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Implementation of Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 in Slovenia and challenges for the future

Abstract: Slovenia implements its rural development policy through Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 (RDP). In this programming period is within four development axes implemented 21 measures in total amount of 1,177 millions €. The main objective of the paper is to analyse the implementation of rural development policy measures in Slovenia in period 2007-2010 and to give proposals which will increase the efficiency of implementation in the next programming period. An analysis of the implementation shows that there is great imbalance between the strategic goals and actual implementation of the programme. In the first four years of the implementation majority of the funds were allocated to the measures which pursuing economic and environmental components of sustainable development but at the level of implementation especially social and spatial issues are not adequately addressed.

Keywords: Rural development programme, Slovenia, sustainable agriculture

Slovenia is a small European country with above average share of rural areas. According to OECD classification 77% of the entire national territory is designed as rural areas and has around 40% of total population [5]. Despite this classification agriculture contributes relatively small share to Slovenia's GDP. Over the last fifteen years this share has declined from around 5% in 1990 to 1.1% in 2008[8]. Despite the small share in GDP agriculture has always played an important role in the development of rural areas.

Agriculture in Slovenia has a much wider role than just production of food. Apart from its production function, agriculture encompasses other functions such as the preservation of the rural landscape, the protection of the environment and contribution to the viability of rural areas.

In 1993 Slovenia adopted Strategy of Slovenian Agriculture where long-term objectives of agricultural policy were defined. The strategy emphasizes the eco-social role of agriculture and its main goals were stable production of cheap and quality food, the preservation of population density in the countryside, permanent increase of competitiveness and guaranteed parity income for agricultural producers [1]. These objectives have to be achieved so that agriculture plays its economic, spatial, environmental and social role. In the beginning of February 2011 was adopted Resolution on strategic guidelines for Slovenia's agriculture and food sectors by 2020. The resolution considers different roles that agriculture plays and defines its goals for achieving sustainability goals which includes:

- ensuring food safety with the stable production of safe, high quality food accessible to the consumer,
- increasing the competitiveness of the agriculture and food sectors,
- ensuring the sustainable use of production potential,
- providing public goods connected with agriculture and guaranteeing integrated and socially sustainable development of the countryside. [9]

We may conclude that strategic goals in the last eighteen years have not been substantially changed and multifunctional role of agriculture are even gaining on importance.

Material and method

The paper consists of three parts. General objectives of Slovene agricultural policy and the basic characteristics of rural areas in Slovenia are presented in the first part. Second part comprehends a qualitative analysis to determine to what extent individual measures pursuing economic, environmental, spatial and social aspects of integrated rural development. In the third part the implementation of the measures in Slovenian Rural development Programme 2007-2013 is analysed. The paper is based on desk research drawing from literature, legislation, programming documents and available research studies. All data

for analysis are gathered from the Slovenian legislation, Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food.

Results and discussions

Basic characteristics of rural areas in Slovenia

Klemencic et al. describe five characteristics which are important for sustainable rural development. They are: demography, economy, structure of agricultural holdings, environment and social aspect [3].

Slovenia has unfavourable demographic structure in rural areas. Out-migration of young people and large percentage of people above 65 years have negative impact on sustainable development. According to the results of the latest agricultural sample census the number of family members on agricultural holdings decreased from 323 thousands in the year 2000 to 258 thousands in the year 2007. Almost 60% of holders of family farms are older than 55 years.

There is strong connection between the development level of the region and the share of agriculture. Regional disparities are bigger in the regions with the higher share of agriculture. Although agriculture contributes less than 2% to Slovenia's GDP it is still an important economic activity, especially in the regions where there is the lack of other employment possibilities.

Unfavourable size structure and low level of specialization of agricultural production remains the greatest difficulties of agricultural sector in Slovenia. According to the preliminary results of the latest agricultural census (2010) there are around 75.000 agricultural holdings in Slovenia and the average size of agricultural holdings is 6.4 hectares of utilised agricultural area.

Slovenian farms are too small in a view to ensuring enough income for all family members. Almost 75% of farm holders earn additional income from off-farm sources. According to the data from Farm Structure Survey in 2007 about 4% of agricultural holdings were diversified in other economic activities. The prevailing supplementary activities on farms are machinery services, food and wood processing and rural tourism.

As already noticed above rural areas in Slovenia have important social function. There are over 6.000 settlements and only 55 of them are considered as urban [2]. Relatively unfavourable natural conditions result in dispersed settlement and large number of small settlements, since only 16 has more than 10.000 inhabitants. Slovenia is relatively sparsely populated. Almost 60 % of the total population lives in densely populated basins and valleys, while in hilly part prevails small settlements with mostly aging population. There is strong correlation between rural areas with the lowest population density and the size of the settlements.

Rural development Programme 2007-2013

Slovenia implements its rural development policy through Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 (RDP) and its primary purpose is promotion of sustainable rural development. In this programming period is within four development axis implemented 21 measures in total amount of 1.177 millions of €. The following table shows distribution between different axes of the programme [5].

Table 1. Financial plan by axes in the period 2007-2013

	Available 2007-2013	Share (%)
Axis 1:Improving the competitiveness of agricultural and forestry sector	402.023,2	34,2
Axis 2:Improving the environment asnd the countryside	592.890,8	50,4
Axis 3:Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of rural economy	136.308,0	11,6
Axis 4:LEADER	33.760,0	2,9
Technical assistance	12.003,6	1,0
Total	1.176.985,6	100,0

Source Rural Development Programme Slovenia 2007-2013

The planned division of the public funds between the different axes of the programme shows that 34 % is devoted for Axis 1 measures. Measures within Axis 2 will get more than half of available funds, while 11% is devoted for Axis 3 measures. Approximately 3% of available funds are devoted to the implementation of LEADER axis.

The measures and activities under Axis 1 are aimed at improving the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry sector. The range of measures includes farm modernisation, strengthening human potential and improving the quality of agricultural products [4].

Among the measures of the 1st axis are three measures which are pursuing mainly social component of sustainable development: ‘Training for persons engaged in agriculture and forestry’, ‘Supporting young farmers’ and ‘Early retirement for farmers’. These measures improve education structure and employability in agriculture and agri-food industry. In the programming period 2007-2013 are for those measures available 83 millions of EUR.

Second group of measures under this axis are aimed at upgrading and restructuring of agricultural holdings and pursuing predominantly economic component of sustainable development. Modernisation of agricultural holdings and Adding value to agricultural and forestry products are the most important measures within this group. For the measure Modernisation of agricultural holdings it is expected that 2.622 holdings will receive the public funds in the total amount over 103 millions of € during the whole programming period. The measure Adding value to agricultural and forestry products is aimed at the introduction of the new products and their efficient marketing, modernisa-

tion of production process and the improvement of environmental protection, hygiene and safety at work and income stabilisation in the field of processing and marketing of agricultural products. In the whole programming period will be within this measure supported 676 holdings which will receive over 93 millions of € of public funds.

Third group of measures under this axis are intended to improve the quality of agricultural and agri-food products with incentives for inclusion of producers in food quality schemes. For those measures are in the whole programming period intended over 24 millions of € of public funds.

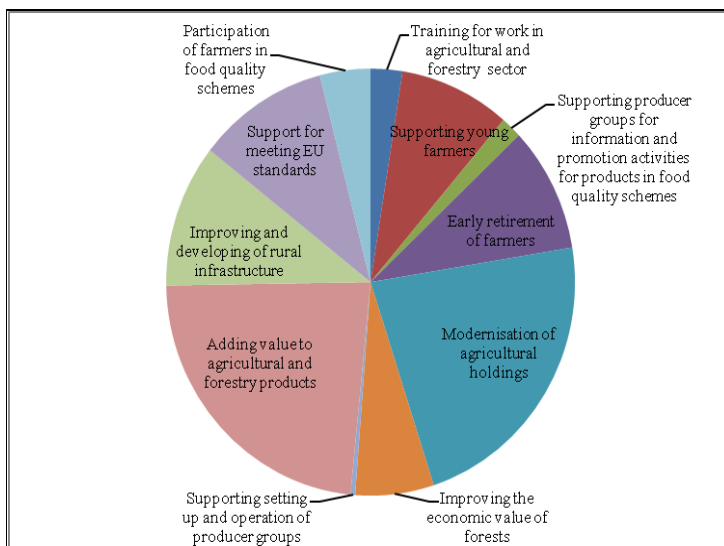


Figure 1. Measures under Axis 1 and the share of available funds in the period 2007-2013

Source Rural Development Programme Slovenia 2007-2013

Axis 2 is dedicated to improve the environment and the countryside. In the frame of this axis are implemented compensatory allowances for Less Favourable Areas (LFA) and agri-environmental payments.

Slovenia has unfavourable conditions for intensive agricultural production since there is around 85% of total national territory and 75% of total utilised agricultural area is considered as LFA areas. Slovenia has long tradition with the support of agricultural production in LFA. The support has been implemented in the different forms since mid 1980s. Before the reform of agricultural policy in 1998 more than half of the supports for less favoured areas were paid in a form of price allowances and only 40% were crop specific payments paid per head or per hectare. Since 2000, compensatory payments are entitled to all the farms that have land on the list of less-favoured areas. The main objective of LFA payments are prevention of agricultural land from abandonment, maintenance of cultural landscapes and

retention of settlement on the countryside. LFA payments in addition to environmental function substantially contribute to economic and social component of rural development. The implementation of LFA measures prevent the loss of the part of income because of the natural resources protection and contribute to the income stabilisation. Another economic consequence is the development of service activities based on sustainable development paradigm such as eco-tourism and conservation and improvement of rural heritage.

Mountain areas comprise the largest share of LFA. In the whole programming period are for mountain areas available 261 millions of € while is for other less favoured areas intended over 50 millions of €.

Second group of measures under 2nd axis are agri- environmental payments which are aimed at the implementation of the environmental friendly practices, promotion of agricultural production compliant to the consumer's demands as well as human health, assuring sustainable utilisation of natural resources and supporting the conservation of biodiversity and characteristics of the Slovenian landscape. The measures are divided into three main groups which define their characteristics and contents. In the first group are measures which reduce the negative impacts of agriculture on the environment (7 measures). Second group of measures is directed to the preservation of nature, biodiversity, soil fertility and traditional cultural landscape (8 measures). The third group of measures under agri.-environmental payments ensures maintenance of protected areas (6 measures).

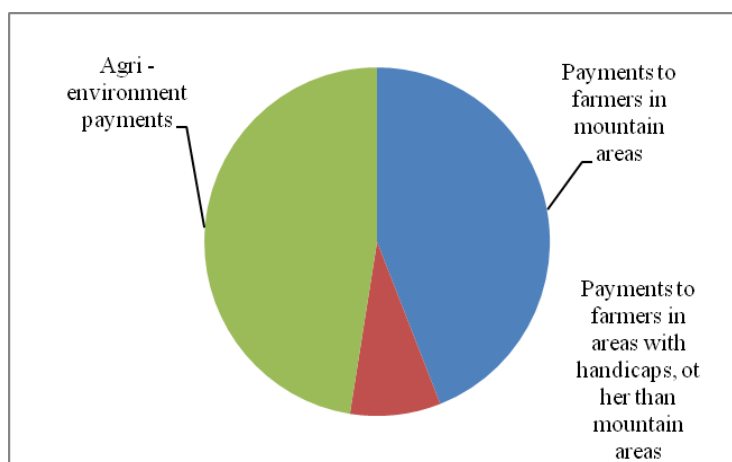


Figure 2. Measures under Axis 2 and the share of available funds in the period 2007-2013

Source: Rural Development Programme Slovenia 2007-2013

For agri environmental measures are in the whole programming period intended over 280 millions of € of public funds.

Measures under Axis 3 are dedicated to improve the quality of life in rural areas and promote the diversification of economic activities. Lack of other employment possibilities outside the agriculture and poor traffic infrastructure causes depopulation of rural areas. Especially in the remote region this could lead to the abandonment of agriculture production and overgrowing of agriculture land. Activities under 3rd Axis are divided into two groups. In the first group are two measures which promote the diversification of income and creation of jobs in rural areas. In the second group are measures which improve the quality of life in rural areas. They are aimed at improving living conditions in rural areas and to conservation and upgrading of rural heritage. In the whole programming period is for axis 3 measures intended over 136 millions of € of public funds. Most of the funds are devoted to investments for creation and development of micro enterprises. The development of micro enterprises is particularly important in remote areas with limited employment opportunities.

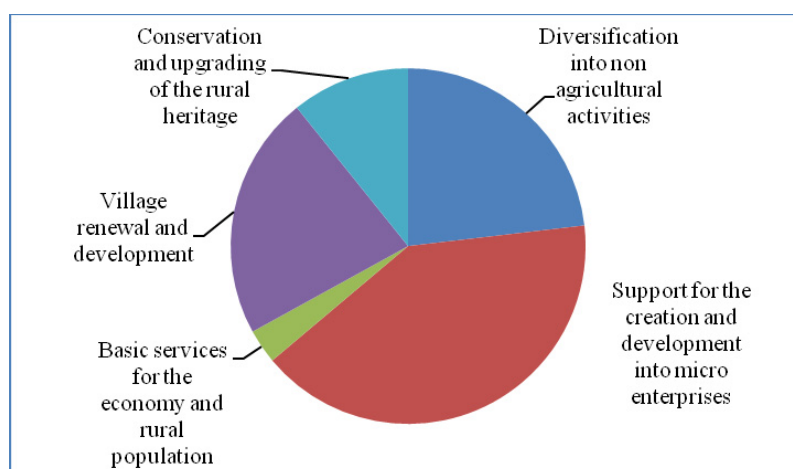


Figure 3. Measures under Axis 3 and the share of available funds in the period 2007-2013

Source: Rural Development Programme Slovenia 2007-2013

Under 4th axis of Rural Development Programme Slovenia implements local development strategies that are based on endogenous development potentials and active role of local communities.

The LEADER axis is important in terms of including wider sector of the population in the programme and promoting public-private partnerships in promoting rural development. Grants are set aside for building local partnerships, promoting cooperation and innovation, as well as improving local management. The main objective of the LEADER approach is integrated rural development on a local level. In this programming period Slovenia has 33 Local Action Groups, which covers 97% of rural areas and 94% of rural population.

According to the analysis of the priorities in National Strategy Plan and the measures in the Rural Development Programme 2007- 2013 it is possible to conclude that at least at strategic level all components of sustainable development are considered. The qualitative assessment of sustainable development, which covers all four axes of RDP 2007-2013, represents the level of individual aspects of the sustainability in the objectives of agri-policy measures.

With the XXX sign are assessed all the measures on the target or implementing level that directly affect the individual aspects of sustainability. When the measure partly affects the individual aspects of sustainability the sign XX is used. If the measure emerges from the indirect impact on the sustainability the symbol X is used. The results are presented in the Table 2.

Table 2. Qualitative evaluation of sustainable development at the level of development axis of RDP 2007-2013

Development axis	Aspects of sustainable development			
	Economic	Social	Environment	Spatial
Axis 1	XXX	XX	X	X
Axis 2	XX	X	XXX	XXX
Axis 3	XXX	XX	XX	XX
Axis 4	XX	XX	XXX	XX

Implementation of Rural development Programme 2007-2013

The implementation of the measures under 1st axis is conducted through public tenders. In the first four years of the implementation 44 public tenders for all 10 measures were published. Altogether 4.389 applications were approved in the total amount over 235 millions of € which represents 59% of available funds for the whole programming period while 39% were already disbursed. Number of applications and available, granted and already disbursed funds for the whole programming period for individual measures are presented in the Table1.

The most successful absorption of funds has been so far for the following measures: Improving economic value of forests, Supporting producer groups and Modernisation of agricultural holdings.

In the period 2007-2010 More than half of all applications were approved for the measure Modernisation of agricultural holdings where prevails purchase of agricultural machinery (68% of all applications) and investments in stables (22% of all applications).

The measure 'Modernisation of agricultural holdings' are conducted through public tenders. In order to improve efficiency the managing authority decided to prepare production oriented public tenders.

Table 3. Available funds for the Axis 1 and absorption in the period 2007-2010

	Number of applications		Public funds(000 EUR)		
	Submitted	Approved	Available	Granted	Disbursed
Training for work in agricultural and forestry sector	105	85	5.000	15	15
Supporting young farmers	1.460	1.274	34.300	25.675	25.670
Early retirement of farmers	145	133	25.160	32.514	6.543
Modernisation of agricultural holdings	3.040	1.664	112.388	65.617	38.841
Improving the economic value of forests	1.442	794	21.426	18.073	15.055
Adding value to agricultural and forestry products	485	240	98.655	42.242	24.430
Improving and developing of rural infrastructure	24	14	36.606	3.890	3.058
Support for meeting EU standards				41.824	41.814
Participation of farmers in food quality schemes	211	147	5.432	64	63
Supporting producer groups for information and promotion activities for products in food quality schemes	39	31	6.936	4.957	1.908
Supporting setting up and operation of producer groups	10	7	2.447	227	178
Axis 1 Total	6.961	4.389	348.350	235.099	157.574

Source: Rural Development Programme Slovenia 2007-2013 and Annual report about the situation in agriculture 2010

Table 4. The implementation of the measure 'Modernisation of agricultural holdings' in the period 2007-2010

	Number of applications		Public funds(000 EUR)		
	Submitted	Available	Available	Granted	Disbursed
All sectors	1.336	883	20.350	18.886	17.687
Hop growing	65	60	3.500	3.138	2.050
Horticulture	92	70	3.000	2.730	2.246
Natural disasters	57	49	2.000	1.410	748
Granivores	39	27	10.000	6.949	1.713
Permanent crops	138	104	8.000	6.839	4.888
Young farmers	306	274	24.000	10.737	5.319
Already started investments	164	145	8.000	7.634	2.510
Modernisation of agricultural holdings addressing new challenges	63	52	8.538	7.301	
Livestock and honey	780		13.000		
Crop production			12.000		
The commitments from Single Programming document 2004-2006			-		1.680
Total	3.040	1.664	112.388	65.617	38.841

Source: Annual report about the situation in agriculture 2010

The implementation of the measures under 1st Axis can be assessed as satisfactory. In the first four years were granted nearly 60% of available funds and almost 40% has been already paid.

The worst absorption was for the measure Training for work in agricultural and forestry sector. By the end of 2011 new public tender where the beneficiaries are educational institutions will be prepared. They will prepare training programs, which will be approved by Agency for Agricultural markets and rural development. After the completion of training educational institution will issue certificates to all participants and send application for payment to the Agency. Education programs will be free for all participants. This method will ensure more effective use of resources and provide quality training, which is the most important.

The beneficiaries for LFA and agri-environmental measures are granted at the basis of Decree on payments for measures of axis 2 from the Rural Development Plan for the Republic of Slovenia. They have to file the claims on an application form which is also used for submitting claims of first pillar of the CAP. It appears that LFA payments in a great extent pursuing all aspects of sustainable development. According to the data from the Agency for Agricultural Markets and Rural Development over 48 thousand agricultural holdings participated in the LFA scheme. Over 49 thousands of agricultural holdings with over 350 thousands of hectares of utilised agricultural area participated in the LFA scheme. So far were already spent more than 50% of available funds.

Table 5. Available funds and implementation for LFA measures in the period 2007-2010

	Number of approved contracts		Public funds (000 EUR)	
	Number of holdings	Area (ha)	Available	Disbursed 31.12.2010
Mountain areas	36.171	256.490	261.204	127.899
Other LFA areas	13.552	94.807	50.124	31.330
Total		351.297	311.328	159.229

Source: Annual report about the situation in agriculture 2010

Compensatory allowances for Less Favoured Areas considerably contribute to income of farmers in handicap areas. In connection with basic criteria of good farming practice, the measure contributes to preservation of agricultural land and therefore improves the environmental functions. The measure has a positive social impact on sustained presence of farmers with lower population density [6].

Approximately 36 millions of € has been spent on agri-environment schemes in 2010. Area included in the implementation of agri environment measures is slightly decreasing. In 2010, these measures affected 260 thousands hectares of agricultural land while in 2007 their extent was over 340 thousand hectares. In 2010, the most important measures were Sustainable rearing of domestic animals and Greening of arable land which covered 122 thousands of hectares.

Table 6. Disbursed funds for agri-environment measures in the period 2007-2010

	Disbursed funds (000 EUR)				
	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
Reduction of negative impacts of agriculture on the environment	27.308	27.908	27.502	26.424	109.142
Conservation of natural conditions, biodiversity, soil fertility and traditional cultural landscape	12.665	12.198	10.095	9.140	44.098
Maintenance of protection areas	532	493	340	351	1.715
Total	40.505	40.599	37.937	35.914	154.955

Source: Annual report about the situation in agriculture 2010

The absorption of agri environmental measures is still relatively good in spite of the decrease in the last years. The decrease is a result of finished 5 years contracts from the previous programming period and some farmers didn't conclude new contracts. By the end of the year 2010 were already spent 55% of available funds. Majority of the funds were devoted to the measures which reduce negative impacts of agriculture on the environment.

Agri-environmental measures definitely have a positive influence on the environment, whether by decreasing the negative impact of agriculture or through maintaining the current state. They are aimed at long-term improvement of natural resources in Slovenia. Agri-environmental measures have also positive impact on improvement of skills and qualifications for the implementation of sustainable agricultural practises [6].

The implementation of the measures under 3st axis is also conducted through public tenders. In the first four years of the implementation 17 public tenders for all 5 measures were published. Altogether 646 applications were approved in the total amount over 67 millions of € which represents almost half (49%) of available funds for the whole programming period.

Table 7. Available funds for the Axis 3 and absorption in the period 2007-2010

	Number of applications		Public funds(000 EUR)		
	Submitted	Approved	Available	Granted	Disbursed
Divesification into non agricultural activities	301	178	46.500	17.020	8.688
Support for the creation of micro enterprises	547	313	63.000	31.604	14.991
Basic services for the economy and rural population	3	1	4.269	1.382	-
Village renewal and development	225	113	43.000	15.741	3.078
Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage	164	41	22.847	1.627	818
Axis 3 Total	1.240	646	179.616	67.374	27.575

Source: Annual report about the situation in agriculture 2010

Throughout the programme period over 40% of available funds for the measure Diversification into non agricultural activities has been allocated. Almost half of all applications under 3rd axis were approved for the measure Support for the creation of micro enterprises where prevail investments in wood processing industry. The absorption of funds within this axis is relatively low due to the fact that all measures except the measure Diversification into non agricultural activities were carried out for the first time. Applications are often incomplete or poorly prepared and applicants have a lot of difficulties with administrative procedures and acquisition of the data from official records.

Most of all applications under this axis were approved for the measure Support for the creation of micro enterprises where prevail investments in rural tourism and wood processing industry.

The gap between submitted and approved applications was especially big in the measures which improve quality of life in rural areas. The main reasons for poor absorption are long administrative procedures, beneficiaries receive public funds after the completion of investment and also economic crisis took its part. Because of that the managing authority increased co financing rate up to 85%.

The implementation of the LEADER axis is carried out through Annual implementation plans which are prepared by Local action groups. By the end of 2010 678 projects in the total amount over 12 millions € were approved. Majority of the projects directly contribute to demographic development and education of local inhabitants.

Table 8. Available funds for the LEADER axis and absorption in the period 2007-2010

	Available (000 EUR)				Disbursed (000 EUR)		
	2008	2009	2010	Total	2009	2010	Total
Implementing local development strategies and inter-territorial and transnational cooperation	1.797	4.221	5.094	11.112	438	3.796	4.234
Running local action groups	514	1.140	1.561	3.215	525	690	1.215
Axis 4 Total	2.311	5.361	6.655	14.327	963	4.486	5.449

Source: Rural Development Programme Slovenia 2007-2013 and Annual report about the situation in agriculture 2010

Slovenia already exceeded planned number of projects for the whole programming period while it was planned that during the whole programming period 650 projects will be carried out. . By the end of the year 2010 over 40% of available funds were allocated. In most cases we are talking about small scale projects. The average value of projects is 15 thousands € and the average co-financing rate is 38%.

Conclusions

Based on the results of our assessment and allocated funds in the first four years of the implementation of the programme it may be concluded that at least on the strategic level sustainable development of rural areas represents one of the main Slovenian development orientations.

Modernisation of agricultural holdings remains the main measure for improving the competitiveness in agriculture. Majority of funds are allocated for purchase of agricultural mechanisation and less to investments in restructuring of agricultural holdings.

The majority of available funds are devoted to the promotion of environmentally friendly farming and improving economic efficiency and competitiveness of agricultural production. For the measures which in a great extent pursue social and spatial functions of sustainable development less than 20% of all funds are available.

Payments for less favoured areas are pursuing all aspects of sustainable development. The new system for delimitation the less favoured areas which assess individual agricultural holdings particularly emphasises spatial aspect of sustainable development.

Employment outside agriculture (industry, services) represents the main additional activity for the Slovene rural population. More efficient allocation of the workforce at agricultural holdings is the main objective of Slovenian agricultural policy. Because of that is the development of micro enterprises and diversification of activities on the countryside particularly important in remote areas with limited employment opportunities.

After initial problems Local Action Groups overcome administrative barriers and the implementation of local development strategies under LEADER axis can be estimated as very successful

More efforts should be given for enhancing economic diversification and social development of rural areas. We should consider options of transferring the Axis 3 and LEADER measures into cohesion policy or transition to regionalisation of policy measures which will increase the efficiency of the implementation.

Slovenia should consider an option of reduction the number of agri-environment measures. Farmers already have to produce in accordance with good agricultural practice and cross compliance. Especially the standards which are valid for integrated production should become more or less conventional.

Long term objective should be increasing of organic production and more funds should be devoted for information and promotion activities for products in food quality schemes.

Because of high level of fragmentation and large number of forest owners more emphasis must be given in grouping of forest owners. That will improve professional work in private forests, and contribute to optimal production and utilisation of forest potential.

At the end we may conclude that the effect of RDP implementation is not fully consistent with the sustainable development paradigm. An analysis of the implementation shows that there is great imbalance between the strategic goals and actual implementation of the programme. In the first four years of the implementation majority of the funds were allocated to the measures which pursuing economic and environmental components of sustainable development but at the level of implementation especially social and spatial issues are not adequately addressed.

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