

IPARD 1 Programme - Why and How Its Implementation Did Not Succeed in Macedonia

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Abstract –The aim of this study is to analyse the implementation of the IPARD 1 Programme in Macedonia in the period of 2007-2013 in terms of why its implementation did not succeed. The analysis was made from the planning phase of the activities, the way of financing, reasons for failure, the appearance of the first negative indicators of implementation, as well as the operation and functioning of the Agency for Financial Support of Agriculture and Rural Development in Macedonia - IPARD Agency. In this study, an appropriate overview of the situation is given, relevant conclusions are made in order to discover the causes of the anomalies; likewise, it offers better forthcoming solutions, i.e. solutions in the implementation of the IPARD 2 Programme which is in progress.

Keywords – financial support in agriculture and rural development, IPARD Programme, implementation, EU Funds.

1. Introduction

On June 17, 2006, the Council of the European Union implemented Regulation No. 1085/2006 establishing the Instrument for Pre-Accession - IPA (Official Gazette, No. 210, p. 82) with rules for its

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implementation, which were enforced in July 2007. As a candidate country¹, the Republic of Macedonia has access to all five IPA components².

The overall objective of the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) is to support Macedonia's efforts to fulfil the accession criteria from Copenhagen in order to establish stable institutions that will guarantee democracy and rule of law, maintain a functioning market economy, adapt to the implementation of European legislation and will demonstrate ability to take on the responsibilities that come with EU membership. This includes preparation for implementation of the Community cohesion policy and rural development instruments by introducing strategic planning and management principles that lead to the implementation of EU structural instruments.

IPARD is Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development - IPARD 1. The 2007-2013 programme for the Republic of Macedonia is access of the Macedonian citizens to the European Union funds for financial assistance in sustainable agriculture and rural development. The program focusses on the implementation of the European Community legislation in relation to a community agricultural policy and policy for sustainable agriculture competitiveness, as well as the creation of strong and sustainable rural communities and a diverse and sustainable rural environment [1].

2. The strategy and goals of the IPARD Programme

Republic of Macedonia, as a candidate country, has access to European Union funds for development of agriculture and rural development through the

¹ Decision of the European Council of Ministers on 17th December 2005.

² The IPA instrument consists of five components: IPA-I: Transition Assistance and Institution Building Component; IPA-II: The cross-border cooperation component applicable in border regions between beneficiaries of state members and, state candidates and states with pre-accession status; IPA III, IV and V: Components for Regional Development, Human Resources and Rural Development, which are planned for the candidate countries.

Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance for Rural Development (so called IPARD) established in June 2006. To start using the IPARD funds, each candidate country should fulfil two key conditions:

1. To prepare the IPARD Programme, which will be accepted by the European Commission;
2. To build institutions for management, implementation and financial management of the IPARD funds to which the management right will be transferred by the European Commission (the so-called European accreditation).

The first condition was fulfilled by the Republic of Macedonia with the preparation of the IPARD Programme for the use of funds, which was accepted by the European Commission in December 2007. After the acceptance of the IPARD Programme, the preparations of institutions for acquiring the right to manage and implement the IPARD Funds, as a second complex step forward, have been intensively initiated in Macedonia.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, as a competent institution for managing the IPARD funds and the Agency for Financial Support of Agriculture and Rural Development (AFSARD) in the capacity of IPARD Agency, are responsible for implementation and financial management of IPARD funds in Macedonia [2] [3]. All stakeholders have made the necessary arrangements in cooperation with the Ministry of Finance in order to obtain national accreditation which was attained in March 2009. Obtaining national accreditation marks the launch of the process for acquiring the right to manage the IPARD funds in Macedonia. The state, from 2007 to 2011, had EUR 60.7 million for the development of agriculture and rural development, and for the implementation of the IPARD measures. Out of these, EUR 45.5 million were provided from the EU budget, and an additional EUR 15.2 million from the budget of the Republic of Macedonia. The purpose of the program was with these funds, to prepare the agricultural sector in Macedonia for enclosure to the Union.

With the money from the IPARD funds in the agricultural sector, 50% of the costs were covered for:

- **Measure 101.** Investments in agricultural enterprises for their restructuring and upgrading in order to bring them closer to the standards of the European Union.
- **Measure 103.** Investments for the processing and sale of agricultural products in accordance with European standards, and

- **Measure 302.** Diversification and development of the economy in the rural areas.

The process of developing the IPARD Programme by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy and the Agency for Financial Support of Agriculture and Rural Development (AFSARD) was based on numerous surveys on the situation in the agricultural sector over several years in order to determine the main problems related to agricultural production, the food industry and economic activities in rural areas. According to the National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (NSARD)³, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy has interpreted the general development vision into long-term strategic goals as a basis for agricultural and rural development and formulated the future agricultural policy [3]. The main emphasis of this policy was to strengthen the country's agriculture capacity in order to be competitive on the integrated regional markets of the European Union and South-East Europe throughout measures to increase the efficiency of agricultural production, processing and placement, as well as to build appropriate effective public and private institutions. This policy also included measures to improve farm incomes; the security so that customers have access to safe, healthy food; optimal utilization of soil, forest and water resources in a manner appropriate to the environment; as well as to build vital rural communities through sustainable rural development.

2.1. Implementation of the IPARD Programme 1 in the period 2007-2013

The first phase in implementation of the IPARD 1 Programme in the period 2007-2013 in Macedonia started with the preparation of application documents by farmers for obtaining financial assistance [3]. Each investment prepares the mandatory and specific documents, which are listed in the instructions for use of the program that could be found on the website of the Agency for Financial Support of Rural Development and Agriculture. Most investors are hiring consultants who are managing their entire investment process because the costs for hiring consultants is recognized and approved. One of the criteria for applying is to have proper property legal documents, accurate accounting, settled obligations on issues related to taxes, fees, loans, etc., as well as prepared documents for applying such as a business plan, accurate offers, and above all, a clear goal for the investment. All documents requested in the IPARD Programme are sent to the Agency that is

³ The National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development 2007-2013 (NSARD) approved by the Government 29.06.2007.

obliged to evaluate them according to all criteria within 6-8 months (if it is for machinery and equipment) or 8-12 months if it is for construction. If the application is satisfactory, the next move is towards conclusion of a Financing Agreement for the requested business in the amount of 50% of the value (in some cases, for measure 101 according to certain criteria and up to 75%). Granted financial support is non-refundable and there shouldn't be double funding. An agreement concluded with the Agency can be used as a guarantee when applying for a bank loan in case the applicant has no financial resources to cover its share of the investment.

The IPARD Programme is covering the following costs: costs incurred for engagement of architects and engineers, consultants, feasibility studies, certificates, patents, licenses, standards, etc., relating to: preparation of IPARD documents; design solution or basic architectural design; revision of the architectural project; verification in IZIS on the architectural plan; obtaining ISO certificates, HACCP, feasibility studies, analyses etc. Other eligible costs are: full construction or reconstruction of buildings; purchase of new machineries; new equipment; new computers and software, but provided that they are procured after the conclusion of the IPARD agreement; as well as procurement of seedlings.

All eligible costs before being accepted by the Agency are subject to review and should be contained in the lists of approved vendors as per country of origin or approved varieties if it is for seedlings. The IPARD Programme is not accepting and recognizing the costs based on taxes, customs, import costs; rent, penalties, costs of litigation; notarization, court translations, bank bonds; and above all purchase of second hand machines and equipment; as well as the purchase of land or properties.

2.2. Terms of financing

The maximum eligible costs for the financial period 2007-2010 are EUR 530,000 per agricultural economy [3]. Candidates can submit several projects within the financial period 2007-2010, provided that the maximum limit does not exceed the previous projects and they are successfully implemented, i.e., the final payment is received. The realization of eligible project activities must start after the signing of the contract with exemption of feasibility and technical studies within the limits of the approved percentage of the measures.

The payment from the financial support is carried out on the basis of justified documentation that proves the realization of the activities and their acceptability. For the purchase of machinery and

equipment, payment is made as a one-time payment at the end of the investment. For investments such as construction and reconstruction of farm buildings, including equipment, the payment can be made up to a maximum of two instalments, in accordance with the choice of the beneficiaries. In this case, the first instalment is paid after the finalization of the construction or reconstruction work, and the second instalment after the installation of the equipment, i.e. at the end of the investment.

Investment expenditures also include costs for the preparation of the business plan and the investment project, but at most 5% of the project value of the investments and a maximum of 12% in the case of a technical project for construction in general costs, such as payments for engineers and consultants, the legal fees, study preparation and/or project implementation. **Beneficiaries – natural persons and beneficiaries – legal entities** must keep accounting records in accordance with the requirements for providing information on the National Agency for Enlargement and the objectives of the Farm Monitoring System for a period of at least 5 years after the investment has been approved, as well as for providing information and data on the farm's accounting network, if such information is requested.

The beneficiary should cooperate and provide information requested by the MAFWE officials, from the IPARD Agency, or from the Economic Commission that is authorized to control and check the implementation of the project.

2.3. Results of the utilization of the funds from the IPARD 1 Programme

Table 1. shows the official figures of the utilization of the funds from the IPARD 1 Programme for agriculture in Macedonia, results that are defeating. Out of a total of Euro 67 million reserved for agricultural support for the period of 2007 to 2013, only Euro 11 million were used, which is about 16.4% of the utilization of funds.

Table 1: Utilization of funds [3]

No.	IPARD Programme measures	Provided (Euro)	Utilized (Euro)
1	Mechanization	30.000.000	4.000.000
2	Vineyard/fruit plantations	14.000.000	3.680.000
3	System drop	10.000.000	3.000.000
4	Construction	12.500.000	/
5	Animal husbandry	500.000	320.000

It can be concluded that Macedonia has a great natural potential for quality and competitive agricultural production, but for the full utilization of

these potentials and for greater effects, the education of farmers on the importance of the measures of the IPARD Programme is of an importance. These measures should help to bring Macedonian closer to the European agriculture and to create competitive products with high added value. The situation in the Macedonian villages is alarming as a consequence of the mass emigration. The elderly who remain are physically powerless for any agricultural activity, nor do they know what the IPARD programme means.

The reasons for the inapplicability of funds from the IPARD 1 Programme are in the lack of greater transparency, promptness, and compliance with the procedure for distribution of European money for agriculture, which is a prerequisite for the successful functioning of the Paying Agency. The results of the utilization of the funds show that no profound analysis of the Macedonian agriculture has been made, as well as serious studies of the subsectors from the Paying Agency and consultations with foreign experts in the preparation of the IPARD Programme. The results show that the paying agency has the lack and difficulty of providing qualified work potential, which should simultaneously work on the harmonization of the domestic legislation with the European legislation. European requirements and procedures are relatively complicated and felt by all countries-candidates for membership in EU.

The Agency must have the capacity to draw and attract resources from EU funds. In this process, it is not important just how effectively the European money will be used in Macedonia, but also the manner of the whole process that needs to be transparent. The utilization of IPARD funds is one of the priorities of the Government.

The IPARD Programme should be understood not only as an investment but also as a rural development program. For the successful use of European pre-accession funds, cooperation between direct producers, their associations, chambers and science is necessary. The goal is to open up a process for as many applications as possible, to use all the facilities, but here also the question arises whether a successful preparation of the program has been made. It is considered that much more should be done to inform farmers and explain them exactly what IPARD means, to understand that this is not a grant, but a return on investment that they have to provide.

There are several reasons for the lack of utilization of the funds, the negatives of the implementation of the program, as well as the ignorance of the farmers, but in the following pages the most important reasons for the failure of the IPARD 1 Programme in Macedonia are concluded.

➤ **A poorly planned Operational Program for Rural Development 2007-2013.**

The poorly planned Operational Program for Rural Development 2007-2013 is not treated so much from the point of view of quality, because it has quality, but from the point of process realization. Namely, the program is considered to have been created in the offices of the Ministry, instead of preparing it with the harmonization of the interests of all stakeholders, especially farmers and banks. Program users still do not know anything about the program. The final version of the program, which although it was approved in 2007, is about 700 pages and has not been translated into Macedonian. Macedonian farmers, unfortunately, do not speak English. This document covers all funding that takes place in the period 2007-2013 and if it was timely promoted among farmers, they would be able to prepare in due time.

➤ **The poor administrative capacity of the employees in the Agency, from several points of view.**

The agency employs work potential that needs training for a long time, and employs inadequate staff (for example, political scientists, pedagogues, medical technicians) that have no point of contact with agriculture.

➤ **Badly planned and comprehended human resources.**

The government plans jobs according to the systematization of the Agency, and the EC has an analysis of the required qualified staff in terms of work load (Workload Analysis), which is part of the Agency's accreditation process. However, despite the thorough planning of the required staff, these positions are not filled. The latest analysis shows that out of the total of 260 positions foreseen for the smooth operation of the Agency, only 180 places are filled (according to the scope of work analysis). Similar is the situation with the National Fund, which is part of the Agency's operational structure.

In addition to the three most important reasons for the failure of IPARD 1, the program is considered to have several subjective factors that arise due to the correlation of the funds from the IPARD Programme and the actual situation on the ground. The analysis shows that the rules and procedures of the program are made from the office and do not correspond to the situation on the ground. The main subjective factors due to the correlation of the funds from the IPARD Programme and the real picture in the field are:

- insufficient information and animation of potential beneficiaries with the program itself;
- extensive and complicated documentation, as well as difficult access to finances;

- the inconsistency of the conditions and procedures; as well as
- unwillingness of applicants to fulfil the conditions.

The results of the survey imply the need of directions for improvement in terms of increasing the utilization of the IPARD fund.

2.4. How to increase the utilization of the IPARD Fund

Below are some suggestions and important moments to pay attention if there is a desire for greater utilization of the IPARD Fund [6] [7] [8].

It is necessary to involve all stakeholders from sectoral working groups, farmers' representatives, bankers and trade union representatives, and develop a sectoral program together with strategy and guidelines, and it has to be promoted to the potential users.

Next what **needs to be done is to create a medium-term budget**, at least until 2019, that is, to the planned assessment (pilot level) even though the Ministry of Finance is not prepared. But expert teams should also be created to support farmers when filling in applications by introducing the so-called voucher system.

Filling all vacancies in the operating structure of the agency, as well as activities in the direction of strengthening the reputation of Macedonia, especially since by 2006 (or before the introduction of IPA), the rate of utilization of European funds was up to 60%.

In addition to the mentioned obstacles that stand in the way for greater realization of the IPARD Programme, there are a lot of others that, if they were removed, there would be a drastic increase in the funds that would reach the beneficiaries. It is obvious that despite the efforts made by the Agency for continuous information and involvement of potential users, the actual and necessary information still does not reach them. The reasons for this can be found in the poor relation between the offer of these funds portrayed in the face of AFSARD and the demand reflected in the face of the target group, that is, the consulting sector. The consulting service is the link that connects farmers, companies and entrepreneurs from the rural areas with IPARD and monitors their cooperation in all circumstances. The involvement of the consulting service in establishing this cooperation is of paramount importance to both parties because farmers and companies are not able to run the process of collecting documentation and submitting the application themselves, and AFSARD has no authority to do so. Practically, in order to complete the request, assistance from experts, who understand the terms and conditions of applying, is needed. Unfortunately, potential applicants complain about

the lack and quality of the consulting services, their high price and the requirement that they are paid in advance, regardless of whether the project will be realized or not. In this sense, besides the private consulting companies that currently play a crucial role in the market, the state Agency for the Promotion of Agricultural Development should also play an important role.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that the potential beneficiaries are insufficiently active and engaged in finding ways to use the support programs, especially for the IPARD Programme [8] [9] [10]. They have to realize that the initiative originates only and only from them and no one else. No institution can be more interested in the work of farmers and their companies than themselves. The search for cheap or non-refundable funds to finance their businesses must be permanent and unconditional, and persistence enormous if they would like to have access to this type of funds. There must be an understanding that officials of state agencies can not enter every home "with a bag of money" and only distribute them, but certain administrative procedure should be followed that starts with showing a serious interest and ends with payment of funds.

An additional problem during the implementation of the IPARD Programme is also the long period for signing the financial support contract that lasts 3 months after the submission of the request (provided that it is complete and appropriate), as well as the long period for processing the payment request (3 months from the date of receipt of the request for payment). This term refers to the time required to make all the necessary administrative inspection, to provide the overall documentation for the request for payment, to perform on-site controls, to analyse the results of on-site controls, to calculate the amount to be paid and payment of funds to the end user. Although they are not part of the public administration, the activities of private consulting companies and development organizations that constantly and outstandingly try to promote the IPARD Programme through various forms of promotion, and to bring farmers and food companies closer to the advisory service and AFSARD, are welcome.

Below is presented the new IPARD 2 Programme (2014-2020) [4][5].

3. The new IPARD 2 Programme (2014-2020) and its realization in Macedonia

The initial observations on the process of preparation of the IPARD 2 Programme 2014-2020 was conducted under the authority of the IPARD Sector for IPA Rural Development IPARD, in cooperation with the IPARD Agency in Macedonia

and in constant consultation with all relevant stakeholders. The interested parties are government, regional, local and other public authorities, economic and social partners and all other appropriate authorities representing civil society, non-governmental organizations, including environmental organizations, representatives of minority groups, stakeholders and authorities responsible for promoting of equality between men and women.

For the IPARD 2 programme, EUR 30.7 million were foreseen, and 1.400 applications were submitted to the public announcement in April 2018. The first contracts from the new IPARD 2 Programme have already been signed. What was noted at the beginning in the realization is that the institutions should be able to prepare the necessary documentation, implement the procedures regularly, and enable the funds to reach the actual beneficiaries. It is not only important to get to the money, but it's much more important to use them properly. It is assumed that around EUR 60 million from the IPARD programme will not be used completely because farmers are not well informed and will not be able to find money for investments, as the banks do not accept village property as a mortgage. Most infrastructure development projects should be expected from the underdeveloped areas.

Namely, the IPARD 2 Programme is typical in the sectoral approach, unlike IPA 1, which had a project approach. This means that the government must prepare a sectoral document for the funding period, make a Roadmap for implementation or an Action Plan, and design an annual sectoral budget for many years, as co-financing must be provided in advance from the National Budget. What is also interesting from the already pre-programmed years is the fact that almost half of the funds will go to technical support (€13.3 million), and only €15 million for grants to farmers. According to the division of the funds by years, it can be seen that EC expected that the absorption capacity of the country will increase year by year.

Unfortunately, the case of Macedonia is a sad story. Therefore, the figures for the utilization of IPA 1 for farmers are catastrophic. The question arises: What is necessary to do to make greater use of the money from the IPARD 2 Programme. Other questions are also raised: Are there any changes to improve the utilization of the new IPARD 2?; Is the IPARD 2 Programme successfully implemented or will show the same negativities, anomalies, obstacles and limitations as well as the IPARD 1 Programme.

The following measures are provided for the IPARD 2 Programme [4][5]:

- **Priority Axis 1: Improving market efficiency and implementing Community standards.**

Potential key issues to be addressed are farm investments that are necessary for restructuring and upgrading the sector to Community standards and increasing competitiveness. The ultimate goal of the pre-accession assistance component V is to prepare the agricultural sector for accession to the EU and to upgrade agricultural holdings and food facilities to meet the EU standards for environment, hygiene, food safety and animal welfare is of great importance.

- **Priority Axis 2: Preparatory activities for introducing agro-environmental measures and LEADER approach.**

The implementation of Priority Axis 2 aims to launch preparatory activities for the implementation of agro-environmental measures and the "LEADER - approach". All of this is done in order to contribute to the sustainable development and development of public-private partnerships in rural areas, as well as the readiness of the agricultural sector and rural stakeholders to accept the relevant criteria and conditions.

- **Priority Axis 3: Development of the rural economy.**

Potential key issues to be addressed are: investment for the development and diversification of economic activities in rural areas that will help the rural population in building economic activities (on and off the agricultural holding), creating additional resources and employment opportunities in rural areas.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Negotiations on the new EU budget for the 2014-2020 period, which will certainly include IPA funds, are undergoing in the EC. It is certain that the guidelines will be much more focused on rural development than on agriculture, which means that the new IPARD 2 Programme 2014-2020 will be developed in that direction. For this reason, the competent authorities are left to start activities for detailed analysis of the agriculture and rural development sector and analysis of the results of the implementation of the IPARD 1 Programme (2007-2013). This will determine the strategic priorities and programs for which funds from the IPARD 2 Programme would be requested and all obstacles and constraints identified in IPARD 1 would be removed in a timely manner.

IPARD 2 is a program in which our country (the Agency) received accreditation in April 2017 and is still working around improvement, with training for all the participants who want to use the IPARD measures in order to enable better implementation [2]. However, account must be taken of the fact that the IPARD programme has a much more modest

financial "weight" compared to the national programs for financial support in agriculture and rural development.

The successful utilization of IPARD funds will be seen only with quality investments that will contribute to the introduction of new production methods and which will stimulate entrepreneurship [8] [10]. It will be a much more important development impulse than the quantitative scale of asset utilization.

Finally, it is summarized that the non-utilization of the funds from the IPARD programme is the result of the lack of awareness of the farmers what IPARD means, as well as the non-compliance of the program with the true and real picture in the field. The unused financial resources of the IPARD programme is a result of the poor structural organization in the Agency, starting with top management, human resources (education, salary, motivation), to insufficient care and engagement around the entire procedure in the Agency [2]. If it truly understands what the IPARD programme requires, but also gives, the farmer and all the applicants will not see it with negativity and mistrust, will not be deceived during the signing of the contract, and even after the signing [11] [12]. This is not only about the users of the measures but also the frauds by the suppliers themselves who offer products to the farmers from old repaired machinery, selling equipment with a production deadline of over 5 years where in the IPARD program it is not allowed. All of this indicates that the program itself is extensive, complex, strict, many documents are required, the rules and procedures must be followed, a long period of time for the approval of payment is awaited, each applicant invests his own funds, and the possibility of fraud and manipulation is reduced because the program itself is subject to audits and controls.

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