

## Bulgaria – innovation example 4

### MOBILE ADVISORY TEAMS (MAT) FOR HNV FARMERS

Society for Territorial and Environmental Prosperity (STEP)

[www.step-bg.bg/en/](http://www.step-bg.bg/en/)

- **Location:** Ponor SPA and Bessaparki hills SPA
- **HNV system:** Extensive grazing, extensive and organic orchards and gardens
- **Scale of operation:** 2 mobile teams working in 2 regions in Bulgaria, 200 farmers consulted
- **Timespan:** Operated for approx. 5 years 2007-2011, ended due to the end of GEF funded project, implemented by BSPB
- **Keys to success:** Real commitment and skills of BSPB local team to promote HNV farming practices, existing GEF funding both for the mobile advisory teams and the AE and Natura 2000 pilot grants schemes

#### Problems addressed by this example

The innovation of setting up mobile advisory teams is a response to farmers' needs for adequate and on-time advice, information and consultation (on biodiversity conservation and links between farming activities and nature conservation, funding opportunities, etc.) in the HNV areas, where the project operated without additional expenses for farmers to visit services usually provided in the municipality/district centres.

#### Story in a nutshell

The mobile advisory teams were created in the framework of project „Conservation of globally important biodiversity in high nature-value semi-natural grasslands through support for the traditional local economy”, funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and implemented by Bulgarian Society for Protection of Birds (BSPB) during 2007-2011 period. The aims of the mobile advisory teams were to consult farmers on new knowledge and skills for HNV farming practices; funding opportunities; preparation of business plans; compliance with the EU standards in the dairy sector (good hygiene practices; production practices, storage and use of manure; good agricultural practices, etc.); marketing activities (direct sales; advice on design and standardization of the jars' shape and labelling; linking farmers and consumers, organization of joint visits at fairs and exhibitions, etc.).



Figure 1 Operation areas of the mobile advisory teams



Figures 2 & 3 Creation of organic garden, supported by MAT



Figure 4 Goat farm in Bessaparski hills



### What does mobile advisory teams achieve for HNV farming?

- The mobile advisory teams gained the trust of farmers and became part of their daily life: “These people have entered into our daily lives, their contacts are on top of our contact lists”, shared one of the consulted farmers.
- More than 200 farmers were consulted. 83 projects were approved to participate in the HNV pilot grant scheme as a result of their work.

### Achievements

In the period 2007-2011, the mobile advisory teams promoted nature-friendly farm techniques. They assisted the development and implementation of pilot AE and Natura 2000 grants schemes for HNV conservation, tailored to the specific regional conditions. Implementation Natura 2000 RDP scheme was initiated and tested by the project team. MAT also promoted the national AE measure for restoration and maintenance of HNV farmland, and gathered proposals for simplification of the rules and the procedure for its implementation.

### Economics of HNV farming

The overall amount of the approved projects under the pilot scheme for support of HNV farms was 213 017 EUR. At the same time, the mobile advisory teams provided support to farmers for their applications in the national support schemes as well as compliance with newly introduced legislation. This helped many farmers to remain in business, instead of closing down.

### Maintaining or improving HNV values

By the end of 2011, the farmers that were consulted were aware how to maintain the high nature value on their grasslands and why this was necessary. The terminal evaluation of the project reported that the project has directly contributed to the conservation of 36 000 ha of HNV farmland.

### How do mobile advisory teams respond to the HNV LINK innovation themes?

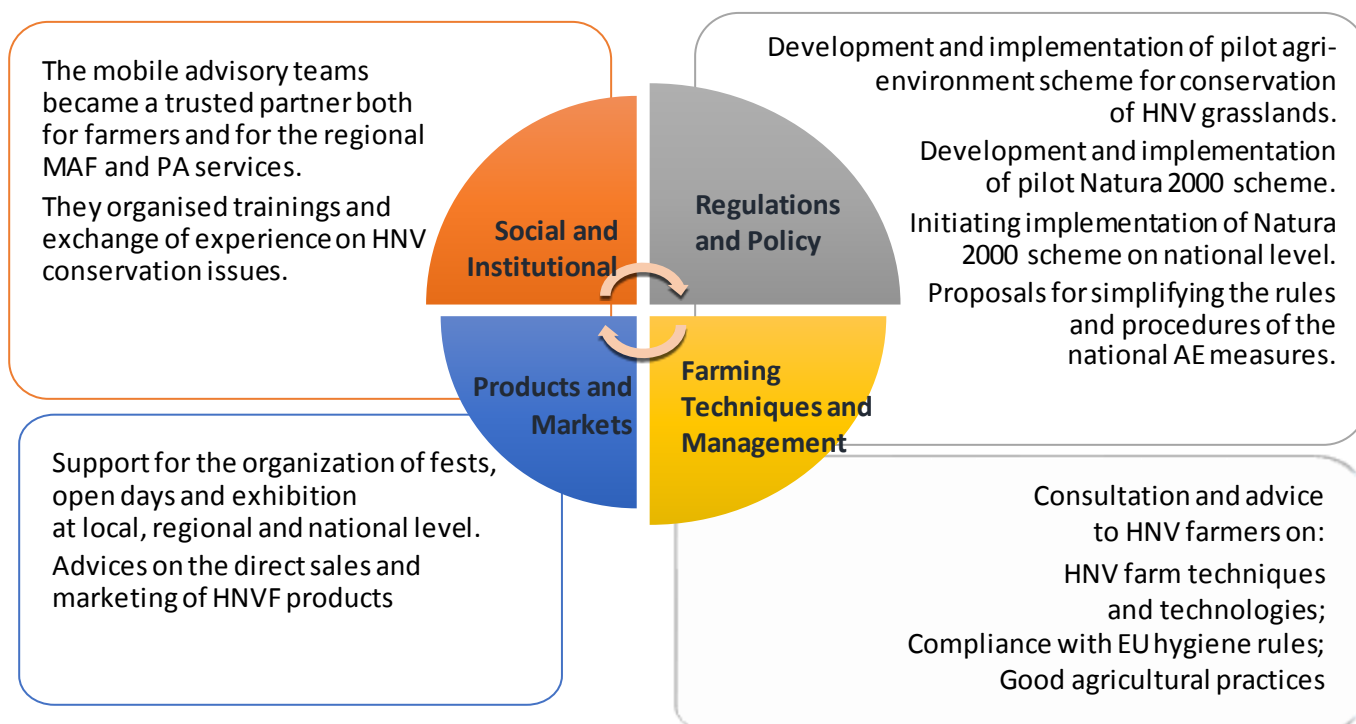


Figure 5 Shows how this innovation addresses the four themes of the HNV-Link innovation framework.

### The process that made it happen and critical factors for success

- GEF funding for the project so that BSPB could hire experts for the mobile advisory teams
- The skills, personal belief and motivation of the teams helped them to gain the trust of the HNV farmers and the regional MAF authorities.
- The grant schemes that were implemented were tailored to the local conditions and the needs of the HNV farmers.
- But the innovation would not have been successful without farmers' commitment to maintain HNV farming systems.



Figure 6 HNV grasslands in Ponor mountain (WSP)



Figure 7 Organic herbs in Bessaparski hills

**Actors and roles:** The initiator was BSPB. The original project proposal envisaged only one mobile advisory team to serve both project areas. The adaptive management of the project decided to create two teams in each pilot region to respond better and timely to farmers' needs. The skills, personal belief and motivation of the team helped them to gain the trust of the HNV farmers and the regional MAF authorities. However the innovation would not have been successful without farmers' commitment to maintain HNV farming systems.

**Institutional context that made it possible:** The innovation was funded under GEF and UNDP funded project „Conservation of globally important biodiversity in high nature-value semi-natural grasslands through support for the traditional local economy“.

**Resources:** Each mobile advisory team had three experts. Each expert worked approximately 60 months during the project. The average monthly operational costs of the mobile teams were 1300 EUR excluding experts' salaries.

**Processes:** The mobile advisory teams were created during the project but the previous work and contacts with the farmers/locals and administration/institutions facilitated the process.

**Critical factors for success:** The skills and the commitment of the experts of the mobile teams were a key factor for success of the innovation.

### Limiting factors, actual/potential problems, and how could they be overcome?

The project funding ended, and unfortunately, this innovative approach was not taken up by the government. Institutional and administrative procedures/ burdens/ bureaucracy of the national and EU support schemes and the discrepancies in the LPIS created mistrust amongst the farmers and made them reluctant to participate in the national level schemes.

### Lessons learnt from this innovation example, and its potential replication

- Face-to-face contact and farm-specific advice are required to effectively engage farmers and local authorities in conservation of HNV farming systems;
- HNV mobile advisory teams have proved to be an efficient and respected partner both for the farmers and the regional MAF and PA services and could an important part of the delivery mechanism of the future AES.

*Overall lessons from this example, especially from point of view of HNV farming?*

Advisory services and consultation for HNV farms are better done by a small teams of experts that have background and experience both in agriculture and biodiversity conservation. Direct advices and on -the farm discussions are preferred by farmers and save them time and financial resources.

*Is the innovation unique to its territory and its characteristics, or is it replicable in other areas?*

This innovation can be replicable in other areas.

*Could it be rolled out on a bigger territorial scale? What would be needed to do this successfully?*

HNV MAT at national level should be created for securing long-term viability of the HNV farming systems. However, these teams have to believe in the future of the HNV farming systems.

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