

# IMPLEMENTATION OF LEADER MEASURES OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN CROATIA

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## Abstract

This paper presents experiences of LAGs in Croatia through the details of implementation of LEADER program in rural development.

IPARD - Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance in Rural Development - Operational programme for agriculture and rural development within European financial perspective 2007 - 2013, defines Croatian rural policy for the stipulated period until acceptance of the new rural development program 2014 - 2020. The implementation of IPARD started in 2008, which brought Croatia the liability of implementing LEADER program. However, it should be noted that the implementation of LEADER is based on "bottom-up approach" in local communities with active individuals and associations as initiators of development initiatives, which should result in founding of LAGs - Local Action Groups for the area of at least 2 municipalities, and LEADER program is intended for municipalities and smaller towns, up to 25,000 citizens. Management structure of Local Action Group has to be at least 50% votes of the civilian sector, at least 30% of votes of women and at least 1 vote of a person under 25 years of age. LAG can cover the area of 5,000 - 150,000 citizens.

In the beginning of LEADER Measure 202 implementation, started in 2013, LAGs face to severe financial and other problems, as pre-financing, payment of VAT, etc. These issues were removed by negotiating of the representatives of the LEADER Network Croatia (association of Croatian LAGs), which have increasingly strong role in the implementation of rural development in Croatia.

In the beginning of 2015, there are expected new tenders from the Rural Development Program 2014 - 2020, with significantly larger funds for the rural development than in the IPARD period. In this new period, Croatian LAGs, covering more than 80% of land area, will be a strong partner to the government in achieving long-term strategic objectives for rural development, and a subject of new research interests.

**Key words:** Rural development, LEADER measures, LAG, Croatia, LEADER Network Croatia.