

# Modernising Land Consolidation using EU Best Practices

## Serbia

Project name	Strengthening Municipal Land Management / Rural Development: Effective Land Management
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) with 1.0 m €, European Union (EU) with 2.78 m €
Project region	7 pilot municipalities in South East Serbia
Lead executing agency	Ministry of Agriculture, and Environmental Protection (MAEP): Directorate of Agricultural Lands (DAL) with 0.1 m €
Duration	2013 - 2016

## Background

Fragmentation of agricultural land is one of the major problems of Serbia's agricultural sector. Serbia's agricultural holdings are highly fragmented and their production is less efficient. Average parcels sizes in South East Serbia amount to less than 0.30 ha and many parcels are not accessible by field roads or tracks. Experiences from other European countries suggests that investing in land consolidation, although costly, can have high returns. Benefits of such a program include consolidated properties, better infrastructure, accurate property registers and cadastral maps increased market values for properties, increased investments, production and employment, higher tax revenues and better rural living conditions.

In the past, Serbia has conducted a large number of land consolidation projects, predominantly in the Northern region (Vojvodina), a highly productive area in the Danube basin. Large areas of bush, shrub and trees have been cleared, swamps have been drained and high amounts of pesticides and fertilizers have been and still are applied to maximise productivity. This led to degraded and imbalanced ecosystems and a loss of biodiversity. Applying these former practices in Serbia's South, which still is rich in biodiversity, would contradict modern sustainable land management concepts, as the Agenda 2030, the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Use of Tenure (FAO) as well as the EU legislation. Serbia on its way to become a member of the EU faces the challenge to comply with EU standards and regulations, which emphasize sustainable agricultural production in balanced eco-systems.

## Cooperation and Funding

The project closely cooperated with the Serbian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (MAEP), in particular with the Directorate for Agricultural Lands (DAL). The Serbian Republic Geodetic Authority (RGA) as well as the local governments are involved as well, in particular in seven pilot municipalities.

The project operated at local and national level. At national level, the project supported the review of the current legal framework according to EU best practices. At local level, several EU standards were introduced and land consolidation projects were piloted in seven pilot municipalities. Based on experiences gained from that process, legal documents (revised laws, new bylaws and regulations) as well as improved administrative procedures were elaborated. Change of laws and regulations also require a change in administrative structures and processes as well as improving administrative capacities. For that purpose, capacity building measures and the elaboration of training manuals and PR materials will help improve the understanding of the newly applied approaches.

## Introducing EU Best Practices

The following EU best practices have been prioritized for Serbia and are stepwise introduced and tested with the support of national and international experts:

- **Active participation** of the involved farmers and other stakeholders to ensure a fair and transparent process. In order to strengthen the role of land owners, a board of participants was created in each land consolidation area, and procedures for hearings and complaints were established.
- Preparation of a **plan for common and public facilities with landscape development plan**. This introduces an **environmental assessment** as part of land consolidation and the implementation of **environmental compensatory measures**.
- Introduction of additional **checks and balances**, in particular supervision mechanisms of the land consolidation commission, the board of participants, as well as supervision of contractors.

## Capacity Development

New approaches require also a shift in value systems and an increased awareness. Therefore, the project offered a number of capacity development measures. A study tour to Germany was organised to provide an insight on how EU member states implement land consolidation and to ensure an exchange of experiences (peer-to-peer learning approach), to discuss challenges and to develop solutions. Particular interest was raised on the plan on common facilities and environmental compensatory measures. The study tour group comprised staff from DAL, RGA and staff from each pilot municipality.

Trainings were conducted to qualify the land consolidation commissions as well as the boards of participants to perform their tasks. In addition, a large number of public meetings were held

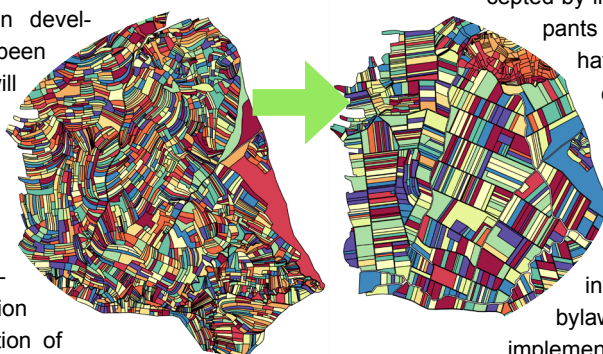
to provide information on the land consolidation process and to encourage participation of land owners, lessees and the interested public.

## Challenges

One challenge is that the availability of digital cadastral parcel data throughout Serbia. While in some areas, vector data are available, in others only scanned maps, or in its worst case, some documentation about land ownership (partly from the 19th century) is available. Furthermore, not all restitution claims have yet been dealt with. Another challenge in the current land consolidation process in Serbia was the high demand for resources (time, manpower) to establish and train each newly assigned land consolidation commissions. It is useful to establish and involve permanent staff at subnational level to ensure continuous learning from applied land consolidation processes.

## Achievements

Reallotment plans for land consolidation for five of the seven pilot municipalities have been developed and their implementation has been finalised, two pilot municipalities will follow in autumn 2016. A high level of participation and dialogue with all stakeholders was essential to achieve reallotment plans with the vast majority of participants being very satisfied. Another success factor was the elaboration and distribution of training materials and the conduction of awareness campaigns, which helped actors and participants to clearly understand their roles and what they can expect from the process. Board of participants ensured that the interest of the participants is well represented throughout the process. As shown in Table 1, results of the land consolidation process show the average parcel size has grown between 43% up to more than 400%. All parcels are now accessible by field roads, drainage canals further improved agricultural production.



**Table 1: Results achieved by land consolidation in 5 pilot municipalities**

Municipality	Boljevac	Knjaževac	Negotin	Pirot	Svrljig
LC area (ha)	260	197	2511	320	314
#participants	258	147	753	880	410
#parcels before LC	926	869	9933	1815	2783
#parcels after LC	409	269	2414	1232	1283
avg. parcel size bef	0.28	0.23	0.19	0.18	0.12
avg. parcel size aft	0.64	0.67	0.77	0.36	0.25
<b>LC coefficient</b>	<b>2,27</b>	<b>2.92</b>	<b>4.07</b>	<b>1.43</b>	<b>2.16</b>
add.field roads (km)	12	19	99	NA	19

## Conclusion

Though land consolidation is a complex process, the Serbian Ministry of Agriculture, with support of this project has modernised land consolidation procedures in Serbia and successfully applied it within seven pilot municipalities. The new approach with focus on participation and applying EU best practices was widely accepted by involved actors as well as by the participants in the pilot municipalities. Many farmers have learnt that land consolidation is the entry point in producing more efficiently and that they are becoming active entrepreneurs ready to compete in the European market. Land consolidation will continue to be a task for generations in Southern Serbia. After improving the legal framework based on modern bylaws jointly elaborated with the project, implementation of land consolidation schemes is now possible at a larger scale and within a wider municipal and regional development strategy. The pace with which land consolidation will be implemented in the future will highly depend on the available resources, in particular in view of staff for conducting the land consolidation process and sufficient funding to improve the required rural infrastructure. This project has laid the groundwork for future land consolidation in Serbia.



Center above: Parcel shapes before and after Land Consolidation in Svrljig. Photos above (l. to r.): Review of Landscape Development Plan in Pirot municipality, Identification of field roads in Svrljig municipality, Improving land valuation methodology in Zitoradja municipality, Vesting into new land parcels in Svrljig municipality

Published by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH  
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As at March 2016

GIZ is responsible for the content of this publication.

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