

Functional and institutional capacities of Regional Development Councils: *Lessons learned and recommendations*

MLPS project is co-financed by:



In cooperation with:



Ministerul Agriculturii,
Dezvoltării Regionale
și Mediului

Author:

GIZ MLPS with contributions from Lilian Danilov

Developed with the support of:

German Development Cooperation through GIZ, with the financial support of the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), via the 'Modernisation of Local Public Services in the Republic of Moldova' Project.

The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and/or of the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

Chisinau, December 2019

Contents

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	4
LIST OF FIGURES	5
LIST OF TABLES	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
1 Introduction.....	7
2 Legal framework and institutional set up.....	8
2.1 Legal framework.....	8
2.2 Institutional set up.....	9
3 Regional Development Councils: Functionality and capacities.....	11
3.1 Regional Sector Commissions.....	12
4 Lessons learned and recommendations	13
5 Conclusions.....	16
6 Annexes	17
Annex 1: The analytical framework of the evaluation.....	17
Annex 2: The interviews outline (summary).....	17
Annex 3: Action plan on the implementation of the recommendations.....	21

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APA	Academy of Public Administration
CALM	Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
LPA	Local Public Administration
LSC	Local Steering Committee
LCC	Local Citizen Committees
MARDE	Ministry for Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment
MLPS	Modernization of Local Public Services
NCCRD	National Coordination Council for Regional Development
NFRD	National Fund for Regional Development
RD	Regional Development
RDA	Regional Development Agency
RDC	Regional Development Council
ROP	Regional Operational Plan
RSC	Regional Sector Commission
RSWG	Regional Sector Working Groups
SPD	Single Programming Document

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Development Regions in Moldova	8
Figure 2: Participation of members in RDC meetings 2015- 2019	11

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: The total number of RDC members	10
Table 2: Regional Sector Commissions	12

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ensuring the functionality of Regional Development Councils (RDC) represents an important element in the consolidation of the legal framework and institutional set up of regional development in the Republic of Moldova. RDC were created as new deliberative structure on the regional level in 2010. Their main objective is to ensure the coordination and promotion of regional development policy objectives at regional and local level. To do so, the councils are composed of representatives from the public and private sector as well as civil society representatives from the region.

In the past and with the support of development partners, several measures have been taken to further strengthen the capacities of RDC and improve their functioning. Among others, several capacity development measures were implemented, the Regional Development Agencies (RDA) established a secretariat to support the work of the councils and Regional Sector Commissions (RSC) were created as consultative structure supporting the work of the RDC on sector specific issues. This contributed to the development of planning and intervention capacities in the above-mentioned areas and encouraged the exchange of experience at local and regional level, sectors analysis, an increased involvement of local authorities and a better coordination of actions with the central authorities. Nevertheless, challenges with regard to the functioning of the RDC and their RSC remain, in particular in view of the composition and size of the councils, the active participation of members, their organization and understanding and exercise of tasks and duties.

This report highlights the key experiences made, challenges encountered, and lessons learned with regard to the measures undertaken to strengthen the capacities of RDC in the period between 2017 and 2019 and provides recommendations for further improvements. It shows that while RDC represent a great platform for participation in planning and decision-making processes for a wide variety of stakeholders, their potential is not fully used yet due to an insufficient understanding of the role of RDC in regional development, limited experience and contribution of the RDC members and a lacking practice to solve common problems and challenges on the regional level. Against this background, the legal framework and institutional set up of the RDC could be further improved, in particular in relation to the composition, size and structure of the councils as well as the selection procedures of its members. The RDA are supposed to support the work of the RDC through a secretariat function. However, up until now, most times they do not have sufficient administrative, financial and human resources to fulfil this task. RDC chairpersons and deputy-chairs need to be selected more carefully and show more responsibility and initiative in promoting the development priorities of the regions and motivating the participation of members in council meetings.

The RSC are perceived as a good mechanism to support the work of the RDC and increase the correlation of regional policies with sector policies. They are also appreciated by the government institutions on the national level as they allow an interaction with the local and regional authorities on sector specific legislation and issues.

1 Introduction

In the Republic of Moldova, regional development represents a priority of the Government, as stated in the Law No. 239 of 13.10.2016 on the approval of the National Regional Development Strategy for the period 2016-2020¹, and in the EU Association Agreement, ratified by Law No. 112 of 02.07.2014. Regional development can thereby be understood as an inter-sectoral policy that made significant progress in a relative short amount of time. With a complex institutional framework, its implementation however faces multiple challenges in relation to sectoral policies and the political support needed to promote and achieve the regional development objectives.

Regional Development Councils (RDC) represent an important link in the regional development policy. They became operational as a structure on the regional level in 2010, when the "de facto" implementation of the regional development policy was initiated. According to the provisions of the legal framework, RDC are "deliberative functional structures at the level of each development region, constituted for the coordination and promotion of the regional development policy objectives, at regional and local level" (Government Decision No. 127 of 08.02.2008). Although the role of the RDC is an important one with RDC having multiple competences at regional and local level, an analysis carried out in 2013² concluded that the level of interest towards the carried-out actions at regional level was rather low. For example, local public authorities (LPA) as members of the RDC were mostly interested in promoting investment projects specific to the administrative-territorial units that they represent and rather uninterested in the promotion of projects with regional impact.

To support the functioning of RDC and realization of their competences as provided in the existing legal framework as well as to ensure a participatory and transparent regional development process, a number of RDC studies and assessments were conducted. In this context, the project "Modernisation of local public services", implemented by the German Development Cooperation through GIZ, supported the elaboration of the "Report on the results of focus group discussions and recommendations for strengthening the capacity of Regional Development Councils"³. The report pointed among others to the following recommendations:

- the creation of regional sector commissions (RSC) as consultative structures within the RDCs; including the elaboration and approval of the RSC operational regulations by the RDC and the involvement of the respective sector ministries in the activity of the RSCs, e.g. as co-chairpersons;
- the provision of sufficient resources for the Regional Development Agencies (RDA) to ensure the secretariat function of the RDC;
- the elaboration and implementation of a comprehensive capacity development program for all stakeholders;
- the compensation/reimbursement of expenses for participation in RDC meetings and events;
- eligible candidates for the chairperson and deputy-chairs of the RDC should be elected by secret ballot and the term of the RDC chairperson and deputy-chairs to be limited (for example, for one year).

¹ Strategia Națională de Dezvoltare Regională pentru anii 2016 – 2020
<http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=368696>

² GIZ MLPS (2013), "Concept of the RDCs' capacity development programmer".

³ Report on the results of focus group discussions and recommendations for strengthening the capacity of regional development councils, Chisinau, 2017 file://
<http://www.serviciilocale.md/doc.php?l=ro&idc=46&id=1669&t=/Publicatii-i-resurse/Dezvoltare-regionala/Raport-privind-rezultatele-discutiilor-in-focus-grup-uri-i-recomandarile-care-vizeaza-consolidarea-capacitatilor-CRD>

The purpose of the present report is to analyze to what extent the above-mentioned recommendations were implemented. The report aims at highlighting the key experiences made, challenges encountered, and lessons learned with regard to the measures undertaken to strengthen the capacities of RDC in the period 2017 - 2019 and provides recommendations for further improvements.

The methodology used for the preparation of the report was based on a set of quantitative and qualitative methods (see annex 1), which allowed the development of an analytical framework for the assessment of the RDC. The analysis was carried out between July and September 2019 as follows: (1) analysis of relevant documents, reports, studies, researches elaborated by the regional development institutions, experts, academic institutions, etc.; (2) analysis of the main organizational and functional structures in the regions: RDA and RDC/RSC; (3) qualitative semi-structured interviews, both individually and in groups, comprising of representatives of the RDC/RSC, RDA, regional consultants, experts and other partner organizations such as the Academy of Public Administration (APA), think-thank organizations and the Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova (CALM). Overall, 44 persons were interviewed (see annex 2).

2 Legal framework and institutional set up

2.1 Legal framework

The Law No. 438-XVI of 28.12.2006 on regional development in the Republic of Moldova and the Government Decision No. 127 of 08.02.2008 on measures to implement the law provide that the central specialized bodies of the public administration and the local public authorities are responsible for the promotion of the regional development policy in the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, the documents outline the legal framework for regional development as follows:

National level:

The National Coordination Council for Regional Development (NCCRD) is responsible for approving, promoting and coordinating the objectives of the regional development policy at national level. The NCCRD does not have a status as a legal entity and operates according to its regulations. Article 5, paragraph 4 of the Law provides that the NCCRD is formed based on parity principle via a Government decision. The council is composed of representatives of the following institutions: the Minister of Economy, the Minister of Finance, other sector ministers as well as the chairperson and one representative of the private sector delegated by each RDC.

The responsible ministry for regional development (specialized central public authority, currently the Ministry for Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment (MARDE)) has the mandate to elaborate, monitor and evaluate the implementation of regional development policies, both at the national and regional level. Moreover, it is responsible for the management of the National Fund for Regional Development (NFRD),



the harmonization of the national strategy with the regional strategies and the elaboration of financing mechanisms for regional development programmes and projects.

Regional level:

The Regional Development Agency (RDA) is a public institution established at regional level and subordinated to the responsible ministry for regional development. The RDA is responsible to analyze the development level of the region and to coordinate the process of regional development strategies, including the implementation of regional programmes and projects. In this context, the RDA is also responsible to attract external financial resources to ensure the implementation of strategies, programmes and projects and to provide information support to LPA. Moreover, the RDA's mandate is to stimulate relevant key actors cooperation in the areas of interest of the region and to elaborate the annual progress reports.

The Regional Development Council (RDC) is foreseen as a deliberative character structure on the regional level, however without having the status of a legal entity. The tasks of the RDC are the following:

- approval of the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) and its operation plan developed by the RDA;
- approval and promotion of regional development projects;
- representation of the respective development region and its interests in the NCCRD;
- identification of the disfavoured zones within the development region based on national criteria
- monitoring of the use of financial resources allocated from the NFRD to the respective development region;
- evaluation of the impact of implementation of the regional projects and programmes as well as the achievement of the regional development objectives;
- promotion of inter-regional and intra-regional cooperation with public institutions and private organizations.

What could influence the legal and institutional framework of regional development in the Republic of Moldova in the future is the implementation of a territorial administrative reform. The reform has been in discussion for a while but has not been implemented yet. It could have an influence on the mandate and tasks of the regional development actors, including the mandate and tasks of RDC.

2.2 Institutional set up

Following the provisions of the National Strategy for Regional Development 2010-2012 which was approved by Government Decision No.158 of 2010⁴, the operationalization of the regions including the establishment of the institutional and planning framework was performed in two stages.

At the initial stage (2010-2012), the efforts were oriented towards the institutional capacity building and strengthening of the three development regions North, Centre and South. Respectively, in 2010 the RDC in each of the three development regions were established and conducted their first meetings. The composition of the councils is thereby as follows: Every rayon within the respective region is represented by four persons in the RDC: one representative of the rayon, one LPA representative (mayor), one representative of the private sector and one representative of the civil society. The representative of the rayon is appointed ex officio, the LPA representatives (mayors) are

⁴ Government Decision No. 158 of 04.03.2010 on approval of National Strategy on regional development, <http://lex.justice.md/md/333914/>

delegated by the Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova (CALM) and the representatives of the private sector and civil society are selected by means of competition, according to the procedure established by the authority implementing the regional development policy. Table 1 provides an overview of the total number of RDC members for the regions North, Centre and South.

Table 1: The total number of RDC members

Structure of RDC members	RDC North	RDC Centre	RDC South
Rayons' chairpersons	12	13	8
Mayors	12	13	8
Representatives of private sector	12	13	8
Representatives of civil society	12	13	8
Total number	48	52	32

Within the second stage (2012-2019), the regional development activities were to be implemented in the development regions ATU Gagauzia, Chisinau municipality and Transnistrian region. In 2013, the NCCRD initiated the process of operationalization of the regional development policy in ATU Gagauzia and from 2016, both RDA and RDC became operational there. However, during this time the first legislative gaps appeared, causing differences in the composition of the RDC in Gagauzia in comparison to the other development regions and provisions of the normative acts in force. In Gagauzia, RDC members include the Governor of ATU Gagauzia, two executive committee representatives; one representative from LPA I level, three private sector representatives; one civil society representative. With regard to the operationalization of the Chisinau municipality development region, the decision on the concept for establishment of RDA and RDC was approved at the NCCRD session held on 26 December 2018⁵. However, so far only one meeting was organized with the representatives of LPA to discuss possible options for the RDA Chisinau status as well as the composition of the RDC.

Based on the legal provisions, the relations of the RDC with the RDA are based on a system of checks and balances. The RDC have the mandate to approve the regional development strategy and corresponding operational plan elaborated by the RDA. In addition, they have the task to monitor the approved regional projects for financing and implemented by the RDA as well as to evaluate their impact. According to Government Decision No. 127 of 08.02.2008, the RDC meetings are supposed to take place on a quarterly basis and RDAs have to establish a secretariat to support the function of the RDC. The secretariat is for example responsible for the organization and convening of RDC meetings, the preparation of the working materials, etc. The invitation to council meetings is usually done in a traditional and formal way (invitation/confirmation). Interviewees pointed out that a weak point of this relationship is that the RDC members are mostly disconnected from the RDA activities.

Moreover, the RDC has the competence to represent the development region in the NCCRD. According to Art. 7 of Law No. 438-XVI of 28.12.2008 on Regional Development in the Republic of Moldova, the RDC "represents the development region and its interests in the NCCRD" by two representatives: the chairperson of the RDC and one representative of the private sector delegated by the members of the RDC. While on paper this appears to be a chance for a participatory and transparent process, in reality there is no obligation of RDC members delegated to the NCCRD to

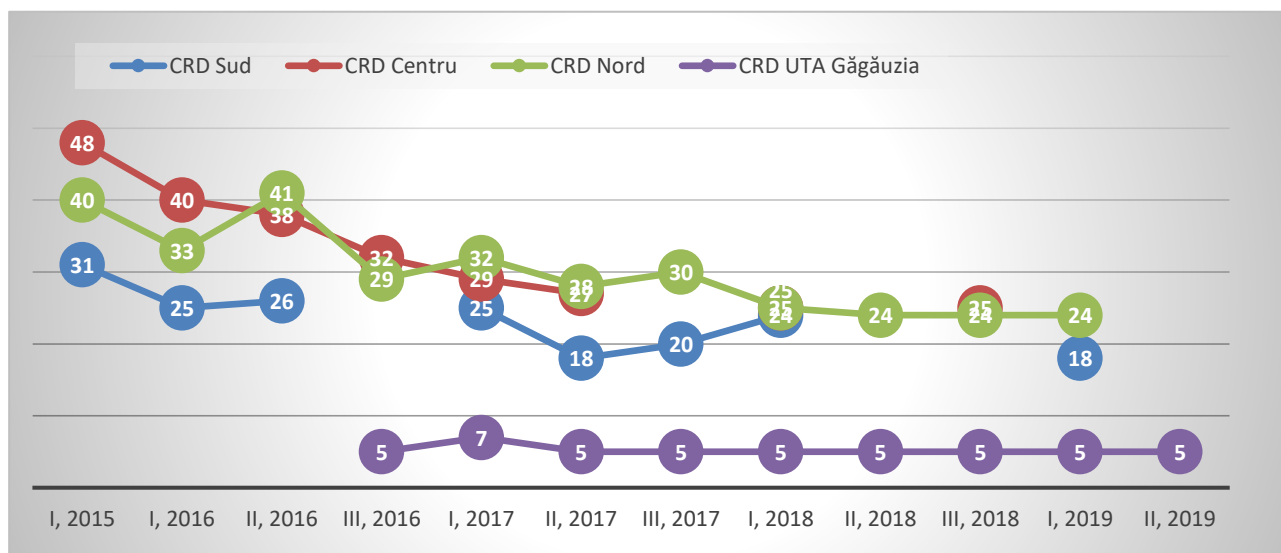
⁵Decision no.18/18 of 26.12.2018 on the approval of the start of conceptualization activities for Chisinau Regional Development Agency set up
<http://madrm.gov.md/sites/default/files/Documente%20atasate%20Advance%20Pagines/Decizia%20nr.%202018.pdf>

report back to their council on the discussions and approved decisions. This leads to a lack of information and transparency for the other council members.

3 Regional Development Councils: Functionality and capacities

Analyzing the functionality and capacities of the RDC, the interviews pointed towards a series of challenges. One of them relates to the participation of RDC members in meetings. As shown in Figure 2, participation rates in RDC meetings decline over time.

Figure 2: Participation of members in RDC meetings 2015-2019



During the term of office of RDC members from 2015 to 2019, one can see a clear downward trend in the participation rate of members in most development regions: from 90% at the beginning of the term to slightly above 50% after 1-2 years of RDC activity. A possible explanation for this decline is that RDC members might only see a limited “personal gain” in the participation of RDC activities and thus lack interest and motivation to actively participate in the council’s work. What could contribute to this is the fact that the call for proposals to receive funding for regional development projects only takes place every four years. This is usually the time where participation rates in RDC meetings and engagement of RDC members in the council’s work is the highest. In addition, communication as well as the non-existing reimbursement of travel expenses to participate in RDC meetings seem to be challenges that influence the participation rates of members in the council meetings. The low level of participation also relates to some of the RDC chairpersons and deputy-chairs which were initially elected. Within the past, some of them either quit their position within the LPA or no longer showed interest to attend the RDC meetings.

Another challenge pointed out by the interviewees relates to the content of RDC meetings and discussions. It was noted that discussions often mainly refer to the implementation of regional programmes and projects and less to other types of RDC duties such as facilitation of cooperation, promotion of local and regional initiatives, capacity building, communication, etc. Moreover, interviewees noticed that within RDC, the spirit of competition and promotion of individual interests of LPA representatives is manifested more than the spirit of regional cooperation. The representatives of LPA seem to be mainly concerned about their own issues, rather than finding common solutions for various regional development challenges (infrastructure, economic development, tourism). So far, there are only a few experiences where actors and especially LPA cooperate to achieve common development goals. With regard to the knowledge of RDC tasks and responsibilities, interviewees observed that civil society and private sector representatives, although less interested and motivated

to participate in the RDC activities, seemed to possess a broader knowledge of the RDC role and competences, than the LPA representatives do.

Consequently, the functionality of the RDC as a deliberative and participatory structure in regional development is often hampered in reality. Their potential is not fully used yet due to an insufficient understanding of the role of RDC in regional development, limited experience and contribution of the RDC members and a lacking practice to solve common problems and challenges on the regional not local level.

To further increase the functionality of the RDC, among others the following measures were taken in the past with GIZ support: creation of an intranet portal dedicated to RDC members to improve access to information, transparency and communication; support to inter- and intraregional exchange; support to the creation of regional sector commissions (RSC) as consultative structures within the RDCs and the development of training programs, e.g. “Management of RDC” in cooperation with the Academy of Public Administration.

3.1 Regional Sector Commissions

Regional Sector Commissions (RSC) were set up as a consultative function for the RDC. Their aim is to develop benchmarks and recommendations to ensure a sustainable development of the respective sector, including the efficient use and attraction of new financial and human resources. The establishment of the RSC derives from the list of recommendations elaborated in 2017⁶.

Based on the decisions of the RDC in the development regions North, Centre, South and ATU Gagauzia⁷, RSC were created and piloted in areas such as water supply and sanitation (WSS), solid waste management (SWM) and business infrastructure development (see Table 2).

Table 2: Regional Sector Commissions

RDC	Created Regional Sector Commissions		
	Water Supply and Sanitation (WSS)	Solid Waste Management (SWM)	Infrastructure support in Business and Tourism
North	√	√	
Centre	√	√	
South	√	√	
Gagauzia	√		√

The development region North even changed the RDC operational regulations to recognize RSC as permanent structures within the RDC. The RSC usually consists of 5-9 persons and has two co-chairs: one from the RDC and the second one from the respective sector ministry relevant to the area of RSC competence. The RSC members represent both the public and private sector as well as civil society. They often possess specific competence in the area of intervention.

The RDA provides its secretariat services also to the RSCs. At the same time, the RSC receives technical assistance from specialists delegated by LPA level II. To ensure the secretariat function for

⁶ GIZ MLPS 2017: Report on the results of focus group discussions and recommendations aimed at strengthening the capacity of Regional Development Councils.

⁷http://www.adrnord.md/public/files/crd_nord_2017/Decizii_CRD_Nord_29.06.2017.pdf,

<http://adrcentru.md/public/files/Decizii-CRDCentru-20092017a0221.pdf>,

http://adrsud.md/public/files/CRD_Sud_din_29.06.2017.pdf,

http://adrqagauzia.md/public/files/sostav_comissii_po_vodosnabjeniu.pdf

the newly created RSC, GIZ MLPS covered in the beginning the costs of one secretariat unit in each development region at the request of the partners. These expenses were not originally planned in the operational budget of the RDA. Based on a joint agreement concluded at the end of 2018, the subsequent costs related to the secretariat function have to be taken over by the respective RDA.

The RSCs act on the basis of an annual action plan, elaborated during the planning meeting. In 2018, the RSCs for WSS and SWM met regularly on quarterly basis to discuss the existing situation in the sector and to agree on priorities and work plans. Challenges related to regional and local participatory planning, regionalization of services, opportunities for inter-municipal cooperation and improvement of service operators' capabilities were discussed. Moreover, with the support of GIZ MLPS, an assessment of the current status in the sectors was performed. Data was collected from LPA and service operators and recommendations were discussed for the two sectors WSS and SWM. The results of the assessment, the challenges in the sectors and the future work plans of the RSCs were communicated and endorsed at the RDC meetings. However, in 2019, except for the ATU Gagauzia development region, no RSC meetings were organised, and the support (secretariat), organisation and functioning mechanism of the respective commissions is not clear.

To further enhance the capacities of RSC, in 2018 RSC members benefitted from exchange of experiences and study visits. In this context, the RSC representatives from the North, Centre and South development regions learned about best practices in the regionalization of WSS and SWM services during a study visit to Romania⁸. Moreover, workshops focusing on the WSS sector and an exchange of experience at local level (Floresti, Falesti) were organised to ensure a better understanding of the common challenges, possible solutions and cooperation opportunities at local and regional level.

The interviewees noted that the RSC proved to be an effective platform for the improvement of the dialogue between various actors (LPAs, CSOs, service providers, etc.) at regional level in a specific sector. RSCs are perceived as a support mechanism for the RDCs to increase their expertise capacity and to ensure the synergy between the sectoral and regional policies. National authorities consider the existence of RSCs as a good opportunity to interact with local and regional authorities on the sector-specific legislation and issues. However, they also noted a few challenges in implementation: (1) A low level/lacking continuity of active participation of RSC members, especially of the representatives of the rayon councils; (2) A lack of financial resources for the efficient organization of RSC meetings; (3) A low degree of involvement of RDA in RSC meetings; (4) A lack of specialized assistance and technical expertise.

4 Lessons learned and recommendations

1) The establishment of the RDC is done through a fair, participatory and transparent process which ensures the legitimacy of the council.

The organization of a fair, participatory and transparent process for the RDC set up is the guarantee for a responsible members' selection and increases the legitimacy of the respective RDC. Any political interference contributes to the reduced motivation of the members and to the credibility of the decisions and actions taken. At the selection stage, it is important to ensure a good visibility of the process and provide comprehensive information on the mission, mandate and duties of the RDC, including the role and function of its members. The members of the RDC need to decide on the procedure of the selection of their chair and deputy-chair, appoint the secretary and formulate a list of

⁸ Progress report no. 8, MLPS phase 2, January – December 2018
<http://serviciilocale.md/doc.php?l=en&idc=69&id=1664&t=/Progress-Reports/Progress-report-No-8-MLPS-phase-2-January-December-2018>

priority activities during their mandate which is based on the actual planning framework and the main development challenges.

Recommendations:

- **Amendment of the legal framework for the RDC establishment** with reference to the composition, structure, size and selection procedures. To increase the functioning of the councils and improve constructive discussions and decision-making, it is advisable to revise the number of council members. One option in this regard could be to consider quotas for regional representation of LPA, civil society and private sector instead of having four representatives from each rayon. The selection of LPA representatives/mayors should be made by the mayors' association/assembly, for example in a public meeting through a participatory and transparent process and focus on representatives with an actual interest in the participation in the RDC's activities. The selection of representatives from the private sector and civil society should be performed through a public and transparent competition, giving priority to active organizations, with focus and competences relevant to the regional development. This could be organized by the RDA. For the private sector, priority should be given to professional associations, which represent the interest of a group of entrepreneurs (associations, producers' unions, etc.).
- **The chairperson and deputy-chair of the RDC should be elected by RDC members** by secret ballot, without the interference of central authorities. The term as chairperson and deputy-chair should be for a limited period of time (1-2 years).
- An **information campaign** should be organized at the stage of launching the selection process of the RDC members, which would explain the mission and functions of the RDC, its importance for the development of the region, the role of the members and the eligibility conditions for participation in the selection process.
- The **RDC should elaborate and approve an annual action plan** in line with their duties, the regional strategic and operational framework and the main development challenges of the region.

2) The analysis and improvement of the institutional framework are necessary to ensure the sustainable and balanced regional development.

In general, the institutional framework for regional development is considered to be flexible enough. However, due to objective and subjective conditions, regional councils have limited decision-making power, RDA are subordinated to MARDE, which limits their functional autonomy, and the LPA have little responsibilities in terms of implementation of projects and priority activities at local level.

Recommendations:

- **The adjustment of the corresponding regulatory framework** (laws, decisions, regulations) to strengthen the regional institutional framework and the cross-sectoral character of the regional development policy.
- **The development of a new financing criteria/principles for the NFRD** should ensure both the financing of the urban development projects and other eligible investment projects, and the mechanisms for co-financing of the cross-border and transnational cooperation projects. The given aspect would reinforce the RDC role and would fortify the efforts to promote the regional initiatives.

3) Sufficient administrative, financial and human resources are necessary for the effective functioning of the RDC and the RSC.

The effective functioning of the RDC/RSC depends on the availability of adequate resources, capacities and tools. To ensure this, it is necessary to finalize the RSC institutionalization process as permanent structures within the RDC and to provide sufficient resources for their proper functioning.

Recommendations:

- **The process of institutionalization of RSC should be completed.** The RDC regulation should directly refer to the existence of RSC as consultative structures, their composition and the areas in which these are established as well as define their role and relationship with the RDC. It is advisable to do this immediately after local elections and within the framework of a new mandate and composition of RDC members.
- **The selection of RSC members should be reviewed,** so that the delegated representatives show interest and desire to contribute to the work of commissions. A proposal in this regard would be that the sector commission members are nominated by and accountable to the rayonal councils. Also, the role of the co-chairs delegated by the central authorities should not be limited only to the provision of explanations to questions or encountered challenges, but also to facilitate discussions on all initiatives promoted at national level. At the same time, it would be good if they are held responsible for the provision of the necessary support to the RSC (as part of their job description).
- **The main mandate of the RSC should be the development of solutions and recommendations** in the priority areas of intervention in the respective sector. The developed solutions and recommendations should be considered and reflected in the decisions approved by the RDC. RSC should provide the necessary expertise and a public consultation on draft decisions.
- **The RDA need to establish an effective administrative structure (secretariat)** for the proper functioning of the RDC/RSC, which contributes to the organization of the RDC and RSC meetings, to the facilitation of communication with and between the RDC and RSC members, e.g. via the intranet portal, to the monitoring of approved decisions implementation, etc. In order to do so, the secretariat needs to be staffed with sufficient human and financial resources.
- **RDC should be provided with reliable sources of funding,** e.g. allocated by the NFRD, other national funds for the respective sector and/or from contributions of the rayon councils (co-financing). The funding should include sufficient financial resources for the realization of the proposed RDC activities, including measures for technical support and capacity building.

4) Capacity development of RDC and RSC members is necessary to ensure the effective performance of their functions.

The RDC has a fairly large set of tasks and represents a platform where various challenges and opportunities for the development of the region can be addressed. Therefore, continuous capacity development is necessary to further strengthen the knowledge and skills of RDC and RSC members and enable them to fulfil their mandate and exercise their roles and responsibilities. APA developed the training module “Management of RDC” dedicated to the RDC role and responsibilities. Moreover, other training modules focusing on regional development, planning etc. exist. The courses are not only to the representatives of LPA, but also to the RDC members representing the civil society and the private sector.

Recommendations:

- Sufficient budget should be allocated to finance the participation in training and implementation of further capacity development measures (see recommendations under b).
- RDAs should promote and ensure the efficient use of the Intranet portal dedicated to the RDC activities. The portal can also be used to exchange information and improve knowledge sharing.

5 Conclusions

The aim of the paper was to highlight the key experiences made, challenges encountered, and lessons learned with regard to the measures undertaken to strengthen the capacities of RDC in the period between 2017 and 2019 and to provide recommendations for further improvements.

The paper comes to the conclusion that RDC continue to represent an important platform to ensure the coordination and promotion of regional development policy objectives at regional and local level and to consolidate the efforts of different stakeholders for socio-economic development in the regions. Moreover, the RDC provide the opportunity for participation in planning and decision-making processes for both LPA/rayons as well as private sector and civil society.

In view of the functionality and effectiveness of the RDC, the paper pointed towards a series of challenges and outlines recommendations for further improvement. Among others, it is recommended to amend the legal framework in place in order to further strengthen the role of RDC in regional development and to improve the level and quality of participation in the meetings and council's work. In particular a revision of the size and composition of the councils seems advisable in this regard. However, it is important to notice that amendments of the framework are also of no use if the motivation of RDC members to actively participate is not further increased and if the challenge of having a low level of understanding of and identification with the different roles, responsibilities and tasks of the RDC is not tackled. Against this background, the paper also concludes that more favourable conditions and further capacity development of RDC members are needed to ensure the functioning of the council and its work. In addition, the allocation of sufficient administrative, financial and human resources is required.

6 Annexes

Annex 1: The analytical framework of the evaluation

Areas of analysis	Categories	Key topics
Organizational development	Organizational structure	Who are the members of the RDC/RSC? How are they being selected? How do they work together?
	Capabilities	Who offers administrative support? Is there a stable source of funding?
Regional governance	Results	What is the result of the RDC/RSC activity? Do the regional institutions solve specific regional challenges, complement regional planning processes?
Operational framework	Participation Transparency Communication	Do the RDCs/RSCs work transparently and follow a clear activity framework (mission, processes)? Do the RDCs/RSCs support the participation of the citizens? Is the communication effective?

Annex 2: The interviews outline (summary)

Regional actors categories	Sector	#	Variables
RDC/RSC	Public	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Within the RDC, the LPA promotes to a greater extent the interests of the territories they represent, than those of the region - The LPA does not exhibit sufficient solidarity in the joint activity - The RSC is an effective platform for the exchange of experience and a deeper knowledge of priority sectors - The working sessions must be combined with regional study visits - The regional development policy contributes to the development of the territories - The participation of the members must be conscious and responsible - The rayons are "parasitic" (free-riding) structures, which must be reorganized - The regional councils have a balanced and fair structure and composition - The current centralized administrative model permits a strong interference of central authorities in the activity of regional institutions. - The participation involves costs (financial, time) - The promotion of good practices at the regional level (study visits) is necessary - The funding sources for regional development are limited - The communication between the chair of the regional council and its members is very weak

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A higher involvement in the participatory activities of all relevant actors of the region is needed - The RSCs ensure a wider involvement of actors, than it is possible within the regional council - The revision of RDA status
CSO	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The associations active in the social field, RDC members, have limited opportunities for manifestation - The members' activism depends on their competences in one field of activity or another - The participation of public associations facilitates the promotion of new initiatives (e.g. social entrepreneurship) - A permanent communication platform for the RDC/RSC members ("forum list") is necessary - CSOs have the capacity to contribute to the promotion of sustainable environment protection solutions - The active CSOs are interested in opportunities of participation to the achievement of RD policy objectives - CSRs ensure an in-depth knowledge of the development sectors - The RDC members communication platform development - The election of the chairperson and of the deputy - chair must be carried out in a fair and transparent process - Ensuring equity with respect to the conditions of RDC members participation - Regional institutions are dominated by central authorities - The RDC is not involved at all stages of the regional development policy - The learning process must be permanent - The exercise of duties requires specific knowledge and skills
Private	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The opportunities of the private sector participation in the regional development policy are limited - The private sector is interested in programs that ensure the development of the business environment in the region

RDA	RDA North RDA Centre RDA Gagauzia RDA South	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The fluctuation of the RSC members reduces the efficiency of the commissions activity and the capacity of initiatives promotion - The activism of the co-chairs contributes to a better functioning of the RSC - RSC and RDC must act coherently - RSC uses various forms of participation - The RSC analyzes the sectoral development problems and challenges, facilitates the drafting of projects and identifies new funding sources - The RSC ensures a wider participation of regional actors - The RSC needs capacity building in the areas of common interest - The RSC contributes to the promotion of regional approaches in the development of public services - The Agency is an institution that can provide, both the secretariat and the expertise for the activity of RDC/RSC structures - The RDC has broad powers, but limited intervention tools - The RDC members have limited capabilities for the exercise of their duties
GIZ	Regional consultants	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The RSCs are necessary, but the realization of the respective duties is difficult - The RSC members wish to have more active roles in regional development processes - The RSC facilitates the implementation of sectoral programs. - The RSC, de jure, has extensive powers, but in reality exerts reduced roles - The RSC sought to improve the functional internal structure of the RDC
MARDE	State secretary	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The prioritization of investments (growth poles) - The programs dedicated to rural and urban development - The rural development: local tourism and dedicated economic activities - The reorganization of regional councils
	Head of Department	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Optimization of Regional Councils duties/powers - Strengthening the RDC capabilities - RDC role increase in the process of projects selection and financing (creation of the regional fund) - The reduced RDC decision-making power reduces the motivation to participate

	Co-chairs of RSC	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The RSCs - a platform of interaction of central and local authorities for joint interventions - The fluctuation of RSC members reduces the effectiveness of these structures - RSC -the participatory analysis of the WSS sector development challenges - The RSC organization on integrated areas of intervention (e.g. environment (SWM, WSS, Energy efficiency) - The topics of interest for the RDC/RDC activity - The regulation of the WSS public service and of the service operators' activity - The billing and payment of services. Ensuring the access of vulnerable groups to WSS services (equity and solidarity) - The knowledge of good practices for the WSS services regionalization
IDU	Director	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The growth of regional councils' role depends on the administrative-territorial organization - The clarification of the LPA role in the regional development processes is very important
BCI	Director	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The synchronization of local interventions (communication, participation and investments) - The diversification of the participation opportunities for the private and voluntary sector
APA	Head of Department	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The training programs contribute to a better knowledge of the regional development policy and of the necessary competences
CALM	Vice-president, expert	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The LPA reduced participation in the implementation of projects bounds the progress of their capacities - More equity is needed in the allocation of financial resources from national funds

Annex 3: Action plan on the implementation of the recommendations

The action plan refers in particular to the actions needed to develop the RDC/RSC capacity building tools.

No.	Recommendation	Actions	Responsible
1. The establishment of the RDC is done through a fair, participatory and transparent process which ensures the legitimacy of the council			
1.	Amendment of the legal framework for RDC establishment	Ensure the participation of RDA representatives in the meetings of mayors' associations to present the role and duties of the RDC members	RDC/RDA North RDC/RDA Centre RDC/RDA South RDC/RDA Gagauzia MARDE
2.		It is recommended to include in the Regulation on the selection of private sector members, that in the competition for the private sectors representatives' election, priority is given to the active organizations (chambers of commerce and industry, profile associations, etc.)	MARDE
3.		The completion of the Law no. 436 of 28.12.2006 on local public administration with new competences in the field of regional development	MARDE
4.		The completion of point 21 of the Regional Development Council frame-regulation approved by Annex no. 2 to Government Decision no. 127 of 08.02.2008 on measures to implement the "Law no. 438-XVI of 28.12.2006 on regional development in the Republic of Moldova", with the subpoint g) "The RDC chairperson will coordinate with the RDC members the decisions to be approved within the NCCRD and will report on the results of approved decisions"	MARDE
5.		The amendment of point 11 of the Regional Development Council frame-regulation approved by Annex no. 2 to Government Decision no. 127 of 08.02.2008 on measures to implement the "Law no. 438-XVI of 28.12.2006 on regional development in the Republic of Moldova", so that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to exclude the obligation of RDC chairperson and the deputy-chair selection from among the representatives of local authorities; - to exclude the involvement of MARDE from the process of chairperson and the deputy-chair selection; - the chairperson and the deputy-chair selection should be carried out by secret ballot. 	MARDE

No.	Recommendation	Actions	Responsible
6.		The organization of an information campaign on the process of regional councils establishment and the mobilization of stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the creation of certain visibility elements (logo, motto) - the elaboration and dissemination of press releases in national, regional and local media - the organization of certain public information and awareness-raising events (territorial and/or sectoral, in CSO networks, etc.) 	RDC/RDA North RDC/RDA Centre RDC/RDA South RDC/RDA Gagauzia MARDE
7.		The elaboration of RDC annual action plans	RDC/RDA North RDC/RDA Centre RDC/RDA South RDC/RDA Gagauzia MARDE
2. The analysis and improvement of the institutional framework is necessary to ensure the sustainable and balanced regional development			
8	The institutional framework is improved	Development of a mechanism for improved coordination of regional development policy with cross-sectoral policies	MARDE
9		Development of a new financing criteria/principles for the NFRD, including modalities for co-financing of cross-border and transnational cooperation projects	MARDE
3. Sufficient administrative, financial and human resources are necessary for the effective functioning of the RDC and the RSC			
10.	The RSC institutionalization process must be finalized	The completion of paragraph (5) article 7 of the “ <i>Law no. 438-XVI of 28.12.2006 on regional development in the Republic of Moldova</i> ” with a new duty b ¹) „Establishes regional sectoral committees as appropriate”	MARDE
11.		The completion of point 15 of the Regional Development Council frame-regulation approved by Annex no. 2 to Government Decision no. 127 of 08.02.2008 on measures to implement the “ <i>Law no. 438-XVI of 28.12.2006 on regional development in the Republic of Moldova</i> ”, with point b1) „Establishes regional sectoral committees as appropriate. The activity regulation of the regional sectoral commissions is approved by the RDC”	MARDE
12.		The approval of modifications to the RDC activity regulations with respect to the creation of sectoral RSC at the decision of the members	RDA Centre

No.	Recommendation	Actions	Responsible
			RDA South RDA Gagauzia
13.		<p>The revision of the RSC structure and approval of their set up decisions in the first meeting of the new RDC mandate.</p> <p>The establishment of the function of regional development specialist in the economic profile departments, who will be delegated to the RSC, additionally, as the case may be, specialists from other specialized subdivisions may be invited. In this respect, the continuity of RSC activities would be ensured by the delegation of the same persons. In addition, the relations between the RDA and the rayon councils would have a more effective institutional framework.</p>	RDA North RDA Centre RDA South RDA Gagauzia MARDE
14.		The elaboration of changes to the job description of the delegated person as co-chair of the RSC, in order to ensure the continuity of the planned activities and of his role within the RSC.	MARDE (as the case may be – other institutions, depending on the created RSC profile)
15.	RDA must establish an effective administrative structure (secretariat) within the regional policy and external cooperation department	The realization of changes to the staffing rules or to the job description of an employee of the Regional Policy and External Cooperation Department, regarding the inclusion of at least one function as RDC and RSC secretary	RDA North RDA Centre RDA South RDA Gagauzia MARDE
16.	The main priority of the RSC should be the elaboration of solutions and recommendations regarding the priority areas of intervention in specific sectors	The elaboration of annual action plans, based on the provisions of national, regional policies and the challenges existing in certain sectors	RDA North RDA Centre RDA South RDA Gagauzia MARDE (GIZ support)
17.	RDC should be provided with reliable sources of funding	The inclusion of expenses necessary for the activity of at least 2 RSC per year, of 8 meetings. (rent, stationary, coffee break costs) in the operational plan of agencies	RDC/RDA North RDC/RDA Centre

No.	Recommendation	Actions	Responsible
			RDC/RDA South RDC/RDA Gagauzia MARDE
4. Capacity development of RDC members is necessary to ensure the effective performance of their functions			
18.	The organization of training programs dedicated to regional development and RDC operation	The implementation of APA training program "Management of RDC" in accordance with the RDC establishment process	APA MARDE
19		Organization of thematic workshops based on specific needs	RDC/RDA North RDC/RDA Centre RDC/RDA South RDC/RDA Gagauzia
20.	RDAs should promote and ensure the efficient use of the Intranet portal dedicated to the regional councils' activity	The completion of subpoint. 5, point. 9 of the Regional Development Council frame-regulation approved by Annex no. 2 to Government Decision no. 127 of 08.02.2008 on measures to implement the "Law no. 438-XVI of 28.12.2006 on regional development in the Republic of Moldova", with paragraph i) "Ensures the management/administration of the intranet portal dedicated to the RDC activity"	MARDE