

Annex 1.

Terms of Reference for the Evaluation of Local Economic Development- (LED) project in Albania focused on improvements in the market system for the Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Sector

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1. General information

1.1 Introduction

Albania is renowned for its biological and natural diversity, which supports a wide variety of plant and animal species, including Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAPs). The harvesting and trading of MAPs have been an important source of income for rural communities in Albania for decades going back to communist times. MAPs are an **important source of income for rural households**, particularly in mountainous regions of the country - for many households, particularly poorer ones, in these areas over 50 percent of their annual income comes from the collection of wild MAPs, and more recently through the organised cultivation of MAPs on their own land. Rural households, however, are finding it increasingly difficult to earn a reliable income from MAPs - this is due to a variety of factors, ranging from low prices which are squeezing what are already very tight production margins for farmers, the depletion of wild MAPs due to over-harvesting and large post-harvest losses due to poor storage practices.

The Medicinal Aromatics Plants Local Economic Development (MAPs-LED) project is implemented by Connecting Natural Values and People (CNVP), and funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) represented by Swedish Embassy in Tirana. The amount of funding for the project is SEK 26,000,000. The project supports the development of the Medicinal and Aromatics Plants (MAPs) sector in Albania, working in close collaboration with actors along the MAPs value chain - from local producers and collectors up to major processors and exporters - supporting new ideas and innovations which improve the range and quality of MAPs produced in Albania, with the ultimate objective of improving the incomes of rural communities involved in the wild harvesting and cultivation of MAPs. Project design and implementation are guided by the Market Systems Development approach.

The project began on 1st October 2020 and will complete its first phase on 31st March 2024 (according to the amended agreement). The project went through an inception phase from 15th April 2019 to 30 September 2020.

The **market systems development (MSD) approach is guiding project implementation** and will ensure that the project is delivered in a way that maximises pro-poor impact. Following the MSD approach CNVP is acting as an external *facilitator* of change. This involves partnering with a range of actors - private businesses, public agencies, and civil society organisations seeking to bring about changes in their behaviour which will result in improvements in MAPs producer's access to the information, resources, and technologies they need to increase the income they derive from MAPs production.

The project is being implemented in six regions in Albania; Shkodra, Tirana, Elbasan, Korca, Dibra, and Berati.

1.2 Evaluation object: Intervention to be evaluated

The evaluation object is LED project interventions in six regions in Albania. The objective of this evaluation is to understand the results of the project to date and to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of implementation to recommend possible future phases of the project.

The overall objective of LED project is to increase the incomes of households in rural Albania by promoting improvements in the efficiency and inclusiveness of the MAPs (and other Non-Timber Forest Products-NTFP) market system.

The specific objective of LED project is to promote sustainable and resilient business and inclusive access to benefits for MAPs and other (NTFP products in rural Albania).

Outputs are the direct results of project activities and interventions. These outputs are framed as changes in the behaviours of the project's main implementation partners (private businesses and public sector agencies), the key changes we expect to contribute to include:

- **Output 1 - MAPs business, input, machinery, and other technology suppliers-invest in new delivery models targeting MAPs producers.** MAPs consolidators and buyers as well as input, machinery, equipment, and other technology suppliers invest in new service delivery models, improving MAPs households' access, especially **women and youth**, to better drying and storage technologies, plant varieties, machinery, etc.
- **Output 2 - MAPs buyers have improved capacity to meet market (export) standards.** MAPs consolidators and buyers coordinate more closely with MAPs households through improved contract farming arrangements and embedded service delivery models, particularly extension services, providing MAPs households with more knowledge of good practices (especially related to organic production) and more certainty around markets and prices. Focus will be involvement of women and youth, being mostly engaged in the MAPs sector.
- **Output 3 -MAPs buyers test new cooperation models, Contract Farming, and embedded services with MAP producers.** MAPs buyers have improved capacity to meet market standards, particularly for high-value niche markets for organic produce.

- **Output 4 - Municipalities have improved capacity to manage land and MAPs natural resources** Municipalities have better systems for allocating unused land for MAPs cultivation and have improved capacity to manage wild MAPs resources.
- **Output 5 - GoA engages in more policy dialogue with MAPs market actors.** The Government of Albania (GoA) and MAPs private sector actors actively engage in dialogue on sector policy, with the objective of creating consistent, unbiased, and equitable policies for all market actors.

These **changes are expected to lead to result in tangible benefits or long-lasting pro-poor outcomes** for programme partners and beneficiaries, these include:

- **Outcome 1: Improved MAPs (and other NTFPs) productivity:** For MAPs households the key benefits are improvements in productivity and ultimately increased sales at better and more predictable prices, critically these benefits are inclusive and accrue to both women and men, young and old
- **Outcome 2: MAPs (and other NTFPs) private sector market actors have sustainable pro-poor business models:** For our private sector partners, the key benefits are businesses that are more competitive, resilient, and profitable.
- **Outcome 3: Enabling environment policies and regulations promote fair a sustainable practices:** For our public sector partners, the key benefit is an improved enabling environment with rules and regulations that promote fair and sustainable practices

Target group

- MAP companies
- MAP producers/farmers
- Municipalities/Local Government Units

Cross-cutting issues

Two key cross-cutting issues - gender and inclusion of women and climate change - are embedded within this Theory of Change and are mainstreamed into all programme interventions.

Gender and Women inclusion

Women represent more than half of Albania's population but are disproportionately affected by poverty. Despite improvements in recent years, legal and regulatory barriers limit economic opportunities available to women - the MAPs sector is no different. In MAPs, and agricultural in general, male gender roles are associated with tasks that involve control over assets, mobility and decision-making and female gender roles typically involve manual pre and post-harvest work. This division of labor means women have limited access to and control over agricultural assets, resources, and decision-making.

Through LED project CNVP is committed to identifying and creating opportunities for women to participate more fully in the economic systems related to the production of MAPs and other non-forest timber products. This means integrating inclusion into all aspects of the implementation process, from research, strategy formulation, and intervention design to implementation including monitoring, results measurement and learning. A detailed gender

analyses and a Gender Action Plan are prepared at the beginning of the project implementation. Disaggregate data will be collected to measure the project's impact on women.

Environment and climate change

Our climate change mitigation measures include interventions that have a very explicit focus on addressing climate change - for example, intervention with municipalities promotes the cultivation of MAPs on abandoned or unused land, this plant coverage will reduce soil erosion, enhance biodiversity, biomass production, carbon sequestration in soils - as well as the broader intervention strategies (particularly improved storage and other investments which aim to add value or increase sales) all contribute to increasing productivity and livelihoods, providing people with the additional resources they need to adapt in response to climate change.

MAP cultivation (mostly organic), along with plantation and agroforestry, remains a preferred option for taking the pressure off the vegetative cover. Administratively, abandoned land has been transferred to the Municipalities which lack the resources to manage it. MAP cultivation is a viable alternative for restoring the productivity and amenity of abandoned land. The project will support through either trainings and/or small investment schemes the cultivation of bare and abandoned lands with MAPs such as sage, mountain tea, lavender, oregano, thymus, laurel etc., as well as nut trees such as chestnut, hazelnut, walnut etc.

For further information, the intervention proposal is attached as Annex B.

The intervention logic or theory of change of the intervention may be further elaborated by the evaluator in the inception report if deemed necessary.

1.3 Evaluation rationale

- To provide CNVP and Sida, with a basis for determining the value of such cooperation and this contribution.

- To identify lessons learned, assess the need for continuous cooperation, and provide inputs for designing possible future projects.

2. The assignment

2.1 Evaluation purpose: Intended use and intended users

The purpose or intended use of the evaluation is to:

- Help CNVP and Sida to assess the progress of on-going project interventions, to learn from what works well and less well.
- Provide inputs for the upcoming discussions concerning the preparation of interventions for a possible follow up project.

The primary intended users of the evaluation are Sida (the funder of the project) and the CNVP implementation team. The evaluation will provide Sida and CNVP with an objective assessment of the achievements of the project; feedback; strengths and weaknesses of the

project's implementation approach; and provide inputs and recommendations on how project implementation can be improved in its next phase.

Other stakeholders or intended users include the Government of Albania, particularly local municipalities and other donors supporting rural development in Albania.

The evaluation is to be designed, conducted, and reported to meet the needs of the intended users and tenderers shall elaborate in the tender on how this will be ensured during the evaluation process. Other stakeholders that should be kept informed about the evaluation including:

- Municipalities from 6 project regions
- Donors in the area like GiZ and Swiss (Risi Albania) and
- MAP companies such as MEIA, LNL Herbs, Salvia Nord, Gjedra, Mucaj Ltd, Agroherbal, Herba fruta, Rrodhe, Kalemi, Shaholli, Gjoni, and MollAlb.

2.2 Evaluation scope

The evaluation scope shall include the time frame of the intervention 2019 – 2022 and focus on project intervention, implementation, and outcomes, cooperation between project partners, and capacity building of target groups.

The evaluation will focus on all of the project's key interventions which can be found in the project document.

If needed, the scope of the evaluation may be further elaborated by the evaluator in the inception report.

2.3 Evaluation objective: Criteria and questions

The key evaluation questions which will guide the evaluation are as follows:

1) **Relevance**

- To what extent has the project's objectives and design (particularly the main intervention areas outlined above) responded to the needs and priorities of key project stakeholders (particularly the Government of Albania and local communities and businesses involved in the collection, processing, and exporting of MAPs)?
- To what extent have lessons learned from what works well and less well been used to improve and adjust project implementation?

2) **Coherence**

- How compatible has the intervention been with other interventions in the country, sector, or organisation where it is being implemented?

3) **Effectiveness**

- To what extent has the project achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives (results)?

4) Efficiency

- To what extent has the project delivered, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way?

5) Impact

- To what extent has the project generated, or is expected to generate high-level effects, particularly income increases for rural communities involved in the collection and cultivation of MAPs?

6) Sustainability

- To what extent will the benefits of the project's interventions continue, or are likely to continue and last?

2.4 Evaluation Approach and Methods

It is expected that the evaluator describes and justifies an appropriate evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection in the tender. The evaluation design, methodology and methods for data collection and analysis are expected to be fully developed and presented in the inception report. Given the situation with Covid-19, innovative and flexible approaches/methodologies, and methods for remote data collection should be suggested when appropriate, and the risk of doing harm managed.

The evaluator is to suggest an approach/methodology that provides credible answers (evidence) to the evaluation questions. Limitations to the chosen approach/methodology and methods shall be made explicit by the evaluator and the consequences of these limitations discussed in the tender. The evaluator shall to the extent possible, present mitigation measures to address them. A clear distinction is to be made between the evaluation approach/methodology and methods.

A *gender-responsive* approach/methodology, methods, tools, and data analysis techniques should be used¹.

In cases where sensitive or confidential issues are to be addressed in the evaluation, evaluators should ensure an evaluation design that does not put informants and stakeholders at risk during the data collection phase or the dissemination phase.

2.5 Organisation of evaluation management

This evaluation is commissioned by CNVP in the frame of LED project funded by Sida represented by the Embassy of Sweden in Tirana. The primary intended users are the Sida team and the CNVP implementation team. The intended users of the evaluation form a steering group, which has contributed to and agreed on the ToR for this evaluation and is a decision-making body that will approve the inception and the final report of the evaluation. The steering group will participate in the start-up meeting of the evaluation, as well as in the debriefing/validation workshop where preliminary findings and conclusions are discussed.

2.6 Time Schedule and Deliverables

¹ See for example UNEG United Nations Evaluation Group (2014) Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations <http://uneval.org/document/detail/1616>

It is expected that a time and work plan is presented in the tender and further detailed in the inception report. Given the situation with Covid-19, the time and work plan must allow flexibility in implementation. The evaluation shall be carried out from 1st June to 15 July 2023. The timing of any field visits, surveys, and interviews needs to be settled by the evaluator in dialogue with the main stakeholders during the inception phase.

It is expected that a time and work plan is presented in the proposal and further detailed in the inception report. The evaluation shall be carried out over an 8-week period between 1 June 2023 to 31 July 2023.

The table below lists key deliverables for the evaluation process. Alternative deadlines for deliverables may be suggested by the consultant and negotiated during the inception phase.

Deliverables	Participants	Deadlines
1. Start-up meeting in CNVP project office or Sida office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluation team ▪ Sida project management officer ▪ CNVP implementation team 	Within one week of signing contract
2. Draft inception report		2 weeks after signing of the contract
3. Inception meeting to present detailed evaluation plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluation team ▪ Sida project management officer ▪ CNVP implementation team 	2 weeks after signing of the contract
4. Data collection, analysis, report writing, and quality assurance		6 weeks after signing of the contract
5. Debriefing/validation workshop (meeting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluation team ▪ Sida project management officer ▪ CNVP implementation team 	7 weeks after signing of the contract
6. Draft evaluation report		8 weeks after signing of contract
7. Comments from intended users to evaluators		Within 1 week of receiving the draft evaluation report
8. Final evaluation report		10 weeks after signing of the contract

<p>9. A presentation of the finding with other donors and stakeholders?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● GIZ, Risi Albania, Agriculture University of Tirana ● Consultants 	<p>.</p>
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The inception report will form the basis for the continued evaluation process and shall be approved by Sida before the evaluation proceeds to implementation. The inception report should be written in English and cover evaluability issues and interpretations of evaluation questions, present the evaluation approach/methodology *including how a utilization-focused and gender-responsive approach will be ensured*, methods for data collection and analysis as well as the full evaluation design, including an *evaluation matrix* and a *stakeholder mapping/analysis*. A clear distinction between the evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection shall be made. All limitations to the methodology and methods shall be made explicit and the consequences of these limitations discussed.

A specific time and work plan, including a number of hours/working days for each team member, for the remainder of the evaluation should be presented. The time plan shall allow space for reflection and learning between the intended users of the evaluation.

The final report shall be written in English and professionally proofread. The executive summary should be maximum of 3 pages.

The report shall clearly and in detail describe the evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection and analysis and make a clear distinction between the two. The report shall describe how the utilization-focused approach has been implemented i.e. how intended users have participated in and contributed to the evaluation process and how methodology and methods for data collection have created space for reflection, discussion, and learning between the intended users. Furthermore, the gender-responsive approach shall be described and reflected in the findings, conclusions, and recommendations along with other identified and relevant cross-cutting issues. Limitations to the methodology and methods and the consequences of these limitations for findings and conclusions shall be described.

Evaluation findings shall flow logically from the data, showing a clear line of evidence to support the conclusions. Conclusions should be substantiated by findings and analysis. Evaluation questions shall be clearly stated and answered in the executive summary and in the conclusions. Recommendations and lessons learned should flow logically from conclusions and be specific, directed to relevant intended users, and categorised as short-term, medium-term, and long-term.

The report should be no more than 30 pages excluding annexes. If the methods section is extensive, it could be placed in an annex to the report. Annexes shall always include the Terms of Reference, the Inception Report, the stakeholder mapping/analysis and the Evaluation Matrix. Lists of key informants/interviewees shall only include personal data if deemed relevant (i.e. when it is contributing to the credibility of the evaluation) based on a case-based assessment by the evaluator and CNVP. The inclusion of personal data in the report must always be based on written consent.

The evaluator shall adhere to the Sida OECD/DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation².

2.8 Evaluation team qualification

The evaluation team will consist of one international expert and a local expert. In addition to the qualifications already stated in the framework agreement for evaluation services, the evaluation team shall include the following competencies:

- Experience conducting large program evaluations
- Knowledge and experience in evaluating MSD programmes
- Knowledge and experience in adaptive and flexible facility management approaches
- Excellent report-writing skills
- Fluency in English
- Experience and knowledge of the Albania context would be an advantage

A CV for each team member shall be included in the call-off response. It should contain a full description of relevant qualifications and professional work experience.

It is important that the competencies of the individual team members are complementary. It is highly recommended that local evaluation consultants are included in the team, as they often have contextual knowledge that is of great value to the evaluation.

The evaluators must be independent of the evaluation object and evaluated activities and have no stake in the outcome of the evaluation.

Please note that in the tender, the tenderers must propose a team leader that takes part in the evaluation by at least 30% of the total evaluation team time including core team members, specialists, and all support functions, but excluding time for the quality assurance expert.

2.9 Financial and human resources

The budget amount for the evaluation will be estimated for a maximum of 25 working days for each consultant (international and national)

The evaluation team may invoice a maximum of 20% of the total amount after approval by the evaluation steering group of the Inception Report and the remaining 80% after approval of the Final report and the completion of the assignment.

Contact details to intended users (cooperation partners, Swedish Embassies, other donors, etc.) will be provided by CNVP Foundation.

² Sida OECD/DAC (2014) Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management.

The CNVP implementation team will support the evaluation team with logistics on the ground (transportation, accommodation, site visits, etc.) whilst undertaking fieldwork for the evaluation.