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**IMPROVEMENT OF THE PERFORMANCE AND QUALITY
OF THE PUBLIC EXTENSION SERVICE IN THE LIVESTOCK
SECTOR**

EUROPEAid/136437/IH/SER/AL

**FINAL REPORT
(1st December 2020)**



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1 INTRODUCTION PAGE

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Project Value: € 1,319,350

PM of Contracting Authority: Ms. Kejn Berliku, Project Manager, CFCU

Address: Sheshi Skënderbej, Tirana 1000, Albania

Phone: +355 67 620 0557

E-mail: Kejn.Berliku@financa.gov.al

Main Beneficiary: The Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development (MARD)

Address: Sheshi Skënderbej 2, Tirana 1000, Albania

Phone: + 355 4 22 25 105

Web site: www.bujqesia.gov.al

Project SPO: Ms. Elisa Teneqexhi, MARD

Phone: + 355 69 271 9485

Email address: elisa.teneqexhi@bujqesia.gov.al

Other Beneficiary: The Agriculture Technology Transfer Centres (ATTCs)
Livestock-based Associations and farms
Livestock and other farmers who participate in focus groups and pilot trials of new approaches

Consultant: **NIRAS IC Sp. z o.o.**

Project Director: Ms. Eliza Domagalska

Team Leader: Mr. Morten Sejersen

Address (Consultant): ul. Puławska 182, 10th floor, 02-670 Warsaw

Phone (Consultant): +48 22 395 71 00

Fax (Consultant): +48 22 395 71 01

Address (Project): Sheshi Skënderbej 2, Tirana 1000, Albania

Phone (Team leader): + 355 69 769 6761

E-mail (Project): jna@niras-ic.pl

Email (Team leader): mose@niras-ic.pl

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Compiled by: Morten Sejersen, Team Leader, Hrvoje Horvat, KE, Michael Hegarty, KE, Ornela Gjika, JNKE

Checked by: Ms Eliza Domagalska, Niras IC Sp. z o.o. Warsaw, Poland

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EuropeAid/136437/IH/SER/AL

**"Improvement of the performance and quality of the public extension service
in the livestock sector"**

Final Report

Tirana

1st December 2020

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ABBREVIATIONS

AKIS	Agriculture and Knowledge Innovation System (previously Agriculture and Knowledge Information System)
ATF	Agricultural Trials Forum
ATTC	Agriculture Technology Transfer Centre
CA	Contracting Authority
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CFCU	Central Finance and Contracting Unit
Consultant	Refers to the Niras IC Sp. Z o.o.
DCM	Decision of the Council of Ministers Albania
EAG	Extension Advisory Group
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
EUD	EU Delegation in Albania
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
INSTAT	National Institute of Statistics Albania
ISARD	Inter-sectoral Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development
JNKE	Junior Non-key Expert
KE	Key Expert
LTE	Long Term Expert
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration (MARD), main project Beneficiary
NFA	National Food Authority
NKE	Non-Key Expert
PD	Project Director
PES	Public Extension Service
PM	Project Management
PSC	Project Steering Committee
SEDF	Strategic Extension Development Forum
SNKE	Senior Non-Key Expert
SPO	Senior Programme Officer
STE	Short-term Expert
TAT	Technical Assistance Team
TL	Team Leader
ToR	Terms of Reference
WHO	World Health Organisation

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At the moment Albania is actively undertaking steps towards the EU accession since in March 2020 the members of the European Council endorsed the General Affairs Council's decision to open accession negotiations with Albania. While striving to adopt the EU standards in many different areas, there are several key elements, respectively in EU CAP, that are for a long-time considered as a minimum standard:

- Existence of registration system that encompasses all the producers;
- Broad range of subsidies – income support, market measures and rural development support;
- Obligatory mechanism for information and education of farmers – available to all interested.

The project IPESA main purpose was to support development and sustainability of the above mentioned last point – services related to information and education of agricultural producers. This report will present all key activities and achievements obtained during the life of the Project, in relation to improvement of farm advisory/extension services.

In relatively short period, from May 7 2017 until November 7 2020, the Project team, together with MARD, engaged experts, ANES personnel and other stakeholders, undertook array of different activities within the following framework:

Overall Project Objective: The overall objective was to contribute to the increase of farm income from livestock sector while ensuring economic feasibility, social fairness and environmental sustainability.

Project Purpose: The purpose was to improve the capacity of extension service to select, design, communicate and disseminate to farmers useful information on agricultural production and management including appropriate knowledge to the animal farming sector.

Result 1: Effective extension service is established following the improvement of institutional and administrative framework.

Result 2: Quality of information of extension service is increased due to enhanced capacities and skills investments.

SHORT OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN PROJECT OUTPUTS

Result 1: Effective extension service is established following the improvement of institutional and administrative framework.

- **Assessment report:** The assessment report was finalized in the first interim period except for the legal part which was added in the second interim period.

Albania's agricultural knowledge and information/innovation system (AKIS), and particularly the public extension services, requires a comprehensive root and branch overhaul to provide the range and quality of advice that farmers (and micro and small and medium sized rural businesses) need in the emerging competitive sphere of the European single market.

- **Detailed recommendations, proposals and presentations related to future institutional setting and operations of the ANES.**

A process to develop a Strategic Action Plan (SAP) for ANES was launched in February 2019. Final SAP was delivered to MARD in December 2019. The feedback from MARD officials on the SAP was positive and included further discussions of and additions to the SAP.

- **Preparation of advisory packages for top priority production areas together with catalogue of packages**

A number of advisory packages were developed. Advisory packages are predefined, structured packages of services that are offered by advisors. Each package is related to specific area of production. For

advisors, advisory packages serve as a tool for more efficient advisory work. A catalogue of advisory packages was also prepared for distribution to farmers.

➤ **Preparatory Work for Future It Advisory Management System (AMS)**

During the Project extension period, the Project implemented needs assessment, facilitated discussions and developed necessary documentation that describe main elements, interface and architecture of the needed system.

Result 2: Quality of information of extension service is increased due to enhanced capacities and skills investments.

➤ **Initial training of ANES and ATTC personnel**

The initial training was divided into two workshops. The first, held in Durres from 03-04 May 2018, was for 33 ANES livestock and agronomy advisers mostly from ANES centres from Tirana, Durres, Korca and Elbasan. Four ATTC staff (Skodra and Fushe Kruje) also participated as trainees. Trainers and other presenters included IPESA KEs and Non-KEs, officials from MARD and ARDA, and group work facilitators from the Livestock Entrepreneurs Association (LEAA), RASP (a development NGO), and GIZ.

The second training workshop was held 30-31 May 2018 in Vlora mainly for advisers based south of Tirana/Durres, also several from ATTCs.

➤ **Base trainings of ANES and ATTCs personnel**

The objectives of the Base Trainings were:

- to improve the knowledge and capacity of ANES advisers to select, design, communicate and disseminate to farmers useful information on standards and good practices in agriculture so as to improve the performance of farm enterprises;
- to improve the competence of ANES advisers to support farmers to access finance for farm business investment and improvement.

The Base trainings were organised in 4 different locations:

- Tirana 23-24 October 2018, 22 participants;
- Durres 25-26 October 2018, 18 participants;
- Kukes 30-31 October 2018, 28 participants;
- Shkoder 01-02 November 2018, 22 participants .

➤ **Advanced trainings for ANES and ATTCs personnel**

The objective of the training was to understand the needs of cows in milk production, to challenge our clients to set goals, to calculate on the consequences of these goals, make and implement action plans to reach these goals, to evaluate results of these action plans and to facilitate ongoing process: Goal → action plan → evaluate results → new goal.

The trainings were organized in:

- Durres, 14-17 May 2019, 23 participants;
- Pogradec, 9-12 July 2019, 23 participants;
- Shkodra, 12-15 November 2019, 25 participants;
- Trush, Shkoder, 9 March 2020, 20 participants;
- Balldren, Lezhe , 10 March 2020, 15 participants;
- Suke, Fier, 11 March 2020, 18 participants;
- Samatice, Berat, 12 March 2020, 17 participants.

➤ **Cost analysis of the extension services and indicate the most cost-efficient means of dissemination of information**

The analysis has in an adjusted form been incorporated in the manual on advisory methods, which has been drafted in this reporting period (see Annex 5). Furthermore, the analysis was used in discussions and contributed to a strategic plan for an efficient and effective public extension service.

➤ **Training to the extension service to assist farmers in the preparation of applications for funding through IPARD measures**

The training was implemented during Base Training of advisors, with help and participation of ARDA personnel. During the events the ARDA presented main rules, regulations and challenges related to IPARD funds application process.

➤ **Practical manuals to guide farmers and agro-processors when planning investments, e.g. construction standards for animal buildings, environmental protection, hygiene and biosecurity, animal welfare etc**

According to the plan and discussion with the Project Technical Working Group the following manuals and booklets were developed:

- The Farm Advisory Operational Manual - finalized and distributed;
- The Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) Manual - finalized and distributed;
- The booklet on the Cattle Management has been printed – finalized and distributed;
- The Farm Business Management booklet – finalized;
- The booklet on the Standard Operating Procedures for the Dairy Farm- step by step instructions for main farm Activities for farmers – finalized;
- The booklet on Cow's and Milking Hygiene: an instrument for improving milk quality and farm profitability for extensionist level – finalized;
- The booklet on small ruminants – finalized.

➤ **Pilot trials to test and improve extension messages and approaches in selected focus groups**

Objective of the two trials were:

- better dairy hygiene for mastitis control and improved milk quality in dairy cow herds.

The trials were conducted in two trials dairy farms (one farm with 25 cows, and the other with 280 cows). In the methodology it is foreseen the evaluation of barn, cows and milking process was done according to the scoring system. Fushe-Kruja ATTC and one adviser from Lushnje Agency were part of the trials.

As a result of trial and testing activities, the project team developed booklet related to milking cows hygiene and related good practices. The booklet is printed and delivered.

➤ **Studies to understand the role of structural and technical factors on farm income and assist in the formulation of appropriate policy instruments to encourage the increasing of production efficiency and competitiveness in livestock sector**

A study on the data collected from the Albanian Farm Database (up to 100 farms) has been conducted. The data are collected approximately according to EU FADN (Farm Accountancy Data Network) standards and there is potential for an increased use of these data for both policy and farm management purposes. In order to reach that objective considerable improvement of the data validation is needed.

A report on preliminary analysis of the farm book data for 2018 was prepared for MARD.

➤ **Training on Implementation of Advisory Packages, Catalogue of Services and Management Protocols/Tools**

During the Project extension period and after all Advisory Packages are finalized, the Project team prepared e-learning material in form of instructional videos and presentations, that will enable ANES advisors to understand the processes and to learn methodology for implementation.

➤ **E-learning video instructional materials**

The project was assumed to prepare and implement a study visit of 3-5 working days for up to 3 people to EU Country where ANES/MARD personnel could learn from experience of implementation of modern tools and systems in advisory work as IT system, advisory packages and work with farmers groups. However, due to ongoing COVID19 situation in agreement with the MARD, it was substituted by development of e-learning video instructional materials in form of recorded videos for advisors and farmers.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

The Project started within relatively unstable environment due to the General Election in Albania (25 June 2017). However, despite the fears of possible constraints, the Project team established good cooperation with the new Cabinet and the new Minister for Agriculture and his administration recognized the IPESA project as an active contributor to the Ministerial Working Group on Restructuring of the Public Extension Services. The main challenge that occurred during that period was a long process of reorganization of the MARD, including ANES, that prevented faster appointment of the new management. That caused certain delays in activities that were solved in incoming months with proactive approach by both: the MARD and the Project team. Although all activities were completed in time and with expected outcomes, an excellent chance for profound transformation of the ANES was not used, due to many different factors that were beyond the scope and potential influence of the IPESA project. However, the Project contributed to many smaller and bigger improvements that were implemented in advisory work.

Another significant challenge and threat to successful project implementation was sudden outbreak of the world crisis due to COVID-19 pandemic. The Project effectively stopped on March 15th, 2020 without any certainty on possible continuation. Fortunately, in constant communication with the MARD, the Project continued to contribute through distant work and fulfilled all the obligations and aims. Moreover, the Project was supported in its request for cost extension of six (6) additional months – from May the 8th until November the 7th, 2020.

It can be concluded that the Project, despite unstable political environment in its first days, delays being beyond of project control and world pandemic, successfully delivered all planned activities and outputs in highest possible quality and fruitful cooperation with all key project stakeholders. Despite some unused potentials for even deeper changes related to extension services, many significant improvements in advisory work and elements of sustainability were implemented.

2.1 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

This report covers the whole implementation period of the project from the start 8 May 2017 up to 7 November 2020 including six months extension period. The draft final report was finalized before November the 7th as indicated by the project ToR. This final report provides details of all the activities and related tasks undertaken to make progress towards achievement of the planned project results and objectives.

The project purpose was to improve the capacity of the extension service to select, design, communicate and disseminate to farmers useful information on agricultural production and management including appropriate knowledge to the animal farming sector.

The project's overall objective was to contribute to the increase of farm income from livestock sector while ensuring economic feasibility, social fairness and environmental sustainability.

This report includes detailed information about training delivery which continued from the 2018 when that activity started. The training process seems to be one of the most impactful project activities, followed by great interest, always positive responses from advisors and already implemented knowledge in advisory work.

Another important area of activities presented in the report belongs to development and distribution of different technical manuals and booklets. All planned written materials were produced and delivered to the advisors.

As part of sustainability of the project activities, this report also encompasses the process of stakeholder discussion and finalization of the ANES Strategic Action Plan (SAP). Together with the aforementioned practical support for the ongoing activities, SAP should enable the implementation of further actions related to the development and strengthening of the ANES in the future.

The overall cooperation and interaction between different stakeholders, the team and the working group members – including CFCU, the Delegation of the European Union, and other Albanian institutions, NGOs, other donor projects (e.g. GIZ and FAO) and also other involved stakeholders – has been strong.

No changes have been implemented in the staff and project organization in the project period. Coordination with the activities of other projects and institutions has been a natural part of the project implementation.

3 REVIEW OF PROGRESS AND PERFORMANCE AT COMPLETION

3.1 Policy and programme context, including linkage to other ongoing operations/activities

Respect of, and contribution to, overarching policy issues

Parliamentary elections were held in Albania on 25 June 2017. On 13 September 2017 Mr. Niko Peleshi was appointed as Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. On 17 October 2017 by Ministerial Order no 433, the Minister formally appointed a Working Group for the restructuring of the public extension service.

The Working Group was responsible for:

- Identifying and analysing the situation, functions, the actual tasks and the problematics that the public extension service is facing, in order to achieve the objectives of the government program in the agriculture and rural development sector.
- Identifying the tasks, functions, and the responsibilities that the public extension service is performing now (in compliance with the legal and sublegal acts into force) outside its specific area.
- Evaluating the role, needs, and the requests for supportive extension service (national schemes, IPARD, the guarantee fund for crediting).
- Proposing the options for the public extension service restructuring, along with their advantages, and disadvantages.
- Identifying the eventual implications and the need for funding, staff, logistic support etc.
- Defining for the approved option from the Minister, the next follow up steps in order to proceed with the restructuring process of this service (drafting of the DCM, etc.).

In the Ministerial Order stated that: “The working group will be assisted by consultants of the project “Improvement of the performance and quality of the public extension service in the livestock sector (IPESA).”

The participation in this Working Group linked very well with the activities planned in the IPESA project regarding Result 1: Effective extension service is established following the improvement of institutional and administrative framework.

The Working Group concluded the preparation of the Decision for the Council of Ministers by 30 November 2017. The decision dated 13 March 2018 adopts the establishment of the regional agricultural extension agencies as public juridical persons, under the dependence of the responsible ministry for agriculture, with its premises in Shkoder, Tirana, Lushnje, and Korce.

This decision was not implemented immediately and consequently several of the activities in the project were postponed until the new organization was functional.

The first call for IPARD project proposals could open by 30 November 2018, so applications for support from the three approved IPARD measures (investments in agricultural holdings, investments in processing and marketing, and rural diversification investments) could be submitted from 30 November 2018 until 30 January 2019.

The decision to appoint a new minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mr. Blendi Cuci was announced in December 2018 and new position was taken on January 5, 2019.

On November 30, 2019 new IPARD call was announced to the Albanian farmers and agri-food industry. The call was open for a period of 60 days and it enabled Albanian farmers and agribusinesses to have access to about Euro 50 million.

The goal of the IPARD programme is to contribute to the competitiveness of farming and the food sector. Also, important role is to achieve national and EU standards on food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary requirements. The call was open for all the individuals in the sectors of agriculture and agro-processing with emphasize on investments in physical assets in dairy, meat, fruit, vegetables, and vineyards, and in processing and trading in milk, meat, fruit, vegetables, and wine processing sectors.

Also, farm diversification and business development was supported in sectors of medical and aromatic plants, mushrooms, honey, ornamental plants, and snails, together with agritourism.

The estimated budget of the proposal is Euro 50.3 million and it is divided in Euro 37.7 million contribution from the European Union EU and Euro 12.6 from the Albanian state budget.

The grant support will be up to 60 percent of the eligible costs, up to 65 percent for young farmers who are under the age of 40 and up to 70 percent for applications in rural areas.

Linkage to other ongoing operations

The staff of the IPESA Project has during all the project lifetime regularly been in contact with team members from other relevant projects and operations such as:

- Improving consumer Protection Against Zoonotic diseases – Phase II (PAZA II);
- Support to Agriculture and Rural Economic Development in Disadvantaged Area (SARED);
- Restructuring and Strengthening of the Food Safety and Veterinary Laboratory Network in Albania;
- Albania Agribusiness Support Facility;
- Restructuring and Strengthening of the Food Safety and Veterinary Laboratory Network in Albania;
- Albania Agribusiness Support Facility;
- Sustainable Development in Rural Areas in Albania; part of the DC programme for Sustainable Economic Development in Albania, GIZ;
- Support to Food Safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary Standards, Albania;
- Rural Korca.

These contacts were both on a formal and informal levels. The impressions and conclusions from these meetings have been used in the implementation of the project.

One example of cooperation with other operations can be mentioned:

On July 9th, 2019 a round table on AKIS was held in collaboration with MARD and GIZ. The term AKIS (Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Systems) stands for the actors who are engaged in research, education or advisory activities related to the farmers. In Albania we have many AKIS actors, but the level of cooperation is not sufficient. Extension (advisory) service ANES, as one of the main AKIS actors, under the EU project IPESA goes through significant transformation with additional training of advisors, the change of structure and development of strategic action plan. The aim is to achieve a modern and functional advisory service that will help farmers to improve their production and to prepare better for all the future challenges they will face. However, functional national advisory entities cannot cover all the emerging needs in today's,

demanding environment alone. It is needed, more than ever, to achieve functional and fruitful cooperation between all the actors involved in knowledge development and sharing.

3.2 Objectives achieved (Overall Objective, purpose, results)

Progress made

At an early stage of the project progress towards implementation of activities has been constrained due to political changes and the planned restructuring of MARD, the public extension service (ANES) and indeed other bodies such as the Veterinary Directorate. The project team was, however, able to adapt and adjust activities in readiness to progress towards achievement of the planned results and ultimately the project objectives.

The most challenging activity where full impact is still not achieved on sufficient level is drafting of the Strategic Action Plan (SAP) that have to reflect on financing, new employment and overall future of the ANES.

Mentioned activity started with different draft proposals of the new structure and possible solutions already in 2017. The activity was postponed during the changes and restructuring of the ANES. After the finalisation of the restructuring of the ANES in 2018, the Project team again opened discussion and urged MARD to engage in SAP development. An agreement about the process for SAP development was made in spring 2019.

Even with activities blocked due to COVID-19 pandemic, it can be concluded that the Project successfully achieved all its milestones and goals, in all the activities that were planned.

The Strategic Action Plan (SAP) that should have a major impact on the future development of the ANES has been amended by new elements and the whole process was finalized by October 2020.

In all the other key areas, specifically in development of practical booklets and manuals and capacity building, the project achieved all planned goals, in some parts even beyond project ToR assumptions and expectations. The quality of produced materials and its practical usability together with quality and impact of the trainings was confirmed both with surveys and direct contact with Project beneficiaries.

The more detailed review of project milestones shows the following results:

Milestone description	Activity	Achieved results	Status
Draft Inception Report submitted	0.1 – 0.7	Inception report submitted	Finalized 100 %
Assessment report including the availability of human resources and their educational level and skills, financial resources and dissemination means to reach as many farmers as possible	1.1	Included in the 1 st Interim Report with updates in 2 nd Interim Report	Finalized 100 %
Assessment report on information reaching the farmers	1.2	Included in the 1 st Interim Report	Finalized 100 %
Proposals on the re-organization of extension service Strategic Action Plan (SAP)	1.3 and 1.4	Proposals on reorganisation in 2 nd Interim Period Procedure for SAP agreed with MARD, process launch Feb'19, Working Groups formed, workshops April, July and September 2019. SAP delivered to MARD in December 2019.	Reorganization completed, finalized 100 %,
Advise on the improvement of the animal information system with additional elements regarding animal production, insemination and breeding and set up the necessary structures for the collection, analysis and monitoring of information database/PAZA	1.5	IPESA project conducted an assessment of the present state and development possibilities of the animal identification and registration (I&R) system in Albania	Finalized 100 %
Preparation of additional Advisory Packages for top priority production areas together with Catalogue of packages	1.6	Planned for the project extension period	Finalized 100%
Preparatory work for future IT Advisory management system (AMS) development	1.7	Planned for the project extension period	Finalized 100%
Training needs Analysis	2.1	Included in the 2nd Interim Report	Finalized 100 %
Report on implemented trainings for staff at the advisory service	2.1	Masterplan for trainings. Reports in 2nd and 3rd Interim Reports, base trainings and advanced are finalized	Finalized 100 %

Report on implemented training for farmers	2.2	Introductory, Base Trainings & training of trainers completed.	Finalized 100%
Report on cost analysis for extension service	2.3	Cost Analysis included in 2nd Interim Report	Finalized 100 %
Report on implemented training on assisting farmers in preparing application for funding through IPARD-measures	2.4	Training of advisers in May 2018 and October-November 2018, included in 2nd, 3rd & 4th Interim Reports	Finalized 100%
Guidelines for construction of production facilities	2.5	Included in 4 th and 5 th Interim Period activities, manuals have been finalized, booklet on farm business management and cattle management are finalized	Finalized 100 %
Plan for pilot trials	2.6	Report in 3rd Interim Report. Milk hygiene trial launched in 4th Interim Period and finalized in 5 th Interim Period	Finalized 100 %
Action plan for studies on structural and technical factors affecting farm income	2.7	Analysis with recommendations prepared	Finalized 100 %
Training on implementation of Advisory Packages, Catalogue of services and management protocols/tools	2.8	Planned for the project extension period	Finalized 100% (the training material prepared for online use – will be used on-demand basis in the future)
Study tour or online workshop to learn from experience of implementation of modern tools and systems in advisory work NOTE: According to discussion with beneficiary and late official approval, this activity was substituted with recording of 4 educational videos on: Milk production hygiene, Hoof treatment, Greenhouses production and Soil analysis, all considered as topics of highest importance for farmers.	2.9	Planned for the project extension period	Finalized 100%

3.3 Activities undertaken (Overall Objective, Purpose, Results)

3.3.1 Activities planned and implemented

3.3.2 Result 1- Effective extension service is established following the improvement of institutional and administrative framework

An important initial step towards achieving Result 1 (and to some extent Result 2) was conducting a detailed assessment of the current institutional, administrative and operational framework – not just of the public extension service, but also on the wider Agricultural Knowledge and Information/Innovation system (AKIS).

Implementation of planned project activities to achieve Result 1 (and to quite an extent Result 2) were constrained due to the length of the Government decision process on restructuring the public extension service – originally expected to be decided December 2017/January 2018, finally approved 13 March 2018. IPESA drafted and presented a number of ideas and proposals to MARD to support the restructuring discussions, although the approved decision by the Council of Ministers does not at this point reflect IPESA's recommendations. However, the restructuring and related strategic planning is an ongoing process.

The range of advisory challenges were presented to MARD, ARDA and other public, NGO and private advisory providers in a workshop on Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) in April 2018, including how AKIS actors in Albania should participate in disseminating knowledge, good practices and information to farmers (Activities 1.1 to 1.5).

Activities assessing the ANES human and other resource capacities were done in the previous Interim Periods (contributions to Activities 1.1 to 1.5). The main activity left still to complete is the critical need for a strategy and action plan for ANES (Activities 1.3 & 1.4), including appropriate commitment by Government to provide the necessary financial and other resources and to include an effective monitoring system to track service performance.

This is a necessary step not only to ensure an effectively working extension service but also to be an important strategic roadmap for progress on AKIS & FAS, as these will be contributing elements in relation to Albania's accession negotiations Chapter 11 (Agriculture and Rural Development) and Chapter 12 (Food Safety Veterinary and Phytosanitary Policy), also Chapter 26 (Education and culture) and Chapter 27 (Environment). A strategy is also considered essential to ensure achievement of project results and sustainability.

The development of a strategy and action plan was discussed and agreed in the third PSC meeting on 3rd July 2018. The strategy/action plan process should include issues such as priority services, target groups, requirements for financial and other resources, address constraints and monitoring of progress according to indicators.

The SAP process was launched by the Minister for Agriculture at a workshop organised by MARD (supported by IPESA) on 28th February 2019 attended by around 50 stakeholders. The workshop explored and outlined the key issues to be covered in the SAP process and the proposed timeline. Four ad hoc working groups were to be established – each relating to one of the four chapters of the proposed table of contents of the SAP.

A MARD team consisting of three persons participated in the Annual EUFRAS conference in Salzburg 2-5 June 2019. EUFRAS is an acronym for European Forum for Agricultural and Rural Advisory Services. They returned to Albania with updated knowledge and inspiration useful for the continuing development of the Albanian Extension Service.

The round table on "Establishment of AKIS (Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation System) in Albania, Potential and Perspectives in the frame of EU approximation of the Agriculture Sector Development" was organized by GIZ and IPESA project in close collaboration with MARD on 9th of July, 2019.

The Objectives of the round table were:

- To introduce the Albanian AKIS, plans and efforts in regard with its development. Initiatives of MARD with support of EU (IPESA) and GIZ.
- Establishment of communication with EUFRAS (European Forum for Agricultural and Rural Advisory Services).
- Exchange of experience with the EUFRAS board members in regard with objectives of AKIS, roles and functions of such a system and its stakeholders.
- Challenges for the establishment of AKIS and the need for a close coordination and collaboration among the stakeholders: Fostering research and innovation. Inclusion of input providers and processors. The best practices and instruments to get the process running.
- Possibilities through partnerships.
- Discussion on further steps along the process for a functional AKIS in Albania.

Final SAP was delivered to MARD in December 2019. The feedback from MARD officials on the SAP was positive. Support for the SAP needs to include a commitment to finance the stated investments, especially in IT systems for advisers and for development of additional advisory packages, and also training of advisers and their managers on SAP implementation.

3.3.2.1 Activity 1.1 Carry out a comprehensive assessment and analysis of the current legal, institutional and administrative framework of the extension services

The assessment report was finalized in the first project interim period except for the legal part which was added in the second interim period.

It includes: i) mapping of the AKIS actors – public extension through the national service, agricultural technology centres, education institutions and other public agencies, input suppliers, NGOs and farmer business organisations, and international partners/donors through programmes and projects ; ii) a screening of strategic documents, laws and related regulations; iii) examination of action plans and reporting systems within the Public Extension Service (ANES); iv) a detailed description of the structure and services of ANES; v) details about ANES's budget, organisation and equipment, and monitoring reports. The chapter ends with a summary of findings and conclusions.

The legal part demonstrates the complexity of the legal framework and consequently the challenges in organizational changes et c. For example employees of the extension service are civil servants which complicates and prolongs the employment procedure of new advisers.

The results of the assessment report have been presented to, discussed with and comments received by the beneficiaries and the Working Group on Restructuring of the Public Extension Services (Ministerial Order No 433 dated 17. October 2017).

Additionally, IPESA contributed ideas to numerous discussions about optimal functional structure for ANES for improved management and service delivery to farmers.

Main conclusions and recommendations of the Assessment report were:

Conclusions:

- Albania's agricultural knowledge and information/innovation system (AKIS), and particularly the public extension services, requires a comprehensive root and branch overhaul to provide the range and quality of advice that farmers (and micro and small and medium sized rural businesses) need in the emerging competitive sphere of the European single market.
- There is no robust evidence that the public extension service ANES operates within a strong strategic framework to support national agri-sector objectives and priorities. Planning, needs assessment and service implementation are rudimentary. Monitoring and reporting is very subjective, and there is no system of evaluating the value and contribution to the performance of the agricultural sector – which is probably much lower than it should be.

- The ANES claim that extensionists spend around 60% of their time out in the field is unlikely to be even close to true because there is almost no budget provided for transport.
- The type of approach to extension – one-to-one versus groups – needs exploring further especially in terms of efficient use of available extension resources. On-farm research projects are seen as useful means of transferring practical knowledge, helping to strengthen the research-extension-farmer linkages. In the view of challenges ahead, the priorities should be revised and reprioritised focusing more on transferring new technologies and issues like climate change vulnerability, environmental safeguards, farm management and food safety.
- To be effective, the ANES human resources capacity (including management and field-based extensionists) and the strategic framework need considerable strengthening to approach EU Member States' capacity and delivery methods, along with the oversight of a robust monitoring and performance system. Such a transformation will not be easy. It will require committed and competent management, probably with at least some experience of successful private sector agri-food and public goods management. It needs motivated, knowledgeable and skilful extensionists able to respond to the demand-driven needs of increasingly perceptive, market-oriented farmers and those delivering other public goods (e.g. environment, wider rural socio-economic development), using modern research findings and technologies linked to competitive processors and marketers and initiatives of other stakeholder groups. This transformation may well require the contribution of a directly contracted international extension expert over a minimum five-year period, strongly supported through political leadership at the highest level, an appropriate budget and an effective monitoring and evaluation system that can accurately measure benefits in relation to clearly defined objectives in line with national priorities.
- The monitoring system for national schemes is ineffective, and there appears to be no robust evaluation system to measure scheme performance. Project reports and evaluations from donor-funded initiatives indicate there are significant gaps in the quality and delivery of both public and private extension services to meet the challenges of improving overall agri-food sector performance.
- Main extension needs include increase knowledge to achieve national and EU standards, including animal health/welfare for Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), preparation of business plans proving economic viability at the end of the investment, and resource efficiency and renewable energy.
- To be effective in delivering the required quality extension services, there is a great need to improve the public extension structure and operational system, and most importantly the competences of extensionists to meet the advisory needs of farmers as Albania moves closer towards EU integration.
- ANES advisors mostly sit in their offices and wait for the farmer to appear and ask for help. Without being able to receive or send an email, make a call and visit farms, it is impossible to organise advisory work. By contrast, investors in agriculture are well educated and informed, they discuss on web forums, Facebook and learn from the YouTube.

Main recommendations:

- Strategic and action planning. Extension service delivery must respond to clearly defined needs of farmers for modernisation and successful engagement in the developing market, funded using sufficient budget resources, and within an agreed strategic framework. Therefore, there is a requirement for objectives and priorities to be agreed in line with national strategic priorities, setting performance targets and preparation of action plans including methods of delivery (e.g. working with farmer groups) with clear timelines. It should be based on robust analysis, e.g. on the expected results and impacts for the various target groups. The strategic plan needs to include definition of the roles of the various AKIS organisations in delivering relevant extension services, and where appropriate agreed partnerships between the various players. It should also include ways of benefiting from under-utilised current systems such as the animal identification system (for example improving farm-level breeding and performance data for dairy and sheep/goat herds) and also to make use of the opportunities available through grant schemes (e.g. IPARD and national schemes) and other available industry supports.

- Structural reorganisation. To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of ANES, a more streamlined management and governance structure should be put in place and made operational. Main steps include: agree a new organogram and reorganise the system of governance including clear definition and roles of line management, accountability systems, involvement of stakeholders in defining service priorities, etc.
- Monitoring, evaluation (M&E) and learning. An effective and efficient system for M&E and learning needs to be in place and made operational, which provides relevant, accurate and reliable data about the extent the objectives and targets in the strategic and action plans are being achieved, and what are the lessons learned and adjustments needed to the strategy to make it more effective and efficient.
- Human resource planning and development. The strategy can only be effective if the human and financial resources are sufficient to implement it. There is a need to identify EU best practices and models of HR development suitable for adoption in Albania. This will include developing and matching the required technical and management competences to deliver on and achieve the strategic priorities. For example, a modern dairy sector requires advisers competent and certified in transferring knowledge on aspects such as feeding and nutrition, animal health and welfare, breeding and selection, environment and energy use, financial planning and investment. Achieving such levels of competency will require appropriate employment contracts and conditions (including ongoing training) within a strong legal framework. It will also require delivery of quality training to field extensionists (on modern advisory and farm technologies and related guidance content/material) and their line managers (on modern, effective management). Studies and pilot trials should be used to test approaches to research and extension delivery, including with various farmer groups.
- Financial planning/budget. An effective public extension system needs a sufficient medium-term budget, including for ongoing operations (day-to-day functionality) and capital investment (e.g. in computers/printers, mobile phones, digital infrastructure such as Wi-Fi, website and social media platforms), and this financial support needs Government commitment.
- Soft skills of the advisors must be upgraded together with topics like business management, marketing, development of the business plans which are becoming more important in the context of the growing need for improved efficiency/performance as well as for accessing support funds (e.g. business plan for national schemes and IPARD program).
- Advisors should promote use of digital content/the internet for getting information on technologies, diseases, price information, exchange experience through Skype, WhatsApp etc. for internal use but also to be shared with farmers, as the use of the new communication possibilities can lead to significant savings in the budget.
- Coordination with all other stakeholders, especially ATTCs needs to be improved and strictly defined to enable use of new technologies, facilitating technology transfer, maximize profits, and also to help scientists to test new technologies in rural areas.
- There should be strategic and long-term engagement by ANES and MARD of the agricultural faculties in Tirana and Korca on standards and certification for extensionists, making use of and further developing their capacities for knowledge transfer and training.

3.3.2.2 Activity 1.2 Assess the current capacity of the extension service to select, prepare and disseminate technical and managerial information to farmers with the purpose of making its structure more effective and efficient.

The output from this activity and tasks are described in Chapter 3 of the assessment report, and include: i) a description (and detailed table) of the human resources and how they are organised including at regional and local level (Agricultural Information Centres – AICs); ii) the type and extent of collaboration between ANES and the Agricultural Technology Transfer Centres (ATTCs); iii) the system for assessing the extension needs of livestock farmers, and including information sources, farmers' opinions of ANES and monitoring extension service delivery; iv) and description of selection, preparation and dissemination of technical and managerial material for farmers including to AIC and regional levels; v) summary of findings and conclusions.

The assessment report contains several recommendations. In order to secure a more efficient extension service it is important that these recommendations are addressed:

- The development of a strategy for the extension service is essential. An agreed strategic framework should be established, defining objectives and priorities in line with national strategic priorities.
- The restructuring of the public extension service has been decided, but not yet implemented.
- An effective and efficient system for monitoring, evaluation and learning needs to be in place and made operational, providing relevant, accurate and reliable data about the extent the objectives and targets in the strategic and action plans are being achieved.
- Human resource planning and development need more attention. The strategy can only be effective if the human and financial resources are sufficient to implement it.

An increase in financial budget is needed. An effective public extension system needs a sufficient budget, including for ongoing operations and capital investment (e.g. in computers/printers, mobile phones, digital infrastructure such as Wi-Fi, website and social media platforms). This financial support needs Government commitment.

3.3.2.3 Activity 1.3 Assess the sources of information and needs of farming community regarding advisory services. Convene meetings of farmer focus groups to take their opinion and priorities for information.

This activity and its findings are described in a sub-section of Chapter 3 of the assessment report. Additionally, Chapter 4 of the assessment report (Review of the engagement of the Extension service in implementation of Rural Development programs and schemes) provides detail about IPARD and other investment schemes which offer opportunities for farmers to plan and invest in their enterprises, and therefore indicates a potential role for ANES extensionists. A summary section on findings and conclusions at the end of Chapter 3 provides an indication of the adequacy of the approach to assessing needs.

After the restructuring framework of the extension service was completed a number of actions were undertaken.

The main actions were meeting, participating and observing farmers in groups and individuals, including with public and private advisory service providers, to help identify the target groups for IPESA training, contribute to advisory needs assessment of farmers, make some judgements about the quality of advice being provided and capacity for engagement of trainers; presentation of conclusions and ideas to the Technical Working Group meeting on 26th April 2018. For this purpose, the following meetings and field visits took place:

Place / Date	Organization /Farm	Farmer #	Subjects
Dajc, Shkodra 17.01.2018	NUCLEUS Albania (NGO) Cattle farmers group	15	Feeding; animal health; low quality of veterinary medicines; lack of mechanization.
Kashar, Tirane 25.01.2018	Creativity Business Solution (CBS) Bedri Dema, Dairy farm	1	Fragmented land (rented); lack of irrigation equipment; lack of expertise and interest by banks.
Lumas, Kucovë 01.02.2018	FG association / SARED, GIZ Small ruminants farmers group	22	Milk available for sale 2-months; breeding and diseases issues; no slaughterhouse
Podgorie, Pogradec 27.03.2018	LEAA (NGO) /SARED GIZ Small ruminants farmers group	20	Feeding; breed improvement; costs and profit analyses; missing of water points in the mountains.
Rakull, Kavaje 25.04.2018	Petrit Tatani, Dairy farm	4	Diseases; feeding ration; haven't received national subsidy in the last 3 years; stable models
Synej, Kavaje 25.04.2018	Vehbi Hadja, Sheep farm	1	10 years of lease contract necessary to obtain subsidy; proper veterinary control; butcher shop and slaughterhouse minimum standards.
Picar, Vlore	Albert Haderaj, Dairy farm	4	Irrigation system is not working;

23.05.2018			diseases; marketing of the calves; feeding.
Orikum, Vlore 23.05.2018	Xheni Balla, Dairy farm	3	Environment national minimum standards; permission of building stables; pasture.
Orikum, Vlore 23.05.2018	Vezir Qepi, Sheep farm	2	Marketing of the lambs; manure manipulation; cost and profit analyses.

3.3.2.4 Activity 1.4 Assist the establishment of cooperation between the extension service and other sources of information such as private extension providers, farmer associations, Agricultural University and technical bodies under the Ministry of Agriculture, and Rural Development to elaborate and endorse a clear platform of extension services.

An important first step related to this activity was preparation of the assessment report 'draft Assessment Report on the Albanian Public Extension Service and Agricultural Knowledge and Information/Innovation System'. That report maps the AKIS and identifies types of information currently transferred to the identified target groups and sets the context for developing the basis for further planning and ultimately agreement on cooperation between the extension service and other sources of information.

The term AKIS is a concept that describes the exchange of knowledge and Innovation in rural areas. AKIS represents a system that links people and organizations to promote mutual learning, to generate, share, and utilize agriculture-related technology, knowledge, and information. In optimal form, the system should include actors such as farm advisors, agricultural educators, researchers, non-academic experts, public and independent private advisors, supply chain actors, other agricultural sector actors.

In most EU countries the AKIS system is very diverse and it reflects national or regional needs. In countries with stronger regional structure there is typically a bigger variety of solutions that correspond with local specifics. The main features of AKIS in any country should be:

- active cooperation and exchange between involved entities;
- constant adaptation to the needs of rural communities;
- production of concrete, measurable results to improve production, resilience and sustainability of the agri-food sector.

The core part of the AKIS in most of the countries is the functional connection between farm advisory services and other actors in the sector. One of the most important links is the one with "sources of the knowledge" – faculties and research institutes. By establishing that link, the farm advisors can be regularly trained and informed on the latest available knowledge, technologies and tools in farming. Another important relationship is with farmers as main beneficiaries and those who should be also engaged in designing the way of work of the farm extension/advisory service.

In order to achieve better level of mutual understanding and cooperation between AKIS actors, IPESA organized and implemented in cooperation with MARD the first AKIS workshop in Albania, on April 27, 2018. It was held in the MARD premises and was attended by more than 50 representatives of several farmers organizations, Agricultural University of Tirana, ANES (Albanian National Extension Service), ARDA (Albanian Rural Development Agency), ATTCs, (Agriculture Technology Transfer Centres), GIZ and other EU supported projects, various NGOs, business initiatives and many others.

The main objective of the workshop was to identify and decide how AKIS actors can participate in dissemination of knowledge, good practices and information for the farmers – and which methods shall be used to ensure absorption and implementation of delivered information by farmers.

Mr Dhimitaq Kote, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural development, emphasized that these days farmers work in a rapidly changing environment where they must adapt to the new market demands but also to the numerous new rules concerning the food safety, environment protection and animal welfare. Also,

there is constant need for improvement of production, implementation of new technologies and latest available knowledge to achieve better quality and prices for the products.

Mr Morten Sejersen, Team Leader of the IPESA project, gave a review of findings and recommendations prepared by IPESA under assessment of the sector. Mr Hrvoje Ivan Horvat, IPESA Senior Sector Key Expert 2, presented AKIS as a term, EU developments and expected changes in relation to knowledge and innovation activities within EU CAP. These two presentations were followed by various Albanian AKIS actors who presented their efforts and planned future steps in this area.

In the second part of the workshop representatives of AKIS actors had a chance to present their views on modalities and areas of possible cooperation in achieving of the national objectives in agriculture. The workshop finished with a mutual understanding of different needs and challenges:

- there are numerous new challenges and needs for the farmers where they need additional assistance and help in Albania;
- AKIS actors should develop closer relations and cooperate – especially public entities;
- AKIS actors should deliver tangible, useful results to farmers;
- Relations of AKIS actors should be more defined and additionally supported.

3.3.2.5 Activity 1.5 - Advise on the improvement of the animal information system with additional elements regarding animal production, insemination and breeding and set up the necessary structures for the collection, analysis and monitoring of information database/PAZA

The possible users of the animal identification system are described in the mapping of AKIS. From the kick-off of IPESA in May 2017, the project team has had a positive and cooperative relationship with the PAZA II project. Sharing of information relevant to both projects has included ideas and advice on improvement of the animal identification system regarding animal production, etc.

The IPESA team conducted an assessment of the present state and development possibilities of the animal identification and registration (I&R) system in Albania – RUDA (includes tasks 1.5.1 to 1.5.3). The IPESA project collected much of the information about the RUDA system from the other, implemented in Albania, EU funded PAZA project that was responsible for database finalisation and start of operational use.

The RUDA online digital data base enables:

- Implementation of the identification and registration of farm animals;
- surveillance system and animal health related activities.

It was developed based in a 2006 EU-funded pilot project dedicated for identification and registration of cattle. The system was completed in 2012, with support of UNDP project and PAZA Project, to include sheep, goats, pigs, bee hives and donkeys. The system is used by veterinarians – both public and private – who can access and view and modify data.

The main modules of the system are:

- Administration – this encompasses data entry and use. There are different levels of information that can be inserted, from general information of the farm, location, type of production, problems, restrictions on farm, species, breeds etc.
- Documents – this part contains different public and EU documents (laws, regulations) of importance;
- Laboratory – data on different analysis conducted during examination;
- Movement of animals;
- Identification;
- EPI – module dedicated for vaccination planning and reporting.

Regarding the functionality, according to PAZA project reports, the system is stable and works appropriately. However, it is important that as the sector changes, especially in organisation and responsibilities of the veterinary and food safety sector, the RUDA system also follows the changes and will be updated.

Management of the RUDA database still has insufficient levels of communication with the Laboratory Information Management System. The LIMS can accept data that is provided by the RUDA system, but not the opposite direction. Also, a big obstacle in setting the RUDA to be main and accurate source of information on livestock disease control is still the inadequate level of data input. There are still not clear consequences for entities that are responsible for provision or collection of data, so the database does not yet represent the real situation on the ground.

3.3.2.6 Activity 1.6 - Preparation of additional advisory packages for top priority production areas together with catalogue of packages

This activity was implemented during the Project extension period in continuation to already developed examples delivered in late 2019.

Advisory packages are predefined, structured packages of services that are offered by advisors. Each package is related to specific area of production. Advisory package facilitates relations between farmer and advisor because farmer can choose one according to the needs. It also helps farmer to understand which activities will be accomplished during advisory work and to focus to predicted outcomes and results.

For advisors, advisory packages serve as a tool for more efficient advisory work. They contain description of each step in advising and link it to certain forms and background material. In essence advisors can use it as a very detailed checklist that will help them to implement structured and result based approach. Furthermore, suggestions for improved advising methodologies for working with farmer groups will be given.

Together with advisory packages, that will enable more efficient and structured work, the project proposed and developed “catalogue” of advisory packages that will be distributed to farmers as a marketing tool and used in everyday advisory work. Also, for internal use, the Project developed supporting management protocols/tools that will enable result-oriented approach and smooth implementation of Advisory Packages in practice.

3.3.2.7 Activity 1.7 - Preparatory Work for Future It Advisory Management System (AMS)

Advisors should record all their activities in an internal IT data base/application that also includes information on visited farms, history of work on each farm, time spent on specific activities and other information according to the management needs. Management can use such system for decision making and provision of better support for advisors. Obtained information of farms, collected in such system can serve as excellent source of statistical data, whose form should be adjusted to FADN methodology. That way accuracy of data needed for political decisions when used for internal purposes. The most important benefits of such IT structure is that it enables constant insight and mentorship of recorded farms since history of issues and advisory visits will be always available.

In general, AMS should enable:

- Collection of all data and information in one place;
- Correct description of the work/processes – office/field/area of work/ etc;
- Field visits recorded exactly – use of GPS positioning, addresses, contact numbers, farmers conformation etc;
- On farm work recorded – history of visits to beneficiaries with precise data on reasons, activities and outcomes (advisory packages);
- Collection of usable data on beneficiaries (farm card and digital database) – can be anonymously filtered later on for policy decisions;
- Easier overall management and planning;
- Easier prioritisation and work preparation for advisors;

- Many potential uses in policy development area;
- Easy to prove and justify budget spending.

During the Project extension period, the Project elaborated needs assessment, facilitated discussions and developed necessary documentation that describe main elements, interface and architecture of the needed system.

3.3.3 Result 2- Quality of information of extension service is increased due to enhanced capacities and skills investments

The postponement in finalisation process of the restructuring of the public extension service (ANES) since the formation of the new Government in autumn 2017 meant it was not appropriate to start training of ANES advisers until there was more clarity on the restructuring. The scope and timing of the initial training took account of progress with the ongoing restructuring. By March-April 2018 when it became clearer there would be minimal changes to the ANES organisation and management structure and operational details, the timing was right to plan and conduct the initial training of staff of the public extension service and other activities related to result area 2.

3.3.3.1 Activity. 2.1 and 2.2 Prepare and deliver a training programme for the staff of extension services, including training of trainers and prepare and deliver training tailored to the needs of existing or newly formed livestock-based associations and commercial livestock farms regarding animal health and welfare, financial management, animal registration, animal breeding, livestock nutrition, record keeping, product marketing etc.

A Technical Working Group was formed and met for the first time on 26th April 2018. Mainly it considered kind of advisory support materials (manuals, other publications) suitable to accompany training of advisers and their direct use in advising farmers.

Additionally, following discussions with MARD, local non-key experts, meetings with other advisory service providers, discussions with ANES managers in the regional directorates, and feedback from established farmer groups identified through cooperation with other projects, it was considered appropriate to include in the initial training subjects and activities related to:

- perspectives for future extension services based on EU models;
- details of structural and managerial changes in ANES;
- farm visits;
- technical topics related to improvement of farm performance (e.g. feed, feeding and nutrition, animal health and welfare);
- soft skills development for improved communication with farmers; and support and preparation of national/IPARD applications for farmers;
- an assessment of training needs of advisers was also built into the initial trainings, to feed into development of the more detailed training programme envisaged in the contract under this activity and to develop a sense of “ownership” of the training programme among ANES advisers and MARD.

Initial training: Albania’s public Farm Extension Service – now and in the future - spring 2018

The initial training was divided into two workshops. The first, held in Durres from 03-04 May 2018, was for 33 ANES livestock and agronomy advisers mostly from ANES centres from Tirana/Durres and the north of Albania, plus from Korca and Elbasan. Four ATTC staff (Skodra and Fushe Kruje) also participated as trainees. Trainers and other presenters included IPESA KEs and Non-KEs, officials from MARD and ARDA, and group work facilitators from the Livestock Entrepreneurs Association (LEAA), RASP (a development NGO), and GIZ (a significant cooperation donor in the agri-food sector).

The objectives of the training were: to explore how public extension service capacity and delivery needs to change to respond adequately to the changing agri-food and rural sector context with a special focus on the livestock sector, and to use the findings for strategic planning and a training programme for Albania's National Extension Service. The trainees participated enthusiastically.

The second training workshop was held on 30-31 May 2018 in Vlora mainly for advisers based south of Tirana/Durres, also several from ATTCs.

The objectives of the initial training were: to explore how public extension service capacity and delivery needs to change to respond adequately to the changing agri-food and rural sector context with a special focus on the livestock sector, and to use the findings for strategic planning and a training programme for Albania's National Extension Service. The trainees participated enthusiastically.

Following training de-briefing discussions including with non-Key Experts, the main Key Expert conclusions from that second training are similar to the first training, specifically as follows:

- There was good interest by ANES advisers and ATTC representatives in the restructuring plans for ANES, and in the future of the Farm Advisory Systems and Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) in the EU, in relation the challenges Albania faces in this field.
- From observations of the advisers during the farm visits, there is a strong need for training in soft skills – including communications with farmers, listening and observing, persuasive techniques, note taking, structured approach, etc. At the sheep farm none of the advisers went to look at the stables/shelter, none saw the poor milking conditions (milk went into plastic buckets previously containing paint); several advisers spent much of the time on their mobile phones not paying attention to the discussion.
- An effective training programme for advisers should include farm visits and role plays to improve practical approaches to knowledge transfer.
- There is currently a low understanding among advisers of how to transfer knowledge effectively through farmer groups and to manage such groups
- The advisers identified (through group work at the training) these topics as technical subject priorities for a future training programme: feed production, storage and feeding/nutrition; breeding; animal health/welfare and disease prevention.
- Subjects identified for applied research included: optimum feeding, dietary balance, condition scoring and breeding; plant production, seasonal variety testing, climate change resilience.
- Physical and financial resource limitations represent severe constraints for delivery of advice to farmers by advisers.
- There is concern among advisers about their future employment, including retention of civil service status, contracts, performance assessment, salaries and access to professional training programmes.
- There is good capacity among national training professionals as trainers of advisers, in meat and dairy production systems and plant production systems and also in setting up and managing farmer groups for delivery of quality advice.

Training and Publications (TAP) technical working group

The name of the Technical Working Group referred to further above subsequently evolved into the Training and Publications (TAP) group for the 2nd meeting (11 July 2018) and 3rd meeting (10 October 2018).

Training materials prepared

Ideas and requirements for training materials were discussed initially from consultations and within the Training and Publications (TAP) working group.

The TAP working group identified three main types of publications to support training of advisers: a) manuals (up to 40 pages); b) booklets of between 20 and 30 pages; and c) leaflets of 2-5 pages. It was agreed within the TAP that two specific manuals would provide the foundation material for the Base Training - Good practice in advisory methods and management; and Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) & Good Agricultural & Environmental Conditions (GAEC). These manuals are in loose-leaf format, so that updates of

sections will be easily possibly without full manual reproduction. These two manuals provided much of the material for two of the PowerPoints for the first session of the Base Training.

Base training for public extension services Albania - autumn 2018

Base Training covers skills and management of advisory work, procedures and requirements for investments and standards, and good practices in agriculture, particularly in view of Albania's progress towards EU accession. The range of subjects covered is based on training needs analysis conducted by IPESA during May 2017 to July 2018, including through the Initial Training (May 2018) and consultation with the TAP (above).

The **Base Training** consisted of eight trainings in different regional locations in Albania in autumn 2018, each lasting two consecutive days including one overnight stay. The eight venues in – Tirana, Durres, Kukes, Shkoder, Pogradec, Elbasan, Permet and Fier – were chosen to ensure balanced numbers and to minimise required travel for participants. On average 25 advisers were to attend each training, so on completion all ANES advisers would be trained up to the Base Level.

Material for the trainings was developed by the IPESA team, compiled from EU Member States and Albanian sources. The trainers consist of international and national experts contracted by the IPESA project. Each training was to be delivered by one of three distinct teams of trainers identified through earlier IPESA collaborations. The trainers for the Base Training were instructed by the IPESA expert team at a half day seminar in the MARD Conference Room in Tirana. Emphasis on the whole training programme included improving practical knowledge, skills and motivation, role plays, farm visits and use of materials and tools. Assessments were conducted of each training level to help inform about delivery of the next level.

The objectives of the Base Trainings were:

- to improve the knowledge and capacity of ANES advisers to select, design, communicate and disseminate to farmers useful information on standards and good practices in agriculture so as to improve the performance of farm enterprises;
- to improve the competence of ANES advisers to support farmers to access finance for farm business investment and improvement.

The Target Group for the Base Trainings were 200 farm advisers currently employed by ANES including livestock specialists (approx. 30), agronomists (150) and economists (20), and participants from ATTC research centres.

Each Base Trainings was divided into four sessions:

Session 1: A changed role for public extension services. Consisting of three PowerPoint presentations, including on: a) Main advisory role to satisfy national/EU requirements; b) Good practice in advisory methods and management; and c) Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) & Good Agricultural & Environmental Conditions (GAEC). Q&A follow-up provided for exchange.

Session 2: Planning for reality. a) Plan farm visits – approach, data sheets, data collection, SWOT of farms, reflections / recommendations, role plays and good practice training; and b) IPARD and national schemes – requirements for applications.

Session 3: Farm visit. a) 1 farm each training, advisers participate in 'Active Group' or 'Observer Groups'; and b) Reporting from farm visit: Active Group.

Session 4: Concluding. a) Reporting from farm visit: Observer Groups; b) trainer observations, reflections & recommendations; c) Next steps: trainees in daily work; advisers interest in Advanced Training; Conclusions Day 2; d) Assessment and presentation of Training Certificates.

The first four Base Trainings – Tirana, Durres, Kukes, Shkoder – took place in October and early November 2018. Although there were small regional differences between the participants, their engagement in the training and with each other was similar, and so a brief summary is presented below of the main conclusions by the trainers and the IPESA expert team.

Summary conclusions of first four Base Trainings

Tirana 23-24 October 2018, 22 participants (Trainers, Profs: F.Salaku, Y.Biçoku, E.Hala)

Durres 25-26 October 2018, 18 participants (Trainers, Profs: F.Salaku, Y.Biçoku, E.Hala)

Kukes 30-31 October 2018, 28 participants (Trainers, Profs: F.Salaku, Y.Biçoku, E.Hala)

Shkoder 01-02 November 2018, 22 participants (Trainers: V.Ylli, H.Toska, E. Halili)

- Most of the concepts and ideas presented in Session 1 were new to the participants. The complexity of the subjects and themes and the need to be well informed on these in future appeared to surprise most. Overall, they were quite attentive during those presentations, and at least some wondered about how they could apply the information for their daily work.
- The idea of the templates used in Session 2 (gross margin sheets, SWOT) seemed new to the trainees, indicating they were not familiar about analysing whole farm production systems or identifying areas where they might agree with their farmer clients what to focus most advice on for improvement of farm and environmental performance.
- The participants responded positively to the role plays (acting as advisers and farmers) and seemed to enjoy this method of simulated learning by doing, especially structured questioning of the acting farmer. The Active Group followed to some extent a pattern of questioning to understand the whole farm system, although at times the questioning jumped from subject to subject. Participants had a reasonable grasp of the ideas about soft skills when communicating and building a relationship with farmer clients, although overall, they did not show significant ability in this regard.
- The trainees engaged well with the ARDA presentations about the requirements for applications for national and IPARD scheme measures. They did complain that ANES advisers (i.e. public sector advisers) would not be eligible to claim fees for preparation of IPARD applications or business plans.
- Many of the participants rated the farm visit as a highlight of the training, which indicates that they rarely get an opportunity to visit actual farms – they are mostly confined to office based work. The approach of using an Active Group for dialogue with the farmer and Observer Groups to observe the skills and approach of the Active Group was quite a practical way of giving a functional role to quite a large group of trainees without overwhelming the farmer. However, at the farms it was noticeable the Active Group took more of an “interview” approach with the farmer than building a relationship and trust in balance with obtaining and discussing details about the farm system and performance, i.e. “soft skills”.
- When they returned to present their ideas and analysis from the farm visit, the trainees mostly focused on random farm management points rather than seeing how those points might be negatively affecting the physical and financial performance of the farm and how they might be tweaked to improve it in the short-, medium- and long-term. Similarly, the Observer Groups seemed also to mostly focus on individual management points and what was missed by the Active Group, rather than a holistic view of the approach by the Active Group and what to focus on to improve the farmer’s livelihood.
- The trainees’ assessments of the Base Training were very positive overall.

The series of the base trainings continued in Pogradec on November, 13-14 2018 (21 participants), in Elbasan on November 15-16, 2018 (29 participants), Permet on November 20-21, 2018 (19 participants) and Fier on November 22-23, 2018 (30 participants).

In total 165 participants completed the training (155 ANES, 10 ATTCs). Other 11 ANES advisers were not available. In regard to the starting knowledge and skills there was impression of outdated knowledge, low technical capacity (e.g. dairy hygiene, nutrition, gross margin, SWOT) and insufficient use of comparative data for targeting profit gains.

It was obvious that present, important EU concepts, policies and rules such as Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs); Good Agriculture and Environment Conditions (GAEC); GLOBAL GAP and CAP, were new for most of the participants.

The introductory “AKIS topic” improved the trainees’ understanding of their role in the Farm Advisory System. Good interest and participation was evident in advisory practices, soft skills (especially communication at farm level) ARDA presentation on investment/IPARD schemes and role plays.

In regard to the response and practical matters the Project team noticed high attendance rate overall, with some fluctuations. Some lectures were not followed with sufficient level of interest, as IPARD promotions made by MARD/ARDA. High proportion of participants said objectives were “fully achieved” (>80%), and “mostly achieved” Shkoder (64%), Pogradec (68%), Elbasan (72%). Overall engagement of advisors was on satisfactory level, with some space for improvement.

During the course of 3 months of continuous trainings, the Project team managed to collect important experience and useful insights, that were utilised in Advanced trainings.

Advanced livestock level training for public extension services in Albania - spring and autumn 2019

The first delivery of the advance livestock training level took place on 14 – 17 of May 2019. As per the agreement with the MARD, the training on five of the priority topics was delivered in one package: Feeding of animals (cattle and small ruminants); Feed production; Breeding; Housing; Hygiene/Animal welfare. 18 advisers from Tirana and Lushnja Agricultural Extension Service Agencies, 3 specialists from Fushe- Kruja ATTC, and 2 MARD official's participated. The logistic and technical arrangements were carried out by the project in close cooperation with MARD.

The second delivery of the advance livestock training level took place on 9 – 12 of July, in Pogradec. 23 advisers from Korca Agricultural Extension Service Agencies, 3 specialists from Korca ATTC, and 1 MARD official participated.

The training participants' assessments of the trainings were very positive.

The third delivery of the Advance Livestock Training, previously planned on the last week of October, was postponed due to the engagement of the Regional Agricultural Extension Agencies, and their advisers in IPARD program launching. The training was conducted on 12-15th of November 2019, in Shkodra. In the trainings participated 23 advisers from Agricultural Extension Service Agency of Shkodra (9 advisers from Shkodra, 8 advisers from Lezha, 1 from Kukes) and 2 advisers from Agricultural Extension Service Agency of Tirana, Dibra district.

The participants' assessments of the Advance Livestock Training held in Shkodra were also very positive.

The Farm Business Management and Greenhouse training were prepared.

Practical training - livestock farms – spring 2020

The practical training on the livestock farm was planned in close collaboration with MARD. The philosophy of the Practical Training on the Livestock was to build a better concept on livestock management through analysing practical farm examples targeting public extension staff, progressive farmers and students with livestock background education. The overall training purpose was "Solve causes of problems, don't treat consequences of problems". The training approaches applied were: “learning by mistakes”; “learning by doing”; “preventing rather than controlling” and considering “cause and consequences”.

The trainings were conducted into four (4) cattle farms in the most intensive cattle area of the country: Shkoder on 9th of March 2020 (14 farmers and 6 advisers), Lezhe on 10th of March 2020 (9 farmers and 6 advisers), Fier on 11th of March, 2020 (9 farmers and 7 advisers), Berat on 12th of March 2020 (8 farmers and 3 advisers).

The fifth training planned to be organised in Lushnje on 13th of March, 2020 was unexpectedly cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic introductory restrictions implemented in Albania and international senior non-key experts needed to leave the country.

The participants' assessments of the practical trainings on the livestock farm were very positive.

The Farm Business Management and Greenhouse trainings planned to be organised also were not conducted due to the COVID - 19 worldwide pandemic situation restrictions introduced during the final stage of the 6th reporting period.

A summary of the project trainings implemented shows table on the next page.

Trainings conducted by IPESA project			
Training Title	Training Objective/s	Date & Location	Participants #
Albania's public Farm Extension Service – now and in the future	Explore how public extension service capacity and delivery needs to change to respond adequately to the changing agri-food and rural sector context with a special focus on the livestock sector, and to use the findings for strategic planning and a training programme for Albania's National Extension Service (ANES).	3-4 May, 2018, Durres	50 participants in total: 33 ANES advisers; 4 ATTC researchers; 4 MARD officials; 4 ARDA officials; 5 representatives from service providers – Agricultural University of Tirana, Livestock Entrepreneurs Association (LEAA), RASP (private development NGO), and GIZ;
		30-31 May, Vlora	35 participants in total: 22 ANES advisers; 4 ATTC researchers; 1 MARD officials; 2 ARDA officials; 6 representatives from service providers – Agricultural University of Tirana, Livestock Entrepreneurs Association (LEAA), RASP (private development NGO);
Base training for public extension services Albania	-to improve the knowledge and capacity of ANES advisers to select, design, communicate and disseminate to farmer's useful information on standards and good practices in agriculture so as to improve the performance of farm enterprises -to improve the competence of ANES advisers to support farmers to access finance for farm business investment and improvement	23-24 October, 2018 Tirana	21 participants in total: 19 participants from Tirana ANES staff; 2 participants from Fushe- Kruja ATTC.
		25-26 October, 2018 Durres	14 participants in total: 9 participants from Durres ANES staff; 5 participants from Kruja ANES staff.
		30-31 October, 2018 Kukes	21 participants in total: 7 participants from Kukes ANES staff; 4 participants from Has ANES staff; 1 participant from Tropoje ANES staff; 9 participants from Diber ANES staff.
		1-2 November, 2018 Shkoder	22 participants in total: 10 participants from Shkodra ANES staff;

			8 participants from Lezha ANES staff; 2 participants from Shkodra ATTC staff; 2 participants from MARD
		13-14 November, 2018 Pogradec	19 participants in total: 13 participants from Korca ANES staff; 4 participants from Pogradec ANES staff; 2 participants from Korca ATTC
		15-16 November, 2018 Elbasan	26 participants in total: 16 participants from Elbasan ANES staff; 9 participants Berat ANES staff; 1 participant from MARD
		20-21 November, 2018 Permet	19 participants in total: 5 participants from Saranda ANES staff 12 participants from Gjirokastra ANES staff 1 participant from MARD Farmer from Permet
		22-23 November, 2018 Fier	28 participants in total: 11 participants from Fieri ANES staff 5 participants from Vlora ANES staff 8 participants from Lushnja ANES staff 2 participants from Vlora ATTC 2 participants from Lushnja ATTC
Advanced livestock level training for public extension services in Albania	-to understand the needs of cows. Only by supporting this need we can expect a good economic result and working pleasure. -to challenge our clients to set goals. -to calculate on the consequences of these goals, make and implement action plans to reach these goals -to evaluate results of these action plans.	14- 17 May, 2019 Dures	23 participants in total: 10 participants from RAEA Tirana 7 participants from RAEA Lushnja 4 participants from Fushe- Kruja ATTC 2 participants from MARD Farmer from Dures
		9-12 July, 2019	23 participants in total:

	-to understand that changes only happen if we change human behaviour, change habits. -to facilitate this ongoing process: Goal → action plan → evaluate results → new goal →	Pogradec	4 participants from Elbasan, RAEA Korca 5 participants from Berat, RAEA Korca 10 participants from Korca, RAEA Korca 3 participants from Korca, ATTC 1 participant from MARD
		12-15 November, 2019 Shkodra	25 participants in total: 9 participants from Shkodra, RAEA Shkodra 8 participants from Lezha, RAEA Shkodra 6 participants from Kukesi, RAEA Shkodra 2 participants from Dibra RAEA Tirane
Practical training - livestock farms	-to build a better concept on livestock management through analysing practical farm examples targeting public extension staff, progressive farmers and students with livestock educational background -to solve causes of problems, don't treat consequences of problems	9 March, 2020 Trush, Shkoder	20 participants in total: 6 participants from Shkodra, RAEA Shkodra; 1 veterinarian 13 farmers
		10 March, 2020 Balldren, Lezhe	15 participants in total: 6 participants from Lezha, RAEA Shkodra 10 farmers
		11 March, 2020 Suke, Fier	18 participants in total: 4 participants from Fier, RAEA Lushnje; 11 farmers 1 veterinarian 2 ABA Centre
		12 March, 2020 Samatice, Berat	11 participants in total: 3 participants from Berat, RAEA Korca 7 farmers
		13 March, 2020 Saver, Lushnje	Cancelled due to lockdown of pandemic situation

3.3.3.2 Activity 2.3 Carry out a cost analysis of the extension services and indicate the most cost-efficient means of dissemination of information

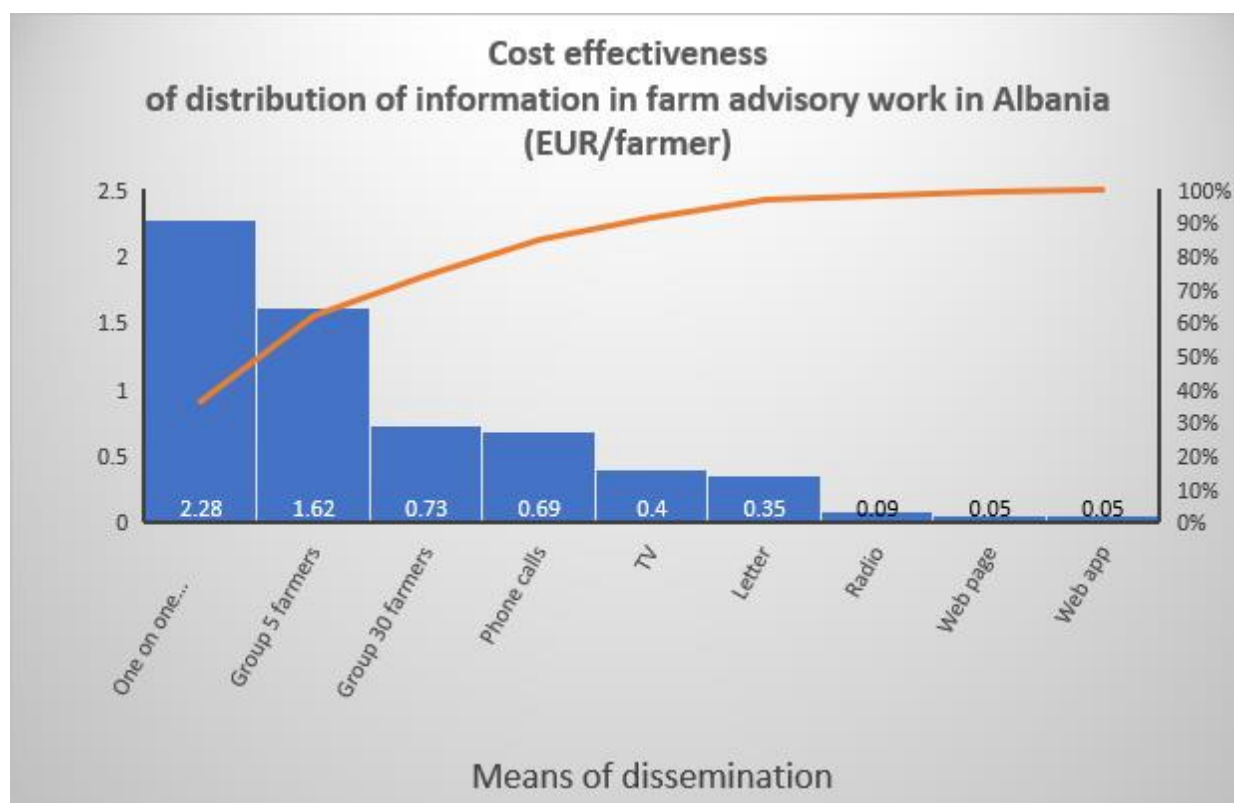
IPESA project first conducted an initial cost analysis of the extension services. The results of this analysis indicate the “one-on-one” approach is by far the most expensive way of dissemination of information for farmers in Albania. The calculation was made by using specific costs in the Albanian economy, but if the same methodology is applied it is expected that results in other countries would be rather similar. Although it is an important part of any advisory work, the one-on-one approach should be replaced by other means of dissemination in all other cases when it is possible.

The analysis has in an adjusted form been incorporated in the manual on advisory methods, which has been drafted in this reporting period (see Annex 5.) Furthermore, the analysis will be used in the coming project periods in discussions and to contribute to a strategic plan for an efficient and effective public extension service.

The analysis has in an adjusted form been incorporated in the manual on advisory methods. Furthermore, the analysis has been used in discussions and to contribute to a strategic plan for an efficient and effective public extension service.

The project team has introduced advisory packages as a tool to improve the efficiency of delivery methods of ANES advisors. An advisory package for milk production is developed.

In addition to the original cost analysis of the extension services, under the development of the ANES SAP covered by this report, cost effective actions and services were analysed again in order to propose the best course of actions. The approach and data used for the cost analysis during the project implementation has been used for a more detailed analysis of costs related to implementation of the ANES SAP.



According to the results (see the graph above) the most cost-efficient means of dissemination are web-based solutions – web page and web-based applications. However, it is very hard to predict and estimate how many farmers in Albania would use such a simple way of informing. The next best option appears to be radio broadcasting.

In terms of cost efficiency radio broadcasting is the best available means of dissemination of simple, not demanding material in Albania and should be used whenever possible. It is advisable to use local radio stations that are followed by farmers, especially if there are specialized agricultural radio shows.

As a most appropriate means of dissemination in everyday work advisors should use larger group meetings. Although group meetings are not the cheapest option for dissemination of information, they offer additional value in terms of physical presence, establishing long-term connection with farmers and possibility of discussion among farmers. To broaden the effect of the group work, especially where information of high national importance must be transferred as fast as possible, it could be supported by radio broadcast. Any means of distribution of information should be always supported by web-based tools.

3.3.3.3 Activity 2.4 Provide training to the extension service to assist farmers in the preparation of applications for funding through IPARD measures

On 22 January 2018 DG Agri approved the entrustment package of budget implementation tasks to Albania for measures 1, 3 and 7 of the IPARD II Programme, but still with a number of conditions to fulfil. The expectation was these would be fulfilled by around the end of May 2018 so that the first call for IPARD project proposals could open around June 2018.

The initial training by the IPESA project of ANES public extension advisers first was delivered in Durrës 3-4 May 2018 and the second in Vlora on 30-31 May 2018. Therefore it was a timely opportunity to include relevant information on the available IPARD measures. The paying agency ARDA welcomed the chance to make a presentation and to answer participants' questions at the training.

The ARDA presentation focused on following aspects:

- Application process up to payment (timing and duration of the various steps up to final payment);
- General eligibility conditions for applicants;
- An outline of the scope, priority sectors and aid intensity of the two measures in the first call: Measure 1 - Investments in agricultural holdings; Measure 3 - Investment in physical assets for the processing and marketing of agricultural products; and the third measure planned for the 2nd call later in 2018: Measure 7 - Farm Diversification and Business Development.

ARDA acknowledged that it lacks detailed information and publicity materials about the national and EU minimum standards required by applicants by the end of the investments, that the Agencies responsible for various certifications on standards will need to provide this to applicants and their consultants who prepare the applications. The fact that ANES advisers are not eligible for payment for consultancy support to applications was criticized by participants during the lively Q&A session at the end. Nevertheless, the training participants rated this part of the programme as very useful.

IPESA made a presentation to the IPARD II Monitoring Committee (21 March 2018) on the objectives and actions of the project.

Updated presentations by ARDA on application requirements for IPARD measures and national support schemes were also included in the Base Trainings in October and November 2018

3.3.3.4 Activity 2.5 Assist the extension services to develop necessary practical manuals to guide farmers and agro-processors when planning investments, e.g. construction standards for animal buildings, environmental protection, hygiene and biosecurity, animal welfare etc

During preparation of the Assessment report it was evident that ANES employees need improved of capacity and support on almost all fields of advising – soft skills, management, national and EU

standards, including animal health/welfare for Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) including environment aspects, technical knowledge, preparation of business plans etc.

To be informed and in line with what was achieved so far, the project team first collected all available writing material prepared by ATTCs, NGOs and projects that were involved in similar activities in the sector. Also, based on the suggestion from the IPESA team, the Technical Working Group was established, consisted of representatives of the MARD and Faculty of Agriculture. The first meeting was held on April 26, 2018. At the meeting the IPESA team presented a suggested list of topics important for ANES employees and the farming community. After discussion, it was agreed that the following topics are priorities at this stage of development:

- Farm Advisory Operational Manual – farm advisers’ skills, management, self-management, procedures, IPARD procedures etc;
- Good Agriculture Practice (GAP) – manual;
- Manual for establishing of milk production – cows;
- Manual for establishing of milk and meat production – goats;
- Manual for establishing of milk and meat production – sheep;
- Booklet – Farm Business Management;
- Booklet – Modern Feeding – preparation and application;
- Booklet – Cheese production;
- Booklet – Storage of fruit;
- Leaflet – Good agriculture practice – Manure;
- Leaflet – Good agriculture practice - Soil protection;
- Leaflet – Good agriculture practice - Use of pesticides;
- Leaflet – Good agriculture practice - Hoofs protection in milk production;
- Leaflet – Good agriculture practice - Animal welfare;
- Leaflet – Good agriculture practice - Standards (Global gap, ISO, HACCP);
- Leaflet – Good agriculture practice - Maintaining pastures;
- Booklet –Greenhouse production.

The list was not exhaustive and considered as a first step in defining the most needed and most practical material that could be produced over the course of the project. It was emphasized that the materials should have a very practical focus and be oriented towards farmers and advisers. It was decided, that the first two manuals to be produced were Farm Advisory Operational Manual and Good Agricultural Practice (GAP). It was considered that the respective manuals will cover the most basic needs of the farm advisors and serve as a foundation for development of other materials. Other material were to be further discussed, especially after collecting the information gathered from advisors during the first trainings in May 2018.

Drafts of these manuals were used as training material in the base trainings held in October and November 2018. Each ANES Adviser has received a copy of the Manuals.

After finalizing the first two manuals the Project continued with production of new technical booklets related to production of cows, sheep, goats. Two International Senior Non-Key experts (ISNK) were provided by the project to lead and conduct development of technical booklets on milk, sheep and goat production.

The ISNK experts work was organized through three principal missions – during February, March and May 2019. During the first two missions the experts were introduced to ANES advisors, ATTCs personnel, farmers and MARD officials and had opportunity to collect all necessary data, important for relevance and applicability of the booklets. Most of the booklets content and presentation material for the trainings were prepared during this reporting period. Third mission was mostly related to the preparation of the first advanced training that was held in Durres from May 14-17 2019.

A booklet on cattle management (approx. 130 pages) and a similar booklet on sheep management has been prepared by the project international senior non-key experts.

Furthermore, there has been a special request by the Advice and Agricultural Information Sector, MARD, regarding the cattle housing standards. Among other issues, it was planned to train the extensionists on the optimal design for cattle housing, but to provide more information on this topic, the project has purchased, and distributed the book "Cattle Housing Design" developed by the Danish Agricultural Advisory Service. Thus, each of the regional extension office got a copy of it. The recommendations in the book are fully in line with the EU-standards.

For each manual and booklet, the discussion sessions on the draft manual/booklet content, were organized and agreed upon with MARD officials, and also sent electronically to them for their written approval.

In total the following printing material was produced and delivered by the end of the project on Nov 7, 2020:

- The Farm Advisory Operational Manual;
- The Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) Manual;
- The booklet on the Cattle Management;
- The Farm Business Management booklet;
- The booklet on the Standard Operating Procedures for the Dairy Farm- step by step instructions for main farm Activities for farmers;
- The booklet on Cow's and Milking Hygiene: an instrument for improving milk quality and farm profitability for extensionist level;
- The booklet on small ruminants;
- The booklet on greenhouse production;
- Catalogue/brochure on Advisory packages
- Score cards for milk production facilities (7 score cards)

3.3.3.5 Activity 2.6 Conduct pilot trials to test and improve extension messages and approaches in selected focus groups

Practical demonstrations of new techniques are often one of the most effective ways of dissemination of knowledge to farmers, as they can see the effects and immediately imagine how the technology should be implemented at their own farm. Therefore, demonstrations of new technologies on real farms could be one of the solutions for an efficient dissemination of knowledge.

Various proposals for pilot trials have been discussed. The proposals came from observations on farm visits since the beginning of the project, and from the discussions with a wide range of stakeholders. The members of the Training and Publication Group have given valuable input and suggestions.

It was agreed to conduct the following trial: better dairy hygiene for mastitis control, and improved milk quality in dairy cow herds. Possibly to select 2 trial farms and 2 control farms. Regarding trial farms, to include training on good udder and milking management, treatment methods, etc.

The trials were conducted in two trials dairy farms (one farm with 25 cows and the other with 280 cows). In the methodology it is foreseen the evaluation of barn, cows, and milking process was done according to the scoring system. Fushe-Kruja ATTC, and one adviser from Lushnje Agency were part of the trials.

The cooperation agreement prepared for the hygiene trials (two dairy farmers, IPESA project, the Regional Agricultural Extension Agency (AREA) of Lushnja, Fushe- Kruja ATTC) was signed by all parties.

Several field visits were organized in two demonstration dairy farms by the project SNKE-s, accompanied by the extensionists of Regional Agency of Extension of Lushnja, in May, June and July

2019. During these visits the hygiene of the barns, cows, milking machines as well the milking process were evaluated. The purpose of the visits was to observe if the rules of the hygiene and the milking process were applied correctly, and if not what is needed to improve. At the end of each visit the SNKE-s, the extensionist and the farmers discussed the weak points that were found during the visits and the farmers were advised how to improve the situation.

Milk tests were done twice every month for the mesophiles and SCC, for the big farm, and only once for the small farm. The results showed that improvements for the hygiene are needed. This period of the year was very busy for the farm owners, as they finished the preparation of grass silage and are preparing the alfalfa hay.

The inputs necessary for the implementation of the hygiene demonstration were delivered to both demonstration farms. The owners of both farms were advised on how to use the udder and milking machine disinfectants.

A final report on the milk hygiene trial was prepared. Furthermore, a leaflet was developed on basis of the report. A more detailed advisory package has also been prepared based on the results of the trial.

As a result of trial and testing activities, the project team developed booklet related to milking cows hygiene and related good practices. The booklet is printed and ready to be delivered.

3.3.3.6 Activity 2.7 Design specific studies to understand the role of structural and technical factors on farm income and assist in the formulation of appropriate policy instruments to encourage the increasing of production efficiency and competitiveness in livestock sector

A study on the data collected from the Albanian Farm Database (up to 100 farms) has been conducted. The data are collected approximately according to EU FADN (Farm Accountancy Data Network) standards and there is potential for an increased use of these data for both policy and farm management purposes. In order to reach that objective considerable improvement of the data validation is needed.

Project international non-key expert on farm management together with the IPESA project team had several meetings with the Advice and Agricultural Information Sector staff regarding the farm data collection, entry and analysis. Data from 65 agricultural households have been collected and entered into the Farm Book system for the year 2018. Data reliability has been discussed as well as the possibilities for use of the data analysis in the extension work and for policy purposes. It was concluded that data collection on farm level has been neglected for several years and thus the quality and reliability of the data collected may not be on a high level. Still, the data can be used as a starting point for further development and update of the data collection methodology and development toward a quality FADN system.

A report on preliminary analysis of the farm book data for 2018 was prepared for MARD.

3.3.3.7 Activity 2.8 - Training on Implementation of Advisory Packages, Catalogue of Services and Management Protocols/Tools

During the Project extension period and after all Advisory Packages are finalized, the Project team prepared e-learning material in form of instructional videos and presentations, that will enable ANES advisors to understand the processes and to learn methodology for implementation.

Initially it was planned to undertake series of regular physical trainings across the country. However, due to uncertain development of the COVID-19 crisis and still ongoing preventive measures, the field training was omitted and substituted with e-learning/teaching material. The advantage of such

approach will be ability of advisors to repeatedly use the material – in case of a need for refreshment training or well-prepared materials for new employees.

3.3.3.8 Activity 2.9 - Study Tour to Learn From Experience Of Implementation Of Modern Tools And Systems In Advisory Work As It System, Advisory Packages And Work With Farmers Groups.

The project assumed to prepare and implement one study visit of 3-5 working days for up to 3 people to EU Country where ANES/MoA personnel can learn from experience of implementation of modern tools and systems in advisory work as IT system, advisory packages and work with farmers groups.

However, due to COVID19 worldwide developing situation and new restrictions introduced by countries in Europe in the period of last months of the project implementation, within agreement with the MARD and with the approval of the Contracting Authority, it was proposed a substitute activity to develop e-learning video instructional materials in form of recorded videos for advisors and farmers.

Subjects to be covered by proposed e-learning video instructional materials are:

- Hygiene in milk production;
- Hoof treatment;
- Soil and water analysis;
- Greenhouse production.

The scenarios for the films were prepared by the project team of key and non-key experts. Filming and editing was conducted by professional service provider who was engaged upon official approval of the activity.

3.4 Project resources used

EXPERTS WORKING DAYS UTILIZATION

Experts	Days allocated by initial Contract	Days used 1st Interim (8 May 2017-7 Nov 2017)	Days used 2nd Interim (8 Nov 2017-7 May 2018)	Days used 3rd Interim (8 May 2018-7 Nov 2018)	Days used 4th Interim (8 Nov 2018-7 May 2019)	Days allocated after reallocation 10/10/2019 (AO 23)	Days used 5th Interim (8 May 2019-7 Nov 2019)	Days used 6th Interim (8 Nov 2019-7 May 2020)	Days allocated by the Contract and Addendum No 1 signed 14/08/2020	Days allocated after reallocation 30/09/2020 (AO 38)	Days used 7th Interim (8 May 2020-7 Nov 2020)	Total days used during the project
Key Experts												
Morten Sejersen, TL	440	51	63	59	56	328	53	43,5	358	358	32,5	358
Hrvoje Horvat, KE2	220	47	42,5	40,5	33	241	29	26	301	272	51	269
Michael Hegarty, KE3	200	39	35	47	48	216	31	16	216	216	0	216
TOTAL KEs	860	138	139,5	146,5	137	785	113	85,5	875,0	846,0	83,5	843
Senior Non Key Experts												
Fatbardh Sallaku		17	16	29	25,5		7,5	20			15,5	130,5
Ylli Bicoku		14	8,5	18,5	22		9,5	13			11	96,5
Valbona Ylli				8	12		6,5	11				37,5
Haxhire Toska				4	6							10
Petrit Dobi				3	7						11	21
Roland Bardhi				3	6,5							9,5
Naim Pacara					6,5							6,5
Susanne Pejstrup					22		13	5				40
Derk Vink					22		13	9				44
Vjerran Kokanović											38	38
Henry Joergensen											10	10
TOTAL SNKEs *	300	31	24,5	65,5	129,5	379	49,5	58	427,0	457,5	85,5	443,5
Junior Non Key Experts												
Ornela Gjika		36	107	91	114		74	53			40	515
Ketrin Topciu			6									6
Idlir Koka				10	20		50	64			26	170
Ervis Halili				5	6			7				18
Edmond Hala				8	0,5							8,5
Vladimir Jovanovic					10		10					20
Shpresa Arbi								40			28	68
Henry Joergensen								10				10
Enver Tome											30	30
TOTAL JNKEs	785	36	113	114	150,5	790	134	174	850	850	124	845,5
Total	1945								2152,0	2153,5		2132

* During 5th reporting period total days used by SNKE equals to 63,5 WDs but due to available amount of approved days for SNKEs only 49,5 could be claimed.

PROJECT INCINDETAL EXPEDNITURES BUDGET UTILISATION

IE budget in a project periods	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	Total in EUR
1st period	€ 569,97					€ 569,97
2nd period	€ 981,09	€ 1 068,86		€ 1 488,45		€ 3 538,40
3rd period	€ 3 603,76	€ 12 418,30		€ 388,38		€ 16 410,44
4th period	€ 3 300,17	€ 16 824,95	€ 643,05	€ 1 745,00		€ 22 513,17
5th period	€ 3 516,73	€ 29 214,65	€ 1 446,58	€ 2 829,36	€ 1 091,96	€ 38 099,28
6th period	€ 206,22	€ 7 118,12	€ 5 559,76	€ 413,29		€ 13 297,39
7th period	€ 358,22	€ 827,85	€ 6 415,65		€ 10 500,00	€ 18 101,72
Budget used by the end of the project						€ 112 530,37

3.5 Assumptions and risks – status update

An assessment of the important assumptions was included in the Consultants technical proposal and was reviewed during project inception period.

The Consultants technical proposal also included a detailed analysis of risks associated with the project's planned activities. The project team reviewed and updated the analysis during the inception period. The assumptions and risks remain valid.

To achieve the planned results and objectives and ensure the sustainability of the project the development of the strategic action plan (SAP) for the extension service is considered very important. What remains to ensure after the end of the project is the commitment by MARD and other relevant stakeholders to follow the strategy.

Furthermore, it is essential that the extension service receives adequate financial resources in order to adopt and implement the enhanced advisory capacity and skills that is the result of the project activities.

In particular, these three risks are considered critical for achievement of the planned outcomes for both result areas:

1. Unwillingness to carry out a complete and efficient reform of the advisory services.
2. Lack of coordination and cooperation among relevant institutions and organizations.
3. Lack of financial resources to support the service(s).

Failure to commit to these actions will negatively affect the sustainability of the project.

3.6 Management and coordination arrangements

The management and coordination arrangements have been working well during the whole Project period.

The General Directorate of Financing and Contracting of EU, World Bank and other Donor Funds / Central Finance and Contracting Unit (CFCU), was responsible for the management of the service contract with the Consultant, and throughout the Project period has approved the Consultant's proposals for implementation and the associated incidental expenditure.

Cooperation with the SPO and other beneficiaries has been running smoothly. All information and copies of relevant documents required by the Consultant have been provided by the beneficiaries. The Consultant has been provided with an adequate office accommodation in the MARD.

Monthly reports describing the progress of the project have been submitted within the agreed time to beneficiaries and CFCU.

The Project Steering Committee met six times during the Project period. The sixth PSC Meetings was held on the 9th January 2020. Final PSC Meeting initially planned to be held on 4th November 2020 had to be cancelled due not to the overall COVID19 pandemic situation but also to the fact that MARD representatives had been tested positive and were on medical care.

The final Project Closing Event therefore was organized as the online platform meeting. The project results were presented as the webinar for which wide group of important to the Project stakeholders were invited. The event took place on 6th November 2020 and was fully recorded.

3.7 Key Quality/Sustainability issues

The success of the project is measured by its sustainability. Therefore, the project team has from the beginning put focus on how to ensure sustainability of the results produced by the Project. All the IPESA activities during the project implementation were done having constantly in mind the importance of sustainability of the project impact.

The framework and contents of the trainings and manuals etc., have been agreed with the beneficiaries who have also participated in all the trainings. The base level trainings have focused on good environmental practices in order to ensure that agriculture is progressing toward meeting national and EU standards. Advising methodology has also been trained in order to improve the advisers capability to transfer their knowledge to the benefit of the farmers. The advanced level trainings build on the knowledge achieved in the base level trainings and also has a focus on how to use the knowledge in advising.

One of the most important aspects of sustainability is the value of knowledge of advisors that was received during implementation of trainings and by development of booklets/manual. According to the surveys conducted after the trainings and response related to the booklets – in all of these areas the project achieved more than satisfactory level of quality and practical usability. It can be assumed that most of the advisors have been positively influenced by new information and knowledge that can be instantly implemented in their work and make them feel more confident.

However, the trainings, manuals and booklets will only have sustainable effect if it is backed up by organizational support from the MARD. Therefore, it is a very important step that MARD has supported development of a Strategic Action Plan for sustainable development of the public extension service (assisted by IPESA), including an action plan for resourcing and implementation. In this way it will be possible systematically to approach the challenges in achieving a sustainable public extension service.

With drafting of the ANES SAP preconditions for further development of ANES are set and ready for implementation including enhanced support and improvement of ANES budget.

There are two important activities that are expected to be delivered through the Project extension period – Advisory packages, management protocols and IT Advisory management system assumptions will significantly influence sustainability of the project efforts.

However, at this stage, two major risks related to sustainability of the IPESA project outputs are still remaining, as indicated in previous reports:

- a. Public extension service delivery in Albania is severely underfinanced. With very limited budget for transport, equipment, etc., it is not possible to operate an efficient extension service.
- b. To support national agri-sector objectives and priorities much stronger performance related management (planning, needs assessment, leadership and service implementation) is necessary.

4 LESSONS LEARNED – CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

According to the initial findings that were confirmed during the Project implementation the following conclusions on the advisory/extension services in Albania can be indicated:

- **RESEARCH AND INNOVATION WITHOUT IMPACT – NO FUNCTIONAL AKIS**

Research and innovation are not transferred to the public officials responsible for advising and farmers. It should be changed and increased, especially in relation to applied research which is related to the farmers' needs. Also, new models of dissemination of the research results are needed, through the new advisory mechanism.

- **THE NEED FOR HIGH QUALITY ADVISORY SERVICES IS REAL AND GROWING**

Farmers in Albania are faced with several parallel challenges. Transition of the whole agri-food sector, new opening to the markets, accelerated changes in applied technologies in order to increase competitiveness, climate change and need for adaptation measures, food safety and standardization needs are just some of the reasons why farmers feel overwhelmed, vulnerable and very open for any kind of support, especially in knowledge and innovation sphere.

- **ABSENCE OF FUNCTIONAL ADVISORY SERVICES**

Although relatively rich and diverse, Albanian AKIS lacks effective public advisory services to provide stability, the range and quality of advice that farmers (and micro and small and medium sized rural businesses) need in the competitive agri-food sphere. There is history of different approaches to development of Advisory services with ANES being the main provider today. However, at the moment, farmers are not aware of any substantial, focused effort and advisory services they could access.

- **PRESENT LEVEL OF SUPPORT OF PUBLIC STRUCTURES (related to knowledge) IS INSUFFICIENT**

There is not enough evidence that the existing public services providers manage to deliver necessary support to agri-food sector, especially in the field of knowledge and innovation. Planning, needs assessment and service implementation are rudimentary and there is no system of evaluating the value and contribution to the performance of the agricultural sector.

- **LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES**

Although existing public employees claim they spend significant amount of their time in the field, it is unlikely to be even close to reality because there is almost no budget provided for transport. Except of using telephone and messengers' applications there is no evidence of widespread direct contact with producers. If existing, those contacts are not part of the planned and focused action but more random events.

- **LOW LEVEL OF TECHNICAL EXPERTISE IN PUBLIC SECTOR**

Employment in public entities related to provision of support services and functions is often made without clear need assessment and prescribed minimum requirements needed for particular tasks.

- **LACK OF SKILLS**

Together with absent technical knowledge there is evident lack of use of foreign languages necessary for information search and share, internal communication, management and self-management skills in public sector providers.

- **UNCLEAR PROCEDURES**

Although part of public sector, financed by all citizens, procedures for employment, minimum requirements, training of employees and decision making in public entities are often not clear and it is hard to obtain information about such processes.

- **QUALITY OF INFORMATION INADEQUATE**

According to numerous information obtained from farmers, existing advisors are often not able to provide useful and up to date input, especially related with implementation of new technologies and establishment of intensive production systems.

- **ACTIVITIES NOT MEASURABLE**

Activities of ANES advisors are not unified under specific system and measurable. Given the fact that advisory work itself is multidimensional, complex activity with the combination of field and office work and interaction of different spheres of expertise, it is important to enable measurability and analysis of ongoing and future activities with custom made IT management system

- **DATA AND INFORMATION NOT AVAILABLE**

Information on existing and previous research results as well as other potential interesting data (prices, legal requirements for certain activities etc.), are not easily available which puts farmers in unfavourable position.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **INCREASE FINANCING OF ANES AND OTHER RELATED STRUCTURES, INCLUDING RESEARCH AND EDUCATION**

Public extension service delivery in Albania is severely underfinanced. With almost no budget for transport, equipment, etc. it is not possible to operate an efficient extension service. Without solving of this issue, it is not possible to expect any significant change of behaviour and quality of delivery of the advisory/extension services in Albania.

- **VISIBILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY**

Advisory services should be easily accessible and visible to all potential beneficiaries. All local offices should be equally and visibly marked – **with recognizable logo and name**. Also, primary contact with farmers should be enabled through so called “one-stop-shop” approach where farmers can get all necessary information related to their problems and start with the process of advising or be linked to other potential sources/solutions.

- **LIGHT STRUCTURE SUPPORTED BY IT SOLUTIONS AND TOOLS FOR COMMUNICATION**

Many administrative and managerial processes became less demanding with available technology and means for communication. In today's business environment, instead of number of managerial and administrative staff, it is more important to focus on adequate, well trained personnel, capable of use of contemporary tools.

- **SUBSTANTIAL DEGREE OF AUTONOMY**

The best available examples show that autonomous or semi-autonomous advisory services, organized outside complex and often cumbersome ministry structures, can deliver much better quality of services. In such an establishment, operations are implemented in much lively manner, the system is more agile and efficient and there are much more options for development –in terms of capacity,

services and structure. Important part of autonomy is potential access to market and provision of commercial services in future.

- **COMPETENT MANAGEMENT, PREFERABLY WITH PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE IN PRIVATE SECTOR AGRI-FOOD AND PUBLIC GOODS MANAGEMENT.**

New advisory service structure needs motivated, knowledgeable and skilful management, able to respond to the needs of demand-driven needs of market-oriented farmers. This will require robust transformation of the present setting and behaviour.

- **TECHNICAL SUPPORT, TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT MUST BE ENABLED FOR EACH ADVISOR EQUALLY**

Advisory services must be available for each farmer, so advisors need minimum conditions and tools for their work. First and most important are suitable offices, PCs and mobile phones, internet, and transportation available for the field visits and facilitation of the farmers groups.

- **NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES ADJUSTED TO THE NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES AND THEIR SPECIFIC NEEDS.**

According to available information, there are more than 70.000 potential beneficiaries of advisory service. According to experiences from EU countries, for such number of potential clients there is need for at least 200 advisors on the field, not counting supporting services and management.

- **MENTORSHIP DURING FIRST PHASE OF ANES TRANSFORMATION**

Overall management structure may require the contribution and mentorship of an experienced, directly contracted international expert/s over a certain amount of time (6 months - 1 year), strongly supported through political leadership and an effective monitoring and evaluation system.

- **A COMPREHENSIVE INTERNAL IT SYSTEM THAT WILL ENABLE COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF ADVISORY WORK, DETAILS OF PROVIDED ADVISORY SERVICES AND BENEFICIARIES.**

For the type of work that is complex, organized in many branch offices and includes lots of field work, it is important that all activities are precisely recorded and visible to management, so work analysis can be conducted, which enables further planning. Also, IT structure enables advisors to have insight in their own workload, history of the farm visits and results of their previous work. Collection of data can open numerous possibilities in terms of development of statistics.

- **RELEVANCE OF ADVISORY WORK**

All Advisory service activities must clearly reflect the needs of the beneficiaries. In order to ensure relevance of the services, number of advisors, type of services and training of advisors, it is of immense importance to establish system of collecting of information from beneficiaries, their filtering and elaboration. Elaboration of data and guidance can be obtained through establishment of national and regional Advisory boards with strong participation of representatives of beneficiaries and other involved actors.

RATIONALE FOR FURTHER INVESTMENTS

There is strong rationale for the Albanian Government to support further development of ANES and overall advisory/extension activities in the country:

- Agriculture provides 40% of total employment, half the jobs in rural areas, 19% of GDP, 40% of export value, is high priority in the strategy for integration with EU, and nearly 50% of the population is rural.
- There is good potential for expansion – the agri-food sector is under-performing and not yet technologically advanced, good agro-climatic conditions exist, there are great opportunities for increasing food exports and for import substitution as integration with the EU single market proceeds and initiatives such as the Food Safety Project advance food compliance standards in the country.

The Albanian National Extension Service has potential to greatly improve technological advancement on farms, but its expertise and services have been allowed to decline due to lack of financial resources for professional development of advisers, modern information and communication technologies, lack of strategic direction and inadequate leadership and management. According to the proposed draft ANES SAP, there is immediate need for additional 419.000 EUR of investments. From that amount the biggest part is related to long term expenses as investment in equipment etc.

On the other hand, from the estimated 70,000 potential target farmers, and 22,257 belonging to actual focus group, in case of a 10% increase of the gross value added per year the direct monetary benefits to ANES client farmers could be as high as €5,225,000/year, plus indirect monetary benefits to processing/marketing businesses during 2020-2021 from better quality/quantity approximately €1,400,000. That shows that the monetary benefits could be 16 times the investment costs, plus other non-monetary benefits

Over a five-year period, the results would improve even more as farmers and other entrepreneurial clients of ANES appreciate the benefits of quality advice. These will also leverage further gains in GDP from follow-on investments in agricultural holdings, e.g. through the IPARD programme and national investment schemes.

There would also be improvements in compliance with agri-environment standards on farms. Estimates indicate modest increases in seasonal employment, as the improved value will come mostly from increased productivity from existing labour.

Returns from advisory to diversification and rural business expansion are more uncertain, as building capacity requires a longer-term approach before positive outcomes are visible.

ANNEXES

- Annex 1: draft final Strategic Action Plan (SAP) 2020-2021;
- Annex 2: Description of Advisory Management System (AMS);
- Annex 3: List of the Manuals/Booklets produced by the project:
 - (i) Advising Methodology Manual for Advisers` Cover;
 - (ii) Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Manual Cover;
 - (iii) "Farm Management" Booklet Cover;
 - (iv) "Cows Milking Hygiene" Booklet Cover;
 - (v) "Small ruminant" Booklet Cover;
 - (vi) "Greenhouse production" Booklet.
 - (vii) "Standard Action Procedures for Dairy Farms Booklet;
 - (viii) "Advisory Packages Catalogue).

Note: Due to the large size of the manuals/booklets, an e-copy will be placed in the final CD accompanying the approved hard copy Final Report.
- Annex 4: Experts mission reports (a scanned copy will be placed in the final CD accompanying the approved hard copy Final Report);
- Annex 5: Training Materials and reports;
- Annex 6: Video learning/TV spots materials;
- Annex 7: Minutes of PSC meeting of 6th Interim report and final report – (the Signed Minutes will be placed in the final CD accompanying the approved hard copy Final Report).