

Rural development in the Republic of Moldova

Context

The Republic of Moldova is Europe's poorest country and ranks 139th worldwide with an annual gross domestic product of US\$1,740. Placed 114th in the Human Development Index, the Republic of Moldova is also Europe's least developed country. There are also appreciable disparities between urban and rural areas, with the latter having benefited less from the modest economic growth of recent years.

Widespread rural poverty has led, over the past few years, to large-scale migration of the rural population to the capital Chisinau and abroad, mostly to Russia and Italy. One in three persons in rural areas has emigrated in recent years. This lack of prospects is driving mainly young and educated people to migrate, with serious consequences for those remaining behind. Agriculture is suffering from a shortage of labour, it is marked by outdated cultivation and production methods, it must grapple with structural problems and low competitiveness despite fertile land and a well-suited topography. The older generation who are unable to work are falling between two stools, as younger family members have migrated and the state social welfare system is unable to provide the necessary access to social and health care services. It is not possible to grow old with dignity in such circumstances.

The HEKS/EPER Moldova country programme is geared towards these social groups, older people in need and small farmers, and is striving to strengthen rural communities so that they can drive local development.

Objectives, priorities, activities

The country programme aims at improving the living conditions for people in the rural areas of the Republic of Moldova. The focus on the rural areas addresses the





disparities and inequalities in development of urban and rural areas in Moldova. The program plans to achieve the goal through three program pillars:

- 1) Increased income of small and medium scale farmers through market development in agricultural sectors:** The interventions applying a market system change approach strive for sustainable market changes through mobilizing and organizing farmers; facilitating access to knowledge, inputs, services, and finances. In combination with a better access to market based on interventions improving post-harvest management, processing and marketing this shall lead to an increase of income of farmers.
- 2) Improved access to integrated home care services for elderly people:** addresses the needs of one of the most vulnerable groups in rural Moldova, elderly people in need of social and medical services. The program sets on the model of integrated home care services provided by its partner CASMED. Aiming at sustainable impact beyond the project's direct beneficiaries the program applies a Human Rights Based Approach and puts an increased accent on advocacy towards duty bearers on regional and national level.
- 3) Empowered rural communities through (i) enhanced capacities of local civil society and LPAs, (ii) cooperation to jointly solve community problems and (iii) access to funds:** This outcome addresses a main constraint for development of rural areas in Moldova which is the lack of a strong and organized local civil society and an effective cooperation with the Local Public Authorities. HEKS/EPER plans its community empowerment interventions to be compatible with relevant EU policies and models applied Europe-wide.

Target groups

The beneficiaries of the country programme are people living in the rural areas of Moldova, in particular small and medium scale farmers and elderly people in need of social and medical services. The programme counts approximately 14,000 direct beneficiaries and an estimated number of 120,000 indirect beneficiaries. A positive change of their living conditions is ought to be achieved through direct cooperation with them or with target groups.

Partnerships, networks, alliances, memberships

HEKS/EPER collaborates with small local organizations: «Pro Cooperare Regionala», «CASMED» and «CONTACT Cahul» are long-standing HEKS/EPER partners and were joined by the Business Advisory Group in 2015. The grape cultivation project is being implemented directly by the HEKS/EPER project team. HEKS/EPER maintains ongoing dialogue with the relevant governmental and non-governmental players.

HEKS/EPER on the ground

HEKS/EPER runs a coordination office with six local staff members in the capital Chisinau.

Topics and working approach

HEKS/EPER follows a systemic working approach based on the principles of human rights – participation, accountability, equal rights and non-discrimination.



Interventions in agricultural projects are based on a market-oriented approach aimed at sustainable market changes for the benefit of smallholders.

Progress

HEKS/EPER has been active in the Republic of Moldova since 2004 and its present programme orientation is based on the multifaceted experiences of recent years as well as the current social and economic context. In the preceding programme phase, HEKS/EPER focused on agricultural development, the home care service and the strengthening of civil society. The political crisis also affected developments in the Republic of Moldova in 2016 and its negative impact was felt most keenly in the finances of rural communities and state institutions. Despite this or perhaps precisely because of it, HEKS/EPER is continuing its activities, and has launched a new 2016-2020 programme phase.

The programme aims at improving the living conditions for people in the rural areas and to that end we focus on the following priority areas: (1) Increased incomes of smallholders: in 2016, 5,773 beneficiaries in the grape and berry cultivation and milk producing sectors took part in project activities, with 68 per cent of them successfully raising their incomes; (2) improved access to home care services for the elderly: HEKS/EPER continues to support its partner «CASMED» and has provided home care services for some 2,260 beneficiaries; (3) strengthening rural communities: study trips and conferences were organized so as to encourage authorities, local business people and civil society organizations to take direct responsibility for driving local development.

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