
LEADER PROGRAMME IN LITHUANIA



LEADER method objective and principles

The principal goal of *LEADER* method in the field of rural development is to stimulate the even regional development, to improve the rural life quality, to tackle social, economic and environmental problems with the assistance of the local population, rural communities and other rural development participants.

The key principle of *LEADER* programme is cooperation or partnership of different partners. Joint efforts of partners towards a common goal enable the more effective use of local capital: knowledge, expertise, financial resources, capacities and initiative. This principle is implemented by establishing local action groups (LAGs), formed of the representatives from different sectors: rural communities, non-governmental organizations, local authorities and business representatives.

Another important *LEADER* principle is the implementation of the “bottom-up” approach. With the application of this principle, the opportunity is given to the local organizations and the population to participate in the formation and implementation of the local policy, adopting decisions, directly predetermining their well-being, to initiate by themselves the changes in the rural localities and to implement them actively. A strategy of rural welfare or development, based on this principle, reflects better the actual situation in the countryside and expectations; it becomes more agreeable and better perceived by rural population.

In implementing *LEADER* method it is necessary to follow the territorial integrity principle. By applying this principle, human and financial resources are directed towards economic, social and cultural development of a specific integral territory. A territory may cover one or several districts or wards (*seniūnija*); however, they must be combined by common factors; geographical, economic and social.

No less important is the principle of integrity, which aims at finding common solutions for different problems rather than addressing problems of individual sectors (e.g., education, medicine, transport), that is, to produce and implement a strategy that combines the development of different sectors.

Those principles are united by the strategic planning principle. Rural welfare should be achieved by consistent and systematic foreseeing of the most important development goals in a particular area (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Main LEADER elements

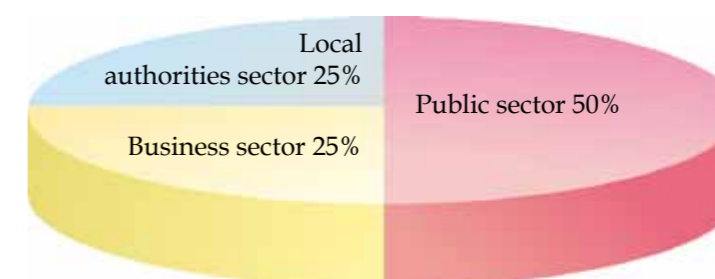


LEADER+ type measure implementation in 2004-2006

After Lithuania became a member of the European Union (EU) and ratified Lithuania’s 2004–2006 Single Programming Document (SPD) for utilization of the EU structural funds, *LEADER+* type measure was started to be implemented, stimulating rural development, local initiatives, activating rural communities, other non-governmental organizations, local authorities and business representatives for cooperation. With an aim of implementing that measure, LAGs, representing the selected territory and combining social and economic partners, were started to be created (Fig. 2). *LEADER+* type measure was considered to be pilot, prior to the implementation of *LEADER* method in 2007-2013.

LAG is a public legal entity of limited civil responsibility, the managerial body thereof, possessing the right of decision-taking, represents the interests of different groups in a LAG territory, i.e. no less than 50 per cent of the members of managerial body is composed of social and other partners, as well as the representatives of their associations, up to 25 per cent business representatives and up to 25 per cent representatives of local authorities.

Fig.2. Composition of LAG Board



In implementing *LEADER+*, two areas of activity were supported: “Acquisition of Skills” and “Pilot Integrated Strategies” (Pilot Strategies). The first area of activities “Acquisition of Skills” is aimed at developing rural population’s skills, required for producing pilot strategies. Out of the total amount of funds envisaged for the relevant measure, 42 per cent were allocated for this particular area. The goal of the second area of activities “Pilot Integrated Strategies” is to implement pilot strategies. Funds allocated for it made 58 per cent of the total amount of funds envisaged for the measure. *LEADER+* type measure in 2004–2006 was allocated EUR 2.72 million.

Pilot strategies according to the themes offered by the European Commission were prepared by 27 local action groups. Of those proposed, 10 LAG strategies were recognized as best and EUR 147,000 was allocated for each (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. LAGs, which implemented the pilot integrated strategies in 2004–2006

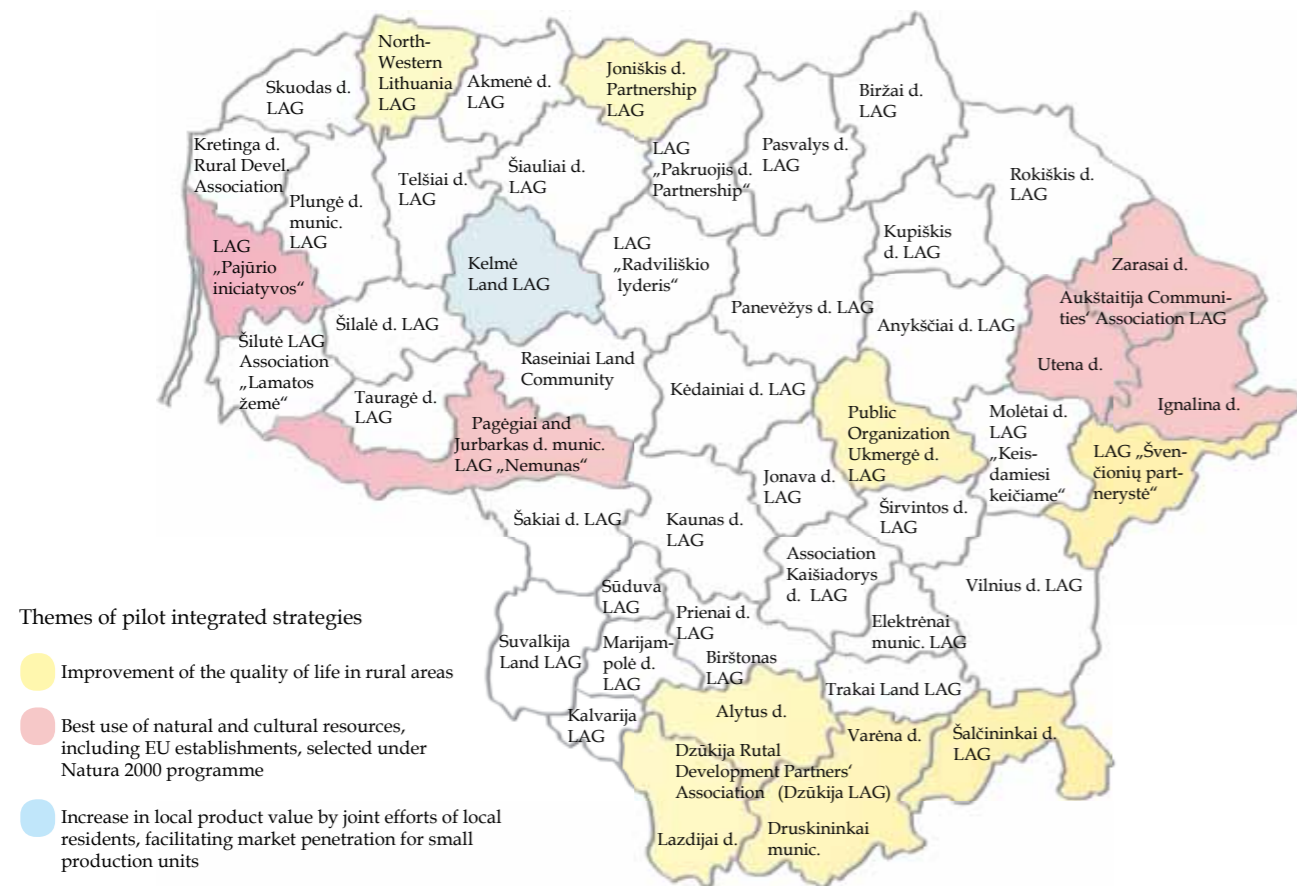


Table 1. Themes of local projects in implementing 2004–2006 pilot strategies under LEADER+ type measure

Themes of local projects	Number of local projects
Creation of attractive conditions of life and environment (renovation or establishment of recreational places, community centres, provision of services to rural residents)	67
Creation of conditions for activation of sociability of rural residents (renovation or establishment of rural community centres, acquisition of equipment for common use)	66
Educational events for animation of rural residents and promotion of motivation in preserving environment, culture and natural heritage	38
Creation of rural conditions attractive for youth (involvement in sports activity, propagation of healthy lifestyle, etc.)	33
Promotion of regional cuisine, crafts and ethnocultural heritage	30
Provision of tourism, recreation services for using and safeguarding natural and cultural resources of the area	29
Promotion of entrepreneurship skills of rural community members (especially women)	24
Initiative promotion of folk masters seeking for improving the attractiveness of the area	13
Production and trade of traditional and non-traditional products, ecological production	12
Integration of the disabled and socially vulnerable people into the community life	8
Total	320

During the implementation of pilot strategies, 320 local projects were funded. The LAGs performed a huge administration job: from assessment and selection of project applications to project financing and implementation monitoring. The average value per project amounted to EUR 3,610.

Local projects were produced and implemented by diverse subjects from the LAG represented territory: the communities, farmers, entrepreneurs, educational establishments, municipalities and wards, managements of parks, health and leisure clubs, women's societies, entertainment, cultural and folk art centres, regional museums, public libraries, and police commissariats.

Local projects reflected a very wide range of the population needs: renovation or establishment of community homes according to community needs, arrangement of seminars for the formation of rural population business skills, involvement of women and children from social-risk families into community activities, advocacy of a healthy lifestyle by involving children and young people in sports activities, creation of a community's website, development of non-traditional business, establishment of a handicraft centre, a drinking water study, water tourism development, adapting of coastal areas and bicycle routes for tourism, arrangement of a competition to nominate the most beautiful homestead, a drama show, education for the disabled people, upholding of traditions, acquisition of hardware, music instruments, etc.

An analysis of local projects shows that the majority of projects related to the problems of sociability of rural residents, creation of attractive conditions of life and environment. Mostly financed were projects covering the following fields of activity like animation of rural communities' activity, strengthening of infrastructure of partnership and rural community centres, training of entrepreneurship, promotion of alternative activity in the village, environmental management and preservation of ethnocultural heritage, preparation of training courses and seminars, publishing of informative publications, etc. With the implementation of the projects it was aimed at preserving natural resources, countryside, and biological diversity (Table 1).



LEADER method implementation in 2007–2013

Within the period of 2007–2013, LEADER method was included in the national or regional rural development programmes of EU countries and may be implemented according to all rural development axes. The main idea of that method is that seeking to preserve the diversity and uniqueness of the European rural areas a local development strategy (Strategy) is efficiently implemented when decisions are adopted by the local population participating in the activity.

In Lithuania, LEADER method is implemented according to the Lithuanian Rural Development 2007–2013 Programme (further – RDP) Axis III “The Quality of Life in Rural Areas and Diversification of the Rural Economy” and Axis IV “LEADER Method Implementation” measures (Table 2). To implement LEADER method 6.06 per cent of the funds was allocated (Fig. 4).

Table 2. Axes and measures under RDP in 2007–2013

Axis	Measures, implemented under LEADER method
Axis I Improving the Competitiveness of the Agricultural and Forestry Sector	No
Axis II Improving the Environment and the Countryside	No
Axis III The Quality of Life in Rural Areas and Diversification of the Rural Economy	Transition to non-agricultural activities
	Support for creating and developing business
	Encouragement of rural tourism activities
	Village renewal and development
Axis IV LEADER Method Implementation	Local development strategy implementation
	Interterritorial and transnational cooperation
	Support for LAG activities, acquisition of skills and their application

Fig. 4. Allocation of funds in 2007-2013 under RDP



- Axis I Improving the Competitiveness of the Agricultural and Forestry Sector
- Axis II Improving the Environment and the Countryside
- Axis III The Quality of Life in Rural Areas and Diversification of the Rural Economy
- Axis IV LEADER Method Implementation
- Technical support

Implementation of Local Development Strategies

A local development strategy is a document, providing an analysis of the social and economic situation in the LAG territory and of the needs of the population, LAG mission, a vision of the development of rural areas, priorities, goals, their implementation measures, spheres of activities and recommended actions for the use of locality resources, public support and rallying the efforts of the LAG, rural communities and other rural residents.

Implementation of strategies is related to RDP Axis III “The Quality of Life in Rural Areas and Diversification of the Rural Economy” measures, whereby it is sought to improve the quality of life in rural areas. The LAG may include in its strategies all measures under this Axis, the principal attention, however, being focused to the measure “Village Renewal and Development”. For this measure under LEADER method, no less than 73 per cent of all funds of the strategy are allocated. Support is granted for renovation of building, for preservation and modernization of rural heritage objects of historical, ethnocultural and architectural value and countryside components, promotion of traditional crafts and improvement of the quality of life.

Support for implementation of strategies in 2007-2013 is granted according to the approved methods. The size of support depends on the number of the residents in the LAG represented territory; the basic amount of support of EUR 869,000 is allocated for each strategy, whereas for the territories, attributed to problematic, additionally 3per cent of the support funds is granted for the implementation of the strategy. Under the said methodology, support for the implementation of one LAG strategy is from EUR 1.3 million to EUR 4.6 million.

The highest amount of support foreseen per project is up to EUR 200,000. The smallest size of support per non-profit local project is up to EUR 7,240, and the value of a profit-bearing local project cannot be less than EUR 14,481. The funds of the local project for profit-bearing projects may account for 70 per cent of all costs eligible for funding and for the implementation of non-profit up to 90 per cent of I costs eligible for funding.

In developing strategies, the LAG conducted a social-economic local analysis, interviewed target groups of rural residents, identified the problems and needs, and predicted the number of local projects and residents, which could make use of the project results.

The strategies foresee the improvement of the quality of life in rural areas, diversification of the rural economy by promoting initiatives and partnership of rural residents, creation of alternative income sources by developing rural trades and crafts, and preservation of rural cultural heritage.

Support for LAG Activity and Acquisition of Skills

Support for RDP Axis IV measure “LAG Activity, Acquisition and Active Adaptation of Skills” is intended for uniting of rural residents, developing of the skills to act together, preparing and implementing strategies. The measure is composed of the four areas of activity:

- Support for the LAG activity, according to which the administration expenses for LAG strategies will be funded;
- Technical support for conducting studies of rural areas, developing and/or renewing of strategies, and training of persons, involved in developing and/or renewing of strategies;
- Support for training, consulting and improving a qualification of persons, implementing the strategy;
- Support for activation of potential local project executors within the LAG territory is granted to the training of local project initiators and executors, making public the LAG activity.

The areas of that activity ensure the overall support for developing of skills, since they afford the opportunity to apply for support during strategy development in administering and implementing the prepared strategy.

Interterritorial and transnational cooperation

The goal of the measure “Interterritorial and transnational cooperation” is to support and implement mutually beneficial interterritorial and transnational cooperation projects, to provide opportunities for tackling rural problems in a creative and efficient way.

The interterritorial cooperation project is the project devised by at least two LAGs, operating in the territory of the Republic of Lithuania. One of the partners should be the LAG that received support for the implementation of a local development strategy.

The transnational cooperation project is the project developed by at least two LAGs, operating in the territory of the Republic of Lithuania and the European Community or third countries. At least one of the partners should be the LAG, existing in the territory of the Republic of Lithuania which received support for the implementation of a local development strategy.

Possible themes for cooperation projects:

- *small and medium-sized business* covers search for small enterprises in other regions for possible business development; creation of the cooperation network among various enterprises in different countries aiming at sharing experience, know-how, technologies, etc.;
- *cultural heritage* is the dissemination of national cultural heritage in the country's regions or among other Member States: organization of joint events for presenting cuisine heritage, sharing experiences in preparing national food products; organization of rural youth events according to the selected theme with young people from other states (regions); organization of cultural exchange projects between different regions; cooperation of institutions in estimating the common cultural heritage of the region; cooperation of institutions in estimating common cultural regional heritage, etc.; preparation of projects encouraging public catering companies to show interest in the nutrition heritage of other regions;
- *tourism* covers seeking to examine what objects of cultural heritage would be renovated, reconstructed and included in the lists of tourist tours; preparation of summer and winter tourism projects; presentation of local tourism products on the international markets aiming to attract foreign tourists.

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Lithuanian local action groups network

In December 2007, in Lithuania, local action groups established the organization representing their interests – LAG Network. Today out of 51 LAGs, 50 participate in the network activity.

LAG Network represents the interests of the members and defends their rights, cooperates with national and EU institutions, participates in drafting Lithuanian and the European Union legal acts, having an impact on the activities of the Network members.

The key areas of LAG Network activities are to ensure the efficient cooperation between Lithuanian LAGs and EU institutions, to accumulate useful information, to process it and disseminate among the LAG Network members, advise, arrange exhibitions, conferences, seminars and other events, and represent Lithuanian LAGs in international conferences and exhibitions.

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Lithuanian Rural Network



Lithuanian Rural Network (further the Rural Network) was set up in 2008. The purpose of the Rural Network is to tackle the most important issues of agriculture, food sector and rural development, to accumulate, analyze and publicize information on the rural development measures and good experience, to exchange know-how and expertise, to submit proposals to state institutions and establishments, to organize training programmes for local action groups, to provide training and technical assistance to interterritorial and transnational cooperation participants. The Network is composed of five committees, tackling the following RAP implementation issues:

- improving the competitiveness of the agricultural, food and forestry sectors;
- improving the environment and the countryside;
- the quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy;
- LEADER method implementation;
- tackling horizontal issues of 2007–2013 Lithuanian Rural Development Programme and agricultural, food sector and rural development.

In 2009, more than 120 members were involved in the Rural Network activity; however, this number is not final. All public legal entities proving that with their activities they contribute to RDP implementation and agricultural and rural development may participate in the Rural Network.

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Information on LEADER method implementation

Information on LEADER method implementation in the EU countries is available on the Internet webpage: ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/enrd

Information on LEADER method implementation in Lithuania is available on the Internet webpage: www.zum.lt; www.leaderprograma.lt; www.zmmc.lt

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