

## Short view on results of Linking Nature protection with sustainable rural development in Bulgaria September 2012 – September 2017

**Organizations:** Project partners were a coalition of Bulgarian and Swiss NGOs involved in Nature protection and sustainable agriculture as: WWF Bulgaria, Birdlife Bulgaria BBF (Bulgarian NGO for Nature Protection), Bioselena (Bulgarian NGO for the promotion of organic agriculture running a very efficient extension service), EASR (Executive Agency for Selection and Reproduction – an agency of the Bulgarian Ministry of Agriculture and Forests – the only institutional project partner), Pro Natura, Birdlife Switzerland and REDD.

**Country:** Bulgaria.

**Title of the project or activity:** Linking Nature protection with sustainable rural development: “To link biodiversity protection and rural development in High Nature Value Territories by sustainable market mechanisms and reinforced public participation.”

**Introduction of the project and short description of the genetic recourse(s) that are involved:**

**Objectives of the project or activities:** The project was, as its title says, focused on improvement of nature protection – main concern was sustainability of nature protection efforts. We had 3 different project main activity lines:

- ✓ First main activity was improving acceptance for nature protection: activities with children, schools, supports of students and doctorands working on publications about biodiversity. Big efforts were deployed towards medias. Project also (co)–financed wildlife observation points, wildlife gardens dedicated to local (medicinal) plants as well as green tourism commodities etc.
- ✓ Second main activity was assuring sustainability of nature protection engagement by improving life conditions (income) of the local populations around Nature protection parks (State Parks and Nature

2000 protected areas). To do so we focused on constitution of identity of territories, supporting local artisans and farmers by building and/or improving value chains.

- ✓ Third main activity line was remuneration of ecological services due to nature protection efforts. The issue is quite difficult as it is very complicated to get any remuneration for ecological services (as clean air and water) even in very “developed countries” like Switzerland. However, activity line is a main concern of WWF International, and WWF Bulgaria, the project partner in charge of the activity, did quite well collecting funds from various Bulgarian businesses (hotels etc.).

It must be said that rare indigenous breed (RIB) preservation was not the main issue of the project – it was part of the “sustainable rural development package” which includes rare breeds preservation. And of course, agrobiodiversity preservation is part of the general efforts for preserving biodiversity! All RIB of Bulgaria were concerned by the project as EASR, responsible for the management of the herd books of all Bulgarian species, was one of the project partners.

### **Steps and activities undertaken for rare indigenous breeds preservation:**

Steps and activities undertaken correspond to the project’s results – everything necessary to reach the results was undertaken. The public relations (PR) aspect, which is very important to make RIB–preservation sustainable, was strongly implemented. Our Bulgarian partners organized largely visited annual exhibitions of RIB and many interviews were given, RIBs were shown on television.

We also organized 2 national congresses about RIB with Elli Broxham from Save office in St. Gallen. All important stakeholders participated: breeding associations, EASR, scientists involved in RIB–breeding.

### **Results to date and next steps:**

- ✓ Installation of a genetic laboratory by EASR (Executive Agency for Selection and Reproduction);

- ✓ Start of an EASR program of systematic control of all animals declared as RIBs and receiving EU and State subsidies;
- ✓ Establishment of a full register completed by a digital map of all RIB holders in Bulgaria. On the register (as on the map) you can however only see the name of the villages, the species concerned and the number of breeders in each village. Reason of that are Bulgarian data protection prescriptions;
- ✓ The project supported and co-financed the installation of 2 rare breeds demonstration farms. 1<sup>st</sup> in Karlovo with Bulgarian buffalos as well as Karakachan sheep, 2<sup>nd</sup> in the village of Repljana (Western Balkan) with Repljanska sheep.

### **Lessons learned and best practices (or needs) for SAVE partners:**

History of RIB-preservation after World War 2<sup>nd</sup> shows in a first time an important diminution of RIB replaced by more productive species or by crossed species. However, state assured RIB-preservation on state research institutes. At the end of socialism, many animals hold on state research institutes were sold or slaughtered as no state support was available any more.

In 1999 I was in charge of a study how to save Bulgarian RIB mandated by SDC (Swiss technical cooperation). We decided to make a restricted but very efficient pilot project in order to save 4 species. We proceeded by establishing breed descriptions (to be accepted by the Ministry of Agriculture), by offering veterinarian support as well as the establishment of mating plans to the farmers, by establishing herd-books, by federating the breeders, by lobbying for the establishment of subsidies for RIB-preservation (we knew that EU-funds were ready for this issue) and last but not least by winning the interest and the sympathy of the Bulgarian public and the medias by organizing exhibitions of the 4 concerned breeds.

The project was a real success – the 4 species have been saved. In 2006, at the end of the project, RIB-preservation had become a very popular issue in Bulgaria. And in 2011, when we planned Linking Nature protection with sustainable rural development project, the Bulgarian government was willing

to save all Bulgarian RIBs. The Bulgarian contribution of about 500'000 CHF (10% of the whole project's cost) went almost exclusively to the improvement of RIB-breeds preservation. This is a good indicator about how popular RIB-preservation had become in Bulgaria – the other issues, nature protection as well as the creation of value chains did not really interest the Bulgarian government.

Our vision of continuation of RIB preservation efforts was however in one point different of EASR's vision. We wanted to continue by supporting the constitution of a big RIB-federation including all species (all breeder's syndicates). EASR decided to split all breeding societies – one breed, one breeding association. Bulgarian government did not like NGOs who can be an important element of contest. This of course was harmful – there is now no strong NGO and no organized capacity of the civil society to defend RIB-breeds (and breeders) interest.

Another weakness is that the big enthusiasm for RIB of the breeders was mainly money (subsidies) driven. Another reason why the constitution of a national RIB organization, where all members of civil society could be members, remains a core condition for sustainable RIB-preservation.

Linking Nature protection with sustainable rural development project in its whole was very successful project – we won EC's prestigious NATURA 2000 award in the category Socio-Economic Benefits in 2016 and had an excellent external project evaluation in 2017. The project works now without external support, nature protection has become a big concern of Bulgarian society and the creation of new on-farm processing and direct marketing unites continues steadily – there are new farms every month.

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