature value semi-natural grasslands through support for the traditional local economy	2007-2011 (2012)	2.2 mio USD	3: WSP, Ponor, Bessaparski Hills	Nature protection/support to local farming economy	BSPB	GEF / UNDP
BG: Promoting Payments for Ecosystem Services and Related Sustainable Financing Schemes in the Danube Basin	2009-2013 (2014)	2.3 mio USD	4: 2 in BG; 2 in Romania	Protection of ecosystem services/new models for sustainable financing	WWF DCP	GEF / UNEP
RO: HNVF – Rural Development and High Nature Value Farmlands in Romania	2013-2016	1.2 mio CHF	HNV areas	Nature protection and sustainable agriculture	Consortium with CH and Rumanian partners	Swiss enlargement contribution
PL: Natura 2000 species diversity	2011-2017	2.9 mio CHF	1: Lubelskie Voivodeship	Nature protection/research	Local regional government	Swiss enlargement contribution
PL: People-Friendly Carpathians	2011-2015	0.9 mio CHF	1: Polish Carpathians	Nature protection, tourism, entrepreneurship	"Partnership for environment" Foundation	Swiss enlargement contribution

Table 2: Similar projects

In summary, the scope of the project "Linking nature and sustainable rural development" was large in comparison to other projects as regards the budget and the activities undertaken. A number of new instruments such as the PES were tested in the project in a collaborative approach with partners both from the NGO sector and government. In comparison with projects with a smaller thematic focus, the combined outreach of the Bulgarian project thus seems reasonable. Moreover, through the collaboration, the single partner NGOs learned from each other on their approaches. This may initially have delayed the project but in the end has strengthened the knowledge in each organisation. In comparison, the time and efforts needed to construct a solid basis of evidence to implement all new instruments may have been underestimated.

2.2.4 Lessons learnt regarding effectiveness

Work in parallel on community level and legislative level was decisive for success. The local-level work provided credibility to work at policy level; while the work at policy level was important to improve efficiency and sustainability of efforts at the local level.

Changing the thinking and the policies is possible even in unstable external environment (e.g. government changes). The key success factors are knowledge and expertise (of the project team), strategy for achieving policy change (when, what and with whom/at what level) and persistence.

⁸ <http://www.cozi.org.pl/?c=mdTresc-cmPokaz-384>; personal information project team

The combination of different levels of learning (training, study trips and learning-by-doing) contributed to changing the way of thinking of stakeholders regarding the integration of nature protection and local economic activities.

Different criteria for the financial approaches (PBB, FI, PES) were used within the project. A coordination of instruments for small businesses (e.g. with one decision committee) would have made the project interventions more coherent (and better measurable).

For upscaling, it is decisive to address the reasons for the reluctance of dairy farmers to register officially. For all businesses, the "early adopters" are often persons with a non-rural background, thus specific measures for enhancing the sustainable entrepreneurship are in need, such as information campaigns and specific training. The non-rural persons often lack specific training in agricultural production.

2.3 Efficiency

2.3.1 The management structures

Six structures were involved in the project implementation:

- **The National Coordination Unit (NCU).** NCU is responsible for the inclusion of the Civil Society Fund (CSF) in the portfolio of Supporting Measures and, on a general level, for the monitoring of the CSF implementation. NCU holds annual meeting with the SDC and is represented at the CSF Steering Committee.
- **Steering Committee of the Thematic Fund level (SC).** Members of the SC are representative of 4 Bulgarian ministries (MoEW, MAF, MLSP and MJ), the Bulgarian NGOs, the NCU, SIB and SDC. SC's role is at the strategic level for the whole thematic fund, ensuring meeting of the fund's objectives, legal and financial compliance and overseeing management systems.
- The **Strategic Platform (SP)** was expected to ensure coherence of the programme and compliance with the high-level objectives. It was planned to have annual meetings, convening one representative of SIB, MoEW, MAF, the 4 project target groups, the Bulgarian and the Swiss partners. More specifically, the SP was expected to follow and advise on the overall project implementation and impact, to evaluate and facilitate the proposals for legislation changes and to facilitate the policy dialogue at the higher level
- **The Swiss Intermediate Body (SIB)** is led by the InnovaBridge Foundation, represented in Bulgaria by the Balkan Institute for Labour and Social Policy (BILSP). SIB's responsibilities are related to all aspects of the management of CSF – contracting the grantees, support and advice during the projects implementation, monitoring and control, avoiding double funding for the projects, review and approval of project reports, payments, launching publicity measures, reporting to SDC, etc.
- **Project Management Board (PMB)** was planned and established with the purpose of ensuring successful delivery of an integral programme without compromising the identity and individual development of the NGOs. All partners were represented at the PMB (two seats for the Swiss organizations). PMB was responsible for all major aspects of the project management – supervision of the PMU performance, planning and modification of activities, coordination of the work between the different components and along the horizontal objectives, approval of all steps related to support for businesses, approval of budgets and reports.
- Bioselena served as **Executing Agency** and host of the **Programme Management Unit (PMU)**. It was responsible for the contacts with SIB, signing contracts and disbursement of funds to the consortium partners, serving as Secretariat of the SP and the PMB, preparation of consolidated semi-annual and annual reports, establishment of common visual identity of the programme and implementation of common visibility strategy.

Four of the above were necessitated by the Civil Society Fund Agreement and two – the SP and the PMB – were offered by the partners in the Project Document.

The interview with a representative of the **NCU** showed that the project is known in detail. It is considered important both in terms of immediate benefits in the area of nature conservation and local economy and in terms of strengthening the civil society organizations. The forming of a large consortium of diverse NGOs is seen as successful approach for large-scale projects, and the effectiveness of the partnership under this project – a model for cooperative NGO work. The project progress has been reported at the SC meetings as required, and NCU, together with SDC, is seen as major partner and not an observer. NCU demonstrated this when high level facilitation was needed for securing the delayed state co-financing of the Genetic Laboratory.

The Strategic Platform did not meet the expectations laid down in the Project Document. A meeting was held in 2014 and measures for supporting the achievement of the project objectives were offered. However, the attending ministries' representatives were not at a decision-making level and, in addition, as the SP was informal body, the meeting did not produce any concrete results. No further meetings were held; moreover the following governments were disinterested to cooperate.

The role of the SIB was discussed during both the interviews and the self-evaluation session. The communication with SIB has been almost exclusively dedicated to the administrative aspects of the contracts implementation – reporting, public procurement procedures, financing details, etc. The communication related to the environmental and developmental aspects of the project was mainly with SDC directly. Apart from instances of introducing some difficult conditions to the partners⁹, SIB has been supportive, especially with its prompt feedback when modifications of the project were introduced. It should be noted that (a) SIB was selected in parallel with the project preparation, (b) it did not have a role in the project design and the selection of the partners and (c) BILSP, although experienced in working with NGOs, did not have a track record in handling projects with a clear environmental focus. Thus, an important part of the project implementation process remained without a responsible body, such as on-going external monitoring, quality control and substantive feedback. At the start, the project design planned for peer monitoring which proved to be difficult in view of the different responsibilities of the partners.

The Project Management Board was the core collective body responsible for the project management. Based on both documentary review and interviews, the PMB was a true management unit and not a formal structure. The PMB meetings were held 4 times each year and SIB was represented in all of them. PMB reviewed the project results per components and project finances, approved the businesses proposed to be supported, decided on outstanding issues, improved the coordination of the work between the different components. Practically all major decisions regarding the achievement of the project results, including the amendments of the logframe, were discussed and taken at the PMG level. In the second project year it was the PMB suggestion that the Bulgarian project partners hold frequent coordination meetings to facilitate the project effectiveness and efficiency. In 2015, after analysing the accumulated delays and challenges, the PMB had an extended meeting – a 3-days planning session – to come up with an adequate response. It was at this session when, together with other measures, an extension of the project duration was suggested.

In terms of effectiveness, all respondents agreed that the PMB was a key factor for the project success. Challenges were identified in terms of efficiency. As the PMB decisions were taken with consensus, the discussions were often lengthy, necessitating follow-up clarifications, and at times difficult for the partners when questions outside their expertise were discussed. The opinion about slow decision-making process was related not just to the PMG work but to the overall project management set-up, *i.e.* the size of the consortium, the different backgrounds of the partners, the several levels of approval, **the ambiguity of the role of the Swiss experts in the project management** (see below).

It is our opinion that while these challenges did cause some tensions and consumed more time than originally planned, they did not affect the achievement of the project results. The issue with the decision-making process is that it was slower than expected. The question of securing efficient management mechanisms was somewhat neglected during the preparatory phase when the building of a coherent project with common objectives was the priority.

2.3.2 The consortium

At the level of day-do-day management, in order to preserve the identity of each NGO and to provide for equality in the decision making process, a coordination rather than leadership project management model was chosen. Under this model Bioselena acted both as a representative of the consortium towards SIB, SDC and the National Coordination Unit (NCU) and as an implementing partner responsible for a set of activities and outcomes. All relevant respondents agreed that Bioselena managed to clearly differentiate these roles and that as a coordinator it was knowledgeable, accurate, supportive and facilitative. A drawback of this management set-up was, as noted above, the absence of a management structure to assume the responsibilities related to external monitoring and quality assurance. A more directive management style could have fastened the processes at the start, but may have put the growing cohesion among the consortium at risk.

The challenges to the project implementation can be summarized as:

2.3.2.1 Delays from the original time-plan

Most of the project activities were implemented with delays, resulting mainly from:

- Incessant changes in Government¹⁰ (followed by changes at different levels of public administration, including most of the directors of national and nature parks) and delay in the co-funding from the MAF;
- Prolonged negotiations with local authorities (in the case of Uzana Children Nature Academy);
- Overoptimistic expectations about the preparedness and willingness of local farmers and businesses to get involved in the project;

⁹ E.g. proofs of salaries' payments, requirements for public procurement when direct contracting was seen as more appropriate, verification of each accounting line, etc. These conditions were applied for the whole thematic fund and derived from the relevant Bulgarian legislation.

¹⁰ Since the project start in September 2012 Bulgaria had three Parliamentary elections (2013, 2014 and 2017) and seven Governments (3 of them caretaker). Local elections were held once during the project period, in 2015.

- (in the first two years) The complexity of the program and the reporting requirements which lead to delays in the reporting from the partners to Bioselena and then from Bioselena to the SIB.

All delays, reflected also in the pace of disbursements, were discussed and properly presented in reports. The partners' response was adequate, e.g. PES promotion continued despite the delay in elaboration of the final draft of the PES ordinance, the decision to support the establishment of NGO ECIP Bulgarka in the Bulgarka Nature Park to bypass the difficult relations with the new Park Director, the enlargement of the project area to involve new farmers and businesses. A special focus of the work of all partners was the proper adaptation of the project in relation to uncontrollable/unpredictable external developments. This conditioned the amendment of the logframe twice, in 2014 and 2016.

The delays of activities that required cooperation with public administration bodies and the low interest on behalf of the farmers were not a result of improper planning. Some of the interviewed farmers shared the opinion that involving them needed time and trust. The case with the use of local NGOs as intermediaries in the PES schemes is different. Firstly, the fact that PAs' generated money is introduced in the national budget could have been taken into consideration before the launch of the project. Secondly, the directions of development of an independent NGO may change depending on the strategy of its Board. Thus, its future implementation of PES schemes cannot be taken for granted – it may decide to focus on other approaches to nature conservation and/or community development. Thirdly, even if a private PES scheme is launched with the support of a cooperative Park director, future change in leadership could compromise its sustainable implementation in the long-run.

2.3.2.2 Communication and coordination issues

Between the Bulgarian partners. The issues here were mostly between Bioselena and BSPB, which were implementing identical activities for good farming practices within two different regions. Both partners refer to them as minor problems of rather personal character that have been solved in the course of the project. However, in the March 2016 mission report of one of the Swiss experts the problems were mentioned in quite harsh manner as threatening the successful implementation of the project. A discussion between the expert and representatives of the two NGOs resulted in a set of concrete measures to be taken. During the interviews and the self-evaluation session the problems were reported as successfully solved. As the component was completed successfully, we don't have reasons to believe otherwise.

Between the Bulgarian and the Swiss partners. The role of the Swiss organizations has not been very clear from the very beginning of the project. Their input as equal partners is widely appreciated by the Bulgarian NGOs, especially their expert contribution, support for the organization of the events in Switzerland and ability to identify alternative solutions to local issues. At the same time, frustrations arose at times due to the perceived desire of the Swiss partners to act more as mentors, advisers or representatives of the SDC, and to over-involve in management issues. This duality is demonstrated by the format of the Annual Project Reports too: separate sections with their *Comment from the Swiss management support partners* exist.

In fact, the Project Document mentions a large array of expectations towards the Swiss partners¹¹. The tensions have been overcome to a great extent during the course of the project. They could have been avoided if there were clear terms of reference for the work of the Swiss partners (separate from the description of tasks in the Project Document), with a clear division between expert and (management) advisory tasks.

2.3.3 The individual NGOs

The interviews with the NGO leaders and project teams showed high motivation and understanding that the project is close to the established scope of work of the organizations and within the competences of their staff. In order to assess more clearly the place of the project within the overall budgets and work of the NGOs we studied their annual budgets, overall staff and team members working on the project.

	APB	BBF	Bioselena	BSPB	WWF
1. Share of the grant in the annual budget	72%	32%	55%	11%	10%
2. Total staff	4	12	7	30	18
3. Share of staff working on the project	100%	90%	97%	33%	44%
4. Share of time dedicated to the project	84%	45%	47%	26%	20%
5. Project staff in full-time equivalent	3	5	3	3	2
6. Share of time out of the total for the NGO	89%	40%	46%	9%	8%

Table 3: The project in the context of the NGOs, average figures for the period 2013-2017.

¹¹ II.3.2. Programme Management and Steering; Strategic and technical advice level, more in detail: strategic and operational advice on the programme management and implementation, provision of overall view, contribution to strengthening the coherence and unity of the programme, helping the effective coordination between the different components, assuring high quality management and most efficient use of its resources.

In terms of staff allocation (3) and workload in fulltime equivalent (5), the figures match the scope and the distribution of work. APB, which is also the smallest organization, mobilized the largest share of its human resources, and the higher workload of BBF corresponds to the diversity of activities within the responsibilities of the organization. There is also a close match between the share of the grant within the annual budgets of the NGOs (1) and the share of the workload within the total human resources (6). The responsibilities of the individual team members were clearly defined, and the employment of PR manager and PR expert (in the BBF team, responsible for the whole consortium) was a particularly good approach, benefiting both the consortium and BBF.

With long-term and large-scale projects there is a legitimate question is whether they risk creating a single donor dependency of the implementing organizations. As in-depth organizational assessment of the partners was not within the scope of this review, we studied only the dynamics of the Bulgarian NGOs' funding outside the project.

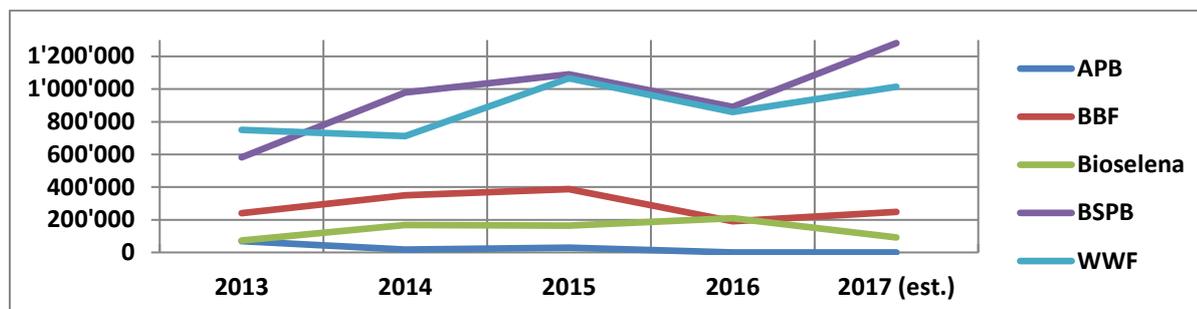


Table 4: Income of the NGOs from non-profit activities without the Swiss grant for the period 2013-2017, in €.

WWF and BSPB managed to increase significantly their external funding, BBF and Bioselena only slightly. The financial situation of APB is very difficult for the reasons mentioned above.

2.3.4 Economic efficiency

In previous sections, it was already explained that the activities chosen to reach the objectives of the project were relevant and that the project largely achieved expected results. This section reviews how far the available funds were used in an economical, effective way. In other words, if the project produced "value for money". Three aspects were reviewed: economic use of funds and time-efficiency. Appropriateness of expertise used was discussed in 2.3.1.

Economic use of funds: A difficulty for this assessment is that budget components do not always correspond to the log-frame (e.g. outcomes 4.). Overall, the activities corresponding to component B ("rural development") consumed most of the budget (almost 52 %) but also produced many positive and crucial results. The activities ordered under outcome 3, corresponding to component C, also produced important results in relation to the expenditures. For component A, it was the component with most of the delay and novel approaches like PES. However, relative to the 20% of project budget expenditures for the whole component, it remained under the expectations. The expenditures for visibility were more than CHF 40'000 under the total budgeted at the start. Staff remuneration corresponds to similar projects according to the reviewers' information.

Component	Expenditures (by 12.4. 17)	Total expenditures/spent (%)
A: Pilot tools and mechanisms for effective enforcement of the relevant legislation to guarantee sustainable use and long-term preservation of rural areas	CHF 848'423	20
B: Develop models of sustainable use of rural areas and improving the socio-economic context by increasing incomes of local communities and businesses	CHF 2'157'246	52
C: Provide models of fostering informed public support for sustainable rural development	CHF 730'396	17
D: Visibility of programme results	CHF 66'361	1.6
E: Programme management	CHF 387'991	9.4
Total project expenditures	CHF 4'150'417	100

Table 5: Expenditures per component

By 29.2.2017, the project still had a balance of roughly CHF 640'000.- or 13% of the total project budget that can be spent. According to the budget (revised budget year V, 12.4.2017), this should all be used up. According to management information, the balance by the end of the project will be close to 0.

According to the different tasks mentioned above, the contribution of the Swiss experts was budgeted in component and in management budget lines. Project money spent for their contribution in management of components and the representation in the project coordination unit amount to 4.9% of the total project budget (only fees, without expenses). Their contribution in technical advice (only fees, without expenses and organisation of the study tour to Switzerland) amount to 1.6% of the total project budget. Relative to their active role in the project, this is a reasonable amount.

2.3.5 Lessons learnt regarding efficiency

Taking into account the external factors, the efficiency of the program was good. It could have been improved with a leaner management structure (one body instead of steering committee and strategic platform). **Clear Terms of Reference for all functions from the start would have reduced some communication issues and helped to reduce the tension between expert role and management advice of the Swiss experts.**

In the case of the funding schemes for protected areas, a more profound research on their financial rules could have helped to craft another solution to their funding issues.

The flexible rules and requirements in the Swiss funding was important to achieve results and encourage beneficiaries and stakeholders to plan for long-term development.

2.4 Sustainability

At the start of the project, the approach to sustainability was described in the project document under the dimensions environmental, economic, social and organisational sustainability.

The project sought to achieve **environmental sustainability** through "economically viable traditional uses of nature resources, which are at the same time biodiversity friendly". Through the pro-biodiversity businesses (PBB), the aim was to become a model for sustainable resource use. The approach of the project to **economic sustainability** was "the development of quality products and services that could be marketed". In addition, the introduction of PES schemes was seen as a mechanism to reward "those whose lands provide these services" (and implicitly, keep and protect the lands). It was already noted that a positive political environment for this schemes is an important element for the introduction of such schemes. Under **social sustainability**, the project understood a) its contribution to employment and income, and b) to the quality of life, not the least through its contribution to the provision of ecosystem services. Finally, the focus of the project regarding **organisational or institutional sustainability** was on the reinforcement of partner NGOs in their task to keep environmental objectives in "public consciousness and on the political agenda". Under this aim falls also the strengthening of the "For the Nature" coalition. The implicit assumption is that the approach to work through civil society organisations to enhance nature protection is effective.

2.4.1 Creation of sustainable market mechanisms

From the definition of sustainability used by the project, the market mechanisms should include the various dimensions. For the time being, data especially on PES is still limited because they are very recent. For some supported PBBs and FIs, the same is the case. However, from the data collected and described in the sections above, it can be concluded that the balance shifted more towards economic and social sustainability. A considerable number of farmers benefits from additional marketing channels. They leave no doubt that interest in their on-farm products are steadily raising and are thinking about increasing the supply. Moreover, several times the improved quality of life was mentioned in interviews, either due to increased income or to the opportunity to live healthy. Respondents from small businesses have a clear understanding of their possibilities on the market and the next steps they would take for their businesses, be it increasing or stabilising the supply. The amount of businesses and farms involved in new market mechanisms may seem small at the first sight, but considering the historical and political context the achievement is an important basis. To reach sustainability at a regional level, the activities need to be up-scaled, while keeping high standards of selection.

"Before we met the NGO, we sold our milk wholesale at 1 Leva/litre. Then we met the people at Bioselena and they told us about on-farm processing. We also met a cheesemaker through the project who introduced us to produce cheese. Without the NGO, we wouldn't have been able to set up the processing. With their help in financing, paperwork and cheesemaking we now have a closed cycle. I opened an additional shop in Plovdiv with one employee. Now we get 2.5 Leva/litre."

Box 3: Rare breeds' farmer

However, the analysis of PES contracts and PBBs¹² shows that environmental criteria are in some cases either unclear (grassland management) or rather weak (K-express contract) so far. It follows that link to nature needs to be strengthened again in the continuation. For the PES, the difficulty is that it is a new concept not only in Bulgaria but also on international level and that experiences from other countries could therefore not be considered. The experiences made in Bulgaria will in turn provide the international community with information on how to implement the schemes. An important part for the sustainability of market mechanisms are the consumers or potential clients and their behaviour. The project has put a lot of effort into making the link of biodiversity protection and rural development in the project regions better understood and could benefit from a general trend of (urban) population towards healthy, regional food. Through the

¹² Pro-biodiversity businesses might be a misleading term, as the formulation of the objective in the logframe does not stipulate to "improve environmental conditions". It is geared towards socio-economic results, assuming that this is the basis for a better acceptance of nature conservation.

mechanisms the project created or started to test, the involvement of the public in pro-biodiversity measures was enabled. However, the sustainability of the measures taken will not the least depend on the challenges to develop a steady supply on the market, market opportunities and marketing skills. This will still need further effort in a potential next phase of the project.

2.4.2 Importance of the changes in Bulgarian legislation

The contribution of the project to the improvements of legislation for small businesses, PES schemes and for biodiversity is considerable. The flagship example is the influence of partners on Ordinance 26 for direct sales. Not only was the text better adapted to needs of small businesses, but the project also had considerable influence in making public services (FSA) understand what farmers need and use the legislation accordingly. This is a key achievement for rural development and an important basis for sustainable further implementation.

However, farmers and project partners still report considerable difficulties to register officially, which indicates that activities on this level need to be continued. The farmers' hesitation to register officially¹³ was one of the crucial difficulties the project encountered. This led to an initial implementation delay and the enlargement of the project area. It is also a concern for out- and upscaling of the models created. The low level of interest for registration maybe due in part to the high level of requirements that government aims to and the controlling function they mainly play. Another barrier might be that direct selling and on-farm processing needs a lot of commitment of a whole farmer family.

For a further phase, it is therefore important to strengthen the work with the public agents to ensure legislation is formulated and implemented in a way conducive for small businesses. It is clear that some barriers might be necessary to overcome to achieve this, but under a sustainability perspective it is indispensable. One aspect of sustainability of measures taken is that government agencies learn to work as service providers, as it has been reported by FSA-respondents, not mainly as controllers.

2.4.3 Improvement of know-how and institutional capacities

According to the interviews with the consortium partners and the internal evaluation, the project allowed the partners to substantially improve their knowledge and institutional capacities. Some of the partners learned about new approaches (in particular the inclusion of the socio-economic needs of people in and around conservation areas) and acknowledged the exchange with other partners in this regard was very fruitful for them. In general, the strength of the coalition improved and with some stakeholders, they could improve their credibility. The internal evaluation showed that lessons were learnt. For a next set up, the consortium will most probably be able to define smoother decision ways and improve internal communication.

Local stakeholders and authorities met (20 respondents) proved with one exception to understand that providing small businesses with economic opportunities that are linked to the local ecosystem helps the socio-economic development of the whole region. Often, the link to tourism was made. However, the kind of tourism that is desired differs among respondents.

The project also helped build institutional capacities at regional level, e.g. regarding the PES and FI management. However, to assess these it is still too early. Regarding park management, the project invested considerable resources in training of protected areas management. The feedback from the training activities is very good. According to interview partners, the capacity improvement of collaborators and the exchange of experience between the participants led to an increased understanding of the mutual dependencies of parks and local people. The reduction of conflicts about grassland allocation and conservation in the national park is a sign for improved management that will persist. However, the grassland management of visited farmers in both parts of the country did not reveal a consistent understanding of HNV grassland management. To fully achieve environmental sustainability of HNV grasslands, further efforts to increase farmers' awareness and understanding will be needed in this area.

An additional aspect regarding improvement of know-how are the various groups outside the project partners or direct beneficiaries that were addressed with education and communication efforts by the project, such as the group of young leaders, volunteers, media (13 respondents). Considering the broad involvement of these groups for the cause and their overall understanding of the link between nature and the socio-economic aspects in the regions in Bulgaria, these efforts are prone to show long-term positive effects.

"As volunteers for green NGOs, we have witnessed how conservationists can make friends with the sheep farmers or with a jam producer collecting wild fruits, for example. Before, the conservationists saw their task in protecting e.g. the vulture and rare plants only. They did not think of the people. The project brought nature and local people together."

Box 4: Volunteers' statement about the mutual learning in the consortium

¹³ The registration as farmer is a condition for on-farm processing and direct selling.

Finally, the continuation of activities in the field depend on the capacities of stakeholders to improve their financial basis even without the project. For the NGOs, the opportunities to attract money within Bulgaria are very limited (2.3.2). However, to provide the services they do now, NGOs depend in the near future on donor money. Ensuring that farmers get access to adequate advice in the future means to include the governmental advisory services in the training and policy dialogue like it was done with the FSA. Due to bad experiences, farmers do not yet trust the public extension services. However, it is a very positive sign that change was achieved in the FSA with training and study tours provided by the project.

For local businesses, the attraction of further sources of financing is crucial for innovation steps. A good sign is that the farmers involved in direct sales overall invested more own money than the project provided. Critical is the situation about the genetic laboratory. Apparently, new funding schemes are in preparation. It needs to be ensured that the public interest in the preservation of rare breeds is politically supported, so that the farmers do not bear the costs only.

2.4.4 Lessons learnt regarding sustainability

In the aim to support the development of nature-friendly business, contracts need to be clear on ecosystem services targeted and the management practices to maintain them. HNV grassland management needs more communication and technical expertise provided to farmers.

To be able to influence legislation needs constant presence and expertise. In the policy dialogue, it is decisive to include both management and technical level.

Funding schemes need to be viable beyond the project duration. How the supported components become self-sustainable after the end of project funding is to be discussed during the planning. For the genetic laboratory, such reflections could not be found in the project document.

3 Conclusions

After evaluating the results based on the data collected and described in section 2, the review team came to the following conclusions for an overall assessment. The colour codes are as following: green stands for fully achieved, yellow for partly achieved and red for critical.

Criteria	Judgement criteria	Evaluation
1. Relevance		
1.1. General relevance	1.1.1. Theory supports approach	
	1.1.2. The project's objectives are in accordance to objectives for nature protection at European level	
1.2. Coherence of approach	1.2.1. Management for the protection of HNV and PA improved (according to interview data)	
	1.2.2. Smallholder structure of agriculture in selected project areas prone for type of chosen approaches	
	1.2.3. The importance of civil society for nature protection and sustainable rural development in BG confirmed/recognized	
	1.2.4. Relevance of the implementation model through consortium of NGOs	
2. Effectiveness		
2.1. Achievement of outcome indicators	2.1.1. Extent to which the outcome indicators are achieved	
2.2. Effectiveness with regards to policy dialogue and improvement/change of legislation	2.2.1. Stakeholders, in particular from government, are likely to revert to the NGOs of the coalition for the elaboration of new legislation (credibility)	
	2.2.2. Number of legislative acts that have been adapted with contributions from the project	
	2.2.3. Legislation that is adapted to enable nature protection and rural development ("quality" of legislation changes, link to sustainability)	

3. Efficiency		
3.1. Efficiency of structure of the project	3.1.1. Partners acknowledge internal learning process through project	
	3.1.2. Selection of relevant partner organisations ("experts in their field")	
3.2. Efficiency of management structures	3.2.1. Timeliness of implementation according to plan	
	3.2.2. Clear definition of tasks (PMU, steering committee, strategic platform)	
	3.2.3. Effective accomplishment of management and coordination tasks	
	3.2.4. Effective use of funds	
4. Sustainability		
4.1. Creation of sustainable market mechanisms	4.1.1. Improvement of income and jobs created/maintained in supported businesses (where numbers available)	
	4.1.2. Improvement of financing sources for biodiversity conservation and protected areas (PES schemes, PBBs and FIs)	
	4.1.3. Likelihood of further expansion of supported businesses (new markets, plans for expansion of production) without further project support	
4.2. Reinforcement of public participation	4.2.1. Contribution to reputation of environmental NGOs in the public	
	4.2.2. Contribution to reputation of the environmental NGOs among public administration	
	4.2.3. Functioning/liveliness of supported networks (e.g. farmers in WSP, farmers-BFSA, PA experts, BFSA experts, the project partners, the For the Nature coalition, the conservation leaders community, etc.)	
	4.2.4. Capacity of education components to continue on themselves	
4.3. Strengthening of specific know-how and institutional capacities of project partners	4.3.1. Strengthening of know-how was acknowledged during the internal evaluation	
	4.3.2. Strengthening of institutional capacity was acknowledged during the internal evaluation	
4.4. Strengthening of specific know-how and institutional capacities of stakeholders and authorities	4.4.1. Strengthening of know-how and institutional capacities were acknowledged	
	4.4.2. Evaluation of training efforts for stakeholders were positive	
4.5. Potential to acquire financial means for similar activities	4.5.1. The partners have further plans to acquire funds	
	4.5.2. Access of NGOs to national public funds for nature conservation	

Key conclusions

The following key conclusions can be made after an assessment of the data collected:

1. The project was a unique learning opportunity on the new approaches and concepts used for the involved consortium partners as well as the public administration and beneficiaries.
2. Direct sales is a success as far as it is assessable by now, and the work on practicable registration needs to be continued.
3. Private PES schemes are working at small scale. Clarification is needed on their concept in comparison to other concepts such as conservation finance or community fundraising. Public PES schemes are not working yet, but they are also ambitious. Once ready to implement, their scope will be national. Support to start implementation is still needed.
4. Financial approaches (PBB, FI, PES): The different criteria and how they were applied by different organisations is not always understandable. This may create inequalities among beneficiaries. A coordination of instruments for small businesses (e.g. with one decision committee) would have made the project interventions more coherent (and better measurable).
5. Most of FIs, PBB and PES are too recent to assess. On the whole, the instruments to support local nature-friendly businesses are promising. However, they need to be monitored closely to assess which one is most appropriate under which conditions and to define the most suitable model to upscale in concertation from the "early adopters" to the local rural population.
6. PBBs can in general be described as nature-friendly, but clear positive biodiversity effects are not always given.

7. The extension of the project area created a missed opportunity for more synergies, e.g. exchange and collaboration of farmers and small businesses (example collaboration efforts in WSP). For upscaling and sustainability, closer collaboration with governmental agencies (including technical level) will be needed.
8. The involvement of different types of stakeholders in all project activities was an important element fostered by the project.
9. Education and communication activities strengthened the community of young leaders and nature supporters.
10. Training activities were highly appreciated, of high quality and appropriate content. They also created opportunities for experts to exchange and learn. This applies also for the training courses in Switzerland, which created real changes of mind.
11. On the legislative level, significant contributions were made that are acknowledged by governmental agencies. There was only limited time to test the new/amended legislation on a practical level.
12. A great achievement is that there are indications for real changes of behaviour of some stakeholders towards linking nature conservation with local development and sustainable agriculture. Through concrete examples, the project was able to enhance the understanding for the role of natural resources protection for the local economy.
13. The implementation through NGOs was key in the context of Bulgaria. The NGOs successfully combined advocacy actions at the higher political level and technical support at the experts' level. The project significantly strengthened the individual implementing NGOs and the *For the Nature* coalition, which demonstrated a model of cooperative work and large-scale civic action.
14. The project effectively contributed to achieving the overall objective of the Civil Society Fund. Its support for the institutional strengthening of the partner NGOs and their network can be considered a solid prerequisite for sustaining the role of ENGOs in the long-term. The level of dependency on international donors is considerable, as adequate access to national funding is still missing.

4 Recommendations

4.1 Termination of the project phase

For the last period of the project, the review team recommends to invest in communication of the project's results to the public as far as this is possible in addition to timely finalisation of ongoing activities. In this way, the project can make further use of the results and enhance policy dialogue.

For the ongoing, last months of the project, the PMB should observe spending according to budget closely. If there is any doubt about reaching a (nearly) 0 balance, inform SIB immediately.

If the continuation of funding after termination is unclear, a budget to support on demand activities that have proved to be successful during the project (such as training events, exchange of experiences, or specific marketing tools) should be set aside during a transition time. To avoid a "stop-and-go" would enhance sustainability of project results.

4.2 Recommendations for upscaling

Component A:

Private PES schemes: The general scope on ecosystem services in the private PES schemes needs to be re-assessed. If the local business partners/members of the PES schemes prefer to maintain the general scope, then other concepts need to be examined to define the most suitable one such as conservation finance or community fundraising. If the ecosystem service that they need to maintain is known and clear, then the ecosystem service and the land management practices that would deliver it need to be defined and described in more details so that the private PES schemes respect the conceptual requirements.

In either case, a PES scheme or conservation/community funding scheme, they need to be communicated better at local level to (1) attract more participants – buyers and sellers of the ecosystem service in the scheme and (2) to continue raising awareness among local and national population and decision makers.

Public PES schemes: For the national PES, the methodology for the valuation of ES is still needed as well as a calculation of the PES forest payment. This responsibility seems to be taken up by the public administration (Forestry Agency), however, they stated a need technical advice and support from field-level experiences. The pilot testing in the forestry unit in Berkovitsa and Vurshets should be continued to go through the entire process and gain real-life experience.

Protected areas management: The institutional framework for income generation by protected areas directorates, where all money are transferred to the national budget without any guarantees for going back to that protected area, is a limiting factor for developing market-based models in the short to medium term. From this perspective, it seems better to support financing models for nature conservation activities which are carried out by local NGOs and community organizations. This will increase the local buy-in and ownership of nature conservation activities.

At the same time, the annual training events organised demonstrated a very strong positive effect on gaining new professional knowledge and skills, networking and generating new ideas for activities. This activity should be continued and strengthened by developing a framework of skills and competences required for protected areas staff, which should be built systematically. Governmental support should also be provided to this type of training especially since it is recognized as a valuable contribution, e.g. as reported by the Forestry Agency. At the same time, special care should be taken to keep the flexibility for adding topics and have free and open discussions, which were among the keys to the current success.

Component B:

In order to reach scale in **direct sales** of HNV products, working on the level of producers and legislation should be continued. For the producers, more efficient forms of marketing should be explored, such as support to regional food enterprises which may collect and valorise HNV agricultural products. Between direct sales and wholesale, firms at regional scale are also an opportunity for new markets. A certain form of self-organisation of producers is necessary to benefit from economies of scale e.g. for marketing. Regarding marketing and promotion strategies, other options than the trademark should be thoroughly studied, such as a collective logo. A collective logo would be more inclusive and most probably cheaper for producers. Online sales for fresh products have proven to be difficult in neighbouring countries, but the website "Food from the Balkan" should continue at least as an online information tool for consumers and contact data. To reach more farmers, it is suggested to train community facilitators who in turn share their knowledge with a wider range of producers. On the legislative level, the shift from (over-)controlling to enhancing economic opportunities should still be accompanied more widely. Organised producers would be in a good position to take influence in government regulations for direct marketing. Austrian or Swiss guidelines provide an example about how these guidelines can be formulated, so that they are within the EU requirements but do not force small producers out of business. The guidelines could be agreed upon on the basis of the self-control documentation for smallholders that was elaborated in the project.

The **financial approaches** (PBB, FI, PES) used in the project should be well monitored and evaluated as to their potential for upscaling. A coordination of instruments for small businesses (e.g. with one decision committee) would make the project interventions better understandable and measurable.

In addition, a further project phase would need to reach out from the "early adopters" of the sustainable business schemes to the **majority**. Measures proposed here are: Overcome the bottleneck of reluctance to registration by communication and information to local farmers as well as continued policy dialogue; support training to local persons in business approaches; and interested persons with non-rural background in nature-friendly agricultural production knowledge (including e.g. plant protection, manure, hygiene).

Young producers: In order to call more attention on the potential of linking nature protection and sustainable rural development, particular attention to youth in rural regions is suggested. To support job opportunities is the right focus the project already uses, but a specific focus on youth could enhance their participation even more. Innovation among young local people could be supported with modern rural extension tools, e.g. capture their attention with digital methods like SMS services and learning opportunities through the web. Communication efforts, as far as they not already do, should include youth meeting sites (virtual and physical).

The local **agricultural extension services** need to be included in the activities and made part of the knowledge and experience building for sustainable rural farm business. This approach should be part of an exit strategy of the project to ensure the sustainability of the project's results. In the long-run, it should not be the role of NGOs to replace public services. NGOs will have a role in their civil society function (advocacy, facilitation) and/or they will develop private services (as they are developing already). However, the political will to provide extension services also for the specific needs of small-scale farmers and rural population is decisive for the success of such an exit strategy. As the FSA, the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAAS) should be included in a further phase of the project to develop its own competencies in the field of sustainable businesses and support the project goals.

Component C:

The work with students and children should be sustained and further developed. Formal partnerships with universities and intensifying the work with local middle schools will be important in this respect. Cooperation with more NGOs in other areas is worth considering, esp. such that aim to link businesses and schools, provide support for choosing career development, etc. Apart from increasing the interest of children in the Uzana Nature Academy, this can provide opportunities for work in the schools and attracting the students to the nature conservation cause as part of their school education.

Of importance for the further advance of the nature conservation cause among citizens will be (a) the introduction and promotion of increased opportunities for citizens to signal in cases of violations of nature protection, especially at the local level, and (b) the provision of individual assistance to interested citizens and groups for their legal actions in such cases. As this line of work will require increased human and financial resources, it is worth including it as a separate activity in a possible continuation of the project.

4.3 Recommendations to NGOs in Bulgaria

The recommended response to the ENGO smear campaign is that it has two prime objectives: getting the benefit of the doubt (i.e. turning the suspicions towards ENGOs into interest in the motives of the adversaries) and strengthening the motivation of the supporters. In public outreach, the focus will be on (a) the creation of new employment and development opportunities, (b) the importance of and the work in Protected areas, not nature in general, (c) storytelling, incl. popular science and lifestyle, raising the interest in nature, (d) the practical benefits of nature conservation actions to concrete people/groups/businesses in concrete cases. The priority audiences will be children and youth, clean food aficionados, partners and clients of the project beneficiaries (they can become effective local proponents of the nature protection cause and the ENGOs).

4.4 Recommendations to SDC for similar projects or project continuation

Project planning

We recommend that the Theory of Change methodology is used in the process of planning of a follow-up project of similar scope. It will help analyse better the challenges in the context and establish clear cause-effect relationships in the identification of goals, outcomes and actions. The participative approach is based on a "backwards mapping" starting from the goal of the project. It allows to analyse potential gaps in a results chain, so-called preconditions¹⁴.

The current logframe contains inconsistencies, *e.g.* outcomes not defining what changes in the behaviours of the target groups will be achieved and indicators that are impossible to measure. In addition, the division of the components was not always made according to the logframe, which had implications for the division of tasks and budget that led to discussions.

With the improved project logic and design, baseline values for the relevant indicators need to be developed and a sound monitoring system to be introduced. The following data collection process needs to be an integral part of the project implementation. The sociological survey will provide much more insight if it is carried out twice – in the beginning and at the end of the project so that the results are comparable.

An improved design of a follow-up project will significantly facilitate both its implementation and its external evaluation. Therefore, we recommend that (a) a skilled facilitator is involved in the Theory of Change planning process and (b) the draft of the new logframe is consulted with an external expert.

Management

The management structure can be simplified. There is no need of introducing Strategic Platform – with a supportive government it will be much more important to involve in formal partnerships with relevant Ministries and in the opposite case the Strategic Platform will be redundant again.

In case of a follow-up project within the civil society fund, we recommend a tailor-made approach. If SDC has the capacity to manage the administrative aspects of the project implementation, SIB may not be needed. SIB can instead focus on large-scale programme for building/raising the capacity for NGOs in general, preceded by in-depth needs assessment. Of particular importance for the ENGOs and *For the Nature* coalition will be high-quality training/counselling in volunteers' management, public relations and community outreach. In all cases, it will be important to provide for on-going external monitoring, feedback and quality assurance. The on-going monitoring can be improved by the introduction of uniform on-line templates completed regularly and accessible to all parties involved in the project. Exchange with similar projects in neighbouring countries should be supported earlier in the project.

Under similar type of partnership in the future, detailed ToR for the roles and responsibilities of each management structure and the partners will be needed, as well as clear procedures for decision-making. The documents will further define the project document (and the relevant Agreements) and can be approved at the very start of the project.

Public acceptance

The development of a communication strategy will be needed, with clearly defined roles of the partners, SIB and SDC. Ideally, the involvement of the Swiss embassy and the NCU will be agreed upon in the document.

Training activities for public service agencies and involved NGOs is an important instrument. Particular eye-openers were the study visits with selected groups in Switzerland. The training for government agencies should be planned with them to deliver the training according to relevant functions. Consider training units shorter than 5 days.

¹⁴ More information on the approach can be found in <http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/> or http://impact.zewo.ch/en/impact/resources/theory_of_change.

5 Appendices

5.1 Assessment of the project results as defined in the logframe

The following assessment was made on the version IV of the logframe (Oct. 2016).

Outcome indicator	Status assessment by end of May 2017
1. Provide tools and mechanisms for effective enforcement of the relevant legislation to guarantee sustainable use and long-term preservation of High Nature Value Territories through achieving:	
Outcome (1.1): Preserved integrity of high nature value territories	
Outcome indicator (OI) 1: Five schemes for PES developed and applied by the programme end	<p>The project team developed 4 private schemes in the two project regions and contributed to 2 public-funded national schemes.</p> <p>The 4 private schemes are implemented/under implementation, while the public schemes are not.</p>
<p>Comments: The definition of PES schemes includes 4 compulsory components¹⁵: (1) a voluntary transaction in which (2) a well-defined ecosystem service (ES), or a form of landuse likely to secure that service (3) is bought by at least one ES buyer from a minimum of one ES provider/seller (4) if and only if the provider continues to supply that service (conditionality).</p> <p>Private schemes: The contracts for the private PES schemes under implementation provide a framework that distance away from the concept of a PES scheme. It resembles more a sustainable financing agreement or implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility policies. The contracts lack the specification of a "well-defined ecosystem service" or the problem with its maintenance or delivery and how it could be solved. On the contrary, they provide a broad definition of what an ecosystem service is. In terms of the ecosystem service buyer – the contract refers to "the agreement being part of their nature-friendly marketing activities or reducing certain environmental footprint" rather than positioning the dependence of the ecosystem service buyer on the ecosystem itself.</p> <p>The annexes to the PES scheme contracts provide more details on the specific PES schemes and the responsibilities of the concerned parties. From this perspective, the two private PES schemes for the restoration and preservation of local genetic resources in partnership with K-express need to be re-considered and strengthened in view of the "PES" label: the recipes of local meals from the territories are only recipes. They can be considered part of a PES scheme when/if the ingredients in the meals from local recipes come from the breeds and varieties under restoration.</p> <p>Another conceptual issue is related to the role of the local NGOs as EKIP Bulgarka, Friends of Vrachanski Balkan, etc. In the schemes' descriptions, they are presented as suppliers of the services. However, in almost all cases the NGOs have no rights over the resource use for securing the continuous supply of the services. Thus, it needs to be assessed whether the NGOs are intermediaries for ensuring the PES scheme operates as opposed to being the direct supplier of the service.</p> <p>This precision is important even if it seems as a minor detail since the concept of Payments in ecosystem services is rather new in Bulgaria as well as in Europe in contrast to Latin America. Any new scheme that is labelled as PES scheme builds the image of PES schemes in Bulgaria and in Europe so the responsibility of the developers is very high.</p> <p>Public schemes: The team contributed to the development of the national PES schemes in the forestry sector by advocacy and expert support for including the relevant measure in the National Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and the development of the ordinance for the implementation of the PES concept in the Forestry Law. The implementation of neither of them is foreseen in the near future. Nevertheless, even the consideration of the concept by the public authorities is a very positive and welcomed development.</p>	
OI 2: At least 30 farms introduced biodiversity friendly practices (extensive grazing and mowing in HNVT)	<p>There is limited information to measure this indicator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project supported 28 livestock farmers who use pastures, meadows and meri (former common lands). • The beneficiaries of the improved Pastoralism scheme in CBNP are 52 in 2016.

¹⁵ Fripp E. 2014. Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES): A practical guide to assessing the feasibility of PES projects. Bogor, Indonesia: CIFOR http://www.cifor.org/publications/pdf_files/Books/BFripp1401.pdf

	However, there is no systematic information on their grasslands management practices that is maintained by the project team.
<p>Comments: During the group interviews with farmers, it was also hard to gain understanding on their grassland management practices. The one that was very clear about the question explained a grassland management system that was rather intensive – mowing was done several times during the season with aftermath grazing and regular mowing. This farmer was an exception from the norm with his grasslands management approach. The other farmers expressed a grassland management approach dominated by spring-summer-autumn grazing and winter-feeding in the sheds.</p> <p>If one considers also the improved grasslands allocation and management under the Pastoralism scheme in Central Balkans National Park, then the indicator of 30 farms is over-reached. The beneficiaries of the scheme in Central Balkans NP in 2016 are 52 (<i>State Fund Agriculture online data</i>).</p>	
OI 3: The farmers included in the project have increased the extensively managed areas by at least 15%	<p>There is no baseline data for the areas managed by farmers when they started to work with the project.</p> <p>Overall, this indicator is not possible to measure considering also the comments on OI 2.</p>
<p>Comments: The only available information is the size of the grasslands they have by the end of the project – in WSP the 16 livestock farmers manage 616 ha, in Central Balkans and other areas – the 12 livestock farmers manage – 836 ha, some of them supported under the Pastoralism scheme of RDP.</p>	
OI 4: At least between 5 000 and 15,000 ha included in the PES schemes at national level	<p>The national schemes are not operational, therefore the indicator cannot be measured. The private PES schemes cover a total area of 199,5 ha:</p> <p>Bulgarka NP (2 PES schemes) 30 ha; Vrachanski Balkan NP (1 PES scheme) 18,6ha;</p> <p>Western Stara Planina Natura 2000 zone (1 PES scheme) 150,9 ha.</p>
<p>Comments: The allocated budget for RDP measure 15 Forest-environment and climate services is sufficient to support approximately 5 200 ha for the 7-year commitment period. However, from today's perspective the readiness for the implementation of the measure is still not evident.</p> <p>The other 10 000 ha were probably expected to be supported by the schemes of the Forest Law art.249. The ordinance for its implementation is under development since 2014 but unlikely to be operation in the coming year(s).</p>	
OI 5: A minimum of 1,000 land-owners/land-managers involved in the PES schemes at national level	<p>The schemes are not operational, therefore the indicator cannot be measured.</p> <p>The number of potential beneficiaries in the three protected areas is reported as Bulgarka NP - 1 268 forest owners; Vrachanski Balkan NP - 2 876; and Western Stara Planina – 2 415.</p>
<p>Comments: The participation in RDP measure 15 Forest-environment and climate services will be voluntary. The payments to land-owners/managers based on art. 249 of the Forest Law seems to be decided administratively. From this perspective, the figure of 1000 land-owners as participants in the PES schemes seems over-estimated for the RDP measure 15, and under-estimated for the Forest Law, art.249 schemes.</p> <p>The project team worked towards pilot testing of the Forest Law, art.249 schemes in Berkovitsa and Vurshets municipalities, which fall within the boundaries of WSP Natura 2000 zone and could benefit some of the 2415 forest owners.</p>	
Outcome (1.2): Improved effectiveness of protected areas management	
OI 6: Enhanced knowledge in business planning for PAs, financial management, fundraising, PR and communication, innovative methods for biodiversity conservation management, environmental education, nature interpretation	<p>The assessment of the enhanced knowledge is made based on a survey, organized by APB in 2017 – 141 people out of the 188 (75%) that participated in the first 4 trainings responded.</p> <p>The main benefits from the trainings they stated comprise:</p> <p>80% New professional knowledge and skills</p> <p>76.4% New contacts</p> <p>76.4% Opportunities for discussions with colleagues</p> <p>61.8% Ideas for new activities</p> <p>60% Comparing my professional activities with the current state in other organizations and institutions</p>

Comments: A significant share of the survey respondents as well as the interviewed nature/national park people stated that the trainings were one of the landmarks of the project's protected areas activities. The combination of topics and lecturers, discussions and field trips was assessed as the right mix for gaining new knowledge and skills. Furthermore, the protected areas experts were able to meet with experts outside their usual field of responsibility – prosecutors for environmental crimes, communicators for engaging the public, financial experts, etc.

The trainings were cited by the Executive Forestry Agency in its 4-year report on the implementation of the National Strategy for the Development of the Forestry Sector as activities supporting the implementation of its objective of „Improved administrative capacity for managing the protected areas and Natura 2000 protected areas“.

Some concerns were also expressed by the interviewed stakeholders – mostly related to the duration of the training, e.g. 5 days is too long for most public service experts; but also in terms of improving the framework conditions for protected areas administrations – a need to develop a set of skills and key competences of protected areas staff and rangers, and then to provide training on them.

Overall, one of the activities and outcomes that were highly appreciated by the beneficiaries.

OI 7: 80 park staff, local stakeholders and NGOs trained in collaboration with business and owners/managers of forests and agricultural lands, business planning for PAs, financial management, fundraising, PR and communication, innovative methods for biodiversity conservation management, environmental education, nature interpretation.

5 annual trainings, each of them 5-day long.
 A total of 256 participants in the trainings from over 90 different institutions (park directorates, NGOs, government structures, businesses and academia working in the field of nature resources and PA management).
 100 lecturers have been delivered on 130 topics among which: Sustainable forest management, Tourism profiting from protected nature, Funding schemes in protected areas, Delegated budgets for PAs, Payments for ecosystem services, Contemporary geo-information technologies for biodiversity conservation, Restoration of flora species, Crimes against Nature, Playground Sites Constructed with Nature Materials, Bio-Products and Food-Delivery Cooperatives, EU Funds related to nature resource and PA management, Contemporary Communication Practices and Communication Campaigns, Researching Biodiversity in the process of Forest Inventory, Environmental Policies and the development of periphery regions within OP Regional Development 2014-2020, fieldwork trips, etc.

Comments: The indicators was over-achieved already after the second year. Still, the number of people interested in the trainings was increasing each year. To cite respondents in the online survey:

"We are grateful and highly appreciate the donor's support that made these trainings possible. It would be very useful to have this initiative of APB supported in the future, too. This training is unique in Bulgaria and it is important to have it continued".

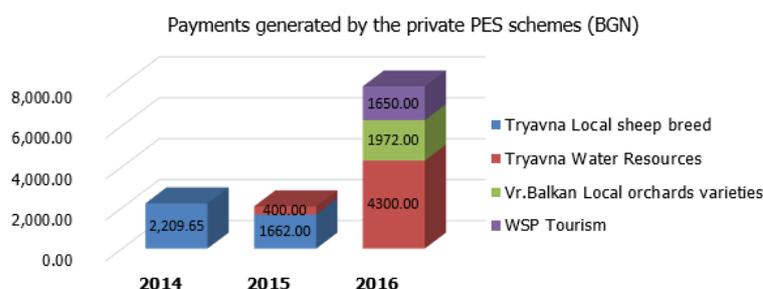
OI 8: At least 20% revenues from financial generation models available for the protected areas

Two models for finance generation for protected areas were tested by the project:
 1) The Financial Instruments – support provided to 5 businesses, which will donate back 20% of the annual profits for activities in protected areas
 2) PES schemes, of which all payments are directed to sustaining the ecosystem services within the protected areas

Comments:

1. The first funding generated by the FIs is expected in April 2018. The minimum amounts to be donated back from the 5 supported business amount to 8450 BGN per year for a period of 5 years or a total of 42 250 BGN.
2. The total funding generated by the four private PES schemes is 15 118.65 BGN in the period 2014-2016. The funding did not go to the protected areas administrations but was delivered via a local NGO working with the PA.

Both models are innovative in the Bulgarian context and would require action by the leading organisations after the project ends in September 2017 for ensuring complete implementation and sustainability of results.

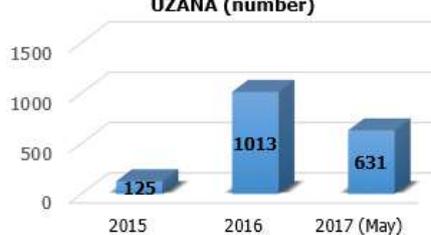


2. Develop models of sustainable use of rural areas and improving the socio-economic context by increasing incomes of local communities and businesses, through guaranteeing that:

Outcome (2.1): Increased number of businesses and farmers generating income from HNVT products and services

<p>OI 9: At least 7 pro-biodiversity businesses implemented in programme model Protected Areas</p>	<p>A total of 8 PBBs were supported: 5 PBBs in WSP Natura 2000 area and 3 PBB in Central Balkans.</p>
<p>Comments: The indicator was initially set at 5 PBBs, and was increased to 7 in June 2016. It is an indication that this type of support has potential for scaling up despite the transfer of funding from a non-signed proposal to UZANA Children Academy. A review of the type of businesses supported reveals that they resemble the examples of PBBs presented in the information document for potential applicants for PBB support. The technical and administrative support provided by APB to the applicants and then beneficiaries was highly appreciated by all interviewed (7 out of 8). This enabled them to prepare good proposals that were approved, and then to report them both financially and technically. The comparison between the PBBs funding approach (administration) and other (notably EU funded) schemes was clearly in favour of PBBs.</p>	
<p>OI 10: At least 30 farms in project regions certified to produce dairy and meat products (on farm processing) and sell them through direct sales mechanisms</p>	<p>The livestock farms in dairy and meat production supported by the project are 28. Of them 19 dairy farms are in the project regions, 11 officially registered and 8 in a process for registration. 11 dairy farms participated in the farmers markets organized by the project in 2017. A guideline for self-control on processing in small farms was elaborated.</p>
<p>Comments: The first part of the indicator on certified registration for dairy and meat farms in the project regions is reached between 37% and 63% - the variation is due to the status of official registration of the farms for direct sales. In terms of performing direct sales, all officially registered farms do it, so this part of the indicator is reached at 100%.</p> <p>There are no meat products from grazing livestock that was registered with support from the project. In general, it is more difficult, because of the need to have a certified slaughtering house.</p> <p>There are other 9 supported farms, registered for direct sales in the project regions: 5 bee keepers, 3 egg producers and 1 rabbits' keeper.</p> <p>The indicator specifies particularly dairy and meat producers in view of the farming systems important for HNV territories. At the same time, already in the PMU meeting in February 2013, the eligibility and selection criteria for farmers included bee keeping and egg production (which was extended to farms outside the project region in 2016). The justification for the inclusion of honey products, eggs, poultry, rabbits and fish was to ensure a sufficient diversity of products for the farmers markets and direct sales. The following questions needed to be addressed from a project review perspective: if the project focus is on HNV territories/production systems then are farmers' markets the most suitable or only approach? If yes, then wouldn't the project aim of promoting sustainable marketing chains be realized without the support for egg/rabbit/fish producers? What is the added value of supporting quails' eggs for HNV territories?</p> <p>There are only 8 dairy producers from the region of Central Balkans, which is surprising having in mind that there are over 50 livestock farmers using the pastures of the National Park. The low level of interest for registration for direct sales deserves additional attention (study) in view of upscaling this activity in HNV territories.</p>	
<p>OI 11: 10 more farmers start processing to ready products outside the project's region</p>	<p>9 dairy producers outside the project areas were supported, 1 is already registered and 8 are in a process for registration.</p>
<p>Comments: This OI was introduced in June 2016. There is no requirement in this indicator for the farmers to be dairy or meat producers, and the selection criteria allow for bee keepers and egg producers to be supported too.</p> <p>The enlargement of the project territories to the entire country on the basis of limited interest for direct sales registration in the project regions raises a number of questions: the project focus and hence the indicator is on livestock systems that support HNV areas in selected project territories. If the interest is low for direct sales registration, what other market strategies could have been there to stimulate the continuation of HNV livestock grazing systems (such as delivering products through regional enterprises)? What was done to study/record the complete lack of interest/support in meat grazing systems? Was the extension to the entire country a means to "pick the low-hanging fruit"?</p> <p>Nevertheless, the project contribution for improving the system/legislation for dairy products registration for direct sales is unquestionable. Even more, it is another landmark of the project. The responsible public administration – Bulgarian Food Safety Agency and MAF appreciate this highly.</p>	

<p>OI 12: The income from the property (land or forest) of the respective owners/managers of lands falling in the area of the PES schemes - increased by at least 10%.</p>	<p>The indicator is not possible to measure. There is no baseline data.</p> <p>The public PES schemes directed at the land owners/managers are not fully developed nor implemented.</p> <p>The private PES schemes are implemented with the support of an intermediary NGO that invests the collected money in direct conservation/tourism activities, hence the payments in them are not directly linked to a change in the land use.</p>																														
<p>Comments: Overall, this indicator is too general. It refers to income from land falling in the area of PES schemes but does not specify if this income should be from PES scheme payments or other activities related to the property. The need to measure an increase in percent requires collection of baseline data to measure to the initial level of income.</p>																															
<p>OI 13: At least 3 sustainable marketing channels are established between producers in the project regions and customers in Sofia and Plovdiv.</p>	<p>Four marketing channels were initiated and developed by the project:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Farmers markets on a weekly basis – in Borovo and other locations in Sofia 2) Festival markets – Easter, Christmas, other events 3) Online platform "Food from the Balkan" 4) Direct sales from the farms 																														
<p>Comments: One of the most significant problems for farmers is to sell their products (in general and as indicated during the group interviews during the field mission). The project was very successful in addressing this problem. The number of farmers participating in the farmers' markets is increasing. The main limitation for having more farmers and products is the need for official registration which takes time and additional investments.</p>																															
<table border="1" style="display: none;"> <caption>Number of Farmers at the Farmers Markets</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Number of Farmers</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Christmas 2015</td> <td>8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Christmas 2016</td> <td>13</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Spring 2017</td> <td>17</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Easter 2017</td> <td>17</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <table border="1" style="display: none;"> <caption>Number of Products at the Farmers Markets</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Number of Products</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Christmas 2015</td> <td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Christmas 2016</td> <td>21</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Spring 2017</td> <td>25</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Easter 2017</td> <td>24</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <table border="1" style="display: none;"> <caption>Total sales during organized Farmers Markets (BGN)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Total Sales (BGN)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Christmas 2015</td> <td>4192</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Christmas 2016</td> <td>8754</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Spring 2017</td> <td>15810</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Easter 2017</td> <td>36062</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Year	Number of Farmers	Christmas 2015	8	Christmas 2016	13	Spring 2017	17	Easter 2017	17	Year	Number of Products	Christmas 2015	7	Christmas 2016	21	Spring 2017	25	Easter 2017	24	Year	Total Sales (BGN)	Christmas 2015	4192	Christmas 2016	8754	Spring 2017	15810	Easter 2017	36062
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<p>Additionally, the participation in the weekly and festival farmers' markets has improved the connections and collaboration between the farmers within and between the project areas. This contributes to improved social cohesion in the project region as people from neighbouring villages with nature-friendly/pro-biodiversity businesses started collaborating and supporting each other (e.g. with advices or friendly encouragement). It also prompted a raise in cooperation initiatives – e.g. one farmer would get other farmer's products and would sell them on the weekly market in Sofia. The following week they can change. In this way they save on human resources (time away from the farm), which was stated as a major issue by all local beneficiaries – farmers or businesses.</p>																															
<p>OI 14: A Label "On farm made" is introduced and used by at least 10 farmers</p>	<p>Standards for the production, processing and trading with farm and artisan food and drinks under the label "Farm-made" was developed.</p> <p>Its adoption by farmers still to be monitored.</p>																														
<p>Comments: The process for the development of the standards for the trade-mark/label is in its initial phase. Some of the farmers interviewed in Central Balkans area expressed an interest in joining it, so development is still upcoming. However, the setting up and operating (monitoring, controlling) of a trade mark requires additional human capacity. There is a potential conflict between consultancy, advisory and the technical support that Bioselena provides to farmers and the monitoring and control functions for the trademark operations.</p>																															
<p>OI 15: Information center with Children Nature Academy UZANA applies business model for reaching sustainability</p>	<p>A 5-year business plan developed for the management of the Children Nature Academy, including investment plan, commercial plan, depreciation and cash-flow plans.</p> <p>A price list of all services and products offered in also available.</p>																														

<p>Comments: The Children Nature Academy opened in 2015 and already has a growing number of visitors. A major characteristic of its operation is the partnership with Gabrovo municipality, which is committed to support its set-up and operational management.</p> <p>The business plan was developed in autumn 2016. Its commercial plan foresees 2320 visits/uses of its services during the first year of its implementation. Having in mind that the year in which the plan was developed (2016) the visits were half this number, the ambition of the team is indicative.</p> <p>The monitoring records of the visits since 2015 contain information about the date and venue, the total number of visitors, age and home-place, as well as the title of the event. It would be good if additional columns are added indicating the type of service from the commercial plan (coded or else) as well as the income for the Academy from the respective event.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Visitors in Children Nature Academy UZANA (number)</p>  <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Number of Visitors</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2015</td> <td>125</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2016</td> <td>1013</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2017 (May)</td> <td>631</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Number of Visitors	2015	125	2016	1013	2017 (May)	631
Year	Number of Visitors								
2015	125								
2016	1013								
2017 (May)	631								
<p>Outcome (2.2): Preserve local breeds as important part of HNVT diversity</p>									
<p>OI 16: 27 specific genetic fingerprints making the basis for scientifically sound, objective and measurable criteria for determining the breed of animal from rare breed developed and operational</p>	<p>27 rare breeds of cattle, sheep, goats, horses and buffaloes are under DNA analysis for making their fingerprints.</p> <p>The DNA analysis of cattle breeds is most advanced, the others are lagging behind.</p> <p>The main reasons were the late financial contribution for the establishment of the laboratory (only in 2016) and technical demands for the sheep and goat breeds.</p>								
<p>Comments: The delays in the financial contribution from the Bulgarian government were a long-standing worry for the project mostly due to the frequent changes in the governments. The commitment from the Executive Agency which is one of the Bulgarian project partners was very high and its team succeeded to communicate the need for the laboratory to the ministers.</p> <p>The DNA analysis are ongoing since late 2016 and are expected to be finalized as specified in the project.</p> <p>Additionally, the Executive Agency and MAF consider the introduction of a dedicated ordinance requiring all newborn (male) animals to be tested in DNA for determining their breed purity. This is still in conceptual phase but an issue of concern is whether the costs for the farmers would be bearable in relation to the sales prices of products.</p>									
<p>OI 17: One ordinance imposing the rules for supporting the rare breeds during the 2013-2020 period developed and submitted to MAF</p>	<p>A scheme for rare breeds support under the Agri-environmental measure in the Rural Development Programme was ongoing since 2007. This scheme continues in the 2014-2020 period, supported by the advocacy actions of the consortium partners.</p>								
<p>Comments: The continuation of the rare breeds support is very important to increase the number of animals from rare breeds in Bulgaria. Because of the available subsidies the opportunistic interests to have more and more animals in the rare breeds registers was constantly increasing. This was also a reason to invest in OI 16 – the DNA analysis of the pure breed characteristics of farm animals.</p>									
<p>OI 18: Two sustainable market mechanisms to increase income of farmers keeping rare breeds production and sales of high added value food demonstrated and implemented</p>	<p>Two demonstration farms for local breeds were supported – one in each project region.</p> <p>Both demonstration farms are registered for direct sales and have on-farm shops for their products. The demonstration farm near Karlovo opened also a shop for its products in Plovdiv.</p>								
<p>Comments: This outcome is closely related to OI 13 and potentially OI 14.</p>									
<p>3. Increase understanding of the importance of the sustainable development and protection of rural areas through:</p>									
<p>Outcome (3.1): Enhanced public participation in nature conservation management</p>									
<p>OI 19: Model for including local business benefiting biodiversity in the planning of one model protected areas developed</p>	<p>Adaptive conservation management methodology was developed by BFB and applied in CBNP. This led to reduction of grassland allocation conflicts and improved understanding of the conservation needs of the protected area.</p> <p>The approach and the results/agreement on grasslands conservation objectives was integrated in the new management plan of the CBNP.</p>								

Comments: The methodology for adaptive conservation management was used both for the annual grazing plans of CBNP and for its strategic management plan. The gathering of farmers, park administration and external NGO was beneficial for improved communication between the parties as well as for increased understanding of each other's perspectives on the issue.					
OI 20: At least 100 people with enhanced knowledge on on-the-farm production and pro-biodiversity businesses through direct involvement in Programme work	The relevant activities to increase the knowledge comprise – the training, consultations, support for farmers and PBBs. The indicator was doubled and this is excluding the capacity building and training for the Bulgaria Food Safety Agency units. They were also close to 200.	Type	In project areas	Outside them	Total
		Training	68	73	141
		Consultations	19	4	23
		Supported farms	28	9	37
		PBBs	8	-	8
		Total	123	86	209
Comments: The outcome on enhanced knowledge for on-farm production and PBBs was another very successful result of the project. The interviewed farmers and businesses recognized the contribution of the project team to make them understand the requirements and to implement them better in their premises. The staff of the BFSA and MAF Livestock Breeding directorate recognized the trainings and experience exchange trips to Switzerland as mind-changing for their understanding and treatment of the on-farm processing. One of the respondents shared: "Before the answer to the question "Can I sell milk directly" was "Yes, see Regulation (EC) No 853/2004". Now, we say: "Yes, you have these options, you should do this and that". Both groups of beneficiaries underlined the need for continuation of this type of training. However, the project team reports under this indicator Likes of the FB page "Food from the Balkan" and effects of publications on the topic. From our perspective, the Likes are an indirect effect of the Programme.					
OI 21: At least 1,000 participants in local promotion activities or discussions and forums involved in taking local development decisions	The consortium members organized and participated in a variety of meetings at local level. The information in the table is extracted from the annual progress reports. The only specified local decision taking forums were the meetings in the CBNP for the grasslands management under Pastoralism scheme.	Year	Local events	Participants	
		2013	0	0	
		2014	3	100	
		2015	CBNP	150	
		2016	9	500 - 6000	
			CBNP	90	
		Total	> 20	850 - 6000	
Comments: The lack of systematic monitoring system does not allow to have a more detailed and meaningful information about this output. For example, in which areas were the meetings held; what type of local development decisions were taken (if any) at the meeting; which groups of stakeholders, etc.					
OI 22: At least 1,000 people a year acquainted with the work of the Programme in support of the pro-biodiversity businesses in Bulgaria due to the National Award Media Campaign	The annual progress report reports a figure of over 2000 people reached by the media publications about the National Award Media Campaign in 2016. In 2013, the first project year, there were 1562 FB reads about the PBBs. The media monitoring of the National Award Media Campaign was very detailed covering the press, radio, TV and online media: in 2016, there were 80 publications related to the award, so it is likely that the figure of 2000 is underestimated.				
	Comments: The indicator was amended after the 2014 annual report to monitor the outreach for PBBs because of the National Media Award Campaign. The National Award raises the profile and image of PBBs and conservation organizations and was appreciated by media, beneficiaries, consortium partners alike.				
Outcome (3.2): Public awareness and appreciation for HNVT conservation, products and services is enhanced					
OI 23: 100 000 people visited programme events both 'live' and virtual	The number of 100 000 people in both live and virtual events was out-reached already in the second year of the project implementation. The visits to activities that were reported in the different annual reports comprise: national green events, project events; farmers gatherings, degustation events organized by the project, PES awareness raising events, university lectures and students camps, etc.				

	The virtual types of activities comprised the project webpage and FB, the partners' webpages and FB, TV films, etc.				
<p>Comments: The figure for this indicator was increased in the last, fifth year of the project implementation to capture the additional events that were organized by the Consortium partners.</p> <p>A weakness of the lack of project monitoring system is that the information on the visitors of the various events listed above could not be compared from one year to the next, and over the project period. As a result, there is no data revealing which type of visits is preferred by which types of target groups, which partner utilizes which approach for attracting visitors, which should be the recommended approach in possible future projects.</p>					
OI 24: Participants in the events have increased their knowledge on HNV conservation, products and services	The understanding of HNV conservation, products and services was promoted through questionnaires and contests for visitors in green days, personal and focus group discussions, educational activities for kids, media trips, etc.				
<p>Comments: None of the big variety of activities and events contributing to understanding the HNV characteristics surveyed the actual increase of knowledge. Thus, one can only assume that there is an increase in the knowledge of the participants. The indicator should be reconsidered to make it measurable.</p>					
OI 25: At least 24,000 visitors to 16 national events (4 events a year with an average of 1,500 visitors) acquainted with the Programme achievements on nature conservation and sustainable rural development	This indicator is a sub-indicator of OI 23. It was also overachieved in terms of the number of visitors. No measurement/assessment of their awareness on the Programme characteristics was made.	Year	Events	Participants	Participants per event
		2013	5	17 000	3 400
		2014	4	10 500	2 625
		2015	6	4 800	800
		2016	5	10 000	2 000
		Total	20	42 300	2 115
<p>Comments: The annual project reports present figures of visitors to national events reaching over half a million in only a couple of days. Clearly, these were big events, but the second part of the indicator requires measuring their awareness on the Programme themes of nature conservation and sustainable rural development. This aspect of the indicator was mostly avoided in the reports.</p>					
OI 26: At least 15,000 supporters of the "For the Nature" Coalition in social network Web Pages	There are over 30 000 followers and supporters on the FB page "For the Nature Coalition", so a doubling of the outcome.				
<p>Comments: This indicator was also modified in 2015 from "supporters of the Programme..." to "supporters of the For the Nature Coalition". Prior to the change, the Programme FB had 600 "friends" and more than 60 000 unique visitors.</p>					
4. Guarantee long-term sustainability of programme results by mainstreaming its outputs into the relevant legislation securing that:					
Outcome (4.1): Project outputs mainstreamed in the relevant planning and legislation					
OI 27: Amendments in three laws and bi-laws ensuring mainstreaming of PES and biodiversity (by the end of the programme) developed and proposed	Legislative amendments achieved in 6 laws – the Black Sea Coast Development Act, the Forestry Act, the Spatial Planning Act, the Agricultural Land Protection Act, the Environmental Protection Act and the Biological Diversity Act. Direct involvement in the drafting of the Ordinance for the implementation of the PES schemes according to the Forestry Act, art.249. Contributions (expert opinions) to the management plans of Vitosha NP, Rila and Pirin National parks.				
<p>Comments: This is another key outcome of the Programme implementation – the timely and targeted amendments to the existing legislation to reduce the threats to biodiversity and to introduce the concept of PES schemes. Furthermore, the outcome indicator reaches only to the level of submitting the proposal, not their practical implementation, thus it is fully achieved.</p> <p>The delays in the development and adoption of the ordinance for the implementation of the PES approach in the forestry sector do not harm the benefit of having the process ongoing. The challenges of making a working national level ordinance are many, e.g. assessment of the ecosystem services; whether they are single service or multiple services; identifying the direct and indirect users; calculating the costs of delivery and the payment levels, etc. There are also limited experience around Europe for introducing such approach at national level, where the forestry sector is heavily regulated.</p>					

<p>The experts from the National Forestry Agency, MoAF and the Nature Conservation Service, MoEW appreciated highly the contributions from the Consortium members on developing and pilot testing private PES schemes as well as the expert contributions for the public / national PES schemes.</p>	
<p>OI 28: Priority activities concerning PA's and NATURA 2000 sites, biological diversity and pro-biodiversity business and nature friendly farming practices proposed to be incorporated in the National Strategic Development Framework (by the end of the programme)</p>	<p>The specific contributions from the Programme comprise the advocacy for the continuation of the Organic Farming and HNV Farming support as well as the introductions of Forest-environment payments and Natura 2000 compensatory payments for forests in the National Rural Development Plan 2014-2020, which is a part of the NSDF.</p>
<p>Comments: The implementation of the Organic Farming and HNV farming scheme in the Agri-environment measure in the RDP is ongoing from the previous programming period. It was a positive development that the schemes were maintained. However, their implementation is threatened by the lack of sufficient funding, thus almost no new applications are allowed after the opening of the RDP in 2015.</p> <p>The new measures that were introduced in the document related to forest-environment services and Natura 2000 areas are not even considered for implementation.</p> <p>These developments are a major drawback for the practical achievement of the outcome, even if outside the area of influence for the Consortium partners.</p>	
<p>OI 29: Texts covering support for agri-environmental practices developed and integrated in the 2013-2020 Rural Development Programme</p>	<p>The content of this indicator is overlapping with reported outcomes under OI 17, OI 28 (HNV farming) and OI 30.</p>
<p>Comments: This OI is the summary indicator for OI 17 and OI 30. The Agri-environment-climate (AEC) measure in the RDP is comprised of the Pastoralism, the HNV grasslands and Rare breeds support schemes among others.</p> <p>OI 29 leads to unnecessary repetition of information. It should have been removed or the other two OIs should have been changed during one of the three changes in the logframe.</p>	
<p>OI 30: One proposal for amending the Pastoralism measure officially filed to MAF</p>	<p>The proposal for improving the Pastoralism scheme of the AEC measure was submitted to MAF and was used to introduce improvements in the design of the scheme.</p>
<p>Comments: The proposal for the improvement of the Pastoralism scheme was based on a quality study of the grasslands conditions in CBNP. It was highly appreciated by the experts working in this sector, since it was the first study to assess the qualitative changes in areas supported by AEC measure and provided meaningful recommendations for the improvement of the scheme.</p>	
<p>OI 31: A proposal for amendment of the Regulation on direct sales presented to the MAF (by the end of the second programme year)</p>	<p>Two proposals for changes were submitted and discussed with BFSA and MAF which were adopted in 2014 and 2015 respectively.</p>
<p>Comments: The proposed changes in Ordinance 26 were very important for simplifying the application procedures for farmers. As a result, of the changes, the number of registered dairy farmers has increased significantly to over 70 at national level.</p>	

5.2 Mission program

Time	Location	Meeting	Participants	Contact person
15 May (Monday)				
9.00 - 11.00	Swiss Embassy, Sofia, Shipka 33 str.	Briefing meeting with SDC, SIB, PMU https://goo.gl/maps/MEx8pCZwg4M2	External Review team: - Angela Deppeler - Yanka Kazakova - Giorro Genchev SDC, SIB, PMU representatives: - Gerassim Gerassimov - Dimitar Matev - Nikolay Yonov Stoilko Apostolov, Elisaveta Pandeve Reneta Barrett - translation	Stoilko Apostolov 0887782575 Gerassim Gerassimov 0889900105
11.30 - 13.00	Sofia	Executive Agency on Selection and Reproduction https://goo.gl/maps/8u8NXoM127R2	External Review team, Yana Mihailova Jivko Dushev	Yana Mihaylova 0887425916
14.00 - 15.30	Sofia, 15, "Pencho Slavejkov" bld.	Bulgarian Food Safety Agency https://goo.gl/maps/zEzq5kKCTwQ2	External Review team, Dr. Vet. Aleksandrina Borisova Dr. Vet. Tatyana Nikolova Dr. Vet. Rossen Baev	Stoilko Apostolov, 0887782575 Dr. Vet. Aleksandrina Borisova 0882469566
16.00 - 18.00	Sofia, Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation Address: Sofia, 1202, 39-41 Vesletz Str. fl. 4, ap.11	Meeting with "young conservation leaders" trained by the project	External Review team Students Rossen Vassilev - BBF	Rossen Vassilev, 0888330010
18.00 - 19.30	Travel to Berkovitsa			
	Overnight in Berkovitsa, Hotel Gelov	Address: 28, Alexandrovska str. tel. 095395008 https://goo.gl/maps/55jhhkfrYrw		Nada Tosheva, 0878599407
16 May (Tuesday)				
9.00 - 11.00	Berkovitsa, hotel Gelov	Group discussions with farmers (who directly benefitted from the project), PBB and FI businesses	External Review team Spatia Wildlife Bulgaria (FI) Trinoga Association (PBB) Karyana Cooperative (FI) EcoBerkMed (management of FI) Antov Melart Ltd. (FI) Bike Ventures Ltd. (FI) Potentially also local media representatives	Nada Tosheva, 0878599407
11.30 - 12.30	Berkovitsa, hotel Gelov	Local administration	External Review team Radoslav Naidenov, Deputy Mayor of Berkovitsa (PES) Sashko Kamenov, Forestry Agency, Berkovitsa (PES)	Rayna Popova, 0893393812
12.30 - 14.00	Berkovitsa	Visit to Ivan Kostov's farm in Bekovitsa, supported by the project Lunch with farm products https://goo.gl/maps/1MSATvW2xO42		Nada Tosheva, 0878599407
14.00 - 15.00	Trip to Prevala village, Chiprovtsi municipality			

15.00 - 17.00	Prevala village, Sinevka jam's workshop	Group discussions with farmers, PBB and FI businesses https://goo.gl/maps/VpJaXbmN1JC2	External Review team Teodor Pushkarov (bee keeper) Sinevka (FI and PBB) Pim Consulting Ltd (PBB) Bio Zemja (PBB) Kiprovetz hotel owner (member of WWF Local PES group) Potentially also local media representatives	Zornitsa Stratieva, 0884073761
17.00 - 17.30	Travel Prevala- Replyana			
17.30 - 18.30	Replyana, Replyanka demonstration center	Meeting with beneficiaries and local authorities https://goo.gl/maps/L5JdWVviRFQ2	External Review team Vanyo Kostin, Mayor of Replyana village and member of the Local Initiative Group Dimitar Ivanov, farmer	Nada Tosheva, 0878599407
18.30 - 19.00	Travel Replyana - Belogradchik			
	Overnight in hotel Skalite, Belogradchik	https://goo.gl/maps/8Dyb2AZ7dYN2		Nada Tosheva, 0878599407
17 May (Wednesday)				
9.00 - 10.00	Travel to Montana			
10.30 - 12.00	Montana	Regional Food Safety Directorate https://goo.gl/maps/imB8kk7SX9n	External Review team, Dr. Vet. Petja Todorova Dr. Vet. Petjo Krastev	Nada Tosheva, 0878599407
12.00 - 13.30	Montana	Lunch		
	Trip to Vratsa			
14.30 - 16.00	Vratsa	Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park Directorate https://goo.gl/maps/1U8zMheEXdP2	External Review team NP Director	Zornitsa Stratieva, 0884073761
16.00 - 18.00	Trip to Bozenski chiflik			
	Overnight in Bozenski chiflik	Dinner with PBB beneficiaries in Central Balkan https://goo.gl/maps/7YmMehcXMt92	External Review team Owners of Bozenski chiflik (PBB) Svetoslav Todorov (FI)	Zornitsa Stratieva, 0884073761
18 May (Thursday)				
8.00 - 9.00	Travel to Gabrovo			
9.00 - 10.30	Gabrovo, Central Balkan National Park Directorate Address: Gabrovo, 3, Bodra smjana str.	Meeting with administration of the National Park https://goo.gl/maps/JEGzbcEIrgt	External Review team Gencho Iliev - Director NP Central Balkan Anton Stanchev - Expert NP Central Balkan Potentially also local media representatives	Rossen Vassilev, 0888330010
12.00 - 13.30	Gabrovo	Lunch with Mayor/representative of the Gabrovo Municipality	External Review team Mayor/representative of the Gabrovo Municipality Potentially also local media representatives	Rossen Vassilev, 0888330010
13.30 - 15.30	Travel Gabrovo - Uzana	Visit to Uzana Children Nature Academy https://goo.gl/maps/bKXiEsbFyvC2	External Review team Marieta Terzieva - BBF Academy Manager	Rossen Vassilev, 0888330010
15.30 - 16.30	Travel Gabrovo - Tryavna			
16.30 - 18.00	Tryavna	Group discussions with the PES scheme members https://goo.gl/maps/M38tupch2E92	External Review team PES scheme members Potentially also local media representatives	Rayna Popova, 0893393812
18.00 - 19.30	Travel Tryavna - Karlovo			

	Overnight in Karlovo, hotel Shterev	https://goo.gl/maps/iE2qJUG86Km		Stoilko Apostolov, 0887782575
19 May (Friday)				
9.00 - 10.30	Karlovo, Biose-lena training center 36, Vasil Karaivanov str.	Group discussions 1 with supported farmers https://goo.gl/maps/NJsF3gXgrz32	External Review team Farmers: Kolyo Kulov, Cvyatko Nachev (farmer and FI), Ivan Tinkov Dimka Hristeva	Stoilko Apostolov, 0887782575
10.30 - 12.00	Karlovo	Group discussions 2 with supported farmers	External Review team Farmers: Stoyan Kisyov, Stoyan Peltechki; Dimitar Kalfov; Mina Vardjieva; Petar Iliev; Ivan Danchev	Stoilko Apostolov, 0887782575
12.30 - 14.00	Karlovo	Lunch with the mayor	Anton Minev - Deputy Mayor Iva Savcheva	Stoilko Apostolov, 0887782575
14.00 - 15.30	Karlovo	Group discussions 3 with farmers that were only trained/consulted	External Review team Farmers: Penka Atanasova; Nikolay Lurtov; Roumen Hristov; Antonia Georgieva; Plamen Genov; Jivko Stefanov; Maria Chonlova; Albina Yassinskaya	Stoilko Apostolov, 0887782575
15.30 - 17.30	Karlovo	Bilateral meeting with Bioselena	Stoilko Apostolov, Elisaveta Pandeveva; Tencho Hristov; Petya Pencheva; Petar Kirov	Stoilko Apostolov, 0887782575
	Overnight in Karlovo, hotel Shterev	http://shterevhoteles.com/en/shterev-complex-karlovo-2/		
20 May (Saturday)				
9.00 - 13.00	Vassil Levski village Kalofer	Visit to the rare breeds farm and demonstration milk processing unit https://goo.gl/maps/bTz8bGYdQo42 Visit of organic bee's wax processing unit https://goo.gl/maps/rjoD5Z2yyN82	External Review team Kolyo Kulov, Tanya Kulova Cvyatko Nachev	Stoilko Apostolov 0887782575 Tanya Kulova 0884732812 Cvyatko Nachev 0889197316
	Trip back to Sofia			
15.00 - 17.00	Team debriefing in Sofia		External Review team	
22 May (Monday)				
9.30 - 11.00	Sofia	Meeting with national authorities (tbc)	External Review team Ros-sina Zhmuranova, MoEW Stoyan Vergiev, MoEW Ivaylo Angelov, Ministry of Finance Tzenko Tzenov, Forestry Agency Ani Petrakieva, Forestry Agency	Rayna Popova, 0893393812
11.30 - 13.00	Sofia, 55, "Hristo Botev" bld.	Ministry of Agriculture and food; Animal Husbandry Directorate https://goo.gl/maps/5ZLHhvED3QR2	External Review team Dr. Vet. Zlatka Vazelova, Director Dr. Vet. Maya Makaveeva, Senior Expert	Stoilko Apostolov, 0887782575 Dr. Vazelova 0885175866
13.00 - 14.00	Sofia	Lunch		

14.30 - 15.30	Sofia, Culture Center G8	Meetings with Media representatives https://goo.gl/maps/REFi4UUzXPw	External Review team; Journalists: Nikolay Vasilkovski ; Mariela Ilieva; Ladislav Tsvetkov; Daniela Filipova; Biliana Slavcheva; Veselina Milanova; Petra Taleva; Mirela Spasova; Svetlozara Dimitrova; Denitsa Vateva; Mara Georgieva; Bosilena Melteva; Tania Demireva; Blaga Bukeva; Svetla Trifonovska; Ekaterina Stoilova	Radostina Tsenova 0888508502 Communication officer of the project Iva Toncheva 0893493063
16.30 - 18.00	Sofia, Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation Address: Sofia, 1202, 39-41 Vesletz Str. fl. 4, ap.11	Meetings with volunteers	External Review team Volunteers	Rossen Vassilev, 0888330010
23 May (Tuesday)				
Morning	Sofia, Crystal Palace Hotel, Shipka Street 14	Preparation for the Validation workshop Crystal Palace Hotel https://goo.gl/maps/knc8M1CZgFF2	External Review team	
13.00 - 17.30	Sofia, Crystal Palace Hotel, Shipka Street 14	Validation Workshop at Crystal Palace Hotel https://goo.gl/maps/knc8M1CZgFF2	External Review team Rossen Vassilev; Radostina Tsenova; Nada Tosheva; Toma Belev; Zornitsa Stratieva; Rayna Popova; Yanka Mihaylova; Stoilko Apostolov; Elisaveta Pandeveva; Iva Toncheva Tencho Hristov; Markus Luthi; Bertrand Sansonnens; Gerassim Gerassimov; Dimitar Matev; Nikolay Yonov Ventsi Gradinarov (translation)	Stoilko Apostolov, 0887782575

5.3 Interview list

No.	Interviewed person(s)	Organization	Place/means	Date
1	Stoilko Apostolov	Bioselena, Manager and Project coordinator	Sofia, Karlovo	23/03/2017; 15,19,20/05/2017
2	Elisaveta Pundeva	Bioselena, Finance manager	Sofia	23/03/2017; 15/05/2017
3	Nada Tosheva	BSPB, Director	Sofia	20/04/2017; 16/05/2017
4	Rossen Vassilev	BBF, Project Coordinator	Sofia	20/04/2017; 15/05/2017
5	Rumyana Ivanova	BBF, Executive director	Sofia	20.04.2017
6	Radostina Tzenova	BBF and project PR	Sofia	20.04.2017
7	Dessislava Zhivkova	BBF, technical assistant	Sofia	20.04.2017
8	Tanya Schnel	BBF, Coordinator C.2.1.	Sofia	20.04.2017
9	Elitsa Ivanova	BBF, Students activities, Comp.C.2.2.	Sofia	20/04/2017; 15/05/2017
10	Marieta Terzieva	BBF, Uzana Children Nature Academy	Sofia	20/04/2017; 15/05/2017
11	Toma Belev	APB, Manager	Sofia	20.04.2017
12	Zornitsa Stratieva	APB, Coordinator	Sofia	20/04/2017; 16/05/2017
13	Vera Staevska	APB, Coordinator	Sofia	20.04.2017
14	Simeon Arangelov	APB, Field expert	Sofia	20.04.2017
15	Georgi Stefanov	WWF DCP BG, Team manager	Sofia	21.04.2017
16	Rayna Popova	WWF DCP BG, Project manager	Sofia	21.04.2017
17	Yana Sabeva	WWF DCP BG, Communicator	Sofia	21.04.2017
18	Markus Lüthi	Consortium partners Switzerland: REDD	CH, Lausanne	25.04.2017
19	Peter Damary	Consortium partners Switzerland: REDD	CH, Lausanne	25.04.2017
20	Pierre Galland	Consortium partners Switzerland: SVS Birdlife	CH, Lausanne	25.04.2017
21	Bertrad Sansonnens	Consortium partners Switzerland: Pro Natura	Skype	09.05.2017
22	Nicola Schoenenberger	SIB/Innovabridge	Skype	12.05.2017
23	Gerassim Gerassimov	SDC, CH Embassy - Sofia	Sofia	15,23/05/2017
24	Dimitar Yonov	NCU, Council of Ministers	Sofia	22,23/05/2017
25	Dimitar Matev	SIB/Balkan Institute	Sofia	23.05.2017
26	Maria Minkova	SIB/Balkan Institute	Sofia	15.05.2017
27	Ani Petrakieva	Forestry Agency	Sofia	22.05.2017
28	Stoyan Vergiev	MoEW, Nature Protection Service	Sofia	22.05.2017
29	Dr.Vet. Zlatka Vazelova	MoAF, Livestock Husbandry Directorate	Sofia	22.05.2017
30	Georgi Yordanov	Executive Agency on Selection and Re- production	Sofia	15.05.2017
31	Yana Mihailova	Executive Agency on Selection and Re- production	Sofia	15.05.2017
32	Jivko Dushev	Executive Agency on Selection and Re- production	Sofia	15.05.2017
33	Dr.Vet. Aleksandrina Borisova	Bulgarian Food Safety Agency	Sofia	15.05.2017
34	Dr.Vet. Tatyana Niko- lova	Bulgarian Food Safety Agency	Sofia	15.05.2017
35	Dr.Vet.Rossen Baev	Bulgarian Food Safety Agency	Sofia	15.05.2017
36	Gabriela Petrova	Young conservation leader	Sofia	15.05.2017
37	Marieta Terzieva	Young conservation leader	Sofia	15.05.2017
38	Maria Kachamakova	Young conservation leader		
39	Neli Naydenova	Young conservation leader	Sofia	15.05.2017
40	Danita Zarichinkova	Young conservation leader	Sofia	15.05.2017
41	Prof. Atanas Grozda- nov	Faculty of Biology, University of Sofia	Sofia	15.05.2017
42	Filip Kirilov and Bar- bara Steinmann	PBBs, Trinoga Association	Berkovitsa	16.05.2017
43	Dobromir Domuschiev	PBBs, Wild Echo	Berkovitsa	16.05.2017

44	Orlin Koychev	FI, Bike Ventures	Berkovitsa	16.05.2017
45	Teodor Valchev	FI, Karayana Cooperative	Berkovitsa	16.05.2017
46	Ivan Dimitrov	FI managing NGO - Eco-Berk-Med	Berkovitsa	16.05.2017
47	Radoslav Naidenov	PES, Deputy Mayor, Berkovitsa	Berkovitsa	16.05.2017
48	Sashko Kamenov	PES, Forestry Agency Berkovitsa	Berkovitsa	16.05.2017
49	Ivan Kostov and wife	Karakachan farmer family	Berkovitsa	16.05.2017
50	Maya Angelova	PBB&FI, Sinevka	Prevala	16.05.2017
51	Lenko Iliev	PBB, PiM Consulting Ltd	Prevala	16.05.2017
52	Daniela Sikovska	PBB, Bio Zemya	Prevala	16.05.2017
53	Dimitar Ivanov	Replyana sheep farmer	Replyana	16.05.2017
54	Dr.Vet. Petya Todorova	Regional Food Safety Directorate	Montana	17.05.2017
55	Dr.Vet. Petio Krastev	Regional Food Safety Directorate	Montana	17.05.2017
56	Nikolay Nenchev	Director, Nature Park Vrachanski Balkan	Vratsa	17.05.2017
57	Olya Genova	PR, Education Programmes NP Vr.Balkan	Vratsa	17.05.2017
58	Eli and Iliya Petrovi	PBB, Bozhenski Chiflik	Sybotkovtsi	17.05.2017
59	Svetoslav Todorov	FI, EY ELF-Sv.Todorov	Sybotkovtsi	17.05.2017
60	Gencho Iliev	Director, National Park Central Balkan	Gabrovo	18.05.2017
61	Anton Stanchev	Expert, NP Central Balkan	Gabrovo	18.05.2017
62	Milena Ilieva	Env.expert, Nature Park Bulgarka	Gabrovo	18.05.2017
63	Nela Rachevic	Deputy Mayor, municipality Gabrovo	Gabrovo	18.05.2017
64	Radostina Pruvcheva	Uzana Children Nature Academy	Gabrovo	18.05.2017
65	Magdalena Madzharova	PES, WWF local team	Tryavna	18.05.2017
66	Milena Mincheva	PES, Hotel Compliment	Tryavna	18.05.2017
67	Maya Radeva	PES, NGO EKIP Bulgarka	Tryavna	18.05.2017
68	Rayna Gancheva	PES, Folklore Dress Designer	Tryavna	18.05.2017
69	Ruslana Ilieva	PES, Oreh Ltd. FSC certified company	Tryavna	18.05.2017
70	Tencho Hristov	Bioselena, Project manager	Karlovo	19.05.2017
71	Petar Kirov	Bioselena, Consultant	Karlovo	19.05.2017
72	Petya Pencheva	Bioselena, Expert	Karlovo	19.05.2017
73	Petya Naydenova	Head of Social Directorate, Karlovo municipality	Karlovo	19.05.2017
74	Iva Savcheva	Expert, Karlovo municipality	Karlovo	19.05.2017
75	Tanya Kulova	Kulovi farm, rare breeds and direct sales	Karlovo and V.Levski	19,20/05/2017
76	Mina Vardzhieva	Goat farmer, St.Zagora	Karlovo	19.05.2017
77	Nikolay and Dimka Hristevi	farmer family	Karlovo	19.05.2017
78	Ivan Tinkov	Quail farm	Karlovo	19.05.2017
79	Stoyan Kisiov	Farmer	Karlovo	19.05.2017
80	Dimitar Kalfov	Farmer from Chepelare	Karlovo	19.05.2017
81	Cvjatko Nachev and wife	Bee farmer, and PBB	Karlovo	19,20/05/2017
82	Albina Minskaya	organic farmer	Karlovo	19.05.2017
83	Maria Chonlova-Minkovska	organic farmer	Karlovo	19.05.2017
84	Zhivko Stefanov	Permaculture farmer	Karlovo	19.05.2017
85	Anelija Geogrieva	organic farmer	Karlovo	19.05.2017
86	Nikolay Yanev	organic farmer	Karlovo	19.05.2017
87	Dimitar Atanasov	organic farmer	Karlovo	19.05.2017
88	Svetlana Trifonovska	Journalist, Agronovinite.bg	Sofia	22.05.2017
89	Bosilena Melteva	Journalist, Green Dnevnik	Sofia	22.05.2017
90	Petra Taleva	Journalist, Bulgarian National Radio	Sofia	22.05.2017
91	Svetlozara Dimitrova	Journalist, Agro TV	Sofia	22.05.2017
92	Mariela Ilieva	Journalist, Agro Compass	Sofia	22.05.2017
93	Tsvetan Ivanov	Volunteer	Sofia	22.05.2017
94	Alexander Marinov	Volunteer	Sofia	22.05.2017

Summary of interviews during the field mission according to groups:

Stakeholder groups	Western Stara Planina	Central Balkan	Total
Farmers	4	14	18
PBB	4	1	5
FIs	5	2	7
PES schemes	(2)	5	7
Local administration	2	3	5
Park administration	2	3	5
National administration	-	-	10
Young leaders	-	-	5
Volunteers	-	-	2
Media	-	-	5
Total			69

5.4 SWOT Analysis**SWOT made by the beneficiaries of the PBB / FI / PES schemes**

Beneficiary name	Filip Kirilov, The Vegetarium Project in Zhelen village Trinoga Association www.vegetarium.eu ; www.trinogabg.org		
Support description	Creation of a place for ecotourism. The main activities are building and renovation of 2 buildings, registration of 3 guest rooms with total of 10 beds and conference hall.		
Scheme	PBB		
Project region	Western Stara Planina		
Strengths		Weaknesses	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are well known We are in a very beautiful place in the nature with many wild animals and biodiversity of medicinal, useful plants. We are 1 hour drive from Sofia, so we are a perfect weekend destination -> it helps the distribution of our products. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For the moment, we are still depending financially – we need to work outside Zhelen to finance the project. (we are lucky that we work for 2 weeks every 3 months – we cook in Switzerland). We don't have enough equipment for the work helping the biodiversity and the trainees activities. We need more garden equipment. We lack sleeping space to host volunteers and people to work for us. We could provide paid work, but we need space for the worker to sleep. 	
Opportunities		Threats	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To establish the harmony between taking care of the environment, educate the youth and have a small business to finance that all. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The local authorities The national authorities 	

Beneficiary name	Orlin Koychev, Bike Ventures
Support description	The project aims at the development of the bike sports, the active healthy way of life as well as promoting the possibilities of the region regarding the tourism, the creation of new economic factors and perspectives for stable development of the region.
Scheme	Financial Instrument
Project region	Western Stara Planina

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profound knowledge and experience in the tourism field, and the area of Northwest BG • Certified guides, licenced tour company • Good advertising and marketing campaign promoting the area and bike tours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First time experience with the development of a project • Need for more staff members in some periods.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing different than biking tours • Financing for the maintenance of the trails and advertisements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolation of the area of Northwest BG • Little advertisement and knowledge of the area – problem with the forest authorities, damaging the way marks and trails. • Small number or no accommodation places in some areas

Beneficiary name	Association Eko-Berk-Med, Berkovitsa	
Support description	Local NGO to manage the contributions of the FIs for the Western Stara Planina Natura 2000 zone	
Scheme	Manager of FIs contributions	
Project region	Western Stara Planina	
Strengths	Weaknesses	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from our members • Local organisation • Focused on the environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of funding • Difficult to organize the members during the summer • Lack of skills for the administration of the activities 	
Opportunities	Threats	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the successful implementation of the project • Advertising the territory • Increasing the environmental awareness of the population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delaying the activities • Insufficient support from the local administration in the implementation of the activities 	

Beneficiary name	Dobromir Domuschiev, Wild Echo/Spatia Wildlife Ltd.	
Support description	Supporting biodiversity stability of the wolf species by awareness-raising and generation of an alternative profit source in animal-watching tourism. Supporting the population of local birds by feeding.	
Scheme	PBB	
Project region	Western Stara Planina	
Strengths	Weaknesses	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent know-how • Well known tour operator • Best wildlife hide in BG and one of the best in Europe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough experienced wildlife guides in BG 	
Opportunities	Threats	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great potential about wolf watching • The hide is becoming widely known in Europe • Option to try the BG market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wolf prosecution - shooting and poison • Negative attitude against wolf related activities • Increased off-road and other human related activities 	

Beneficiary name	Teodor Vulchev, Karayana Cooperative – goat farm	
Support description	Developing of goat farming and concomitant farm as hens, eggs, vegetables and fruits.	
Scheme	Financial Instrument	
Project region	Western Stara Planina	
	Strengths	Weaknesses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing the opportunities for sales More people would be able to see this type of livestock breeding Possibilities for providing accommodation services and developing tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no
	Opportunities	Threats
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversifying the activities which would lead to sustainability Opening new working places 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no

Beneficiary name	Lenko Iliev, PiM Consulting Ltd.	
Support description	Building a botanical collection area of about 300 m ² which will introduce the plant diversity of Western Stara Planina. It will be created a small collection of ex-situ of some rare species from the region.	
Scheme	PBB	
Project region	Western Stara Planina	
	Strengths	Weaknesses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New clients Green schools Children games Increasing the variety of offered products Potential to develop towards growing herbs for sales 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The commitment Dependence on human factor – labour force Possibility that some of the plants would not sustain
	Opportunities	Threats
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating different games, applications, interesting for the children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -

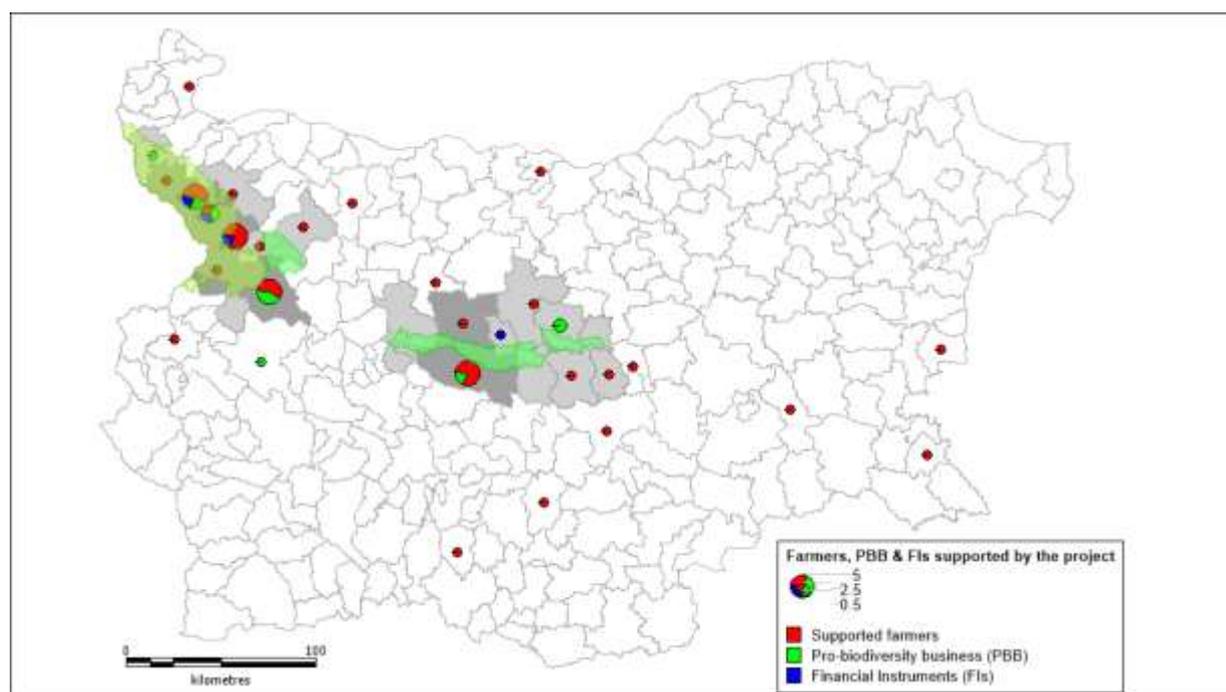
Beneficiary name	Daniela Osikovska, Bio Zemya Ltd.	
Support description	Creation of a self-sustaining place for living which follows the nature laws and carries out for nature conservation. The main activities are: 1. Creation of 10 000 m ² bio plantation of mallow and bio seeding of 2000 m ² of mustard. Incomes from the project will be generating from sale of the Organic certified Malvaceae foliage and dried mustard color and homemade mustard.	
Scheme	PBB	
Project region	Western Stara Planina	
	Strengths	Weaknesses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permanent crop, that will provide income in the future Business intertwined with nature – marketing, nature Closed cycle – herbs, drying An image of uniqueness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distant from large centers Small yields Lack of a legal facility for packaging
	Opportunities	Threats
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tendencies towards natural way of life including all elements for existing – food, place for living, water, etc. Experience which can be multiplied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of labour force Lack of compliance with the restrictions in Natura 2000 zones

Beneficiary name	Maya Angelova, Sinevka Ltd.	
Support description	PBB - Creating a micro-business for processing forest fruit into jam using a traditional recipe and developing and application of a methodology for sustainable gathering of forest fruit and herbs FI - Construction of demonstration centre for (1) Making of pastries and pastry sheets; (2) Baking using a traditional wood furnace; (3) Weaving, spinning, making of felt, dyeing with natural dyes, with a loom and other facilities required for the demonstration of those activities which are typical of the region.	
Scheme	PBB/FI	
Project region	Western Stara Planina	
Strengths		Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The only one in the region A tourist product, which is nature-friendly 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of workers
Opportunities		Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nature – climate conditions

Beneficiary name	Eli Petrova, Bozhenski Chiflik	
Support description	Construction of an observation point for wildlife photography, and of an education center – 24 hours tracking the movements of animals. Other activities include cleaning and safety maintenance of two forest trails, and development of an education spot in a farm to for getting children to know domestic animals.	
Scheme	PBB	
Project region	Central Balkans - Gabrovo	
Strengths		Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing new additional attractions for entertaining tourists and children Education spot for domestic animals on the farm Increased visits to Bozhenski chiflik 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insufficient own resources to complete the construction works in Bozhenski chiflik
Opportunities		Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity to have visits from more tourists Increased popularity of the place due to the support from the project For the Balkans and people 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem to find suitable workers Natural conditions – extreme events, droughts, wind, etc.

Beneficiary name	Svetoslav Todorov, ELF	
Support description	Promoting nature conservation by focusing the attention on elements of conservational importance, specific species and the status of different categories of protected sites in Bulgaria	
Scheme	FI	
Project region	Central Balkans - Apriltsi	
Strengths		Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The location of the place Development of the tourism in the region Good traditions Knowledge of the region its protected areas and species, etc. Contacts with the national and nature parks 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small size of the place No place for a parking and a future development of other buildings Lack of motivated people to work Lack of experience in tourism
Opportunities		Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hiring/buying new land parcels Applications for EU Funds support Use of additional place in a nearby location 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The prices of land in the area are high Lack of funding for investments Difficulties in communication

5.5 Map on supported farms, PBB and FIs



5.6 "Most significant change" stories

Public sector: Food Safety Agency (FSA)

"What we have learned through the project is that processing food on farms for direct sales is a need for farmers. For them to be able to do this, a flexible approach from our side is needed. The contact with the NGO helped us understand the problems in the field better and the training in Switzerland was instrumental to us for understanding the opportunities direct sales provide to farmers. For the training sessions in Bulgaria, not only heads of directorates but also ordinary inspectors were invited. So we had fruitful exchange among us. Even if we are the controlling body, we don't want to act as a police. We want to assist the increasing trend of registration. NGOs help us because they are really close to the farmers."

Consortium member: APB (funding businesses)

Since its establishment APB was focused specifically on nature conservation. This role of the organization made it an enemy of some large-scale private interests. Together with the traditional work of APB in the fields of policy change and solving conflict cases, under the project, the organization entered a new domain – business development in protected areas (FIs and PBBs). This is both a significant change in the understanding of APB of sustainable nature conservation and a strong public message about the inherent links between socio-economic development and nature protection. This role of APB was appreciated by businesses too – 2 years ago APB became a member of the Bulgarian Association of Industrial Capital (listed together with the Industrial Branch Chambers), and the Coalition signed several memoranda for cooperation with tourist associations.

Stakeholders: volunteers (Changing view of conservationists)

"As volunteers for green NGOs, we have witnessed how conservationists can make friends with the sheep farmers or with a jam producer collecting wild fruits, for example. Before, the conservationists saw their task in protecting e.g. the vulture and rare plants only. They did not think of the people. The project brought nature and local people together."

Private sector/ farmers supported by the project

Rare breeds farmer: "Before we met the NGO, we sold our milk wholesale at 1 Leva/litre. Then we met the people at the NGO and they told us about on-farm processing. We also met a cheesemaker through the project who introduced us to produce cheese. Without the NGO, we wouldn't have been able to set up the processing. With their help in financing, paperwork and cheesemaking we now have a closed cycle. I opened an additional shop in Plovdiv with one employee. Now we get 2.5 Leva/litre. "

Farmer and cheese producer: "I'm a milk technologist and first worked in big dairies. Then I decided to restore traditional technologies, but the approval for on-farm processing was very difficult. I had two court cases. If it wasn't for the help of the NGO, I would not have been able to get my production approved. Now I also train other farmers to make cheese specialities. "

Rabbit breeder: "I started to breed rabbits as a hobby about 10 years ago. But it was difficult to find a market first and I almost gave up, despite trying to get help from different institutions. A friend directed me to the NGO. Without them, the Food Security agency would not bother to us. Now we're registered. Grey sector farmers are always under pressure and get low prices. We have our own processing facility since 9 months and as the demand for our rabbits is higher than the supply, we'll start enlarging the number now. We already hired two employees."

Quail breeder: "I got to know the NGO only after registering for direct sales. If I'd done the registration with them, I could have registered earlier. The organization helped in two ways: I have a packaging through them that is cheaper and I sell at the farmer's market they set up. Without that market, I would work only half capacity. The demand at the market in Sofia is higher than what I can produce, and I sell double the price I would get selling at an ordinary shop. I sell 30% of my production at the markets in Sofia and Plovdiv, but I want to enlarge this proportion because it's better profit. Through the project, I could enlarge the production and get better profit."

Honey producer: "What changed for me is that with the NGO, we managed to sell directly to the market. If it was not for the project, we would sell to a purchasing company and would get less than half the price that we now fetch through direct sales. "

Organic farmer: "If we didn't know the NGO, we wouldn't have started with organic agriculture. We would have remained in the tourism business with horses. We got very high level consultancy from the NGO. We started with kale which is a very new culture for Bulgaria."

5.7 Sources

Project internal documents:

- Project document (March 2012) and logframe
- Yearly progress reports
- Consortium activity agreement, Addendum № 1/ 16.09.2014
- Financial reports
- Expert reports
- Auditor's reports
- Assessment of the changes as a result of the implementation of for the Balkan and the people project. Report on the base of Data Researches. Sofia, ESTAT Agency, February 16, 2017.

Project external documents:

Assessment of the changes as a result of the implementation of For the Balkan and the People project, 2017, and The Active NGOs in Bulgaria, Open Society Institute, 2017

Reviron Sophie 2016: End of phase report, HNVF – Rural Development and High Nature Value Farmlands in Romania. On behalf of SIB.

Velikov Iordan 2013: Development in agriculture and rural areas in Bulgaria. From implementing full EU CAP in the first seven years of full EU Membership and the Potentials for improvements. Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung, Belgrad. Retrieved on 9.6.2017 from: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/belgrad/10399-20131211.pdf>

Websites

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/awards/2016-edition/winners/socio-economic-benefit/index_en.htm

<https://rsf.org/en/bulgaria>

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/erweiterungsbeitrag/en/home/countries/bulgarien/thematische-fonds-in-bulgarien.html>]

Projects Poland:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/erweiterungsbeitrag/en/home/countries/polen/projekte-in-polen.filterResults.html/content/projects/SDC/en/2011/7F07431/phase1.html?oldPagePath=/content/erweiterungsbeitrag/en/home/laender/polen/projekte-in-polen.html> , http://www.agropronatura.pl/en/o_projekcie , <https://www.eda.admin.ch/erweiterungsbeitrag/en/home/countries/polen/projekte-in-polen.filterResults.html/content/projects/SDC/en/2011/7F07576/phase1?oldPagePath=/content/erweiterungsbeitrag/en/home/laender/polen/projekte-in-polen.html> , 11.6.2017

<https://www.erweiterungsbeitrag.admin.ch/erweiterungsbeitrag/de/home/projekte/fokus.html/content/projects/SDC/en/2011/7F07058/phase1?oldPagePath=/content/erweiterungsbeitrag/de/home/projekte/fokus.html> , 28.6.2017

<http://www.cozi.org.pl/?c=mdTresc-cmPokaz-222>

Theory of change:

<http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/>

http://impact.zewo.ch/en/impact/resources/theory_of_change

<http://www.hfrp.org/evaluation/the-evaluation-exchange/issue-archive/evaluation-methodology/an-introduction-to-theory-of-change>