



**AULEDA – LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
OF VLORA REGION, ALBANIA**

**NATIONAL CATALOGUE OF INNOVATIONS
IN ALBANIA**

IDEASS - Innovation for Development and South South Cooperation

INTRODUCTION

AULEDA is a non-profit registered organization established in August 2003 in Vlora, Albania, and constituted by the most relevant actors of the Region, such as the Prefecture, the Regional Council, almost all the municipalities, the chamber of commerce, the universities of the Region, the Regional department of Ministry of Agriculture and NGO-s. This agency serves about 300,000 residents of Vlora County, and operates in an area of 2706 km², with seven municipalities and 19 communes, respectively



It is the first Albanian organization dedicated to enhancing the involvement of regional public and private stakeholders in the process of regional development, therefore constituting an example of good practices and defining a reproducible model of regional management.

AULEDA mission is to sustain the social, economic, cultural and environmental development of Vlora region, reinforcing and integrating its own resources according to the principles of human development, and in accordance with the regional strategic plans.



AULEDA is part of the international network of Local Economic Development Agencies sponsored by ILSLEDA, and it achieved the international EURADA/ILSLEDA quality label for local economic development agencies operating for human development.

for local economic development agencies

AULEDA provides services and carries on initiatives and projects at benefit of the population resident in the region (300,000 persons in 19 commons) -with priority to the most disadvantaged ones- of the entrepreneurs and farmers - with priority to the micro and small businesses- to the public administration - mainly at support of its planning activities - to the local NGOs and associations -mainly strengthening their capacities- through harmonising activities and resources towards the common perspective of valorising and making competitive the endogenous resource, while respecting the principles of social equity and inclusion, gender equity, and protection of environment.

AULEDA constantly studies and maps the endogenous economic potential, analyses needs and demand for sustainable development, provide financial and non financial support to the creation of new businesses and the reinforcement of the existing ones, mainly through the promotion of value chain related to the priorities established in the regional strategic plans, such as currently sustainable tourism, agro-food production, fishing and green economy.

AULEDA also supports the inclusion of the most disadvantaged people into the mainstream economy, supports territorial marketing strategies, realises projects in accordance to the priority needs, favour international relationships for the local institutions, and business-to-business partnership with international partners.



In the last ten years AULEDA has demonstrated responsibility and professionalism in realizing its mission and objectives, attracting the interest and financial support of, among the others, UNOPS, UNDP, European Commission, Oxfam GB, Soros Foundation, Italian Cooperation, American Embassy in Tirana.

WHAT PROBLEM DOES IT SOLVE

AULEDA supports Vlorë region development and facilitates its alignment with the National Stabilization and Association Agreement Action Plan, the National Strategy for Development and Integration and the Integrated Planning System. Thanks to its well established relationship with local government, AULEDA has been able to develop a comprehensive strategy for regional development based on five priority areas:

- Transparency and accountability
- Participative public decision-making
- Increased and more equitable access to quality basic services
- Inclusive regional development for reducing disparities among Municipalities
- Environmentally sustainable development

Moreover, attention for gender issues and capacity building have been defined by AULEDA as cross-cutting priorities of its activities.

Working for supporting the decentralization of economic development decision-making and implementation, AULEDA:



Acts as a forum for participated dialogue on local economic development:

- providing an open space for decision-making, and
- facilitating the relations among public institutions and civil society;

Coordinates local economic development planning and implementation:

- identifying the priorities of the territory, and
- providing technical assistance to local administration developing territorial Strategic Planning;

Supports local enterprises development and sustainability:

- sustaining local entrepreneurs in defining their business plans, verifying their feasibility and starting economic activities,
- providing local entrepreneurs with inexpensive credit (disbursed after verifying the feasibility of the entrepreneurial project, and covered by a specific Guarantee Fund
- assuring to local entrepreneurs post-financing assistance,
- promoting mechanism for facilitating innovation at business and public administration level
- promoting the association of small entrepreneurs in cooperatives, value chains around the most competitive regional products, and brand partnerships
- enhancing local economic, social and cultural resources and helping their channelling into a competitive and sustainable system of value chains,
- supporting local small producers' launch in national and international markets;

Promotes social inclusion of disadvantaged groups:

- providing technical assistance
- facilitating the access to credit for social enterprises (through its Guarantee Fund),
- enhancing the participation of all the local social actors in the decision-making process regarding local development,
- supporting, in particular, disadvantaged women in their entrepreneurial activities, for re-affirming their economic and social role;

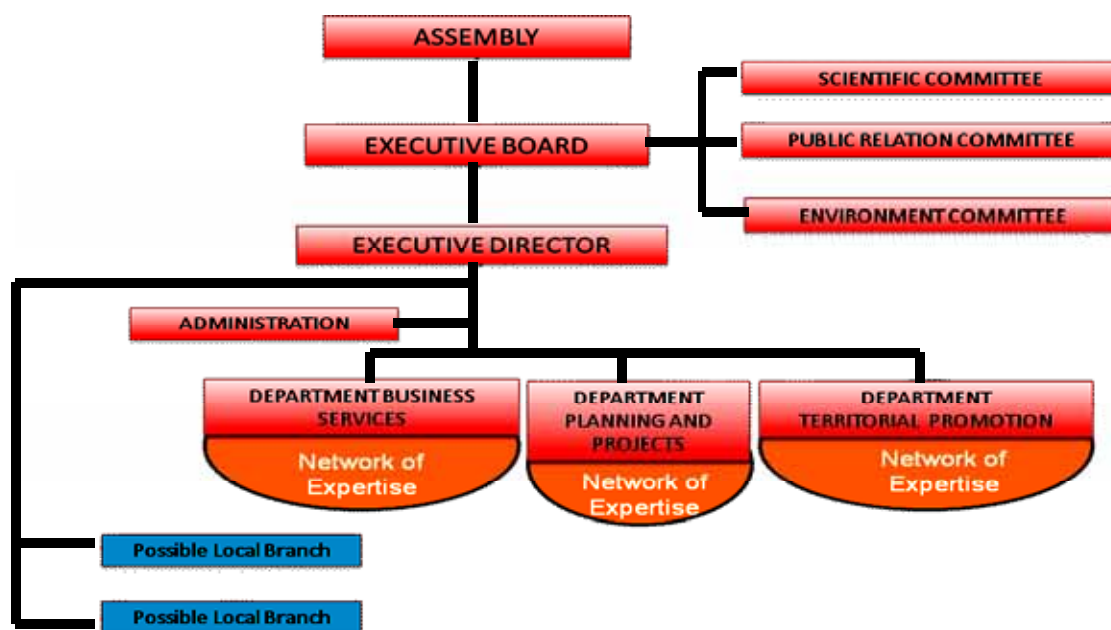
Raises environmental awareness among local economic development actors, and promotes and supports green economy;

Facilitates the integration of local economic development strategies in national and international initiatives, being part of national and international networks: promoting the territorial marketing of the region, either for

exposing it at international level, or attracting resources and tourism in the region; supporting international partnerships

AULEDA, IN PRACTICE

AULEDA ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



Members of the Assembly

- Vlora Prefecture
- Vlora District Council
- 5 Municipalities: Vlore, Sarande, Delvine, Orikum, Himare
- 8 Communes: Hore Vranisht, Armen, Kote, Shushica, Novosela, Brataj, Lukova and Center Commune
- Public University "Ismail Qemali"
- Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Vlora
- 8 private associations
- Scientific Research Institute for the Transfer of Agriculture Technology

Institutions collaborating with AULEDA

- Vlora County
- Department of Agriculture and Food
- Department of Education
- Department of Forest and Water Administration
- Department of Public Health
- Department of Labour and Social Services



AULEDA WORKING STRATEGY

AULEDA working strategy is especially focused on three elements:

STRATEGIC PLANNING IN VLORA REGION

AULEDA is one of the main actors participating in the development of a Strategic Plan for Vlora Region, realized by regional public and private stakeholders with the support of UNDP.

AULEDA has played a fundamental role in the management of the participatory process that brought to the definition of the plan, and, supported by Strategic Planning experts, has developed its capacity of devising complex projects, gathering territorial actors, and moderating public discussions. More than 120 meetings were held in the framework of the Strategic Planning initiative, from February 2010 to April 2011 (50 meetings with stakeholders, 70 coordination meetings, 6 public consultation events in which more than 330 people participated).

During the process future configurations for Vlora Region have been identified, based on present conditions, on the trends outlined by ongoing policies and on the variables



the Strategic Plan can introduce to trigger

sustainable, endogenous development:



According to the created Strategic Plan, Vlora region has to be:

- a place where sustainability is applied to all sectors of human activity and all development policies and initiatives are coordinated and synergistic;
- a really attractive territory offering well-preserved natural assets, a strong, peculiar cultural identity, qualified human resources, efficient services, social cohesion;
- a region where environmental protection is considered as an opportunity to foster innovation, socio-economic development and professional growth;
- a territory willing to overcome the development model followed so far, increase qualified employment, preserve regional attractors, keep and increase tourist flows.

BUSINESS SUPPORT AND GUARANTEE FUND

AULEDA provides a comprehensive support to establish new businesses or to existing entrepreneurs, with priority to the small and medium businesses. AULEDA provides all the necessary technical assistance for the implementation of business ideas, in particular developing market researches, organizing trainings for entrepreneurs, helping them in preparing business plans and running the businesses, facilitating the

association of entrepreneurs, creating competitive value chains, and partnership brands, promoting local products on national and international markets. The basic principle of this support is to contribute to the economic development of the region, through prioritising those businesses related to the value chains included in the regional strategic plan.

A Guarantee Fund for facilitating access to credit for local SMEs. It was created in 2003 as part of the comprehensive assistance, with the support of UNOPS and Credins Bank. The Guarantee Fund constitutes a fundamental part of AULEDA work, and facilitates the access to credit of people who have a feasible entrepreneurial idea, but don't have sufficient guarantees of capital assets; the Fund is meant to sustain, in particular, small entrepreneurs from rural areas and start-ups.

The credit is provided to demands between 400,000 and 10,000,000 *leke* (to be returned in a period of 2-7 years) for purchasing machineries, equipment and manufacturing materials.

The Guarantee Fund scheme has two important further features:

- It triples the value of the guarantee fund deposited in the bank for credit operations
- It provides incomes to AULEDA, from the interest on the fund, and the ones applied to the customers



OTHER SERVICES

AULEDA provides other services, whose beneficiaries are the population, the entrepreneurs and their associations, the local NGO's, the local authorities, such as:

- Permanent analysis and monitoring of the regional endogenous resources, aimed at it continuous valorization
- Support to the territorial promotion, through information and communication, aimed at the strategic territorial marketing
- Facilitation of business networking, linking local enterprises with those at national and international level
- Promotion and support of international territorial partnerships, for carrying on common initiatives and projects



SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

Support to the establishment of social enterprises is a fundamental part of AULEDA's work. Through the creation of those activities AULEDA can indeed promote social inclusion and social cohesion, thus implementing the values the Agency is founded on. The social enterprises that have been supported by AULEDA so far are:

- a green house for flowers production employing mental health patients, created in collaboration with Vlora psychiatric hospital and Vlora Mental Health Community Center;
- a social enterprise of rural women that collect medicinal herbs in the Lumi i Vlores area;
- a social restaurant employing female mental health patients involved in the de-institutionalization process, created in collaboration with Vlora high school for tourism and business.



- a project regarding the constitution of a social enterprise employing Egyptian people in paper recycling has been submitted by AULEDA and BIENDELTA (Egyptian community association), and is currently under evaluation.

AULEDA PROJECTS

Besides the three main field of activities described above, AULEDA also works for the implementation of development projects, in collaboration with local, national and international partners and thanks to the support of international funds. The main projects implemented in the last years (or currently under implementation), divided by field of interest, are:

Environment

- Greener environment for sustainable development in Novosela (financed by REC)
- Building an artificial wetland for wastewater treatment in the course of Narta (financed by GEF/UNDP)
- Protection of forest biodiversity through cultivation of medicinal plants in Vlora River (financed by GEF/UNDP)
- Awareness for environmental protection, air defence campaign (financed by Mileucontact)
- Satellite monitoring system of environmental resources in cross-border area Greece–Albania (financed by European Commission, IPA CBC Programme)

Sustainable tourism

- SSTLA: development of local tourism systems (financed by Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Marche Region)
- Ecological Valley, the pattern of rural development (financed by UNDP, ArtGold1 Programme)
- I&A: Interactive portal between Albania and Italy for cultural tourism (financed by European Commission, Interreg III A Programme)
- Valt: assessment of art, culture and language (financed by European Commission, Interreg III A Programme)
- SITRUS: use of information technologies for the development of sustainable rural tourism (financed by European Commission, Interreg III A Programme)
- Rural economy and the role of youth in its development (financed by OXFAM.GB)
- Cross Border Shared Integrated Alternative Tourism (financed by European Commission, IPA CBC Programme Albania - FYROM Macedonia)
- Towards sustainable tourism: Strategic Planning in Vlora Region (financed by UNDP, ArtGold2 Programme)



Agriculture

- Promotion of grape and wine products (financed by OXFAM.GB)
- Farmers' fair to promote local agricultural products and livestock (financed by OXFAM. GB)
- Building the farmers' market in Orikum Municipality (financed by OXFAM.GB)
- Supporting the farmers of Shushice Commune to easily enter the market (financed by OXFAM. GB)
- Local Development Groups (LAG) in rural development (financed by OXFAM.GB)
- IPATECH: Miniaturization of agro-food products technology in the Adriatic area (financed by European Commission, IPA CBC Adriatic Programme)

Social inclusion

- Mental Health: integrated social services for female mental health patients (financed by Regione Puglia)
- Minori: integrated social services and creation of recreational structures for the children of "Ibrahim Kushta" school (financed by Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
- Social inclusion of women from rural areas through the collection of medicinal plants in the area of Vlora river (financed by Soros Foundation)
- C4E: Coach for Employment (financed by SWISS Cooperation)

Economic development

- ROSA: establishment of an international network of enterprises, local economic development agencies, chambers of commerce and other entities working for development (financed by European Commission, CARDS Programme)

ICT development

- PITAGORA: Platform for the Information Technology Aimed at Getting Opportunities to Reduce ICT gap in the Adriatic Area (financed by European Commission, IPA CBC Adriatic Programme)

RESULTS

In AULEDA's 10 years of activity:

- inter-municipal and regional Strategic Plans have been developed following the participatory methodology;
- local economic potentialities have been mapped;
- around **150 enterprises** have received technical assistance, and 16 of them have also received financial support thanks to the Guarantee Fund;
- **214,000 USD** have been delivered to entrepreneurs as credits, with 100% return rate;
- **150 jobs** have been created;
- **2500 people** have received professional training or have been trained in enterprise management;
- the constitution of **4 social enterprises** has been promoted, and the enterprises have consequently been financially supported;
- **35 projects** have been implemented, for a total amount of 1,500,000 Euro managed by AULEDA.



In particular, in the last three years:

- **38 local administration** and **25 local NGOs** have been trained and supported in planning and managing local economic development;
- **9 value chains** have been created and 8 have been supported in Vlora region;
- **38 enterprises** have been created and 24 have been supported in Vlora region,
- **130 enterprises** have been **technically supported**;
- **114,000 USD** have been used for sustaining **8 enterprises**, out of 207,000 USD at AULEDA's disposal for support to access to credit;
- **100 jobs** have been **created** (45 of which for women) and **150** have been **maintained** (56 of which for women) thanks to AULEDA's support;
- **1000 people** (375 of which women) have been trained in enterprises management.



11 capacity building trainings have been organized, respectively for:

- Shushica farmers, on new agricultural technologies
- Lumi i Vlores sheeps and cows farmers, on new vaccines for their animals
- Lumi i Vlores women employed in the medicinal herbs sector, on new processing technologies
- women from Vlora, on the management of B&B structures
- young people from Orikum, on employment opportunities in the touristic sector
- youth from rural areas, on new communication technologies
- regional administration, on how to Managing European support funds

- staff of the Programming and Development office of Vlora region, on regional Strategic Planning process based on wide participation of stakeholders and groups of interest
- local administrations, on ISO Standards (in collaboration with CDQ – international entity for quality certifications)
- AULEDA Assembly members, on Project Cycle Management
- AULEDA Technical Group, on project evaluation process economic and territorial analysis have been developed, and the related studies have been published:
- Feasibility study on the use of ICT tools by public administration when offering services to citizens
- Survey on the use of ICT tools by SMEs, with a focus on web commerce and e-commerce
- Feasibility study about tourism development in Pogradec
- Survey about value chains in Vlora Region
- Rural Strategy development of LAG “Adrijon area”
- Master plan for economic development of Lumi i Vlores area

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL INTEREST

AULEDA is currently planning to reproduce its experience in Gjirokastra, providing technical assistance to Gjirokastra regional administration in its idea of creating a Regional Economic Development Agency.

AULEDA is part of a worldwide network of Local Economic Development Agencies coordinated and promoted by ILSLEDA. It is also part of AdriaPan and MEDPAN networks, and in those contexts AULEDA activities related to environment protection take place. Finally, it also takes part in GARD network, that works for the empowerment of women from rural areas.

With the invitation of UNDP and ILSLEDA, AULEDA participates in various international meetings (the last ones being the International Conference of Development Agencies, that took place in Seville, Spain, and the EURADA 20th Anniversary Conference held in Brussels), thus continuing strengthening its international connections.

The quality of AULEDA's work has been recognized both at national and international level, and awarded in the following occasions:

- In May 2011 AULEDA received the ILSLEDA award “LEDA of the Month”, as the best Agency in implementing European Community Projects.
- In October 2011 AULEDA received the ILSLEDA and Eurada “Certificate of quality”, for good performance as Local Economic development Agency working for human development
- In April 2011 AULEDA was invited at the annual assembly of the European regional development agencies in Brussels as one of the best practices of agencies operating in developing and in transition countries.
- In 2011 AULEDA and its Executive Director, Mirela Koci, received the award “Protagonist of the year 2011” from the Municipality of Vlora, after participating in an online competition.
- In 2012, on the occasion of the Centenary of Albanian Independence, the Ministry of Science and Education awarded AULEDA with a Certificate of Appreciation for “special merit, outstanding contributions and human values in the academic field”.

TO KNOW MORE

To better understand AULEDA mission and working strategy, please visit the website www.auleda.org.al.

CONTACTS

AULEDA is available to provide technical support and innovation transfer for the process of reproduction of its experience in other Albanian regions and other Countries. For more information, please contact:

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