

## The Fund Which Changes the Polish Villages

The European Fund for the Development of Polish Villages started its operation in 1990, pursuant to an agreement between the Government of Poland and the European Economic Community. The EFDPV Fund is a non-governmental organization which has been helping to change the image of Polish villages for nearly 30 years, adjusting to the changing needs of the local community. Currently, the operations of the Fund are based on the following three pillars: support of investments in technical infrastructure and development of local enterprises, implementation of donation programmes for local communities and education of children and the youth, as well as development of solutions and directions of development for the Polish and European agriculture.

Since the very beginning, the European Fund for the Development of Polish Villages has been actively supporting investments in technical infrastructure in rural areas. The first activity it undertook was, among other, implementation of donation programmes in the area of telephone infrastructure development, development of water supply networks and sewage systems for villages and construction of communal roads. In 2011, the Fund launched the “Self-Governmental Loan Programme” under which gminas and poviats may apply for loans for development of education, collective development of water supply networks for villages, as well as construction and renovation of communal and poviats roads. The results of this programme include more than 200 granted loans for a total amount of approx. PLN 130 million, which significantly contributed to the improvement of the quality of life in rural areas. Moreover, support in development of entrepreneurship among people inhabiting Polish villages is one of the important areas of operation of EFDPV. Credit and loan programmes, initially addressed mainly to farmers willing to develop their farms, and currently also to people conducting non-agricultural operations are aimed at reducing unemployment and opening opportunities for pro-activeness of rural inhabitants. Currently, entrepreneurs may take advantage of crediting programmes, such as “Reliable Partner”, microcredits, credits for financing and development of agricultural tourism, as well as credits and loans for entrepreneurs. Enriching the scope of support for entrepreneurship, in 2005, the Fund established

a guarantee fund called “Poręczenia Kredytowe” Sp. z o.o., which is currently the only nation-wide guarantee fund, operating only in rural areas.

The second pillar is composed of donation and educational programmes. The Fund places a lot of emphasis on the development of social infrastructure in rural areas. Through various financial tools and donations, it implements a number of programmes whose purpose is to support integration and activate local communities, acting towards the solution of important social problems and equalizing educational opportunities for children and youngsters from small towns and villages. The beneficiaries of EFDPV include, among others, non-governmental organizations, informal groups of inhabitants and students of primary and secondary schools:

- The “Youngster” Programme – offering opportunities to study English to students of junior high schools in rural areas, aimed at equalizing educational opportunities of youngsters,
- The “On Your Own Account” Programme – developing knowledge in economy and entrepreneurship among students of junior high schools from rural areas,
- The Programme aimed at helping autistic people in rural areas and their families, “Understanding Autism” – covering complex activities aimed at identifying medical-therapeutic, educational and social needs of autistic persons,
- The “Local Initiatives for the Environment” Programme – supporting local communities’ sustainable development activity and initiatives,
- The “Different Natural Science Lesson” Programme – introducing education in life sciences among primary school students from rural areas.

The third pillar of the Fund includes the Development Initiatives Forum (DIF), established in 2010. Its purpose is to develop solutions and positions important from the point of view of development of rural areas and agriculture throughout the European Union. The activity of DIF concentrates on research projects, development of analyses, reports and scientific studies, as well as organization of conferences and debates regarding the future of rural areas and directions of their development, not only in Poland, but throughout the European Union. For that purpose teams are established within DIF associating independent experts and scientists recognized in Poland and abroad. The results of the operation of the Forum include the following reports: “Economic consequences of coming into force of the prohibition of using GMO fodder in feeding animals in Poland”, “The health of population of rural areas in Poland”, “The concept of the reform of the farmers’ retirement and disability pension system” and the research project entitled “Rural Development Monitoring (MROW)” initiated in 2012 in co-operation with the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish

Academy of Sciences, intended as a systematic examination of changes in socio-economic development of rural areas in Poland.

In 2016, within DIF, a series of conferences was also initiated regarding RES. The topics and conclusions of the discussion held with experts and representatives of politics, also issued in the form of a post-conference publication, constitute an important voice in Poland-wide debate concerning the development of renewable energy sources and prosumer politics in rural areas in Poland. This year's conference, concerning the overcoming of administrative barriers in the development of renewable energy micro-sources based on the experience of Poland and the European Union, was held with the participation of, among others, the EU Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy Miguel Arias Cañete and representatives of Polish ministries of agriculture and energy, state agencies and companies operating in power industry, self-government activists and experts involved in problems related to barriers in prosumer and distributed power engineering.

The EFDPV Fund is also the organizer of the International Agricultural Conference in Jasionka near Rzeszów. The meeting which, ever since 2011, has evoked a lot of interest among people from the world of politics, science, agricultural and trade organizations, provides an opportunity to discuss current problems and the future of the Polish and European agriculture.

A "Guide to Best Hygienic Practices of Cheese and Other Dairy Articles Production in Farmers' Milk Processing Industry" is the latest initiative of EFDPV implemented within the Forum. This pioneer publication in the Polish market is a complete and synthetic description of issues related with safety and hygiene of production in the course of processing milk into cheeses and other dairy products. The publication is a tool for small processing plants. Its purpose is to offer assistance in development and implementation of owners' supervision and guaranteeing safety of their products for consumers' health. The guide was submitted for registration in the Register of National Guides to Good Hygiene Practices kept by the European Commission.