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## LAG “GotseDelchev-Garmen-Hadzhidimovo” (Bulgaria)

Author:

Ms Tereza Vakareeva, Executive Director of the LAG Gotse Delchev - Garmen – Hadzhidimovo

### A. Summary table

LAG name	LAG “GotseDelchev-Garmen-Hadzhidimovo” NGO				
Lead partner	Aleksandar Stamboliyski Str.1 2900, Gotse Delchev, Bulgaria		LAG director	Marina Gerova, LAG Manager mig_gotsedelchev@abv.bg	
LAG financial structure	Main European Structural and Investment Fund	Part of another territorial delivery mechanisms	Multi-fund		
	EAFRD	-			
CCI number	Financial allocation (EUR)	Priority axes concerned	Programme Thematic objective(s) concerned		
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Programme	BG16RFOP002	1,500,000	axis 1, axis 2	1, 3	
European Social Fund (ESF) Programme	2014BG05M9OP001	760,000.00	1,2	8,9,10	
European agricultural fund for rural development (EAFRD)	2014BG06RDNP001	2,000,000/500,000 - of which for strategy management/			
LAG Strategy				LAG Implementation Current situation (June 2017):	
Population covered by the strategy	Specific thematic focus and challenges of the strategy	Specific territorial focus of the strategy	Specific social target of the strategy		
55,046	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Economic development</li> <li>o Social inclusion</li> <li>o Access to services</li> </ul>	Mainly focused on rural development / rural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Tackling social exclusion and unemployment</li> <li>o Marginalised communities</li> <li>o Enterprising communities: business creation, developing new business ideas by organising trainings and workshops for advice on entrepreneurship</li> <li>o Life-Long Learning (LLL)</li> </ul>	Strategy selected	

### B. Strategy

## B.1. Area of the CLLD

### a. *Area and population covered by the strategy*

The territorial coverage of the Local Action Group (LAG) incorporates the territory of three municipalities - Gotse Delchev, Garmen and Hadzidimovo and all the included populated areas - 2 towns and 41 villages. The territory of the LAG has an uninterrupted boundary and a total area of 1.046.28 km<sup>2</sup>, included in the Blagoevgrad administrative district and the South-western Planning Region in Bulgaria. An important advantage in terms of the transport situation in the LAG territory is the proximity of the municipalities to the Blagoevgrad district and the capital city of Sofia, as well as to the functioning border checkpoint Ilinden-Exohi with the Greece. The area covers the south-eastern part of the Pirin Mountain, part of the western slopes of the Western Rhodopes, the north-eastern part of the Slavyanka Mountains and the southern valley of the Mesta River and the Gotse Delchev valley. The relief is characterized by a wide variety - from high mountains to valleys. The area is relatively poor in minerals, but rich in water resources.

The total LAG population in 2014 (at the time of drafting the Strategy), according to NSI (National statistical institute) data, is 55,046 people and represents 17.5% of the population of Blagoevgrad region. Nearly 39% of the population live in the two cities on the territory of LAG (Gotse Delchev and Hadzidimovo) and 61% - in the villages (including the municipal centre of Garmen). The population of the territory as of 31.12.2016 amounts to 54,449 people.

In the educational structure of the population the highest share is of those with secondary education (9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade), followed by the population with basic education (5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade) and by the population with primary education (1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> grade), incomplete primary education and the group of having never attended school. Residents with higher university and college education are close to 12% of the population. Social services on the territory of LAG are relatively well developed, focusing mainly on the social inclusion of vulnerable groups in order to avoid the risk of social exclusion. A total of 2,133 people with disabilities are registered on LAG territory, most of whom are over 65 years old.

A total of 2.341 enterprises operate on the territory of LAG in 2014, over 90% of which are micro-enterprises. The processing sector is a structurally identifying sector for the three municipalities. Leading industries are the textile and footwear industry, the production of leather, food and tobacco industry, as well as the wood, paper and cardboard industry and the rubber and plastic industries. The LAG area has excellent ecological characteristics in terms of air, soil, noise and pollution, which allow the development of organic farming and tourism.

### b. *Development needs and potential of the area*

The SWOT analysis presented in the Strategy identifies the following possibilities and potential for development of the LAG territory:

- Ability to exploit the strategic location in terms of the development of cross-border cooperation with Greece - presence of border checkpoints near the region, close to the port of Kavala, Greece.
- Significant forest fund, which allows the development of an all-year-round tourism and recreation, hunting tourism, livestock grazing, yield of hay and leaf fodder, extraction of herbs, medicinal plants, berries, mushrooms, etc.
- Opportunities for development of water resources (Mesta River, mineral springs, lakes and water basins) for the development of water sports and sport fishing, as well as spa tourism.
- Various natural landmarks and protected areas with representatives of rare and extinct species, which are the basis for the development of ecological tourism, ornithological and exploratory tourism.

- Possibility of utilization of the variety of tangible and intangible cultural and historical resources for tourism purposes, including through restoration, research, optimization of access to them, promotion and exhibition.
- Development of the potential of a high entrepreneurial spirit, accumulated traditions in the processing industries (light, textile, clothing, shoe, etc.) and attracted foreign investors.
- More active development and modernization of the food processing industry (processing enterprises) for agricultural production - in the milk, meat, vegetable, perennial, herbaceous and other sectors, including through EU funds.
- Development of local crafts for tourism purposes.
- Opportunity for co-operation between the business and the local vocational high schools and educational centres.
- Utilization of the opportunities for partnership with the non-governmental sector to provide social services.
- Mobilizing the local community to promote the area and maintain the material and intangible cultural and historical heritage by organizing festivals, fairs and exhibitions and participating in national and international events, providing tourist information, promoting of the cultural and historical heritage and the local crafts, customs and rituals through the organization of innovative events with the participation of tourists.

The SWOT analysis also identifies the following needs for the successful development of the LAG territory:

- Optimization of the health care in some smaller and remote settlements.
- Improvement of the facilities in some educational institutions of pre-school and school education, including the cultural clubs.
- Need for modernization of the water supply and sewerage systems in almost all settlements, including construction of purification facilities.
- Need to improve the state of the street and road network in some settlements.
- Need to increase and maintain the green areas in some of the settlements.
- Need to improve the sports infrastructure, including the schools.
- Need to implement energy efficiency, energy saving and sanitation measures for obsolete buildings in residential and public buildings, including the deployment of renewable and alternative energy sources.

## B.2. Strategy of the CLLD

### a. *Thematic scope of the strategy*

The Strategy for Community-led Local Development (SCLLD) of the LAG - Gotse Delchev - Garmen - Hadjidimovo is not only focused on one specific objective but focuses on several, interlinked objectives, being developed entirely on the basis of the local needs and potential resulting from the social-economic study and the stakeholder consultations. The views and proposals of the stakeholders are the basis on which the objectives and priorities of the Strategy are defined, according to which the future of the LAG should aim to continue to stimulate the development of tourism, the support for businesses outside the agriculture sector, development of agriculture and support for renovation and modernization of agricultural holdings, improvement of the state of municipal infrastructure, fight against unemployment and social exclusion, increase of the efficiency of the labour force, encouragement of the entrepreneurship, etc., overcoming the identified problems, needs and weaknesses in the development of the three municipalities. It is precisely the achievement of these goals that the LAG's vision for development and the specific measures included in the Strategy aim at.

*b. Objectives of the strategy and their priorities*

In accordance with the identified needs and characteristics of the three municipalities, the SCLLD has set the following **common strategic objective**:

*Sustainable development on the territory of the municipalities of Gotse Delchev, Garmen and Hadjidimovo by stimulating the local economy, improving the environment and the quality of life, increasing the capacity of the human resources and utilizing the local potential and the identity of the territory.*

The implementation of the overall objective is envisaged to be achieved through the implementation of the following **PRIORITIES** for spatial development within which the specific measures of the Strategy are defined:

**PRIORITY 1 – Sustainable development of the local economy:**

- **Specific objective 1.1** – Stimulating the sustainable development of the agriculture on the territory of the municipalities of Gotse Delchev, Garmen and Hadjidimovo;
- **Specific objective 1.2** – Diversification of the local economy through the development of non-agricultural activities in the sphere of tourism and services and stimulation of innovative ideas and technological innovation of small and medium-sized businesses on the territory of the LAG;

**PRIORITY 2 – Improving the living environment by investing in refurbishing small-scale infrastructure, preserving local identity, cultural, historical and natural heritage:**

- **Specific objective 2.1** – Stimulating the development of the LAG's territory by upgrading all types of small-scale infrastructure;
- **Specific objective 2.2** – Strengthening and preserving the local identity by promoting the cultural, historical and natural heritage on the territory of LAG Gotse Delchev - Garmen - Hadzhidimovo;

**PRIORITY 3 – Developing the human capital by improving the access to employment, stimulating entrepreneurial ideas and providing modern social services:**

- **Specific objective 3.1** – Improving the access to employment and the job quality through training for the unemployed and the employed and supporting the development of entrepreneurial ideas;
- **Specific objective 3.2** – Promoting the social inclusion of persons from marginalized groups, disabled people, lonely people and other vulnerable communities;

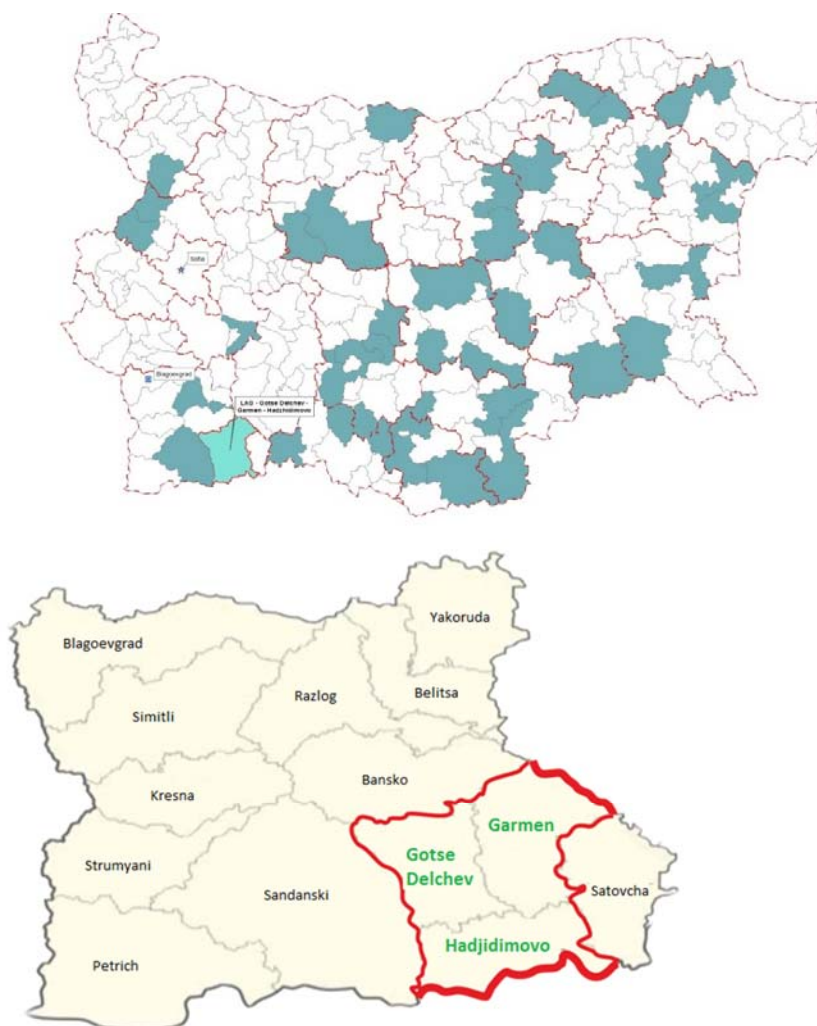
To each specific objective of the Strategy are selected measures of the Rural Development Program (RDP), measures in compliance with Regulation 1305/2013 and measures of the Operational Program "Human Resources Development" (OPHRD) and the Operational Program "Innovations and Competitiveness" (OPIC). The measures in the strategy are specifically tied to the achievement of each of the specific objectives defined in the strategic framework, which in turn target the strategy's priorities. The logical link between the measures, the specific objectives and the priorities of the Strategy will ensure the achievement of the final results and the satisfaction of the expectations and needs of the local community in accordance with the characteristics and potential of the territory.

*c. Targets and results*

The LAG will monitor the progress and the quality of the implementation of the local development strategy in accordance with the financial indicators, the performance indicators and the result indicators. For each of the measures included in the Strategy, the unit of measure and the objective of achieving the relevant indicator by 2023 are defined, as well as the sources of information.

The general indicators for the overall implementation and the indicators for each of the measures included in the SCLLD of the LAG - Gotse Delchev – Garmen -Hadjidimovo, are presented as a table in the documents itself published at: <http://www.mig-gotsedelchev.com/index.php/strategiya-zavomr/rezyume-na-strategiyata>.

d. Maps



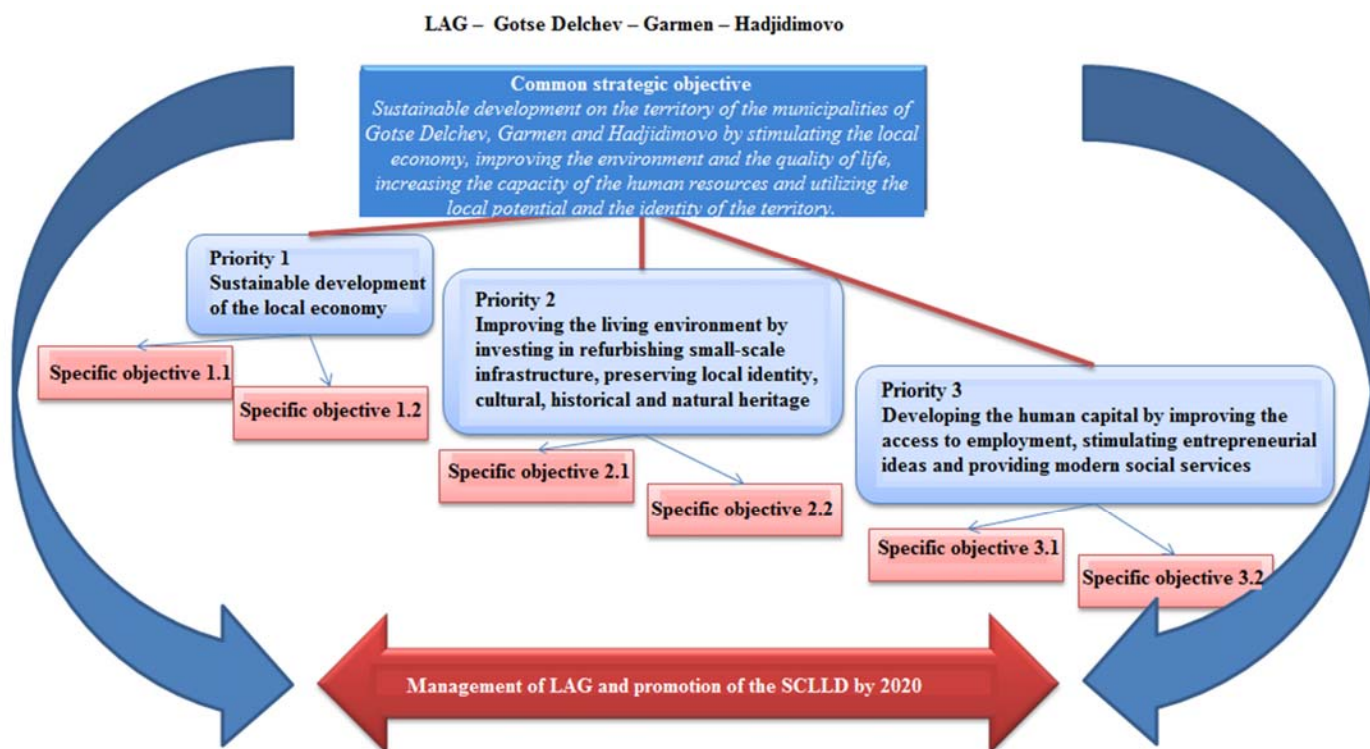


Figure: Hierarchy of the objectives of the SCLLD of LAG - Gotse Delchev - Garmen - Hadzhidimovo

### B.3. Place-based approach

#### a. Territorial coherence

As mentioned above, the municipalities of Gotse Delchev, Garmen and Hadjidimovo form a territory with uninterrupted boundaries. They have many similarities in their geographic, economic and socio-cultural development. By uniting together in the common area of the LAG, they specify and affirm their identity and create even greater opportunities for strengthening the local potential and achieving common sustainable development.

The three municipalities have long-standing traditions in their relations. The real partnership, based on the territorial proximity and the identical socio - cultural specificity of the region, has already proven successful in the collaboration on a large scale of initiatives in the recent years. In view of the good relations between the three neighbouring municipalities, it was decided to start a joint work in order to realize the development opportunities provided by Measure 19 (CLLD) from the Rural Development Program.

The proposed partnership was welcomed and supported not only by the leaderships of the three municipalities in the face of the mayors and the municipal councilors, but also by the stakeholders and the general population of the LAG. Representatives of the local community have actively participated in all campaigns and events in the process of developing the Strategy.

*b. Legacy with previous experiences*

During the previous programming period no local development strategy was implemented on the territory of any of the three municipalities. Each of the municipalities has applied with a project under sub-measure 431-2 "Acquisition of skills and achievement of public activity on the respective territories for potential local action groups in rural areas" financed under the Rural Development Program 2007 - 2013. On the territory of the municipalities of Gotse Delchev and Hadjidimovo the projects have been implemented, local action groups have been set up and local development strategies have been developed but have not been approved for funding. The local community from the territory of the municipality of Garmen had an approved project but declined to sign the contract for financing the project for the preparation of a strategy and the establishment of a LAG.

In the course of the public consultations and after getting acquainted with the community-led local development approach, the requirements for the local action groups and the local development strategies; taking into consideration the analysis of the achievements and in view of preserving the built capacity, the local community from the territory united around the idea of LAG - Gotse Delchev to expand its territory by conducting legal procedures for the merger with LAG Hadjidimovo and also accepting as members the representatives of the public, economic and non-profit sectors in the municipality of Garmen. The implementation of this approach aims at preserving the capacity built up in the period 2007 - 2013, with the merged LAG already covering representatives of the public, business and non-profit sector from the territory of the three neighbouring municipalities. The prepared SCLLD reflects the specific traits, needs and priorities for the development of the whole LAG territory.

*c. Synergy with existing local development strategies*

The Local Development Strategy of LAG - Gotse Delchev - Garmen - Hadjidimovo should be seen as a separate initiative aimed at the simultaneous and unified sustainable development of the three municipalities but only by capitalizing and upgrading the objectives and priorities that each municipality has set for itself in its local strategies and development plans.

All the measures selected in the Strategy will contribute to the development of the LAG's potential and improve the competitiveness of the local economy, thus contributing to the implementation of the local development policies defined in the municipal plans of the three municipalities and the Strategy for the Development of the region of Blagoevgrad for the period up to 2020.

The implementation of projects under measures of the Strategy financed by the OPHRD is expected to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of key strategic documents:

- National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Inclusion 2012-2020;
- Regional Strategies and Municipal Plans for the Integration of the Roma (integration strategies) of Gotse Delchev, Garmen and Hadjidimovo municipalities;
- National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Promoting of Social Inclusion 2020;
- The National Long-Term Care Strategy;
- The Municipal Strategies for Development of the Social Services of the Gotse Delchev, Garmen and Hadjidimovo Municipalities.



## C. Management

### C.1. Financial structure

#### a. Budget

In order to meet the diverse sectoral needs of the territory, the local community focused on the development of the SCLLD of LAG - Gotse Delchev - Garmen - Hadjidimovo with funding from more than one fund: European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund.

The Strategy includes measures that meet the objectives and are funded from the following programs involved in the CLLD approach:

1. Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and Regulation (EC) No 1305/2013
2. Operational Programme "Innovation and Competitiveness" 2014-2020
3. Operational Programme "Human Resources Development" 2014-2020

Each measure is planned to be funded by only one programme (according to the table below), with no co-financing possibilities for a single measure by multiple funds / programmes. Such ideas were discussed during public events with stakeholders on LAG territory, but given the limitations in the legislative sphere, the so called "cross-measures" were not included.

Indicative allocation table for programmes / funds and measures:

Measure code	Measure name	Total public contribution for the strategy period	
		euro	%
Measures financed under RDP 2014 – 2020 ( EAFRD)		1 400 000	37%
M1–4.1	„ Support for investments in agricultural holdings”	310 000	8%
M2–4.2	„ Support for investment in the processing, marketing and/or development of agricultural products”	120 000	3%
M3–6.4	„ Investments in support of non - agricultural activities “	370 000	10%
M6–7.2	„ Investments in creating, improving or expanding all types of small-scale infrastructure “	600 000	16%
Measures outside the scope of the measures of Regulation (EU) № 1305/2013, but consistent with the objectives of the Regulation (financed under EAFRD)		100 000	3%
M 7	„ Preservation and promotion of local identity, cultural, historical and natural heritage “	100 000	3%
All measures, financed under EAFRD		1 500 000	40%
Measures, financed under OPHRD (ESF)		760 000	20%
M 8	„ Increasing the access to employment for unemployed persons, including people with disabilities and adapting the employees to the needs of the business”	410 000	11%
M 9	„ Support for the development of entrepreneurial ideas on the territory of LAG - Gotse Delchev - Garmen - Hadjidimovo “	50 000	1%
M 10	„ Integration of marginalised communities”	150 000	4%

Measure code	Measure name	Total public contribution for the strategy period	
		euro	%
M 11	„ Better access to sustainable services for the social inclusion of people with disabilities and the self-employed”	150 000	4%
Measures financed under OPIK (ERDF)		1 500 000	40%
M 4	" Support for the development and implementation of innovation in SMEs	180 000	5%
M 5	" Technological upgrading and implementation of standards in SMEs "	1 320 000	35%
<b>TOTAL FOR THE WHOLE STRATEGY</b>		<b>3 760 000</b>	<b>100%</b>
Current expenditures and promotion of the SCLLD of LAG - Gotse Delchev - Garmen - Hadjidimovo		500 000	-
Current costs for managing the strategy of LAG		400 000	80%
Costs for promoting the SCLLD on the LAG territory		100 000	20%
<b>TOTAL FOR THE WHOLE STRATEGY, including CURRENT COSTS</b>		<b>4 260 000</b>	<b>-</b>

In the process of implementation of SCLLD, LAG will conduct non-discriminatory and transparent project selection procedures by developing application guidelines, including a project proposal evaluation order that ensures:

1. Avoidance of conflict of interest in the selection of projects;
2. That at least 50 percent of the votes in selection decisions are given by members who are not public sector representatives;
3. That the selection results are documented.

Each project selection procedure starts with the publication of a call for project proposals. Within one admission, calls for proposals, funded from different sources and measures, may be published. Each of the MAs of the funding programmes provides methodological assistance to the LAGs according to their established procedures.

In the framework of the 2014-2020 programming period, in accordance with the Law on the Management of the European Structural and Investment Funds, a Decree on determining the rules for coordination between the programme managing authorities and the local action groups and the local action fishing groups in view of the implementation of the CLLD approach was adopted.

*b. Running costs and animation*

LAG - Gotse Delchev - Garmen - Hadjidimovo is a non-governmental organization operating in public interest, does not carry out economic activity and does not have its own resources for carrying out activities for management of the Strategy.

The Local Action Groups with approved Strategies are eligible for EAFRD financial support for running costs and costs of promoting strategies, with the maximum eligible expenditure not exceeding 25% of the total public expenditure of the EAFRD under the SCLLD. The financial assistance is provided in the form of advance and interim payments. As of August 2, 2017, LAG - Gotse Delchev - Garmen - Hadjidimovo did not receive payments on applications for advance / interim payment.

For the period since the signing of the Strategy Implementation Agreement until now, LAG executes the running costs of managing the Strategy with credit resources received from the municipalities on the territory. Upon request, 2 bank institutions submitted bids for additional credit. Revenue from members of the general assembly in the form of membership fees will allow LAG to secure the costs of borrowing from the banking institutions. LAG relies on a regular refund of payments by the paying agency at payment requests, otherwise it will face the impossibility of servicing the credits received from municipalities and banks, which will cause problems in implementing the Strategy's management activities.

## C.2. Administrative structure

### a. Local Action Group

LAG Gotse Delchev - Garmen - Hadjidimovo is a public-private partnership, established and registered under the Non-profit Legal Entity Act, which carries out activities for public benefit. It aims at providing capacity and implementing the SCLLD on the territory of the municipalities of Gotse Delchev, Garmen and Hadjidimovo. The share of the representatives of the public sector, the business sector and the non-profit sector in the collective management body and in the collective supreme body of the LAG does not exceed 49 per cent of the members with a right to vote.

The General Assembly of the LAG has a total of 57 members, including representatives of 24 settlements or over 55% of all settlements on the territory; representation of the interests of 100% of the stakeholders on the territory has been provided.

The General Assembly includes representatives of the public, business and non-profit sector in the following ratio:

- **Public sector - 5.26%** (3 representatives - 3 municipal administrations)
- **Economic sector - 47.37%** (represented by 27 representatives of the local community, enterprises in non-agricultural sectors, their associations and farmers)
- **Non-profit sector - 47.37%** (represented by 27 local community representatives, cultural clubs, NGOs in other spheres (tourist associations, sports clubs, eco-organisations, training organisations, etc.).

The General Assembly is the collective supreme body of the LAG and has the right to take decisions on all matters of its activity. It consists of all members of the LAG and is responsible for adopting the statute, choosing the management body, adopting the main guidelines, the schedule and the budget of LAG activities, including the SCLLD and the annual activity and financial reports.

The Managing Board is the main body with specific responsibilities for the operational management in the process of realisation of the SCLLD, being responsible for the process of preparation and subsequent management of the SCLLD, approving the Indicative annual work program and the Application guidelines for the measures in the Strategy, the rules for the functioning of the Project selection boards and the evaluation reports of their work, electing the executive and operational units of LAG.

In connection to the implementation of the SCLLD, a team has been appointed, comprising of an Executive director, two Strategic implementation experts and an Accountant, who are responsible for the operational activities of LAG.

### b. Networks and Cooperation

We do not have information on the existence of an organised national network set up by the national authorities to support the implementation of the CLLD Approach.

The MA of the Rural Development Programme organises workshops on the implementation of SCLLDs with the MAs of other funding programmes.

LAG - Gotse Delchev - Garmen - Hadjidimovo became a member of the Non-profit association for public benefit activities "Bulgarian National LEADER Network", which is an organisation for mutual assistance of the local action groups implementing Strategies in the rural areas on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria.

LAG - Gotse Delchev - Garmen - Hadjidimovo has not participated in international networks or events to support the implementation and exchange of good practices. Of course, if an opportunity arises at national or international level, the LAG team would be happy to take an active part in events to exchange knowledge and good practices in implementing local development strategies.

## D. Implementation

### D.1. Strategy design

#### *a. Strategy design*

The strategy of LAG - Gotse Delchev - Garmen - Hadjidimovo's has been developed with a wide public participation. In the initial stage of the preparation of the Strategy, the stakeholder groups were identified. They took an active part in the surveys, meetings and information events and shared their views on the problems and needs on the territory of the three municipalities and presented their ideas on the main priorities which the Strategy should aim at and the measures it needs to include.

The stakeholders were identified on the basis of their role in the drafting the Strategy:

- **Potential future beneficiaries of projects under the Strategy**, who contribute with their views on the main needs and problems of the territory, propose priorities and measures to be included in the Strategy and express interest in the future application aiding us with the determination of the implementation potential of each measure;
- **Partners in the preparation of the Strategy**, who provide background information for its development, participate in the discussions regarding the problems and needs of the territory and give opinion on the feasibility of the measures which would be included in the Strategy without being potential beneficiaries.

All stakeholder groups were involved in the process of elaboration of the Strategy by participating in the information and consultation meetings and public discussions. As a result, the priorities, objectives, and of the Strategy were identified. The views of all stakeholders were thoroughly explored, summarised and reflected in the final version of the Strategy.

Local authorities have been involved in the process by providing an up-to-date statistical information necessary for the preparation of the analysis regarding the Strategy, as well as by participating in meetings and delivering opinions on the adequacy and feasibility of the proposed measures without being potential beneficiaries.

The local governments, i.e. municipal councils and municipal officials took an active part in the public events and discussions held by the LAG. The final version of the SCLLD was approved by the municipal councils of the three municipalities as well as by the local community representatives included in the LAG General Assembly.

The role of the Managing Authority was to monitor the process of preparing the SCLLD, funded under the so-called preparatory measure under the RDP - MA attended the public events held by the LAG and gave its judgment on the progress of the Strategy development. The Managing Authorities of the funding programs provided guidance on the normative documents that regulate the development of the Strategy by organizing trainings and information days for the local action groups.

#### *b. Support and guidance*

In the process of preparing local development strategies, a meeting with the participation of the Managing Authorities of the funding programs was organised regarding the guidelines for the preparation of SCLLDs. The MA of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 has published and updated the implementation ordinance on sub-measure 19.2 "Implementation of Operations within the Community-led Local Development Strategies" of Measure 19 "Community-led Local Development". The Managing Authorities of OPHRD and OPIC also published guidelines for the preparation of the strategies.

Local councils from LAG territory took an active part in discussing the draft of the Strategy, endorsed the final version and agreed to provide a credit loan for LAG management.

The LAG received assistance from municipality of Gotse Delchev, which provided offices for the LAG team, computer and other equipment. The Foundation "Tourist Fund – Pirin" donated office equipment to the LAG.

Municipal councils are also expected to become guarantors of banking institutions in connection with the need to provide additional credit for securing the LAG's activity, given that the LAG will receive advance payments for running costs amounting to 50% of its annual budget but should at the same time provide additional financial resources to finance the management activities.

## D.2. Strategy implementation

### a. *Implementation progress*

The agreement on the implementation of the SCLLD was signed on 29/11/2017. Up until 09/08/2017 the LAG did not announce invitations to projects. The delay in the publication of calls for projects and the preparation of Guidelines for Applicants is due to the necessity:

- to await the synchronization of regulatory acts that the LAG applies in the course of its work and which should be correctly reflected in the procedures and the order for project evaluation;
- to provide technical capability and training to the LAG teams to work with the EU Management Information System for Bulgaria 2020 (UMIS);
- to provide additional guidance on the applicable state aid schemes under the measures financed by the EAFRD and specifying the procedure for their co-ordination, which is a duty of the MA of the RDP.

LAG - Gotse Delchev - Garmen - Hadjidimovo updated its Indicative Annual Work Program (IAWP) for 2017 and postponed the measures adopted for the last quarter of 2017, planning to announce a total of 5 measures as follows: 1 measure for technological renovation and implementation of standards in SMEs (financed by OPIC), 2 measures financed by OPHRD related to training and employment of the unemployed and training of employees, as well as 2 measures, financed by the EAFRD - for investments in agricultural farms and investments in the building, improvement or expansion of all types of small-scale infrastructure. The IAWP for 2018 is due to be drawn up by the end of August 2017. The LAG should plan the calls for proposals under the SCLLD measures for 2018, taking into account the fact that, according to the applicable legislation, if there is no implementation of 20% of all indicators of the SCLLD up until 30/06/2019, the MA of the financing programmes, after analysis, have the right to withdraw the financial resources and to redirect them to measures from the operational programmes. The delay in announcing the measures poses a risk and may lead to the termination of the Agreement on the Implementation of Strategies with Multi-fund Financing.

### b. *Animation and participation*

Representatives of all sectors (public, business and non-profit) as well as representatives of all stakeholders identified in the course of the strategy development participate in the General Assembly of the LAG. They also actively participated in the process of preparing and approving the Strategy. Members of the General Assembly will be participants in the Project Selection Boards. They will be involved in trainings on the application of selection and evaluation procedures for the project proposals.

A large-scale information campaign on the forthcoming calls for proposals under the Strategy will be carried out, with representatives of the local community being included in the information events and trainings for project preparation and implementation. With a view to reaching all stakeholders in the area, the LAG plans to hold information events in all the settlements on the territory where information

materials will be provided, the LAG team presented and other advice experts introduced. If necessary, the LAG is ready to provide advice to potential beneficiaries in the municipal centres of the Garmen and Hadjidimovo municipalities where the LAG has no offices as well as in the larger settlements.

Traditionally, residents on the LAG territory are active and no special measures are required to provoke their participation in public events organised by the LAG team. Events are announced in advance on the LAG's website (<http://www.mig-gotsedelchev.com>), the LAG's Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com>), on local sites and newspapers, on information boards in municipal buildings, etc. These information sources are usually enough to attract people from the territory of the LAG who are genuinely interested in the process of implementing the Strategy.

### *c. Monitoring system*

To monitor the progress and results of the implementation of the Strategy, the LAG applies its own system of ongoing monitoring and evaluation based on the periodic monitoring and reporting of the achievement of predefined indicators. This system includes all monitoring and evaluation activities:

- Current data collection for monitoring and updating indicators;
- Aggregation and analysis of collected data on monitoring indicators - at least once a year;
- External interim evaluation, if necessary;
- Post evaluation in the last year of the implementation of the SCLLD – 2023.

Planning and implementation of ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities is a responsibility of the LAG team. Performing interim or post evaluations are planned and assisted by the LAG team and will be performed by independent assessors.

By 15<sup>th</sup> February of each following calendar year, the LAG shall submit to the MA of the funding programmes an annual report on the implementation of the strategy for CLLD which includes an analysis based on the monitoring of the indicators, implementation of the pre-defined financial indicators, publicity and information measures, application and implementation of beneficiaries' projects.

## E. Added values and constraints

### *a. Added value and bottlenecks*

In relation to other traditional policy approaches, the CLLD approach is a mechanism for concentrating and purposefully spending resources according to the specificity of the territory, based on the local initiative and encouraging local development as defined by the local community. The implementation of multi-fund financing under the approach provides added value by connecting the support for local development to the bottom-up principle and providing funding from different European structural and investment funds, supporting integrated territorial development, improving the coherence and the coordination of the EU funded support to the local development.

### *b. Multiple targets*

Within the framework of LAG - Gotse Delchev - Garmen - Hadjidimovo, there is no possibility to grant money for integrated project proposals, which give an opportunity to present project ideas combining resources from different sources.

There are no limitations on the number of projects implemented by an applicant under the SCLLD. If an applicant is eligible under measures funded from different sources, he / she may submit project proposals under the respective measures and to implement the projects if he / she has the necessary capacity.

### *c. Adequacy*

We believe that the structure of the available Strategy funding meets the identified local needs. The amount of the allocated budget is in line with the maximum eligible public contribution in the financing plan of a SCLLD and has taken into account the broader territorial scope and the larger population in connection with the EAFRD and ERDF funding.

In the initial definition of the financial resources, the interest of the potential beneficiaries from the territory that took part in the conducted survey was taken into consideration. In the process of the public discussions, the distribution of the financial resources under the different measures was discussed in detail, all the proposals made were reflected in the final version of the Strategy. The stakeholders' assessment confirms that the allocated budget is sufficient and its allocation by measures is adequate to achieve the chosen objectives.

### *d. Good practices*

At the current stage, we could not give examples of good practices related to the implementation of the Strategy.

In the course of preparation of the Strategy, we could point out as a good practice the unification of the local community from the territory of three neighbouring municipalities in order to prepare a common SCLLD and to preserve the capacity built in the previous programming period in relation to implementation the LEADER approach on part of the territory. In addition, we can share that the stakeholders' assessment of the work of the LAG team and the results achieved (the prepared and approved Strategy) is very high. As a good practice, we can point the inclusion of the broadest possible population of the territory, with different characteristics (gender, age, social status, economic activity, from towns and from villages, representatives of marginalised and vulnerable groups, etc.) - the inhabitants of the municipalities are most aware of the local problems, needs and the potential for development of the territory.