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“Memorandum of Understanding & Operational Plan”

Δράση D.T3.1.1

“Μνημόνιο κατανόησης και Σχέδιο Λειτουργίας”

[L3.3.b “Μνημόνιο κατανόησης και σχέδιο ανάπτυξης του επιχειρηματικού φόρουμ”]

**β. Μνημόνιο κατανόησης και
σχέδιο ανάπτυξης του επιχειρηματικού φόρουμ**

**b. Memorandum of Understanding and
development plan of the business forum**

Project Beneficiary: Development Association of Halkidiki S.A. - Organization for Local
Development - Lead Partner

Δικαιούχος: ΑΝΑΠΤΥΞΙΑΚΗ ΧΑΛΚΙΔΙΚΗΣ Α.Ε. Αναπτυξιακός Οργανισμός Τοπικής
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Abstract

The present deliverable is produced within the framework of the project “Herbs for Growth”, which is implemented with funding from the Joint Operational Programme (JOP¹ CBC²) *Black Sea Basin 2014 - 2020* and the Programme Priority 1. *Promote business and entrepreneurship within the Black Sea Basin* and the Programme Priority Specific Objective: 1.2 *Increase cross-border trade opportunities and modernisation in the agricultural and connected sectors.*

The main object of the deliverable will be the development of *the memorandum of understanding and the operational plan for the herbs’ business forum* in the Black Sea³. The approach regards a dynamic plan (non-fixed) that may include cultivators and producers, as well as processing companies and traders, and other stakeholders in the sector of herbs, from the participating countries (Greece, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia).

The aim of the memorandum of understanding is to support the development of the network and the development of local markets, and the development of cooperation with other similar networks, in other countries. Furthermore, it intends to ensure sustainability of initiatives under HEGO project, after the end of the project lifetime.

The final document of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU⁴) is accompanied by the development plan of the business forum, the implementation essay to the

¹ JOP: Joint Operational Programme.

² CBC: Cross-border cooperation.

³ The present deliverable refers to the whole project. It is developed by the Lead beneficiary and takes into consideration the views of the other project partners. It covers also the plan for the development of the business forum

⁴ MoU: Memorandum of Understanding.

Lead Beneficiary, and the annex with the contribution of the partners of the HEGO project.

1. Introduction

In the areas where rural people live and create, the collection, production and use of herbs either as ingredients in culinary recipes or as decoctions and/or for their medicinal properties, are important elements of tradition and cultural heritage, in the intervention area (Halkidiki - North Greece, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia).

At the same time, herbs are elements of local economic activities, in rural and urban areas. However, many times their collection from nature, endangers biodiversity systems, without the application of rules and restrictions.

The increasing demand for quality products in urban areas, creates a new state of incentives for exploiting the value of herbs and therefore growth opportunities, but at the same time risks of reckless collection from nature.

The objective of this MoU, is to develop a thematic herbs' business forum, which will promote networking between project partners, herbs' cultivators, herbs' businesses and herbs' related businesses, trade organisations, export organisations, policy planning organisations, training centers and educational and research institutes.

The herbs' business forum will act as a network between project partners and target stakeholders and organizations to be identified, attracted and engaged during project implementation.

The ultimate goal is:

- The protection and preservation of biodiversity;
- Strengthening the local economy by making the most of knowledge farming;
- The preservation and creation of new jobs.

2. HEGO project: summarised reference (physical object, main goals).

Project countries (Greece, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia) share a rich biodiversity and endemism of herb plant species, as well as an interconnected herbal medicine and food historical tradition. However, the overexploitation of wild growing endangered and endemic herb plant species, due to the inappropriate collection methods from the wild and the rapidly growing demand for herb products to 2025 (according to recent studies), resulted to an unsustainable wild growing herbs utilization as well as production efficiency. The unsustainable and doubtful economic future of local people in areas with rich biodiversity, like mountainous population in Project countries, is the bottom line of these environmental and socio-economic risks.

The significant positive impact of the HEGO Project will be the change of the production model for herb products in all Project countries, which will lead to the positive effect on improving the **economic and business performance of the herb sector** and indirectly on contributing to the **biodiversity conservation of endemic herb plant species**, with the sustainable utilization in Project countries.

The HEGO Project will address to the above mentioned **common challenges** by developing training tools and by applying them in activities:

- Informing and **educating farmers** for reducing collecting **herbs** form the wild and promoting **agricultural diversified new cultivations** with improved trade value added products (endangered and endemic herb plant species for processed products);
- Informing and educating farmers on how to adapt to **new challenges in farming entrepreneurship**, trade and product quality with reference to herb products;
- Establishing and promoting “**research to business**” networking linkages among research organizations and relevant enterprises with reference to the improved value of herbs, especially for endemic species, having potential markets in Food industry, Pharmacy and Cosmetics;

- Establishing and promoting multi-lateral cross-border and international **trade links** for herb products produced in BSB countries participating in the proposed Project using **ICT and Marketing and Branding Strategies**;
- Improving the access of agricultural enterprises in **granting and investment schemes** as well as in initiatives for the **creation of clusters** in agricultural sector.

The partners of the project are:

Development Association of Halkidiki S.A. - Organization for Local Development (LB/GR);

the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki - Special account of Funds and Research (PB2/GR);

the Organization for Entrepreneurship Development (ODA, previously known as ODIMM) (PB3/MD);

Georgian Farmers' Association (PB4/GE); and

Center of Agribusiness and Rural Development Foundation in Armenia (PB5/AM).

3. Memorandum of Understanding

3.1 *About the memorandum of understanding*

The Memorandum of understanding outlines the general objectives, the rules, the restrictions and tools for the development of a thematic business forum in the herbs sector. The network of the business forum will consist of clusters at national level, which will create a single open - dynamic network of herb farmers, herb enterprises and enterprises whose business is linked to the herb sector, trade organisations, export organisations, policy planning organisations, training centers and educational and research institutes. The herbs' business forum will act as a networking platform between project partners, stakeholders, and target organisations that will be identified, attracted and engaged in long term, after the lifetime of the HEGO project.

The network, alongside its activities identified in the development of the respective economic scope of the commercial parties involved, will promote a biodiversity conservation and protection approach, avoiding the collection of herbs from the nature.

The network that will be developed, initially intends be informal (without legal form) and will have the potential to be supported, and further developed with new financial instruments.

3.2 *Main objective of the Memorandum of Understanding*

The scope of the **Memorandum of Understanding** is the development and planning of procedures for the preparation, creation, implementation and dynamic development of a business network for herbs in the intervention area, on the basis of quality and reputation/branding development.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) shall outline the terms and conditions of the agreement among partners of an herbal business forum, including the roles and responsibilities of each partners, the scope of their collaboration, and any financial or other resources that will be contributed or fundraised.

The MoU shall serve as framework for collaboration and cooperation between partners, and help to ensure that everyone is on the same page in terms of expectations and outcomes. It could be used to establish partnerships between businesses, organizations, or governmental and other agencies involved in herbal industry, and could cover a wide range of topics, such as research and development, marketing and promotion, or sharing knowledge and expertise.

Overall, the main objective of an MoU related to herbal business forum, is to establish a foundation for successful cooperation and achievement of common goals for the development and promotion of herbal industry.

3.3 *What a thematic business forum is*

A business forum, is a cooperation model, using also digital tools, that connects business between companies in a certain sector.

In a business forum, business professionals, entrepreneurs, investors, and other stakeholders, come together to discuss and exchange ideas, knowledge, and experiences related to the business world of their related sector. It is a place / a space where individuals can network, share best practices, and collaborate on various business issues.

Business forums can be physical events that take place in conference halls, hotels, or other meeting venues, or they can be virtual events that take place online through webinars, video conferences, or other digital platforms.

Business forums cover a wide range of topics, including finance, marketing, sales, management, technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship. They provide an opportunity for participants to gain new insights into the latest trends and developments in the industry, learn from experts, and make valuable connections with other business professionals. They can imply activities such as: participation in bilateral business meetings (B2B), meetings with investors, and policy makers, etc.; advocating, promoting, and launch of new products or services; display, presentation and demonstration of the products and/or services to attendees of the business forum events; interaction with mentors, policy makers, entrepreneurs, investors that share same interests; round tables discussions on particular topics; training programs, mentoring sessions; advocacy, etc.

In the case of the HEGO project, the business forum has a more stable structure for continues communication and cooperation between the different stakeholders in the Herbs' sector. It will be an informal network without legal identity.

3.4 *Thematic Business Forum (Herbs' sector)*

A thematic business forum in the field of herbs, intents to promote networking between project partners, herb cultivators, herb and herb businesses, trade organizations, export organizations, policy-making organisations, training centers and educational and research institutes. The herbal business forum will act as a network between project partners and target stakeholders and organisations to be identified, and engaged during project implementation (with the option of continuing the development even after the completion of the project).

3.5 *Members of the Business Forum*

Members of the business forum will be:

- The beneficiaries of the HEGO project;
- Herb cultivators - producers;
- Herb businesses (processing; marketing/trading);
- Enterprises whose activities are linked to the herbs' sector;
- Nutritionists;
- Trade associations and chambers of commerce;
- Export agencies;
- Investors;
- Policy-making associations;
- Vocational training centers;

- Educational institutions and research institutes.

The countries of origin will first of all be the countries participating in the HEGO project (Greece, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia), while counterparts from other Black Sea Basin countries may also join the network.

3.6 *Network maturation toolbox*

The Memorandum of Understanding is accompanied by:

- The development plan of the business forum (in this document);
- the operational plan of the business forum (in this document);
- the network maturity toolbox (deliverable L3.6 / D.T4.3.1) which will include the necessary legal and operational documents (tools) for the creation of clusters of stakeholders and end beneficiaries of economic activities related to the sector of herbs and herb-based products, covering the whole range of production, processing, manufacturing and trading.

3.7 *The Memorandum of Understanding*

The Memorandum of Understanding is based on rules that are accepted by the participants. These rules may be updated as the network matures and develops in the light of broader developments in science, technology, economy and various needs in general.

The network - business forum will have the following general principles:

- Protecting and conserving biodiversity;
- promoting the approach of avoiding the collection of herbs from the nature;
- promoting the approach of cultivating herbs;
- promoting the approach of training in the cultivation of herbs as well as topics such as modern trends in markets, cosmetics, marketing, e-

commerce, development of partnerships, product and packaging quality, branding, etc. with training in the fields, the classrooms but also digitally;

- developing partnerships with universities and research institutes for research and support of the development of the herbs' sector;
- the creation of a network/business forum for the development of the herbal sector, with rules for the admission of new members, as well as procedures for staying in it and the related opportunities it will give to its members.

Participating organisations and beneficiaries are required to follow the rules and procedures for participation in the business forum so that it can maintain its prestige, ultimately for the benefit of its members.

3.8 *Indicative literature review*

The creation of cooperation networks is not a new concept. However, there are many cases of successful and unsuccessful attempts in this process. Therefore, as a practical guide, in a special section of this document, some critical success factors are given.

This section summarises some indicative references to similar actions, which could inspire actions and innovative interventions in the context of the informal business forum, within the HEGO project.

In the international literature, many important inputs are reported for the development of agri-food as a resource for progress in local communities, especially for crisis and post-crisis periods.

Typically, according to Thomas and Miller (2019), after a series of crises either in the agri-food sector or with a direct impact on it, as has been happening continuously over the last two decades, the necessity for the development of a new model, a new model of agri-food entrepreneurship, is imperative, with the approach including among the critical elements of development:

- (i) The existence of a knowledge transfer loop;
- (ii) Food projects for the community;

- (iii) Producer markets; and
- (iv) (iv) Good practice techniques.

These elements can therefore be argued that only through cooperation can they be operationally effective and developed at a reasonable cost and therefore provide evidence of the importance of developing local networks of producers and distributors of local agri-food products. Thus, Thomas and Miller (2019), conclude that improvement in the rural development environment now requires a coherent frame of reference with improved quality attributes, reduced production costs, transfer (i.e. by adaptation) of good practices, training and knowledge transfer, and extension / consultations.

Furthermore, in the monograph by Dansero, Pettenati and Toldo (2017), the “need for geography” in relation to nutrition is an important element of local development. Thus, the relationship between power, economy, society, culture and environment and the new relationship between rural and urban areas, crucially incorporate the association of food products and nutrition with land and reference regions. It can therefore be concluded that there is a need for a link with the place, and hence for cooperation at local level between the parties involved, as an element that contributes to local development in a very targeted way.

Ruben, Slingerland and Nijhoff (2006), refer to poor rural households, which find it difficult to cope with the competition of low-cost industrialised food production, with difficulties in integrating new technologies, etc. The diversification of small producers may be at the advantage of providing labour-intensive products that require high quality supervision. Thus, the authors justify that bridging the gaps between local economic development and the integrated food chain requires the development of new institutional and organizational networks that allow producers to comply with the requirements of the relevant sector and trade standards, with dissemination of information and collaborative relationships with

institutions that create opportunities for small producers to adapt their production to the needs of the consumers and become an active - dynamic part of the chain.

According to FAO FAO⁵ (2021), as cited in Anon (2021), critical elements for agri-food system resilience include among others: *supporting the development of small and medium agri-food enterprises, cooperatives, consortia and clusters that can assist maintaining diversity in domestic value chains of agri-food products.*

3.9 Plan of development of the business forum

The main characteristics of the herbs' business forum network are provided below.

To complete the draft business forum, this was shared with partners for their input and assistance with comments, which were subsequently incorporated as appropriate. The subscription with comments, as had been mentioned in the relevant communications of the comment form with the participants, was done in an anonymous manner, in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation⁶.

3.9.1 Target Groups

The operational plan for the development of the business forum in the field of herbs, is addressed to the following target groups, as the synthesis of approaches from different perspectives on the subject, allows the optimal formulation of the action for the utilization and promotion of the value of herbs in agro-food, cosmetic and pharmaceutical use in the intervention area:

- The members of the business forum as listed above (section 3.3);
- Local public authorities;

⁵ FAO: Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.

⁶ GDPR: General Data Protection Regulation.

- Regional public authorities;
- National public authorities;
- Associations / cooperatives, etc. in the rural development sector;
- Non-governmental organisations with a subject matter which is in the context of rural development and local development in general;
- General population.

3.9.2 Terms

The creation of the business forum in the herbs' sector should be based on some main benchmarks, which will be related to parity, equality, respect for different views, vision for enhancing local economic development, etc.

In the first period, the network, should be supported for its establishment and initial operation as an informal network, by a public or semi-public authority. In particular, either the lead partner (ANETXA - Greece) or partner 3 (ODA (former ODIMM) - Moldova) is suggested as a good solution⁷, due to their specific characteristics.

Thereafter the first operation period, the development of a legal entity, should be pursued⁸, in order to develop related actions and establish the network, but also for being able to support its members.

Subsequently, there must be stable administrative support in order for the new body to be operationally consistent and progressively strengthened, with the support of both sponsorships and grants, as well as the implementation of co-funded projects.

⁷ It is suggested to start the coordinator with the LB - ANETXA.

⁸ Not within the lifespan of the HEGO project.

The network should include members from the broadest range of cultivation - trading, as presented in this document.

The network should also develop partnerships with other networks, starting with other local networks developed in the participating countries.

The membership base will be open to new members, according to standards and requirements that will be clear to all. The following may be referred as common membership eligibility criteria: (i) professional involvement in herbal industry (members may be required to demonstrate their professional involvement such as being a producer/processor, trader, researcher or interested investor in this industry, etc.); (ii) relevant qualification and experience in the herbal industry (several years of experience); (iii) performing ethical and sustainable practices; (iv) active participation; (v) membership fee (in case it will be required in the future).

Communication and information to members will be full and transparent, inclusive and respectful of differing views.

Develop and implement a quality pact and label as specifically stated below.

3.9.3 Accord and quality mark

The development plan has as its main axis the development of a quality accord, which will allow the formulation and dynamic updating of requirements and specifications, in order to ensure the quality characteristics of the products produced and traded by those participating in the network, so as not to jeopardize its prestige, but rather to enhance its reputation.

The first step is to establish criteria for participation in the accord and quality mark. This could include requirements such as adherence to ethical and sustainable practices, compliance with relevant regulations, commitment to quality and safety, etc.

The quality accord to be developed, will apply rules to producers, processing units and traders, but also to businesses that use herbs and their derivatives, such as catering businesses, hotels, points of sale to the general public, etc., with specific characteristics in terms of products, procedures and responsibility towards the

consumer. In addition, it will have rules for both retention and expulsion from it, where appropriate, through transparent procedures that ensure equal treatment of all participants.

The quality accord will have clear criteria for entry, retention and/or exclusion from it, which will be respected by all participants.

Participants who meet the criteria, will be provided with a quality mark to display on their products or marketing materials, indicating their commitment to ethical and sustainable practices.

The quality accord can be a key point for the development of the network⁹ that will allow the project objectives and local economic development in general to be achieved.

The accord will be accompanied by a specific label to be produced and widely used by the network members in order to develop an identity.

3.9.4 Network development potential

The network that will be created, will be dynamic and will allow the entry of new members, in accordance with the rules in force and the criteria of the quality accord that will be put in place¹⁰.

The network will start in an informal form, within the HEGO project partnership, but will then seek to acquire legal personality in order to be able to develop and to participate in co-funded projects with proposals that promote its objectives.

⁹ Indicative example of good practice for a quality network, is the *Fair Trade*.

¹⁰ Before setting the quality accord in force, all terms and regulations of establishment and operation of the network, will be met.

3.9.5 Network management

Once the business forum in the herbs' sector is established, in the near future, after it will have acquired legal form¹¹, it will be governed by a Board of Directors in accordance with the provisions of the relevant statutes, while the network's General Assembly will be the supreme body.

3.9.6 Steps of the development plan of the business forum

The development plan of the herbs' business forum should include the following steps:

- Define the Purpose and Goals: Clear definition of the purpose and goals of the business forum. This will help guide the development plan and ensure that the forum is meeting the needs of its participants.
- Identification of the Target Audience: Identification of the target audience¹² for the forum, including businesses, entrepreneurs, investors, and other stakeholders. This will help determine the topics, format, and structure of the forum.
- Research Best Practices: Research of best practices for business forums, including successful models from other regions and industries. This will provide insights into what works and what doesn't, and help guide the development plan.
- Development of a Content Strategy: Development of a content strategy for the forum, including topics, speakers, and formats of intervention. This will

¹¹ The network starts its operation as an informal type of network.

¹² Especially for events targeting to the selected audience (e.g. the members of the business forum or potential members), their format and structure, have to be determined in advance, subject to its goals and expected audience.

ensure that the forum provides value to its participants and is engaging and informative. A constant approach through all its life cycle will secure that its objectives, are achieved.

- Identification of Key Partners: Identification of the key partners for the forum, including local and regional business organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders. This will help ensure the success of the forum and provide access to resources and expertise.
- Creation of a Marketing Plan: Creation of a marketing plan to promote the forum to its target audience. This should include a mix of online and offline marketing channels, such as social media, email marketing, print ads, and media outreach.
- Build of a Team: Build of a team to support the development and operation of the forum, including event planners, content creators, and marketing and outreach specialists.
- Secure of Funding for operation: Secure funding for operation / operation tools for the forum, including sponsorships, ticket sales, and grants. This will ensure that the forum is financially sustainable and can continue to provide value to its participants over the long term. In the case of the forum of the HEGO project, that is envisaged through ongoing related funded programmes.
- Evaluation and Improvement: Continuous evaluation of the forum and look for ways to improve it. This may include soliciting feedback from participants, analyzing attendance and engagement metrics, and making adjustments to the format, content, and marketing strategy as needed.

By following these steps, the development plan for the herbs' business forum, can successfully be implemented, and provide value to its participants, engage the target audience, and help drive economic growth and development in the area of intervention.

3.10 Summarised ex-ante evaluation

The operation of the business forum in the herbs' sector, requires systematic support, both during its preparation and during its establishment and subsequent operation.

- (i) *By developing autonomy and systematic operation (with a minimum of one staff person) during the 2nd implementation period.*

In this case, it is expected that once the development elements are activated (creation and implementation of a quality accord and quality label, use of financial programmes and instruments to support, strengthen and further develop the network, development of partnerships with Local Action Groups (LAGs) and other stakeholders, etc.), the network will be able to sustain and strengthen its operation and its substantial contribution to the development of the participating members and consequently the local economy and the enhancement of employment. There should be a positive impact on production and its quality characteristics, as well as an improvement in production costs. At the same time, it is expected to develop the approach of protecting and conserving biodiversity.

- (ii) *Without the development of an autonomous and systematic operation (with a minimum of one staff person) during the 2nd implementation period.*

In this case, it is estimated that the network will not be able to grow and will gradually weaken and will soon cease to exist.

3.11 Expected results

The implementation of the development plan for the creation and operation of the business forum in the herbs' sector, is expected to have the following main results:

- (i) the promotion of herbs for agro-food, cosmetic and pharmaceutical use in the participating countries, by establishing joint marketing strategies and regional structures (local clusters) to increase visibility (regional and international), enhance competitiveness and create commercial opportunities;

- (ii) the development and strengthening of the social position and cultural identity of small producers / processors of herbs (main stakeholders), through capacity building, transfer of knowledge and good practices for quality and sustainable production, thus contributing to the modernization of the herb sector in the intervention area; and
- (iii) The conservation and protection of biodiversity by avoiding the collection of herbs from the wild, which generally leads to a high degree of endangerment of endemic species.

The operation of the network will allow the participants to be constantly updated, exchange practices and gain a better knowledge of market trends (existing and potential) and new techniques, technologies and processes, so that they can enter new markets, develop broader partnerships, improve their products, survive and grow their businesses and thus actively contribute to the strengthening of local economies.

3.12 *Link to other local networks*

The network of the Business Forum in the herbs' sector, will cover the intervention area and subsequently the wider Black Sea basin region, and will consist of local clusters per country. It will then be able to interconnect, in the second phase, with other relevant local networks.

The aim of this hyperlink will be to exchange good practices, to avoid mistakes already made by others, to develop future trade relations (between the parties concerned) and cultural exchanges at the level of tradition and preservation of the cultural heritage of the participating countries, based on the herbs sector.

3.13 *Indicative Success factors*

Success factors that can contribute to the growth and effectiveness of the herbs' business forum are:

- Strong Leadership / Coordination: The business forum / business network, should have strong and effective leadership that can provide direction and

guidance, and help build trust and rapport among members. The leadership can remain with the Lead Beneficiary of the HEGO project, especially at the beginning of the operation, unless otherwise is decided at a later stage.

- **Active Participation**: The members of the business forum / business network should be actively engaged and participate in the network's activities and events^{13,14,15, 16}. This helps build relationships and connections, and fosters a sense of community among members.
- **Clear Goals and Objectives**: The forum / network should have clear and well-defined goals and objectives that are aligned with the needs and interests of its members. This helps ensure that the network provides value to its members and remains relevant and effective.
- **Diverse Membership**: The business forum / network should have a diverse membership, representing different industries, backgrounds, and

¹³ The organisers of the business forum events, should always consider specific criteria for the selection of topics, which indicatively include: (i) Relevance (for the market, investors, producers, etc.); (ii) Specific (to avoid too general topic and not relatable to attendees' profile and background); (iii) Interest (topics shall be of interest to the audience attending the forum, whether they are entrepreneurs, academia or policy makers, etc.); (iv) Diversity (topics shall be enough divers and cover different business functions such as marketing, operations, and finance); (v) Expertise (the speakers and presenters shall have qualifications in the relevant topic areas and be able to provide valuable insights and information to audience); (vi) Interactivity (topics shall allow interaction and engagement from the audience, whether through Questions and Answers sessions, breakout discussions, or networking opportunities).

¹⁴ Especially for events, beside the lectures speeches, debates, facilitation, etc. good logistics plan should be in place, such as venue rental, catering, audio0visual equipment.

¹⁵ Attendance: The number of attendees is a key indicator of the success of an event. A high attendance rate indicates that the event was able to attract a significant number of professionals in the herbal industry.

¹⁶ Positive feedback: positive feedbacks from participants is a strong indicator of success. Feedback could be collected through surveys or other means, and can be used to improve future events.

perspectives. This helps foster innovation, creativity, and cross-sector collaboration.

- Regular Communication: Effective communication is critical for the success of a business forum / network. Regular communication can help keep members informed about upcoming events, news, and opportunities, and can help build trust and a sense of community.
- Access to Resources: The business forum / network should provide members with access to resources, such as funding opportunities, expertise, and information. This helps members grow and expand their businesses, and can help the network attract new members.
- Measurable Outcomes: The business forum / network should have measurable outcomes and be able to track and report on its impact. This helps demonstrate the value of the network to its members and stakeholders, and can help attract funding and support.

By focusing on the above success factors, the Herbs' business forum / network can create a strong and effective community that provides value to its members and helps drive economic growth and development.

3.14 Indicative time plan

The indicative time plan for the development of the business forum is as follows:

- February 2022 - December 2022: Preparation activities;
- December 2022 - January 2023: Finalisation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the plan for the development of the herbs' business forum;

- February 2023 - April 2023¹⁷: Setup of the herbs' business forum as an informal structure, including endorsement of the MOU by the project partners and stakeholders;
- May 2023 - September 2023: First development steps of the herbs' business forum / business network.
- October 2023 - May 2024: Second phase of planning. Evaluation of the implementation; Securing continuation with activities beyond the HEGO project initiative, through other projects;
- June 2024+: Continue of evaluation, decisions for upgrade and / or modifications and operation.

4. Conclusions

Subject to a variety of factors, the operation of the herbs' business forum / network can have a number of conclusions, both positive and negative. Here are some possible conclusions that can arise from the operation of a business network:

Positive Conclusions:

Improved Collaboration: The herbs' business forum / network can lead to improved collaboration among members, which can result in new business opportunities, innovation, and improved problem-solving.

Access to Resources: The herbs' business forum / network can provide members with access to resources, such as funding opportunities, expertise, and information, which can help them grow and expand their businesses.

¹⁷ April 2023: End of the HEGO project. However, the business forum in the herbs' sector will continue its operation.

Increased Visibility: The herbs' business forum / network can increase the visibility and reputation of their members, which can help attract new customers, investors, and partners.

New Business Relationships: The herbs' business forum / network can facilitate the development of new business relationships, which can lead to new partnerships, collaborations, and joint ventures.

Improved Industry Knowledge: The herbs' business forum / network can provide members with access to industry knowledge and insights, which can help them stay up-to-date on trends, regulations, and best practices.

Negative Conclusions:

Lack of Engagement: The herbs' business forum / network can fail if members are not actively engaged and do not participate in the network's activities and events.

Lack of Value: The herbs' business forum / network can fail if they do not provide value to their members, such as access to resources, business opportunities, or industry knowledge.

Lack of Trust: The herbs' business forum / network can fail if members do not trust each other, or if there are issues with confidentiality.

Insufficient Leadership / Coordination: The herbs' business forum / network can fail if there is insufficient leadership or if the coordinators are ineffective or unresponsive to members' needs.

Limited Reach: The herbs' business forum / network can fail if it is limited in scope or reach, and do not attract a diverse and engaged membership.

In conclusion, the success of the herbs' business forum / network will depend on a variety of factors, including the engagement of its members, the quality of its leadership and coordination, and its ability to provide value to its members. By addressing these factors and focusing on the positive conclusions, the herbs' business forum / network can be a valuable resource for its members and contribute to the growth and success of the businesses in the network.



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5. Annex I: Good Practice

A good practice is the Farmers' Business Network (FBN)¹⁸.

It is a business network serving in the USA; Canada, Australia; and Brazil.

Its Mission is *“Powering the prosperity of Family Farmers around the world.”*

Its Vision is *“Every farmer is a member of Farmers Business Network, resulting in economically viable and sustainable family farms and rural communities.”*

Its Values are *“Act like an owner, be a great team, serve Family Farmers.”*

FBN was developed in 2014 by a handful of farmers as an independent, unbiased and objective farmer-driven information source. **By sharing agronomic precision data with one another, they knew that all farmers could make better decisions on seeds and agronomics.** No marketing fluff, just the facts on raw performance. They wanted transparency and to be treated fairly in the market. That’s how a dream became a reality – Farmers Business Network. Within two years, the network spread to thousands of farmers managing millions of acres. As each new farmer joins the FBN Network, every member’s seed information, agronomic analytics and buying power gets stronger. When farmers connect, farmers win – and the services, technology and network keep growing.

Through crowdsourced data, FBN provides recommendations on seeds, fertility, and crop protection. In addition, it sells generic products directly in their platform as well as connecting farmers to buyers of their crop.

¹⁸ <https://www.fbn.com>



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In its goals, among others, are: democratise information; provide unbiased analytics.



SHOP MARKET ANALYZE COMMUNITY ABOUT

Sign In

Sign Up

Welcome to *Farmers Business Network*[®]

FBN helps Family Farmers maximize their profit potential with data and technology, direct-to-farm commerce, community and a sustainability platform.



Reduce Production Costs

Great value and convenient farm products and services delivered direct-to-farm.



Maximize Profit Potential

Cutting edge marketing and risk management services to help maximize the value of your crops.



Make Confident Decisions

Data-backed, farm-tested insights and our global farmer community to make decisions that improve the bottom line.

55,000 +
Farmers

4
Countries

117M
Network Acres

Common borders. Common solutions.

6. Annex II: Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

Memorandum of Understanding

In Polygyros today, day, 2022, at the premises of Development Association of Halkidiki S.A. - Organization for Local Development, the parties signing at the end of this document:

1. The Development Association of Halkidiki S.A. - Organization for Local Development (hereinafter referred to as ANETXA), which is legally represented for this purpose by, (property),
2. The other signatories at the end of this document,

Hereinafter referred to as «Parties», having regard to:

- (i) that provision is made for the conclusion of such memoranda of understanding, provided that they are not subcontracts and do not distort competition,
- (ii) that together and within their respective roles, parties can address the challenges of utilization of herbs and their derivatives while conserving biodiversity,

By this document they agree to:

- (A)** formulate a framework for cooperation between them, in order to contribute through their joint actions to the conservation and utilization of valuable local development resources related to herbs and endemic species, where appropriate, in a quality-oriented manner. Thus, they can:
- (i) strengthen the local economy;
 - (ii) maintain jobs and create new ones;



- (iii) protect biodiversity by conserving species that would otherwise be at risk.

The cooperation between the parties is expected to develop valuable synergies, multiplier effects and economies of scale in the critical area of regional and local development with the contribution of the herbs' sector, which will contribute to the upgrading of the parties' business operation and the well-being of citizens. In particular, it is considered that the development of partnerships within and outside the country, the exchange of good practices and knowledge sharing, training and consultancy, the use of financial instruments for actions to upgrade the skills of producers and other stakeholders in the production - marketing spectrum, but also other stakeholders such as non-professionals involved in herbs, can be elements to strengthen the local economy and the employment and retention of young people in the countryside.

(B) to work together to create a business network in the herbs sector, based in The network, in its initial structure, will be informal and will seek to be transformed into a formal network with a legal form and specific statutes. The network will be open to new members, provided they meet the specific requirements set out in relevant development plan and after the formal body will be established, with the requirements of the statutes, and once the agreement and quality label, if applicable (type of stakeholders) in accordance with it, will be in force, in addition to the requirements of the statutes.

(Γ) for the fulfillment of the issues highlighted to undertake:

- (i) cooperation to address problems that may arise;
- (ii) the setting up of ad hoc and thematic working groups and the organisation of thematic and general meetings and workshops;
- (iii) undertaking other actions to strengthen and promote cooperation within the network,

- (iv) the establishment of a Monitoring Committee to monitor the progress of implementation of this Memorandum and the related Operational Plan.

This Memorandum shall enter into force upon signature and shall have a term of seven (7) years. The agreement may be extended, upon the consent of the first party and a majority of other parties.

THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

1. Development Association of Halkidiki S.A. - Organization for Local Development

(Name, Position, Signature)

2. Other Parties

Name	Position	Accommodation Address	Telephone	Signature
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ANNEX to the MEMORANDUM OF COOPERATION

Development plan for a business forum in the herbs sector (sub-chapter 3.9).

7. Annex III: Summarised comments over the draft version of the document, by the partners

The draft of the memorandum of cooperation (v0.4) was sent to the beneficiaries (partners) of the HEGO project for information and sending opinions, questions, and/or remarks, as the case may be.

The partner PB4 (GFA) referring to the prioritisation for the countries participating in the HEGO project, with the possibility, however, to participate in the business network, and entities from other countries of the Black Sea basin, asked if entities from other (EU) countries will be able to participate. It was answered that as the network concerns the Black Sea Basin, the members will be from countries in the eligible area. However, the development of networking with other networks and entrepreneurship forums in the herbal field is envisaged in the document. To the question about the coordinator, it was answered that at the beginning it is recommended to be the lead partner, and then there can be changes. To the question about participation by subscription, it was answered that this can be considered later, after the end of the HEGO project, by the members, however the reference to the importance of the funding of the network, in the new sub-chapter of the document, on success factors of the project, should be taken into account.

Partner PB5 (CARD) agreed with the content without the need for any addition, and received relevant clarifications on questions they raised: the coordination at the beginning is suggested to remain with the Lead Beneficiary (ANETXA), and can change later; the business forum will be informal (without legal identity), at least not during the project life time; the administrative support will be sought to be funded by other projects (e.g. the cost of a person, etc.) as such options are always open and available; the option for membership fees is not valid at the beginning, however as described in the document, the existence of some funding is one of the success factors; entities from other EU countries, not in the Black Sea eligible area, will not participate, but the business forum is suggested to cooperate with other networks in the herbs sector.

Partner PB3 (ODA), agreed with the content and proposed some minor improvements such as: clear reference to the actual development period of the business forum network (after the HEGO project lifetime), to include two more target groups (nutritionists; investors), indicative membership eligibility criteria, indicative accord and quality mark criteria, use of quality mark by the holders, two indicative success factors for events (attendees and feedback). Furthermore, it suggested additional elaboration of the sub-chapter of the main objective of the MoU. Finally, it elaborated a draft version of a legal specimen document of MoU, including significant details of the supporting document (this document).

7.1 Email text to the participants in the discussion of the draft of the memorandum of understanding

From: DOMI DEVELOPMENT PC - Yiannis [mailto:yiannis@domikoinep.gr]

Sent: Wednesday, 14 December, 2022 9:55 AM

To: 'Anastasios Michailidis' <tassosm@auth.gr>; Rodica.Crudu@oda.md; olga.moraru@oda.md; 'Natia Gelashvili' <ngelashvili@gfa.org.ge>; 'Sona Telunts' <sona.telunts@card.am>; 'Tamar Sargsyan' <Tamar.Sargsyan@card.am>

Cc: livadiotis@anetxa.gr; 'Tsoukalidis, DOMI DEVELOPMENT' <yiannis@domikoinep.gr>; hego.bsb@gmail.com; 'ΔΟΜΗ ΚΟΙΝΕΠ - ΔΟΜΗ ΚΟΙΝΕΠ' <info@domikoinep.gr>; nikouli@anetxa.gr

Subject: HEGO DT311 Draft

Dear HEGO partners and friends,

hello.

Please kindly find attached the English version of the draft of DT311 (in DOCX and PDF format), regarding the MoU, for which your comments / contribution is needed.

In case of no comments, you can still send your response with your review (that the provisions are inline with your approach and covers the local needs).

with your feedback, the final version will be prepared within a week time.

with kind regards,

Yiannis

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