



STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-2022

BALKAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

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Contents

Foreword	3
1. Socio-Economic Situation in Balkan region.....	4
2. Rural Development – a Country Situation Analysis	8
3. Organisation profile	11
3.1. BRDN History.....	11
3.2. SWOT Analysis.....	14
3.3. Organisational structure	17
4. Stakeholder analysis	20
5. Public relations.....	22
6. Strategic Tenets	24
6.1. Organisational vision, mission and values	24
6.2. Strategic priorities.....	26
1.1. Specific objectives, success indicators and results	27
2. Capacities and resources needed to implement the strategy	31
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Table of figures

Figure 1: Rural population (% of total).....	9
Figure 2: Integrative rural development model.....	11
Figure 3: SWOT analysis definition	15
Figure 4: SWOT analysis of the BRDN network.....	16
Figure 5: Proposed organizational structure of BRDN.....	19
Figure 6: Stakeholder mapping chart.....	20
Figure 7: Stakeholder involvement strategy.....	20

Foreword

The interest for starting the *Balkan Rural Development Network (BRDN)* was recognized need by the rural development networks in the Balkans to establish a platform, through which they could regularly exchange information, experience and knowledge, as well as network and cooperate together in order to increase their effectiveness in work with their constituents on national level.

Since its establishment on March 4th, 2011 in Skopje, the network has been guided by the ***Declaration on Networking*** and the ***Statute of the Balkan Rural Development Network***.

The environment in which the member-organisations function, the surroundings and challenges in which rural areas develop, as well as the overall social contemporary burning issues, such as poverty and economic prosperity, climate change, sustainable resource management, social inclusion and integration of vulnerable communities, are all common issues and factors that affect and determine the development pathway of BRDN. Therefore, it seems to be natural that the individual-driven interest of the member-organisations, to strengthen their own position on national level, by networking and cooperating with each other, has evolved into a common ***mission*** for *advocacy and networking, aiming to improve the livelihood and promote the diversity and potential of the rural communities from the Balkan region*, which is expressed in the BRDN Strategic Plan for the period 2018-2022.

Today and in the future, BRDN is to sustain as an asset for knowledge transfer, and promotion of innovation and best practice examples that would:

- improve the rural development potential of the member countries,
- support the preservation and enhancement of the ecosystems, and
- contribute to efficient utilisation of the natural resources and social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development of the Balkan rural areas,

by joint implementation of projects, advocacy, participation in policy and decision-making processes and empowerment of the rural communities.

Considering these common development drivers and challenges, the BRDN member-organisations, , have defined the BRDN Strategic Plan 2018-2022, which gives the organisational focus and shows to the constituents and stakeholders what they may expect from BRDN. It also strengthens the organisation's position in regards to participation in policy and decision-making, as an advocacy and lobbying tool for the rural communities, as well as media for promotion, visibility and communication of the common rural development issues, and exchange of experience and knowhow.

I expect that BRDN will prove to be a social asset for the Balkan rural communities, that will be able to utilise the opportunities and strengths of today, in order to annul the challenges of tomorrow and contribute to innovative and sustainable solutions to the current and future social and rural development issues.

BRDN plans and acts today, for better tomorrow of the Balkan rural communities!

BRDN members

1. Socio-Economic Situation in Balkan region

The Balkan Rural Development Network is established by the national rural development networks of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. 6 countries of the Western Balkans – namely the four official candidates (Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania and Serbia) and the two potential candidates (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo) – after Croatia’s adhesion in 2013, are on the track of a gradual integration in the EU. Still, this region is facing consistent threats to its EU and Euro-Atlantic integration. The global economic crisis, Brexit, Greece’s economic and financial collapse, ISIS, immigration, the growth of anti-European political forces, namely nationalist and centrifugal forces in the old and new EU member Countries, the situation in Ukraine... all of these factors threaten to revive “Eurosceptic”, populist factions in the Balkan Countries. The lack of socio-economic development and stalled EU progress has opened the way for nationalistic rhetoric and volatile change of political events.

Some of the key challenges for the time being are outlined here. ^[1]_[SEP] In October 2016 on parliament election day, Montenegro – that opened over two thirds of the negotiating chapters launched in the EU adhesion process, leaning towards NATO, that would make it the 29th member of the Alliance – underwent an attempted putsch on the part of political parties that oppose its joining the Alliance, supported, according to news gathered so far, by Russian secret services. In Macedonia, the unsolved denomination with Greece and stand-off between major ethnic population groups, has result in consistently tense political situation. Serbia, which opened the 12 chapters in its dialogue with the EU, is balancing between clear EU direction and involvement of Russia. This vocal neutral way is not providing solutions to the challenges of citizens, who are mostly burdened with the question of Kosovo’s independence in Serbia. The State of Kosovo has not yet been recognised by five EU Countries (Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, Spain) and by two countries in the region (Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina), and has not yet solved the problem of the ratification of the border Agreement with Montenegro, critical to the liberalization of visas for its own citizens. Kosovo’s and Serbia’s integration is closely linked to the outcome of their mutual relations and to bilateral dialogue. On its part, Bosnia-Herzegovina is marked by all the flaws of the 1995 Dayton Agreement, which led to the creation of two separate entities that in the course of the past twenty years were never fully integrated and whose fragile balance is under the yoke of Serbia’s threat of a referendum on the Country’s separation, that would divide it in two. Finally, Albania, the only NATO member Country in the region, seems to be experiencing a less turbulent phase compared to the others, despite a less than enviable economic situation. Moreover, the EU is encouraging all of these Countries – i.e. 15 million people – to cooperate in a number of cross-border programs, representing the first simultaneously-completed leg – albeit non official – leading to full European integration.

In terms of economic development, more of the state experience similar problems.

Serbia has a transitional economy largely dominated by market forces, but the state sector remains significant in certain areas. The economy relies on manufacturing and exports, driven largely by foreign investment. As of December 2017, Serbia had opened 12 negotiating chapters including one on foreign trade. Serbia's negotiations with the WTO are advanced, with the country's complete ban on the trade and cultivation of agricultural biotechnology products representing the primary remaining obstacle to accession. The government has shown progress implementing economic reforms, such as fiscal consolidation, privatization, and reducing public spending. Unemployment in Serbia, while relatively low (16% in 2017) compared with its Balkan neighbours, remains significantly above the European average. However, Serbia is slowly implementing structural economic reforms needed to ensure the country's long-term prosperity. Public debt had more than doubled between 2008 and 2015. Serbia's concerns about inflation and exchange-rate stability preclude the use of expansionary monetary policy. Major economic challenges ahead include: stagnant household incomes; the need for private sector job creation; structural reforms of state-owned companies; strategic public sector reforms; and the need for new foreign direct investment. Other serious longer-term challenges include an inefficient judicial system, high levels of corruption, and an aging population. Factors favourable to Serbia's economic growth include the economic reforms it is undergoing as part of its EU accession process and IMF agreement, its strategic location, a relatively inexpensive and skilled labour force, and free trade agreements with the EU, Russia, Turkey, and countries that are members of the Central European Free Trade Agreement.

Croatia experienced an abrupt slowdown in the economy in 2008 and is slowly recovering; economic growth was stagnant or negative in each year between 2009 and 2014, but has picked up since 2015. Difficult problems still remain including a high unemployment rate, uneven regional development, and a challenging investment climate. In 2016 Croatia demonstrated a commitment to improving the business climate, simplifying its tax code to stimulate growth from domestic consumption and foreign investment. Even before 2016, Croatia has worked to become a regional energy player and plans to import liquefied natural gas through a prospective import terminal and re-export it to European consumers. On 1 July 2013, Croatia joined the EU, following a decade-long application process. Croatia will be a member of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, with its currency effectively pegged to the euro, until it meets the criteria for joining the Economic and Monetary Union and adopts the euro as its currency. EU accession has increased pressure on the government to reduce Croatia's relatively high public debt and as a result Zagreb has cut spending and has raised additional revenues through more stringent tax collection and by raising the value-added tax. The government has also sought to accelerate privatization of non-strategic assets, with mixed success. Croatia's economic recovery is still somewhat fragile, though, as one of the country's largest companies almost collapsed in 2017.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a transitional economy with limited market reforms. The economy relies heavily on the export of metals, energy, textiles, and furniture as well as on remittances

and foreign aid. A highly decentralized government hampers economic policy coordination and reform, while excessive bureaucracy and a segmented market discourage foreign investment. The economy is among the least competitive in the region. In 2016, Bosnia began a three-year IMF loan program, but it has struggled to meet the economic reform benchmarks required to receive all funding instalments. Since 2013, Bosnia and Herzegovina has posted positive economic growth, though severe flooding hampered recovery in 2014. Bosnia and Herzegovina became a full member of the Central European Free Trade Agreement in September 2007. Bosnia and Herzegovina's private sector is growing slowly, but foreign investment dropped sharply after 2007 and remains low. High unemployment remains the most serious macroeconomic problem. Successful implementation of a value-added tax in 2006 provided a steady source of revenue for the government and helped rein in grey-market activity, though public perceptions of government corruption and misuse of taxpayer money has encouraged a large informal economy to persist. National-level statistics have improved over time, but a large share of economic activity remains unofficial and unrecorded. Bosnia and Herzegovina's top economic priorities are: acceleration of integration into the EU; strengthening the fiscal system; public administration reform; World Trade Organization membership; and securing economic growth by fostering a dynamic, competitive private sector.

Montenegro's economy is transitioning to a market system. As of 2015, around 90% of Montenegrin state-owned companies have been privatized, including 100% of banking, telecommunications, and oil distribution. Tourism, which accounts for roughly 20% of Montenegro's GDP, brings in three times as many visitors as Montenegro's total population every year. In addition to tourism, energy and agriculture are considered two distinct pillars of the economy. Montenegro uses the euro as its domestic currency, though it is not an official member of the euro zone. The government recognizes the need to remove impediments in order to remain competitive and open the economy to foreign investors. The biggest foreign investors in Montenegro are Russia, Italy, Cyprus, Denmark, Hungary and Serbia. Net foreign direct investment in 2016 reached \$755 million and investment per capita is one of the highest in Europe, due to a low corporate tax rate. Montenegro is currently planning major overhauls of its road and rail networks, and possible expansions of its air transportation system. In 2014, the Government of Montenegro selected two Chinese companies to construct a 41 km-long section of the country's highway system. Montenegro has recently explored further economic cooperation with China. The Montenegrin Government recently said it would increase the non-tourism rate to 21% as of January 2018, with the goal of reducing its public debt.

Macedonia low tax rates and free economic zones have helped to attract foreign investment, which is still low relative to the rest of Europe. Corruption and weak rule of law remain significant problems. Some businesses complain of opaque regulations and unequal enforcement of the law.

Macedonia's economy is closely linked to Europe as a customer for exports and source of investment, and has suffered as a result of prolonged weakness in the euro zone. Unemployment has remained consistently high at about 23%, but may be overstated based on

the existence of an extensive grey market, estimated to be between 20% and 45% of GDP, which is not captured by official statistics. Macedonia is working to build a country-wide natural gas pipeline and distribution network. Currently, Macedonia receives its small natural gas supplies from Russia via Bulgaria. In 2016, Macedonia signed a memorandum of understanding with Greece to build an interconnector that could connect to the Trans Adriatic Pipeline that will traverse the region once complete, or to an LNG import terminal in Greece. Macedonia maintained macroeconomic stability through the global financial crisis by conducting prudent monetary policy, which keeps the domestic currency pegged to the euro, and inflation at a low level. However, in the last two years, the internal political crisis has hampered economic performance, with GDP growth slowing in 2016 and 2017, and both domestic private and public investments declining. Fiscal policies were lax, with unproductive public expenditures, including subsidies and pension increases, and rising guarantees for the debt of state owned enterprises, and fiscal targets were consistently missed. In 2017, public debt stabilized at about 47% of GDP, still relatively low compared to its Western Balkan neighbours and the rest of Europe.

Kosovo's economy has shown progress in transitioning to a market-based system and maintaining macroeconomic stability, but it is still highly dependent on the international community and the diaspora for financial and technical assistance. Remittances from the diaspora - located mainly in Germany, Switzerland, and the Nordic countries - are estimated to account for about 17% of GDP and international donor assistance accounts for approximately 10% of GDP. With international assistance, Kosovo has been able to privatize a majority of its state-owned enterprises. Kosovo's citizens are the second poorest in Europe, after Moldova, with a per capita GDP (PPP) of \$10,400 in 2017. An unemployment rate of 33%, and a youth unemployment rate near 60%, in a country where the average age is 26, encourages emigration and fuels a significant informal, unreported economy. Emigration remains challenging, however, because Kosovo lacks visa-free travel to the EU most of Kosovo's population lives in rural towns outside of the capital, Pristina. Inefficient, near-subsistence farming is common - the result of small plots, limited mechanization, and a lack of technical expertise. High levels of corruption, little contract enforcement, and unreliable electricity supply have discouraged potential investors. Kosovo's tie to the euro has helped keep core inflation low. In 2016, Kosovo implemented the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) negotiations with the EU, focused on trade liberalization. While Kosovo's economy continued to make progress, it needs further reform and investment to enable the level of growth required to reduce unemployment and raise living standards in a meaningful way.

Since 2014, Albania's economy has steadily improved and economic growth reached 3.8% in 2017. However, close trade, remittance, and banking sector ties with Greece and Italy make Albania vulnerable to spill over effects of possible debt crises and weak growth in the euro zone.

Remittances, a significant catalyst for economic growth, declined from 12-15% of GDP before the 2008 financial crisis to 5.8% of GDP in 2015, mostly from Albanians residing in Greece and Italy. The agricultural sector, which accounts for more than 40% of employment but less than

one quarter of GDP, is limited primarily to small family operations and subsistence farming, because of a lack of modern equipment, unclear property rights, and the prevalence of small, inefficient plots of land. Complex tax codes and licensing requirements, a weak judicial system, endemic corruption, poor enforcement of contracts and property issues, and antiquated infrastructure contribute to Albania's poor business environment making attracting foreign investment difficult. The Albanian Government has strengthened tax collection amid moderate public wage and pension increases in an effort to reduce its budget deficit. The country continues to face high public debt, exceeding its former statutory limit of 60% of GDP in 2013 and reaching 72% in 2016¹.

2. Rural Development – a Country Situation Analysis

For BRDN member countries, regardless of the progress stage in approximation to the European Union, rural development and agriculture (as major part of rural development) are important priorities in the accession process. This is so even for Croatia, which as member country is a step-ahead, being able to utilise the support measures designed with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

The graphic below shows the percent of the total population of the country that lives in rural areas (according to the World Bank Data). Country data for Kosovo is not available, but the EC study on *Empowering Rural stakeholders in the Western Balkans* states that “of Kosovo’s population, over 60% live in rural areas”².

¹ CIA Factbook. (2018). <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>. Accessed on February 03rd 2018

² European Commission. (2014). Summary. In M. Dower, *Empowering rural stakeholders in the Western Balkans* (p. 8). Brussels: European Commission.

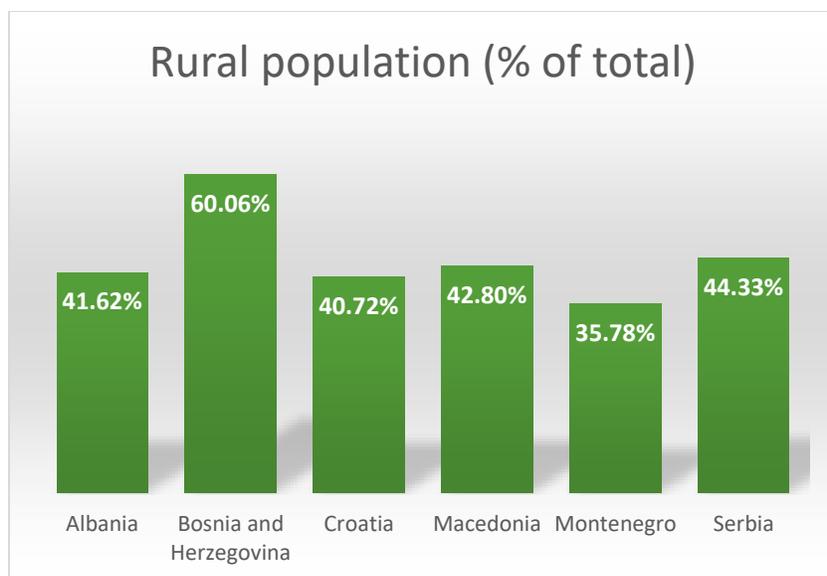


Figure 1: Rural population (% of total)³

Even though the average of the rural population in the target region of BRDN is around 45%, still the official country records show that unemployment among rural population is higher than the country average, which is due to the limited opportunities for entrepreneurial and business development. This is affected by the limited access to funding resources (banks and other financial institution are more reluctant to give loans in rural areas), the underdevelopment of the infrastructure and access to the rural areas, as well as the weak access to public institutions. Another common characteristic of the rural population in the BRDN countries is that the level of education is primary or secondary (less people are university graduates), which in combination with the above hindrances leaves agriculture as major occupational choice and limits the employability potential and possibilities for the rural population. Being employed in agriculture, with limited awareness of diversification, and entrepreneurial knowhow, the poverty rate among rural population is above the country average in all of the BRDN countries. All these are factors that limit the “attractiveness” of life in rural areas, so another common characteristic is the more frequent migration from rural to urban areas among young people, which consequently leads to unfavourable age structure (with the exception of Kosovo), among the rural population in the BRDN countries.

The research study on ***Agribusiness and Agro-Industrial Strategies, Policies and Priorities for Achieving Higher Competitiveness, Employability and Sustainability in the Western Balkans Region*** summarizes the following common issues that affect rural development in the Western Balkan countries:

- *Low competitiveness of economic activities in rural areas (agriculture, forestry, fishery, food sector, rural tourism, service industry);*

³ Source: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?locations=AL-BA-HR-XK-MK-ME-RS&view=chart>

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- *Underdeveloped basic municipal and basic infrastructure in rural areas;*
 - *Underdeveloped access of rural population and economic subjects placed in rural areas to public institutions and goods (telecommunications, public transport, educational and information systems, health - care);*
 - *Depopulation of rural areas;*
 - *Unfavourable age and gender structure of rural population (18,9% of population in rural areas is older than 60 – women, and 65 years – men);*
 - *Low level of education of rural population;*
 - *Weak activity or non – existence of regional and local institutions competent for rural development; and*
 - *Inadequate coordination of programs and activities directed towards different economic activities in rural areas⁴.*
-

In order to be able, the national rural development networks, that are member-organisations of BRDN, recognise the need to network, cooperate and advocate together in order to change the overall environment and development climate for the rural areas, and consequently the rural population of the Balkans.

Rural development is a complex issue that tackles multi-level questions, such as:

- *Policy development and implementation*, that would enable sustainable growth and equal development and integration opportunities for the rural population – rural organisations should have a *sit-at-the table* in the process in order to ensure the flow of communication and linkage in the *bottom-up* and *top-down* approach, as this is a two-way process, where CSOs role is of crucial importance;
- *Grassroots level work and awareness raising* on:
 - Value chain integration,
 - Rural diversification,

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Grozdanić, R. (2013). Executive Summary. In R. Grozdanić, *Agribusiness and Agro-Industrial Strategies, Policies and Priorities for Achieving Higher Competitiveness, Employability and Sustainability in the Western Balkans Region* (p. 24). Belgrade: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

- Food safety, and
- Adaptation to climate change;
- *Exchange of experience and coordination with the academic community* on capacity development of the rural population and enhancement of the entrepreneurial and business development potential;
- *Advocacy, networking and lobbying* for upgrade of the access to extension and financial services, public good and services, and improved infrastructural facilities that would improve the living conditions in the rural areas and decrease the migration of young and educated people to the urban areas or abroad.

Therefore, when speaking about rural development, one should plan and act in integrative method, which is summarised in the figure below.

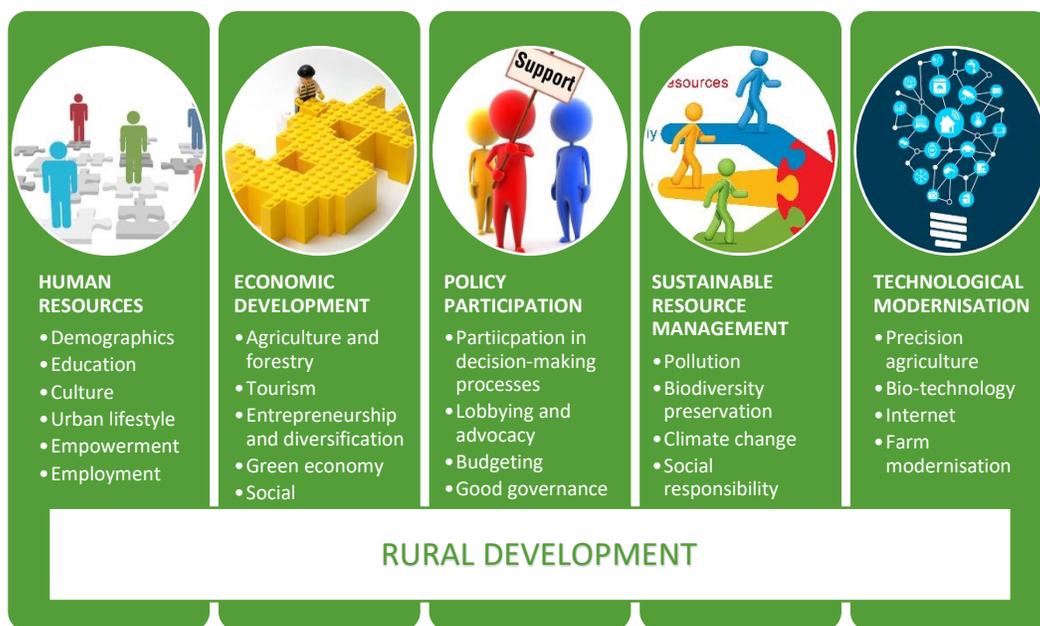


Figure 2: Integrative rural development model

All these factors that affect and are part of the complex nature of the issue on rural development are being recognised by the BRDN-member organisations, and are going to be in the focus of the organisation's work for the planning period 2018-2022. With this, the aim is to contribute to facilitate the positive climate change in which the national rural development organisations will act, in order to deliver specific results for their constituents' and enhance the overall rural development potential of the countries, in a sustainable and effective manner.

3. Organisation profile

3.1. BRDN History

The Balkan Rural Development Network (BRDN) was established on March 04, 2011 in Skopje, by the Rural Development Network of the Republic of Serbia, Rural Development Network of

the Republic of Macedonia and Rural Development Network of the Republic of Montenegro, based on the *Declaration of Networking* signed at the Regional Participatory Planning Workshop on “Establishment of rural development networks in SEE countries”. The need for establishing the organisation was recognised by the constituent organisations, and was supported by the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South Eastern Europe.

The existing Statute of BRDN was developed and signed by the original constituent members, and was latter accepted by the rest of the member organisations of BRDN:

- Albanian Network for Rural Development – ANRD;
- Rural development network in Bosnia and Herzegovina – MRRBiH;
- Croatian network for rural development – HMRR;
- Network of organizations for rural development of Kosovo – NORDK.

Ever since its establishment, BRDN acts as an informal association of a civil society rural development networks. The member organisations are all established in the SEE region, and are themselves member organisations, which represent national rural communities’ interests and rights, and act for rural development. The BRDN member organisations represent more than 200 rural development associations from the region, and advocate for the interests of more than 9 million rural people from the represented countries. The characteristics and assets each of the BRDN members bring-into the network are summarised as follows:

- *Albanian Network for Rural Development (ANRD)* is a non-governmental organization established in December 2015. It has emerged as a need to ensure effective policymaking on rural development. Thus, ANRD is a mechanism to support and implement policies of rural development in Albania in the light of the principles that guide the country’s integration into the European Union. ANRD mission is to promote community-led rural development through advocacy and initiatives on policy development and implementation regarding sustainable rural development, with the aim of improving the quality of life of rural communities. The Network aims to promote and support community-oriented and bottom-up approaches towards social and economic development of rural areas and represents 22 member organisations.
- *The Rural development network in Bosnia and Herzegovina (MRRBiH)* is a member-organisation which is active in the area of rural development since October 2014. The organisation represents the interests of rural communities from the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, for which it networks with national, regional and international organisations and academic community, and implements projects that support the social and economic empowerment and create equal development opportunities for the local population in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

- *The Croatian network for rural development (HMRR)* is a member-organisation that supports the development of the rural communities in the Republic of Croatia, advocates for wide stakeholder representation in the processes of policy and decision-making in regards to rural development, and cooperates and exchanges experience and knowhow with similar organisations, with the aim to enhance the environment and prospects for rural development in the country. To achieve this, HMRR works on education and research, supporting of participative democracy in the rural areas, improvement of the effectiveness of the public policies, local community development, public information and national and international cooperation, since its establishment in 2008.
- *The Network of organizations for rural development of Kosovo (NORDK)* was established in 2013 in Kosovo, and is a national network that promotes and supports the development of relationships and partnership between different sectors of the rural community in Kosovo through advocacy activities which contribute to sustainable rural development. The organization cooperates with various organizations of the same profile, exchanges ideas, information and experiences, and promotes and organises activities in the field of rural development. It also works for better conditions for sustainable development of rural areas, and improve the quality of life for the rural population of the country.
- *The Rural Development Network of the Republic of Macedonia (RDN)* is a national umbrella organisation that was established in December 2010, and currently represents more than 70 member-associations. The organisation cooperates and works with similar international organisations and bodies, for sharing information, ideas, experience, knowhow that would support the rural development of the country. It contributes to development of the rural communities by following the principles of sustainable rural development, community and bottom-up support, development of local partnerships, implementation of integrative actions and strengthening of the multi-sector cooperation for enhancing the quality of life of the rural population in the Republic of Macedonia.
- *The Rural Development Network of the Republic of Montenegro* was established in June 2012 and represents 23 member organisations. The organisation cooperates with similar member organisations from the region and the European Union and works on implementation of projects that support and strengthen the rural development of Montenegro. The organisation's members are active in lobbying and advocacy activities, and participate in various national working groups that are concerned with agricultural and rural development. The aim of the network is to contribute to overall improvement of the living conditions and development perspectives in the rural areas.
- *The Rural Development Network of the Republic of Serbia* is a member organisation, representing 15 rural associations from the entire territory of the Republic of Serbia. The organisation provides support to stakeholders in rural development, through the identification, initiation, promotion and networking with various stakeholders, and so contributes to strengthening of the development and improvement of the quality of life of

the rural communities. To achieve this, the organisation cooperates and networks with similar international organisations, organises and implements training for rural communities and other stakeholders who have power and influence in rural development, and participates in the national and local policy and decision-making processes, that are concerned with the enhancement of the socio-economic circumstances of living of the rural communities.

The *guiding principles* of BRDN that unite the member-organisations in common mission for integrative rural development in the Balkans region, are:

- Enhancement of dialogue, confidence and cooperation among the members;
- Sustainable development based on preserving and development of the natural resources and living environment;
- Support diversity of the rural areas;
- Bottom-up approach and empowerment of the local rural communities;
- Networking, cooperation, exchange of best practices, experience and knowhow;
- Advocacy, wide stakeholder involvement and cooperation with the academic community;
- Joint implementation of projects;
- Visibility, transparency and work accountability.

The *aims* of BRDN, as defined with the current Statute are:

- To connect and align different profile organisations for exchange of opinions, information and experiences, as well as implement activities for promotion, organisation and assistance in the sphere of rural development;
- Promote rural communities' development and connect the different sectors that function in those communities;
- Work on promotion of the conditions and consistent development of the rural areas and improvement of the quality of life.

By following the guiding work principles, and working towards fulfilment of the organisation's aims, BRDN will support effective utilisation of the natural and human capital and will contribute to sustainable growth and development of the rural areas. By doing so, it will back-up the empowerment of the rural communities, their participation in the policy and decision-making processes, that will in the long run improve the social well-being of the rural people from the Balkan region.

3.2. SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis represents a structured analysis method that evaluates the internal organisation's strengths and weaknesses, and examines the external environment's

opportunities and threats that may affect the organisation's possibilities for growth and development, in a given period of time. It is an acronym for:



Figure 3: SWOT analysis definition

The BRDN SWOT analysis, as defined by its members during the strategic planning workshop, is as given in the figure 4.

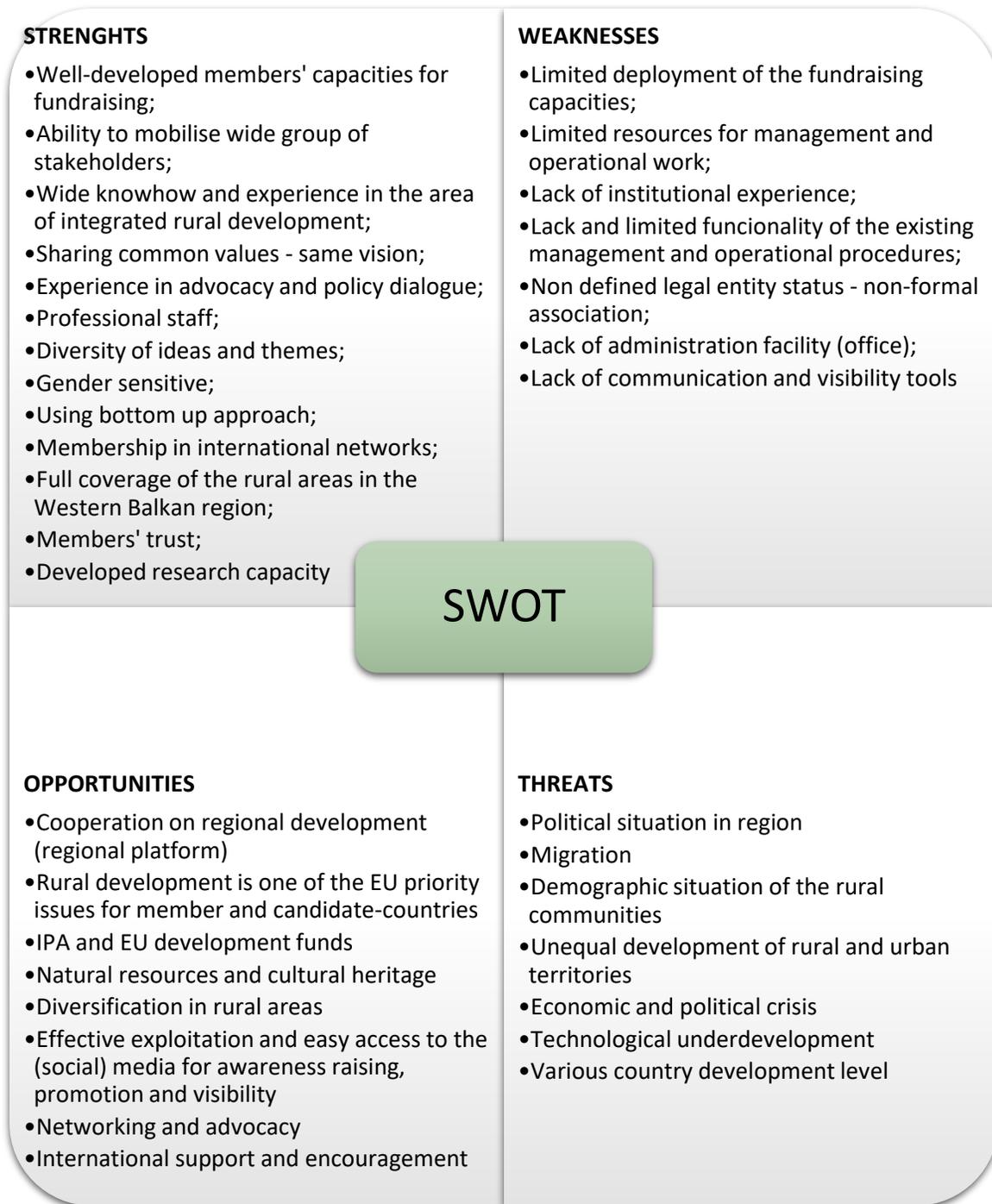


Figure 4: SWOT analysis of the BRDN network

As presented, the members recognised and offered in function their personal organisations' strengths as assets and *strengths* of BRDN. The major resources the members bring into the organisation are their fundraising, research and networking capacities and experience, as well as the knowhow in advocacy, participation in policy and decision-making and mobilisation of wide range of stakeholders. All these, combined with the mutual trust among the member

organisations are internal strengths that are important for the future organisational development and growth, and are adequately reflected in the 2018-2022 Strategy.

Major *weaknesses* are that the organisation's status is not yet formalised and the existing Statute is outgrown by the members and therefore needs further amendments. Additionally, the organisation lacks functional working procedures and operational structure that will enable it to put in function more effectively the management and fundraising experience and knowhow of the member organisations, and so utilise the existing IPA and other regional and EU funding opportunities that would facilitate the process of integrated rural development in the Balkan region.

Major *opportunity* is the fact that the rural development is among the top priority issues of EU, and there are many funds that could support BRDN to mitigate its weaknesses and further develop its strengths, in order to grow into sustainable common platform and main support mechanisms of the national rural development organisations in the process of advocacy and decision-making in regards to rural policy development.

The *threats* that could affect the work of BRDN currently and in the future, but which could be alleviated with utilisation of the opportunities and the existing organisational strengths are the fragile political situation in the Balkans, the unequal country development level and depopulation of the rural areas.

3.3. Organisational structure

The member organizations of BRDN discussed the need for formalization of the network and the possible organizational structure and roles, that will guarantee the functionality and effectiveness of the network in the future.

As major concerns that were pointed out at the meeting were:

- Organizational and resource capacities of the BRDN constituents to undertake and withstand certain responsibilities that will guarantee the effective and diligent functionality of the network;
- Form of registration and country of registration;
- Organizational structure and roles and responsibilities of the member-organizations;
- Statute, internal management and organizational procedures that would guarantee the transparency, accountability, as well as effectiveness and efficiency of BRDN work;
- Fundraising and organizational sustainability.

Having plenary discussion on all these common concerns and issues of interest, the BRDN member organizations agreed upon the following:

1. The organization will divide its management and its executive power (separate role and function of the Management Board from the Executive office), which should be adequately reflected in the amended Statute of the organisation;
2. The Presidency of the management board will rotate among member organizations – the period to be determined with the Statute;
3. The Executive office will be represented and coordinated through Secretariat, which will have fixed (stationary) position, and professional work teams, that will function within the Secretariat
 - 3.1. *Secretariat* - The Secretariat will coordinate the operational/executive work and processes of the organization and will govern the professional teams that will function within it.
 - 3.2. *Professional teams* – There will be at least 4 professional teams, covering each of the strategic priorities of BRDN. The professional teams will be comprised of delegated members from the BRDN member organizations or their constituents. The work of the professional teams will be coordinated through the Secretariat. Professional teams could be organized depending on the needs and circumstances, and apart from the regular members, as associate could be engaged representatives of Universities or other stakeholder groups.
 - 3.3. *Volunteers* – Volunteers can help drive the growth of BRDN as they represent valuable human resource. The Secretariat will provide support to each member organization on how to structure the Volunteering Programme. Professional teams will be responsible for incorporating volunteers in their work and define exchange of volunteers in different member organization.
4. The possibilities and opportunities for registration of BRDN should be explored and shared with the BRDN members
5. The strategic document should be followed by development of:
 - 5.1. Enhanced BRDN statute
 - 5.2. Internal operational procedures
 - 5.3. Communication and visibility strategy
 - 5.4. Advocacy strategy

Following the discussion and conclusions of the participants, the proposed BRDN organizational structure is as given in figure 5.

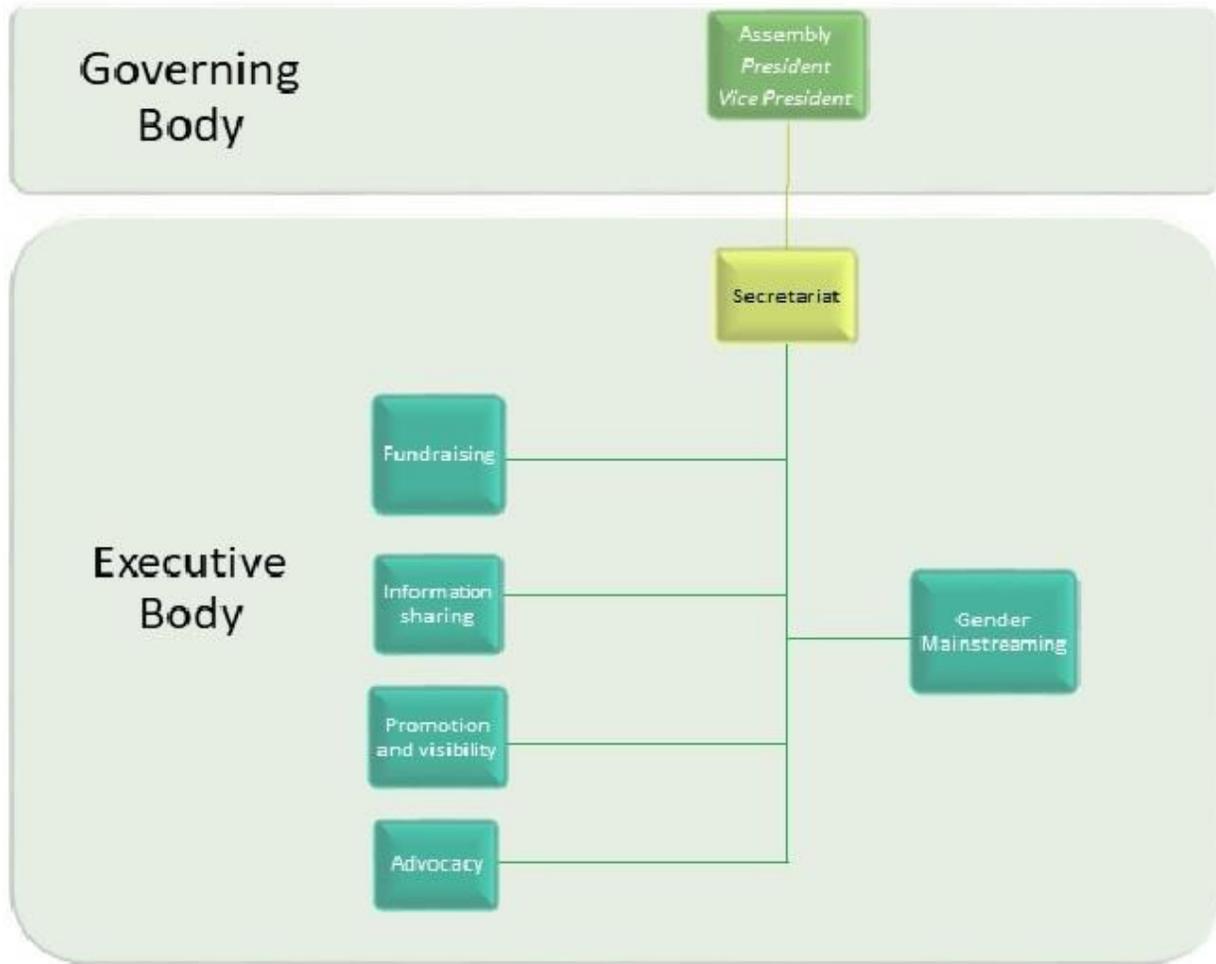


Figure 5: Proposed organizational structure of BRDN

The organisational structure of BRDN, as presented, is to be reflected in the amendments of the Statute that should be implemented following the adoption of the Strategic Plan 2018-2022, and be supported by adequate working and management procedure that would enable quality and effective functioning of BRDN in the Strategy implementation period.

4. Stakeholder analysis

The stakeholders' analysis of the Balkan Rural Development Network (BRDN) was prepared so to anticipate the **interest** a specific stakeholder has in the organization and its success, while considering the **power** (influence) level the stakeholder could have over the success and work of the organization (Figure 6 – Stakeholder mapping chart).

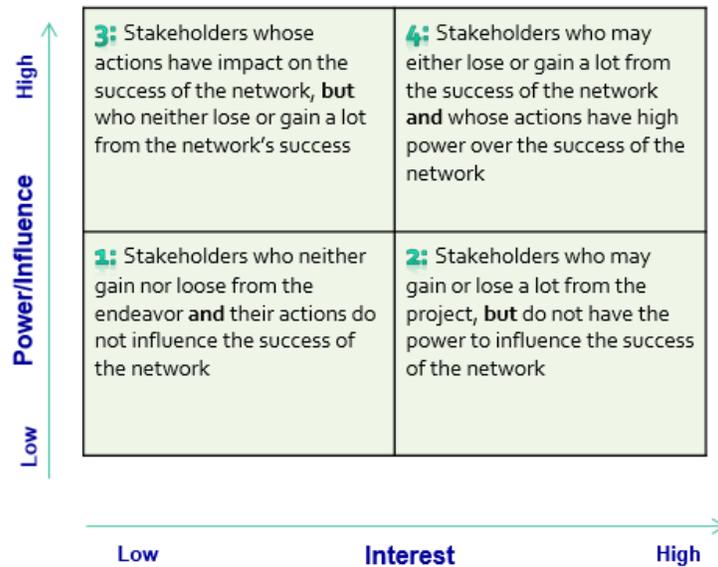


Figure 6: Stakeholder mapping chart

Depending on the anticipated interest and power the stakeholder has over the organization, specific stakeholder involvement strategy should be applied (Figure 7).

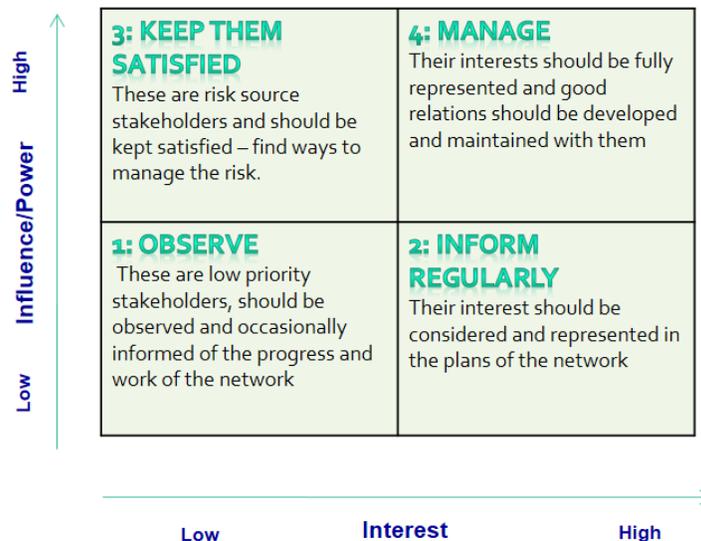


Figure 7: Stakeholder involvement strategy

The stakeholders, as categorized by the BRDN members according to the power and interest they have (are expected to have) over the Network, and the stakeholder involvement strategy

that should be applied when communicating and working with them, are as given in the table below:

Stakeholder	Interest	Power	Stakeholder Involvement Strategy
	(S – small; M – medium; H – high)	(S – small; M – medium; H – high)	O – Observe; I – Inform regularly; S - Keep them satisfied; M - Manage
Embassies	L	M	S
Dg Near	L	H	S
DG Regio	L	H	S
DG Agri	M	H	S
Large scale business organizations	M	H	S
Universities, Institutes	M	L	O/I
Chambers	M	L	O/I
Ministries, agencies	M	M	O/I
Media and social media	M	H	S/M
We Effect	H	H	H
GIZ, Sida	M	H	M
Chambers of commerce	M	H	M
Municipalities	H	L	I
Community structures	H	L	I
Grassroots CSOs	H	M	I
USAID, FAO, UN and donor organisations	H	H	M
Cooperatives	H	H	M
SMEs	H	L	I
Environmental CSOs and individualists	H	L	I
SWG	H	M	I
Consultants (individuals and companies)	H	H	M

Regional development agencies	H	H	M
Women economic clusters and similar grass-root CSOs	H	M	I
National parks and agencies for management of protected areas	H	M	I/M
Tourist operators	H	M	M
Consumer organizations	H	H	M
Advisory services	H	M	M
Farmer organizations	H	H	M
LAG ad CLLD initiatives	H	H	M
EU CSO networks (PREPARE, ELARD, ENRD...)	H	H	M
BRDN member organizations and their constituents	H	H	M

Table 1: BRDN stakeholder mapping according to interest and power

Considering the list of stakeholders (which is non-conclusive), it is evident that BRDN has a wide range of stakeholders, varying from policy and decision-makers at local and national level, donor-organisations and similar networks, to academic community, extension services, grassroots organisations and rural communities themselves. All these are potential associates, supporters and project partners through which the network could deliver its planned objectives and results, and which should be managed and involved in the organisation’s work in accordance to the project or assignment it implements. Below is provided

5. Public relations

Member organizations have different level of recognition in the member countries. BRDN will aim to increase its recognition but also help member organizations to increase their visibility. In order to do so, BRDN will have to actively engage media. Secretariat of BRDN will have the main coordinating role for PR, adopting and mainstreaming communication and visibility guidelines, to help support the activities of BRDN.

The public relations will be mainstreamed in all strategic priorities, and will particularly support the attainment of strategic priority 4. Promotion, visibility and communication. However, due to anticipated greater role in advocacy and lobbying, the wider public must be more informed on the work of BRDN and its members in order to represent a credible partner and stakeholder in rural development in the Balkan region. Moreover, such transparency and active

engagement with the public may support BRDN's efforts for financial sustainability as it endeavours to generate donor support.

BRDN will also have to involve both traditional and digital media as tools for public relations (including but not withstanding: informative editions, promotion at events, press-conferences and meeting with media, Facebook and Twitter, Instagram, etc.). BRDN will consider to public its network information, depending on financial opportunities, twice a year and each edition should focus on a particular theme. Online ad-hock publications shall include various news, Annual Reports, Fact Sheets and a range of other resources. The communication and visibility plan will define the scope and methods for BRDN public relations.

6. Strategic Tenets

6.1. Organisational vision, mission and values



VISION

- Rural areas in the Balkans are prosperous and sustainable, offering fair economic opportunities and livelihood



MISSION

- BRDN is voice of rural communities by advocating for inclusive rural development policies and supporting development activities, through regional cooperation and strengthening the national rural development networks.

VALUES

- Equal opportunities
- Networking, participation and integration
- Diversity
- Enthusiasm
- Transparency and accountability
- Professionalism
- Continuous learning
- Result orientation

1. Equal opportunities – BRDN will strive for socio-economic opportunities in rural areas in the Balkan region

2. Networking, participation and integration – BRDN aims to work with all rural stakeholders, integrate different policy and programme solutions with aim to attain rural development and enable opportunities for BRDN constituents to shape and improve services provided by RDN.

4. Diversity – Inclusion of various groups and stakeholder initiatives in BRDN programmes will offer power and strength that brings us together

5. Enthusiasm – Instigating and supporting initiatives of BRDN members, acting in constructive and appreciative manner

6. Transparency and accountability - Integrity towards our constituents and stakeholders by ensuring that the performance of BRDN is measured against the strategic objectives which are available to interested parties

7. Professionalism — Building and maintaining a highly skilled, diverse, and compassionate staff and associates focused on quality, excellence and good rapport with internal and external stakeholders

8. Continuous learning – Offering opportunities for professional growth of staff and stakeholders
9. Results Orientation — Measuring performance and making management decisions to direct resources to where they are used most effectively.

6.2. Strategic priorities

After thorough analysis of the organisational strengths and weaknesses, in comparison to the external working environment's opportunities and threats, and considering the past performance and future perspectives for integrative rural development of the Balkan rural areas, as well as the power and interest of the organisation's stakeholders, the BRDN members defined four priority action areas for strategy implementation period 2018-2022. The strategic priority action areas in which BRDN will develop itself and will work for the best interest of its constituents are:

1. Organisational development

2. Exchange of experience, knowhow and best practices

3. Advocacy and lobbying

4. Promotion, visibility and communication

- ❖ Gender mainstreaming within BRDN as cross cutting strategic priority will apply on each of the BRDN strategic priorities.

Under each of these areas, BRDN will act in accordance with its defined values, and towards achieving prosperous and vibrant rural development, and enhanced socio-economic livelihood of the rural communities.

1.1. Specific objectives, success indicators and results

The specific objectives and expected results per strategic priority area, are as given in the table below:

Specific objectives:	Success indicators	Expected Results:
Priority 1: BRDN organisation development		
1. Establishing BRDN as a legal entity, and developing statute, legal and internal operational procedures.	The organisation of work, groupings for delivery of the planned results and system of coordination is defined and accepted by all members. BRDN Statute is updated and represents the shared interests and values of its members and their constituents.	1.1 Organisational structure is established by the end of 2018.
	Developed and functional procedures for the BRDN functioning of the management and executive bodies of BRDN.	1.2 Internal operational and management procedures are developed by the end of 2018.
	BRDN is registered as a multinational civil society organisation.	1.3 BRDN has a formal organisation status by the end of 2019.
2. Developing BRDN capacities, to ensure effective and efficient administrative and professional management.	The Secretariat, as main executive management body, manages the process of TNA and capacity development of BRDN, and coordinates the work of the professional teams within the network in regards to capacity development.	2.1 Developed and functional professional team for training needs assessment and coordination of capacity development activities.
	The organisation has clear and functional procedures for performance monitoring.	2.2 System for organisational performance monitoring and evaluation is established and operational.
	The organisation functions effectively and efficiently, and is able to acquire the necessary physical, technical and	2.3 Strengthened physical, technical and human capacity resources for efficient administrative and professional management.

Specific objectives:	Success indicators	Expected Results:
	human capacity resources.	
3. Ensuring financial and organizational sustainability.	The organisation's partners are equally engaged and contribute to organisational fundraising in accordance to the defined procedures and operational rules.	3.1 Defined procedures and operational rules for fundraising and fund management.
	BRDN utilized the existing national and regional funding opportunities.	3.2 Developed and functional professional team for coordination and initiation of fundraising activities.
Priority 2: Exchange of experience, knowhow and best practices		
4. Enhancing communication with the member-organisations, constituents and other stakeholders.	BRDN has clear and functional communication procedures with the internal and external stakeholders.	4.1 Established and functional communication strategy.
	The network members are on-time informed of the development, policy and advocacy issues, that are of their concern.	4.2 Developed system for easy-sharing of internal knowledge and documents.
5. Enhancement of the internal and external networking processes.	The integrity and professionalism of BRDN are recognised by using a wide stakeholder involvement approach.	5.1 Established operational mechanism for frequent and structured stakeholders' participation in BRDN's work.
	BRDN member effectively participate and contribute to the development and work of the organisation, in according to their constituents' needs and while considering the global and EU development trends.	5.2 Enhanced cooperation and networking among BRDN members and their constituents.
6. Development of the BRDN capacities for research and analysis.	BRDN is recognised as valuable and trusty source of information in regards to rural policy and development issues in the Balkans.	6.1 Developed channels, mechanisms and tools for research and analysis.
	BRDN members have capacities to coordinate and implement research and analysis projects.	6.2 Set-up system for capacity enhancement of the BRDN members in research and analysis, and dissemination of knowhow and learning experience.
Priority 3: Advocacy and lobbying		

Specific objectives:	Success indicators	Expected Results:
7. Enhancement of the organizational advocacy and lobbying capacities.	BRDN has a clear vision of the advocacy issues it will represent its constituents on.	7.1 Developed Advocacy and Lobbying Strategy.
	BRDN successfully uses the rights-based advocacy approach and advocates for common rural development and advocacy issues for	7.2 Defined Advocacy Plan, and tools, mechanisms and tasks that will facilitate its implementation and disseminate information on the effects of the implemented human rights based advocacy.
8. Strengthening the participation in creating and implementing regional and rural policies.	BRDN, through its member networks, has a sit-at-the-table in national policy and decision making processes in regards to rural development.	8.1 Created database on the progress and brief country experiences in the process of approximation to the EU rural development legislative.
	Through the implemented projects, BRDN offers evidence-based policy solutions, and actively participates in decision making and policy creation processes.	8.2 Formed e-platform for systematic stakeholder sensitisation, promotion of policy dialogue and development of evidence-based policy solutions.
9. Advocating the needs of rural population from the Balkan region, at EU level.	Through intensive networking, the organisation has strengthened its position in advocacy and policy-making processes.	9.1 BRDN participates in new rural development advocacy networks on EU level, has strengthened its current position within the existing membership networks, and cooperates with stakeholders and similar organisations
	Members send strong message on the Balkan region's challenges and priorities in regards to rural development.	9.2 Balkan rural parliament is implemented bi-annually.

Specific objectives:	Success indicators	Expected Results:
Priority 4: Promotion, visibility and communication		
10. Advancing the promotion, visibility and communication of BRDN.	The network has clear vision of its public image, and approaches its strategically in order to further strengthen and sustain its integrity towards its members and other stakeholders.	10.1 Developed strategy for communication, promotion and visibility of BRDN
	The network its recognised by its constituents, partners and wide stakeholder groups	10.2 Improved organisation’s brand, visibility and credibility, through structured and systematic communication and enhanced transparency and accountability towards the stakeholders

2. Capacities and resources needed to implement the strategy

Results	Anticipated budget per year				
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
R1.1: Organisational structure is established by the end of 2018	9.500,00 €	/	/	/	/
R1.2: Internal operational and management procedures are developed by the end of 2018.	9.500,00 €	/	/	/	/
R1.3: BRDN has a formal organisation status by the end of 2019.	11.600,00 €	/	/	/	/
R2.1: Developed and functional professional team for training needs assessment and coordination of capacity development activities.	15.000,00 €	15.000,00 €	15.000,00 €	15.000,00 €	15.000,00 €
R2.2: System for organisational performance monitoring and evaluation is established and operational.	/	16.500,00 €	3.500,00 €	3.500,00 €	3.500,00 €
R2.3: Strengthened physical, technical and human capacity resources for efficient administrative and professional management	4.500,00 €	11.500,00 €	11.500,00 €	11.500,00 €	11.500,00 €
R3.1: Defined procedures and operational rules for fundraising and fund management.	11.000,00 €	6.500,00 €	6.500,00 €	6.500,00 €	6.500,00 €
R3.2: Developed and functional professional team for coordination and initiation of fundraising activities	2.250,00 €	13.750,00 €	13.750,00 €	13.750,00 €	13.750,00 €
4.1 Established and functional communication strategy	7.500,00 €	15.500,00 €	3.500,00 €	3.500,00 €	3.500,00 €
4.2 Developed system for easy-sharing of internal	/	3.000,00 €	/	/	/

Results	Anticipated budget per year				
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
knowledge and documents.					
5.1 Established operational mechanism for frequent and structured stakeholders' participation in BRDN's work.	8.000,00 €	13.000,00 €	13.000,00 €	13.000,00 €	13.000,00 €
5.2 Enhanced cooperation and networking among BRDN members and their constituents.	15.000,00 €	27.000,00 €	27.000,00 €	27.000,00 €	27.000,00 €
6.1 Developed channels, mechanisms and tools for research and analysis.	1.500,00 €	/	/	/	/
6.2 Set-up system for capacity enhancement of the BRDN members in research and analysis, and dissemination of knowhow and learning experience	9.500,00 €	9.500,00 €	9.500,00 €	9.500,00 €	9.500,00 €
7.1 Developed Advocacy and Lobbying Strategy	16.000,00 €	/	/	/	/
7.2 Defined Advocacy Plan, and tools, mechanisms and tasks that will facilitate the implementation of the Advocacy strategy.	13.000,00 €	10.000,00 €	10.000,00 €	10.000,00 €	10.000,00 €
8.1 Created database on the progress and brief country experiences in the process of approximation to the EU rural development legislative.	9.000,00 €	9.000,00 €	9.000,00 €	9.000,00 €	9.000,00 €
8.2 Formed e-platform for systematic stakeholder sensitisation, promotion of policy dialogue and development of evidence-based policy solutions.	14.000,00 €	14.000,00 €	14.000,00 €	14.000,00 €	14.000,00 €
9.1 BRDN participates in	/	/	/	/	/

Results	Anticipated budget per year				
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
new rural development advocacy networks on EU level, has strengthened its current position within the existing membership networks, and cooperates with stakeholders and similar organisations					
9.2 Balkan rural parliament is implemented bi-annually.	22.500,00 €	22.500,00 €	22.500,00 €	22.500,00 €	22.500,00 €
10.1 Developed strategy for communication, promotion and visibility of BRDN	/	18.000,00 €	2.000,00 €	2.000,00 €	2.000,00 €
10.2 Improved organisation's brand, visibility and credibility, through structured and systematic communication and enhanced transparency and accountability towards the stakeholders	4.500,00 €	7.500,00 €	7.500,00 €	7.500,00 €	7.500,00 €