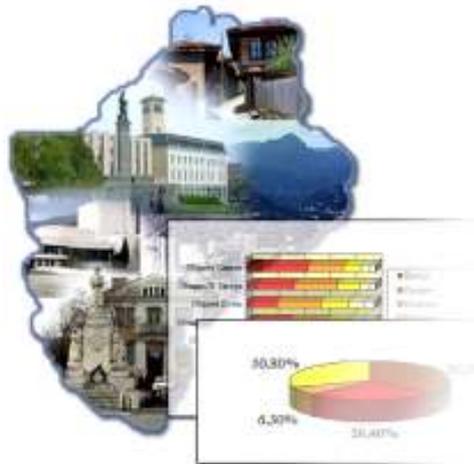


DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION SLIVEN

**STRATEGY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT
OF SLIVEN DISTRICT
2005 – 2015**



**VISION, STRATEGIC GOALS,
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES, PRIORITIES
MEASURES, POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES**

1. Introduction

The necessity of district strategies results from the need of a hierarchic organization of the management and planning processes in Bulgaria. **It is necessary to work up a strategic plan for the development of sub-district but over-municipal level** which, under the new Regional Development Act, should serve as a **basis for the design of regional plans for development** (of the planning regions) and a **framework for the design of municipal plans** for development.

A plan should not exist if it is only a means for the development of another plan and that is why the team coordinating the development of the strategy of Sliven district has endeavoured to create a partnership-based **process and structures (sector and inter-sector work groups)** which can be used for the creation of any planning document at district level (in line with the particular needs and requirements) and for advice and coordination.

The team developing the Strategy has tried to lay the foundations of a sustainable process which would coordinate and integrate planning documents, significant for the district, that already exist or are under development and supported by actual resources and actions. In this respect the **District strategy may serve as a key** for the development, updating and assessment of other planning documents and projects thus ensuring continuity, co-ordination and synergy.

The strategy should be taken as a **“platform” for searching and attracting resources**. It can help to define quickly what is eligible in a particular funding programme, whether it has been identified as something necessary we should do.

The strategy of Sliven district is an attempt to clarify what can be done at district level with the resources of the district partners and, due to various reasons, has not been done at municipal or national level.

The philosophy of the strategy is connected with achieving a balance between the various economic, social and ecological aspects of the sustainable development, between the various private, public, group and sector interests and between the various levels – national, regional, local.

2. Process of strategy development

The development of the strategy activated the local participants in the process of development. The trends in the district over the last years have been analyzed; the objectives and priorities in the medium and long run have been defined. The strategy includes expert analyses and attitudes in the spheres of human resources, social and healthcare policy, education, culture, industry, tourism, agriculture, infrastructure, environment, spatial planning and development. About 90 representatives of municipal administrations, territorial units of the state administration, business, non-governmental organizations and other institutions, organized in five work groups, have been involved in the process.

The “Partners for Development” project of the Department for International Development assisted the process and facilitators from the District administration Sliven coordinated and facilitated the work groups.

The stages of work follow the logic of strategic planning and they include:

1. **Gathering and summarizing the information** from experts, representatives of various institutions /partners/ in five work groups;
2. **Analyzing the data, identifying the problems and needs;**
3. **Conclusions, defining the strategic goals and priorities** in the development of the district as commitment and interdependence have been sought, without isolating at sector level, aiming to achieve sustainability of the development.
4. **Planning measures and actions** for change and achieving a new condition.

National strategic documents such as: the National Plan for Development, the National Strategy for Regional Development, the National Plan for Development of Agriculture and Rural Areas, the National Plan for Employment, etc., have been considered when defining the strategic goals and priorities for the development of the district and the measures for their achievement.

The existing planning documents, developed within the period of 1999 – 2005 in the District administration and the municipalities have been integrated in the strategy for development of Sliven district. The strategy for the development of agriculture of Sliven district, submitted by the District Directorate “Agriculture and Forestry”, the strategy for improving the health of the population, submitted by the District Healthcare Centre, the investment programmes of the Water Supply and Sewerage Company LSCo, the District Road Office, etc. have also been taken into account.

By order of the Governor, in compliance with the Methodological Guide for developing the district strategies for development, a District group for strategic planning was appointed. The heads of regional directorates of the state administration and employees from the municipal administrations who had coordinated the working out of the municipal plans for development have been involved. After judging the conformity of the District Strategy for Development with the local priorities, the National Strategy for Regional Development and the national priorities for the development of the particular sectors, the District group has made the necessary amendments.

3. Scope and structure of the strategy

The strategy for development of Sliven district comprises the following priority spheres: human resources, social and healthcare policy, education, culture, industry, tourism, agriculture, infrastructure, environment, spatial planning and development.

Time scope: the implementation of the laid down measures and the activities under them is envisaged to be completed in a short-term period – until the end of 2006, in a mid-term period – until 2009 and in a long-term period – until 2015.

The following hierarchy has been adopted in the structure of the strategy:

Vision – it shows how we would like to see the district in some time.

Strategic goal – an intention within the time horizon of the strategy which will contribute to achieving the vision.

Specific objectives – particular and measurable objectives for achieving the strategic goals.

Priorities – the most significant operational objectives for achieving the specific objective from the point of view of significance and available resources.

Measures – a combination of similar activities through which a particular priority is achieved.

Activities - a project or a combination of projects with a fixed budget, funding source and partners.

4. General analysis of the economic and social situation

4.1. General data about the district

Sliven district is situated in southeastern Bulgaria and its territory is 3544.066 sq. km. which is 3.19 % of the territory of the country. It borders Yambol district to the south, Bourgas district to the east, Veliko Tarnovo, Targovishte and Shoumen districts to the north, Stara Zagora district to the southwest.

The geographical position is favourable from the point of view of the opportunities for development of the district. They largely depend on the opportunities for integration of Sliven district with the neighbouring districts as well as creating prerequisites for joint use of resources and potentials for development.

Regarding the administrative division the district is divided into four municipalities – Kotel, Nova Zagora, Sliven and Tvarditsa as Sliven is the largest town and the district centre.

Regarding the relief there are two areas: hilly and mountainous in the north and plain in the south. The climate is temperate continental with an average annual air temperature of 12.4 degrees centigrade. The hydrological stock in the district is not big. The river of Tundja – the biggest feeder of the river of Maritsa, with a catchment basin of about 7800 sq. km. - is the basic water resource. With regard to the soil the carbonic black earth tarry soils, black earth tarry soils and the leached black earth soils are the most characteristic. The mineral resources which are extracted on the territory of the district are combustibles, copper ores and quartzite for ferrous-silicon. At present they have no great economic significance because of the continuous decline of this industrial sector.

The permanent population of the district towards 31 December 2003 runs to 213 194 which is 2.7% of the population of the country. That ranks the district fourteenth among the 28 districts of the country and second in the Southeastern Planning Region. Regarding the density of population Sliven district ranks eleventh (60.2 people per sq. km.). The percentage of the townspeople is lower than the average for the country (66% as against 69.8%).

4.2. Economic situation

As a result of the unsuccessful privatization and restructuring of some leading industrial enterprises in the district within the period of 1999 – 2001 the development of Sliven district lagged behind. In 1999 the district occupied the tenth position regarding the per capita GDP whereas it occupies the 26th position in 2000. It should be emphasized that after 2000 the district economy distinctly tends to grow with a pace which is not lower than the average for the country. As a result in 2002 the district rates 23rd regarding the per capita GDP. This favourable trend is due to the manufacturing industry and mainly to the textile branch.

After 2000 the gross value added, generated by the industrial sector, has tended to grow and to exceed the one in the agrarian sector. The number of the employed in industry has also been increasing during the last years but the efficiency of labour is still low. It is necessary to support the high-tech branches and productions where high value added is made.

As a result of the analysis of the territorial structure of economy the municipalities in the district can be divided into three groups:

- Sliven – industrial-agrarian, having the greatest significance for the industry in the district and a big share in the agrarian sector.
- Nova Zagora – agrarian-industrial, having the biggest share in the agrarian sector and a significant share in industry.
- Kotel and Tvarditsa – both of them agrarian, with a trend to reducing the share of the industrial sector and increasing the share of the agrarian one.

The process of privatization has almost been completed. Some of the large enterprises, having the potential to survive in the new market conditions, were not restructured in due time and now they are in a grave economic situation.

The shortage of investments for the district economy during the last years is in the basis for its lagging behind. That is why the policy of attracting investment is of primary significance. The fact that the district managed to attract considerable foreign investment – mainly in the textile branch, dairying, wine-production, etc., should be pointed out as a competitive advantage.

The considerable percentage of revenue and number of employed in the micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) proves the great significance of the sector and the necessity of outlining measures for increasing its competitiveness and steady growth.

In connection with the development of the district strategy inquiries of business representatives were carried out; from their point of view the narrow market and the reduced demand of goods and services was the main obstacle to the economic development. They pointed out other important problems such as the high taxes, the complicated credit procedures and unfair competition. The frequent changes of laws and the complicated registration procedures were pointed out as the main obstacles in the sphere of legislation. The restricted access to market information was graded low in the classification of problems which reveals neglect of marketing activities and strategic planning.

The information on the negotiated terms for EU accession is still disregarded in the hierarchy of information needs of Bulgarian entrepreneurs from the SMEs sector.

At the present stage of development of the country the prevailing part of Bulgarian firms apply a strategy of low prices in the process of competition at the national and international market. For the time being it is successful in most cases. However the strategies of low prices are not sustainable within the framework of global economy because there is always someone offering lower prices. Countries with low price levels and companies, applying such a strategy, prove to be in a downward spiral of value added. Furthermore the strategies of low prices prevent the human resources from staying in the country. Therefore the introduction of innovations is the better strategy providing competitive advantages. In the developed countries they rely not only on technological advantages but also on up-to-date methods of company management, funding, marketing, staff training as well as on other factors. To a great extent their advantages in the industrial sector are due to the good combination of all those factors – elements of the overall innovation system.

Particular attention should be paid to the consequences for the SMEs from the EU accession of Bulgaria. If the necessity of making efforts for achieving competitive advantages on the basis of reduction of production prime cost and increasing quality through the introduction of new technologies, quality control systems, certification of products, improved management and marketing and higher staff qualification is not taken into consideration in due time, then

there might be unfavorable consequences for the SMEs entailing serious problems. In order to resist to the future competition the SMEs managers need to acquire new marketing skills and potential for strategic planning. At local level the efforts should be directed towards supporting SMEs on these lines.

The owners of a great number of small firms realize the advantages of their unification but they are also aware of unsuccessful practices which prevents them working for such initiatives. In some sub-branches of economy such as: plant-growing – vegetables and perennial plants, dairying, production of meat, production of socks, crafts, etc., regional associations of producers either already exist or attempts have been made to establish them..

It would be appropriate to apply the cluster approach in district economy. It is necessary to identify successful and interrelated sub-branches and to encourage the producers in them to create regional clusters. This approach is important for the attraction of foreign investment based on strategies for joint production of goods.

4.2.1. Situation of the industrial sector

The industrial sector is leading in the economy of Sliven district although only 16.9% of the enterprises in the district economy are in this sector. The employed in industry are 15 025 or 43.4% of all employed in the district economy. The fixed assets are BGN 393 349 000 or 72.9% of those belonging to the companies of the non-financial sector in 2003. A gross production of BGN 402 451 000 or 69.3% of the total for the district was created in the industrial sector and net sales income of BGN 451 078 000 or 49.2 of the total for the district.

Processing industry

The processing industry is the most important sub-sector. The main branches of processing industry are: production of textile, textile ware and clothing, production of foodstuffs and beverages, production of machine and equipment, production of electro-optic equipment, etc.

The textile branch continues to dominate the industrial sector. The appearance of a big investor such as the “Miroglio” concern that bought and equipped with new machinery some of the largest textile enterprises in the country, situated in the towns of Sliven and Nova Zagora, was of a crucial significance for the good economic results in the textile branch during the last years. That is the most considerable investment in the district and one of the biggest in the country.

Production of foodstuffs and beverages is the second branch with a view to significance. The favourable conditions for agriculture on the territory of the district are an important prerequisite for its development. “Domein Boyar” and “Vini” JSCo are the biggest wine producers in the district and one of the biggest wineries in the country. The main producers of tinned fruits and vegetables in the district are in the towns of Sliven and Nova Zagora. According to data of the “Agrostatistics” Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in 2002 the district ranked first with respect to the gathered and processed milk and it ranked second in 2003 – that reveals the great potential of the district in the sub-branch of dairying. The biggest enterprises for nuts and dry fruits processing and packing are in the town of Sliven.

Production of machine and equipment – a process of reorientation to new productions and successful attempts for distribution on new markets has been observed in the last years.

Production of electro-optic and other equipment is a traditional branch in the district economy. In spite of the unsuccessful restructuring of the leading enterprises in the branch the expectations for its revival still remain.

Production of goods made of non-metal mineral resources – after “Crystal” JSCo declared bankruptcy the production of glass, which is traditional for the town of Sliven, continues in small firms.

Timber-processing – the branch develops well at national level. Although it is not well developed in Sliven district, there are several firms having good positions in the production of furniture and house and office furnishing.

Extractive industry – coal extraction, dressing and pressing into briquettes. In the recent past the coal output in the so called Balkan basin was one of the main branches in the district. In the 1990s a number of economic factors imposed the liquidation of a considerable part of the activities of the coal extraction enterprises – completely on the territory of the municipality of Sliven and partially on the territory of the municipality of Tvarditsa. The branch was in a continuous decline but in the last few years the coal extraction in the municipality of Tvarditsa has gradually been reviving.

Construction is of considerable significance for the industrial sector. In 2003 a gross production of BGN 48 815 000 or 12.1% was produced and a net sales income of BGN 52 933 000 or 11.7% of the total for the industry was realized.

Production and distribution of electric power and heating energy, gas and water – the branch is represented mainly by big monopolist companies. Although they are few in number, they produced about 6.4% of the gross production and 6.1% of the net sales income in the industrial sector in 2003.

The assessment of production competitiveness and export potential reveals that the sub-branches of textile and wine production have the best perspectives. Given the considerable new investments, growth of dairy production could also be expected. Concerning machine-building it could be prognosticated that, under certain circumstances, a development may be in for.

A great number of small and big companies with various branch specialization perform activities in the industrial sector of Sliven district. That is a favourable situation for business development.

Basic problems of the industrial sector in Sliven district from the point of view of its economic efficiency:

- not rhythmic orders due to loss of traditional markets and difficulties to find new market niches;
- out-of-date technologies and products;
- shortage of investment for research and development activities, technological modernization, bringing production in conformity with the higher requirements which EU accession will impose;
- shortage of well-trained staff and management knowledge and skills particularly in the smaller firms;

- shortage of information on the requirements towards business resulting from the engagements we undertook under the EU accession negotiations;
- high taxes, administrative barriers and “grey” economy setting an unfavourable business environment in general.

The analysis reveals that the industry in Sliven district has the potential for development and growth but attracting more internal and foreign investment to increase the competitiveness of industry is the most important condition.

According to the inquiry, done by the team, business expects the following support at local level in order to solve the problems:

- introducing local producers abroad – participation in fairs, in business delegations, etc.;
- providing more information on the opportunities for coming out to EU markets;
- organizing fairs and economic forums for introducing the local producers.

4.2.2. Condition of agriculture and forestry

The agricultural territories are 1 826 925 dka, which is 51.55% of the total area of the district. The percentage of the arable land compared to the total area of the reinstated estates is 75.73%. The reinstated estates for permanent use “field” have the biggest percentage – 1 153 000 dka of which 47% are in the municipality of Nova Zagora. The pastures and meadows are second, followed by vineyards and perennial plants. The prevailing categories of land in the district are 4th and 3rd categories. The average size of a reinstated estate in the district is 6.9 dka as the biggest average size of reinstated estates is in the municipality of Nova Zagora and the smallest one is in the municipality of Tvarditsa – 3.1 dka.

The uncultivated lands on the territory of Sliven district are 150 155 dka. 68 % of them are in the municipalities of Kotel and Tvarditsa. There are various reasons for their existence – economic and demographic (resulting from the depopulation of the settlements in the hilly and mountainous areas), as well as the fragmentariness of the reinstated estates, a large number of owners, etc.

The change of climate related to the prolonged periods of drought imposes the development of irrigation agriculture through improving the condition of the existing irrigation infrastructure and equipment and increasing the areas under irrigation. The constructed irrigation system on the territory of the district, covering 348 549 dka, has been amortized to a great extent, a part of the equipment is missing. Only 13.8% of the set up and fit for irrigation fields are irrigated. Additional difficulties ensue from the fact that these equipments were constructed for large-area agriculture.

Plant-growing

The region has strengthened its position as one of the big producers of agricultural production as the grain and cereal crops growing, fruit-growing, vine-growing and vegetable-growing are traditional.

The agricultural producers are also interested in more attractive crops such as oil-bearing cole-seed, peppermint, lavender, but their growing is still limited to small areas – rather experimentally.

The production of grain and vegetable crops is done mainly in the municipality of Nova Zagora where the yields are above the average for the country and they are due to the better soil characteristics as well as to the consolidated arable lands.

Fruit-growing is the structure-determining branch in the district. The soil and climatic conditions are the most favourable for peach-trees growing and therefore it occupies the largest areas with a view to the fruit types. The largest area in the country, planted with peach-trees, is in Sliven district. In the last years an interest to creating new peach-trees gardens has been observed among the agricultural producers. An Experimental field of peach-trees was established in the municipality of Sliven – the only scientific organization affiliated to the Agrarian Science Centre – Sofia. The basic gene-fund of peach sorts introduced and selected in our country is concentrated there. The only fruit nursery-garden for Southern Bulgaria is also situated in the town of Sliven – a certified fruit planting material is produced there; an association of the peach producers has also been established aiming to acquire marketing functions gradually taking upon itself the common realization of production.

The vineyards occupy 67 000 dka and they are grown on the territory of the entire district, mainly grapes of wine varieties – Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Rkatsiteli, Chardonnay, Pamid. Only 6% of the vineyards are planted with dessert grapes. The existing traditions, the favourable soil and climatic conditions, the presence of wine-cellars and two wineries for wine and spirits production are prerequisites for vine-growing and establishing it as a priority branch for the district as well as the strengthening of the position of the region as one of the strategically important regions in the country for the development of vine-growing and wine-producing.

In the last years there is an unfavourable trend to reducing the average yield and raising the prime cost of the agricultural production. Most of the machinery used by the farmers is amortized. It is necessary to look for and put new investment in renovation of machinery, technologies and sorts. The farmers do not have at their disposal enough financial resources for normal production. As a result the technologies of growing the agricultural crops are not observed, the seeds and planting material are not of the necessary quality, the science-based fertilization and methods for plant protection are not applied. In most cases the used sorts are not in conformity with the soil and climatic conditions.

Although large canning and processing factories and wineries operate within the district there is no practice of entering into contracts with the producers in advance. Many of the farmers prefer to offer their production at a higher price, under unregulated and unfavourable conditions.

Stock-breeding

Stock-breeding is the second basic sub-branch of agriculture in the district. The good grain and fodder production in the field part of the district determine the development of cattle-breeding, pig-breeding and poultry-raising in these areas while the presence of very good pasture grounds in the mountainous and hilly part is a condition for the development of sheep-breeding and beef-cattle.

There are some prerequisites for transforming Sliven district into one of the stock-breeding development centres in the country. A very good infrastructure has been built, including the Regional directorate for stock-breeding selection and reproduction, an artificial insemination station and a milk description laboratory. The largest Live-stock market in Southern Bulgaria

has been built on the territory of the Sliven Spa. There are enough enterprises producing compounded fodders which determines the high productivity of the animals as well as processing dairies and packing-houses with a big capacity and possibilities to realize the production. A Regional association of the dairymen, having a strong position among the stock-breeders in the country, has been established on the territory of the district. The ambitions of the association are directed towards implementing and developing the selection activities of the stock-breeding in Sliven district. A Bulgarian-German trade association for trading in breeding stock, seminal material, technologies, equipment, training, etc., has also been established.

In the last years a permanent trend to increasing the number of stock and the average productivity of cows, buffalo-cows, she-goats and swarms of bees and decreasing the number of sheep and sows is observed. Although specialists report on a trend to enlarging the stock-breeding farms, increasing the number of animals in the herds and using modern technologies, there is a series of problems mainly for the small farmers. The high prices of fodders are the reason for the imbalanced and non-standard feeding. The lack of mechanization for the basic technological processes and the low concentration of animals in the farms raise the cost of the animal production and make it unprofitable.

The lack of reliable and secured markets and the low purchase prices of the agricultural production lead to lack of motivation and make a large number of farmers refusing to engage themselves in agricultural production.

The farmers do not realize the benefits of establishing local associations of producers and their role for protecting the farmers' interests with respect to asserting fair prices, market behaviour, information services, etc. It is necessary to carry out an active information campaign about the changes and consequences for the farmers, ensuing from our country's membership in the EU.

There is a need of making science-based studies and examinations, trainings and consultations both in the sector of plant-growing and the sector of stock-breeding.

Forestry

The woodland area in Sliven district is 151 042 ha of which 92% are covered with forests. The beech-trees, oak-trees and cerris-oak trees predominate. The average age of the forests is 58 years as the broad-leaved kinds are 82% of all.

The district has considerable non-ligneous forest resources – herbs, mushrooms, forest fruit, etc. The local population uses these forest resources inefficiently. Big quantities are gathered without paying attention to their conservation.

A lasting trend to deteriorating the condition of game and its decreasing in number has been observed. The reasons are poaching, a great number of predatory animals and bad coordination between the hunters associations and the representatives of the Regional forestry office.

The forest fires are a great threat for the forests, 20 000 ha of the entire woodland area for the last 5 years have been affected. The out-of-control pasture and the increased number of goats as well as the damages, caused by the game, also contribute to the forest degradation.

4.2.3. Condition of the tourist sector

Sliven district is not a traditionally developed tourist region although there is certain but not used to the best advantage potential for development of tourism, especially the alternative kinds of tourism. The future actions in this respect will be to make tourism a leading sector for the district economy given that in the last few years tourism has been one of the branches in the national economy marking a continuous growth. The proximity of Bourgas district is an important prerequisite since it disposes of rich tourist attractions. They can expand the supply of tourist services and attractions of Sliven district. The tourist attractions of Sliven district can also be used within one-day excursions by tourists staying at the southern Black sea and other tourists looking for alternative forms of tourism and wishing to get acquainted with the interior of the country.

Sliven and Kotel have been identified as the municipalities having the best opportunities and considerable potential for the development of tourism; the development of tourism is the first priority for the municipality of Kotel. Given the geographical situation and natural resources of the municipality, the rural and eco tourism are the main accents of the tourist supply. They can successfully be combined with the sports, cultural and cognitive tourism and complement them in a suitable way in order to variegated the tourist supply and to meet the requirements of modern tourism.

Based on the characteristics of the resources of Sliven district several types of tourism with a potential for development can be defined:

Mountain, eco, rural and cultural tourism

The Eastern part of Stara Planina is the biggest resource for the development of tourism in Sliven district. The Nature Park “Sinite Kamani” - an area of high significance for the biodiversity protection, and the locality called Karandila – the most popular and accessible part for the tourists, which is connected with the town by a rope-way – are situated on the territory of the district and in the immediate vicinity of the town of Sliven. The mountain provides conditions for cognitive, walking, eco and cultural tourism, as well as conditions for the sports forms of tourism – alpinism, rock climbing, cycling, mountain cycling, hang-gliding, parachutism, etc. There are many natural landmarks in the municipality of Kotel – rock formations, caves, two reserves, waterfalls, protected objects, which are in the basis of the ecotourism development and which are still not used to the best advantage for the needs of tourism.

The anthropogenic resources for tourist development on the territory of Sliven district are varied in character and epochs (prehistoric Thracian mounds, Roman time’s remains, many historical records from the Revival epoch, etc.). Sliven district ranks third among the other districts of the country as regards to the number of monuments of culture. That fact makes it possible to work out various programmes which could be set as separate tourist products together with the natural wealth according to the visitors’ interests. Along these lines one of the main tasks is to identify the existing and potential demand of products and services by the tourists who are interested in rural, eco and cultural tourism and the development of tourist products corresponding to that demand.

Several architectural reserves from the Revival epoch are situated on the territory of the municipality of Kotel – they are of great interest for the foreign tourists.

The towns and the villages in the district have preserved their folklore traditions throughout the ages and today annual folklore and religious feasts as well as cultural events and celebrations can be seen – “Summer academy of arts Jeruna”, “Karandila” International meeting, “May days of culture”, the day of St. Dimitar – a public holiday of the town of Sliven, the day of the Leaders of the Bulgarian National Revival - a public holiday of the town of Kotel, etc.

Balneological tourism

The balneological tourism can successfully be developed on the territory of the municipalities of Sliven and Nova Zagora given that there are mineral springs.

Presently the material and technical foundation of the spa has become very obsolete and needs renovation and investment in order to develop a quality and profitable balneological tourism.

The condition of the existing infrastructure (general and specialized) is not satisfactory at the present moment. For many years nothing significant has been done to improve the quality and to variegate the tourist product. Since 2003 there has been a plan for the management of the Nature Park “Sinite Kamani” under which about 70 projects are to be implemented. They provide the construction of a specialized tourist infrastructure as well as the improvement of the existing one aiming to raise the quality of the tourist product and to increase both the number of visitors and their average length of stay.

A part of the territory of Sliven district (Sliven, Kotel, Tvarditsa) is in the focus of the National strategy for ecotourism, developed and adopted in 2003 with the collaboration of many representatives of the stakeholders – local and state authorities, NGOs, etc. According to the strategy Sliven district comes under one of the twelve eco-regions – the Eastern Stara Planina eco-region.

The lack of investment and partnership relations between the entrepreneurs and the public authority is the main problem for the development of the tourist sector at the present moment. This leads to a standstill in the sector and to a lack of motivation among the potential investors because in actual fact there is not an all-round policy for the tourism development in the district.

5. Social and demographic problems

Sliven district has been influenced by the trend to reducing the total number of population spreading over the whole country in the last years. These changes are the result of the unfavourable development of the processes related to the demographic reproduction: reducing birth rates, increasing death rates, raising the negative rate of population growth, ageing population.

The age structure of the population in Sliven district is of a regressive type: the number and share of the elderly population are increasing while those of the young generations are down. 19.4% of the population is under working age, 59.2% - of working age and 21.4% is over working age.

The trend to a further aging of the population, which finds expression in reducing the share of population under 18 years and increasing the number of people over 65, is clearly traced out. On the territory of the municipality of Sliven the specialized institutions (Domiciliary social service, Home for elderly people) provide social services for the elderly people.

There is a lasting trend for the well-educated **young people** to leave the district and look for work both out of the district and abroad.

The percentage of young people drinking alcohol is rising. The share of smokers among the young people aged between 15 and 24 has risen as well. The dissemination of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases has risen as well as the use of psychotropic stuffs. The rate of the early pregnancies is high.

The level of unemployment among the young people is high as they constitute a sizable disadvantaged group on the labour market.

Infant mortality rate in the district considerably outnumbers the average for the country. The infant mortality rate is the highest in the municipality of Tvarditsa (45.9‰) and only the municipality of Kotel is close to the average for the country with respect to this index (14.2‰). For a few years Sliven district has been first in the country regarding the infant mortality rate – 30.55 per 1000 born alive as against 12.3 per 1000 born alive for the country in 2003 and under 10 per 1000 born alive in the developed European countries.

The reasons are the deteriorated social and economic conditions, the high percentage of minority population having very low health culture, the increased number of new-born babies with congenital malformations and hypotrophy, etc. Not in the last place the high infant mortality rate is an indicator reflecting the quality of the medical aid.

The assessment of the condition of the pre-hospital and hospital medical aid system points out as its strengths the good provision of bed space and medical institutions for outpatient treatment, a comparatively even territorial distribution of the medical institutions, private sector development. At the same time the problems characteristic for most of the districts in the public healthcare system are present here too – obsolete housing stock and equipment, shortage of financial resources for the medical institutions, insufficient staff qualification, low management and organization knowledge in some hospitals, lack of modern internal systems for quality assessment of the healthcare services. The rapid development of the neighbouring regional hospital networks, which at the absence of medical aid zoning would redirect many patients to them, is a threat for the economic state of the medical institution of the district. In the long run that will lead to deterioration of the healthcare services provided in the district.

The ethnic structure of the population in Sliven district is variegated. The district has a minority share considerably outnumbering the one for the country: 25.3% as against 16.1%. Therefore generally speaking the district could be considered a typical area of concentration of ethnic minorities – mainly Roma and Turks.

The percentage of the Roma (12.3%) and the Turks (10.5%) is the highest. The Roma are concentrated in the municipality of Kotel, where the Roma population has the highest percentage in the whole country (27.3%), the municipality of Tvarditsa (20.8%) and Nova Zagora (11.9%). The Turkish population predominates in the municipalities of Kotel (29.2%), Nova Zagora (18.2%) and Tvarditsa (10.6%).

The compact minority groups, especially the Roma, suffer acute social and economic problems: low educational level, huge unemployment and poverty, bad health status. Most of them live on the social assistance benefits, provided by the state.

The poverty concentration among these groups of population, as well as the lack of infrastructure in their residential areas, is one of the reasons leading to a shorter life expectancy among them (10 years shorter) as compared to the one for the country (71.9).

The educational structure of population in Sliven district is dominated by the groups with secondary education (31.8%) and elementary education (29.5%) – a typical situation for the country in general (37.9% and 27.4%). In the district the percentage of the illiterate people (4.5%), the people with elementary education (15.3%) or uncompleted education (7.8%) considerably prevails the percentage for the country (1.8%: 12.5%: 5.8%), as for the municipalities of Kotel and Tvarditsa these indices are even higher due to the concentration of ethnic population. The people with higher education (the degrees of “Master”, “Bachelor” and “Specialist”) constitute 10.3% of the population of the district as against the average level of 14.1%.

Sliven district occupies the last place but one as regards to the literacy rate among the districts in the country. The municipalities with ethnic minority concentration – Tvarditsa and Kotel, are characterized by the lowest level regarding this index. A great part of the children in the district do not enter school. The percentage of children and young people enrolling in every higher grade of education has been dropping off.

The influence of the ethnical structure of population and the presence of centres where various educational institutions are concentrated (specialized secondary schools, vocational schools, language secondary schools, branches of higher educational institutions and universities), are determinative for the literacy rate at municipal level. The 2002 and 2003 Human Development Index Reports place Sliven district in the last position among the 28 districts with respect to the Combined Educational Index (CEI). The report points out the dependency between the low rates of CEI and the share of ethnic minorities within the total population at district and municipal level. In the municipalities with higher concentration of population with Turkish and Roma ethnic identity the average CEI is considerably lower.

Towards December 2004 there are 165 state, municipal and private schools and kindergartens on the territory of the district - 95 schools, 66 kindergartens, and 4 others such as homes for bringing up children deprived of parent cares, children’s complexes, etc. At present 28 930 students receive education at school while in 2003/2004 school year they were 30 414. The students in the technical specialties are 5 671 distributed into 249 classes and 17 vocational schools.

There are more than 3300 students in Sliven district who receive education in 6 higher educational institutions and colleges: Faculty of Engineering and Pedagogy Sliven affiliated to Sofia Technical University; “Public administration” Sliven affiliated to Varna Technical University; College of Medicine affiliated to Stara Zagora Thracian University; College affiliated to Sofia Technical University; branches of Bourgas Free University and Veliko Tarnovo University; Private Professional College of Marketing and Private Professional College of Trade.

The presence of branches of higher educational institutions and colleges in the town of Sliven and the existing scientific potential attain more significance given the EU policy for a knowledge-based society. They ought to be supported and stimulated as an important factor for the development of the district.

As a result of the demographic collapse the number of children of school age will be reduced. This imposes restructuring of the school network. The number of profiled secondary schools and vocational schools will remain the same. The all-day kindergartens will be reduced as the number of the other children's homes will remain the same.

The trends of the education development and the creation of central schools require provision of transportation for the students to these schools. The modern IT development requires updating of the material foundation and pedagogues' qualification.

The active population in Sliven district in 2003 is 81 700 people. The coefficient of economic activity (the relative share of the active population as against the total population) is 46.6% and it is under the average level for the country – 49.2%.

The employed people run to 62 100 and the employment coefficient (employed people per 100 people) is 35.4% and is under the average for the country – 42.5%.

The trend to increasing the number of the employed under the Labour law in the private sector continues but in 2003 a growth in the number of employed in the public sector was observed for the first time.

In the municipalities of Kotel and Tvarditsa the employed in the public sector outnumber those employed in the private sector which runs counter to the general for the district and the country trend of private sector predomination. That reveals an unfavourable economic conjuncture in these municipalities: underdeveloped private sector and unfavourable conditions for recruitment and job creation.

In the last years the level of **unemployment** remains unacceptably high. The access to the labour market is difficult especially for the disadvantaged groups. The effect of the numerous active measures for protection against unemployment and employment promotion, although they alleviate the state of the unemployed and reduce their share, is still insufficient and non-persistent.

There is not a balance between the demand and supply of labour force at regional level as a result of the restructuring processes. The level of professional qualification of the labour force, especially of the unemployed, does not meet the market requirements and demands which explains the high unemployment rate in the municipalities with a high percentage of Roma population. Not many clients of the Labour office consider the qualification services necessary. Additional incentives and concomitant services should be created to make the qualification programmes more attractive.

There is a trend to a permanently growing long-term unemployment, especially among the most vulnerable groups of population. The formal chances for them to be recruited are minimal and they are forced to resort to informal ways for earning.

The low educational level, respectively the unemployment and poverty, among the Roma population is the most serious problem. Most of them have not completed their primary education and they have never worked. It is necessary to look for new forms for their integration which would combine the seasonal and odd jobs that they prefer with training programmes and acquiring specialty.

Culture

The cultural traditions, the cultural and historic heritage and the exchange of cultural products and ideas are of great significance for the cultural life in the district. The folklore musical and dance arts have a traditionally strong presence.

State, municipal, regional, NGOs and private institutions, organizations and associations carry out the activities in the sphere of culture in Sliven district. The Dramatic Theatre “Stefan Kirov”, the State Puppet Theatre and the National Museum of Textile Industry (a branch) have the statute of national cultural institutions.

The cultural and historic monuments are 1255, 23 of them have national significance (20 in the municipality of Sliven and 3 in the municipality of Nova Zagora); the architectural and historic reserves are 5. They are on the territory of the municipality of Kotel – the villages of Jeravna, Medven, Katunishte, Gradetz and the town of Kotel, as they have conserved their architecture from the Revival epoch. Sliven district ranks third among the rest of the districts with respect to the number of the cultural monuments.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

The NGOs are a factor having an increasing role at local level. 150 NGOs have been registered on the territory of Sliven district. About 30 of them operate actively in various spheres of the social and economic life of the district.

A basic characteristic of the sector is the concentration of NGOs in the district. It could be claimed that they are situated mainly in the town of Sliven as the activity of few of them is directed to the neighbouring settlements. A few organizations have been registered in the other settlements. It is necessary to look for cooperation between the district authorities, local authorities and NGOs aiming at the more active citizens' participation in local self-government as well as participation in joint project activities providing decisions to local and regional problems.

6. Technical infrastructure

The technical infrastructure covers the material and technical foundation of four basic engineering networks and systems: transport, power supply, water supply and communication systems.

On the territory of Sliven district two types of transport are developed – road and railway transport. There is a civil airport in the vicinity of the town of Sliven but it is not used. The transport infrastructure in the district is well developed. Roads, which provide a good potential for the labour, tourist and economic relations between the settlements, have been built. The connections between the district centre and the municipal centres are very good. All municipal centres with the exception of the town of Kotel are also connected by railway transport.

Sliven district has a well developed road network which is denser in the plain areas of the district and not quite dense in the mountainous and hilly areas. The roads in the mountainous areas are difficult to pass in winter. The road network needs renovation, modernization and geo-protective activities.

The road network density in Sliven district is 0.345 km/sq. km. and it is higher than the average for the country – 0.333 km/sq. km. The category of the built road network is comparatively high, the share of the 4th – category road network is big.

The development of the transport infrastructure should be directed to the rehabilitation and modernization of the existing infrastructure which is a part of the national transport system with a view to creating prerequisites for accelerated economic development and improving the population's standard of living.

The water supply system is related to all spheres of economy and everyday life. The basic sub-systems of the water supply system are: drinking water supply, leading and purifying the waste water, hydro-amelioration and hydro-energetics.

Sliven district disposes of good water sources with regards to their quantity and quality with the exception of the territory of the municipality of Kotel. The available water sources are not used effectively and therefore there are water supply restrictions on the drinking water in some of the settlements in the district.

Most of the existing water supply network is obsolete and needs substitution and rehabilitation. The construction of a water treatment plant for drinking water in the town of Sliven is imperative because the basic water source for the town is open – the “Asenovetz” dam.

Sewerage has been built only in the big settlements; cesspits are used in the rest leading to underground water pollution. There are no waste water treatment installations.

Sliven district disposes of a comparatively well-constructed hydro-ameliorative network as a part of it has been destroyed and plundered. The share of the irrigation agriculture is still low.

It is necessary to direct the development of the water supply infrastructure to the rational use of the water resources, the provision of quality drinking water for the consumers, the rehabilitation and improvement of the existing facilities for irrigation agriculture.

Sliven district is mainly an energy consumer rather than a producer. The energy system of the district is well developed and capable of taking loading which may encourage the future economic development.

The power supply network needs to be entirely completed and rehabilitated especially in the areas having potential for tourism development. It is necessary to set the power supply network in the exurb of the town of Sliven, which promises to become the “green territory” for the town's development, in line with the technical requirements.

The start of the industrial consumption of natural gas has been laid; the gasification for domestic purposes is forthcoming.

It is necessary to study the opportunities for using alternative renewable energy sources and carry out activities for energy efficiency in the industrial sector, for the public institutions and for domestic purposes.

The communication system covers a complex of technical equipment, networks and activities, which carry out the telecommunications, post-office services, radio and TV broadcasting. The telecommunication subsystem covers the telephone and telegraph services and networks. The telephone density of Sliven district is 29.25 telephones per 100 people which is under the average index for the country – 30.3 telephones/100 people. Almost all the settlements in the district are included in the national automatic dialing system. A digital telephone exchange has been created only in the town of Sliven.

An important task, given the continuing digitalization of the telephone network and improvement of the Internet services quality, is their efficient use in the public and private sector.

7. Environment

Generally the territory of Sliven district has a good ecological characteristic which is determined by the favourable physical and geographic, soil, microclimatic and sanitary and hygienic requirements. The lack of huge industrial pollutants favours the good ecological condition.

A key ecological problem regarding the surface waters in the district is the protection of the river of Tundja and its feeders. The areas along the Tundja river valley are the basic water sources of drinking water for a great part of the district.

The problem concerning the mine waters from the former “Sliven” mine, situated under the locality of Karandila and within the exurb area, is very poignant. As a result of the underground mining works the hydro-dynamics of the underground waters has been broken – their level has been lowered in consequence of draining and making a depression funnel in the area as well as pouring out mine waters into the surface water basins.

The available information on the measuring of air purity does not show systematic air pollution such as above-the-standard concentration of noxious gases and dust. Most of the existing industrial sources of emissions are of low potential and they cannot be defined as considerable air pollutants of the district.

The household waste is a serious problem for Sliven district. On one hand it is not collected regularly and it pollutes the environment. There is not a separate waste collection; food, glass, plastic waste and a considerable part of industrial waste are deposited together. The organized waste collection and removal covers the municipal centres and the large settlements on the territory of the district.

The exhausted capacity of the depot for solid household waste of the town of Sliven is a basic problem. Within the years of its exploitation, offending the law, not only solid household waste but also industrial and hospital waste, liquids, etc. have been deposited there.

The issue of depositing and making the hospital waste and the sediments from the town’s water treatment plant harmless has not been solved.

8. Territorial Structure

The growth of population’s concentration in the big towns is a characteristic feature of the urbanization in Bulgaria. The situation is the same in Sliven district. More than the half of the

population in the district /66.2%/ is concentrated in the six towns in the district – Sliven, Nova Zagora, Kotel, Tvarditsa, Kermen and Shivachevo.

The density of the settlement network is the highest in the municipality of Nova Zagora which is geographically related – lack of mountainous territory. The density of the settlement network is the lowest in the municipality of Tvarditsa followed by the municipality of Kotel, due to the mountainous terrain.

However, that fact, combined with the high level of the road infrastructure, is an advantage and a prerequisite for the development of various forms of eco and cognitive tourism, offering a virgin nature and healthful relaxation.

The big and medium-sized towns which are municipal centres are an organizing factor for the territory of the district. The lively relations between the town and the village, well-known in the near past and finding expression in labour and cultural trips, are now strongly limited as a result of the economic difficulties – that would lead to a limitation and decay of the town functions and the organizing role of the towns for the neighbouring villages. The future construction of the long-term model of these natural centres of the municipal territories is connected with the development of their economic basis.

The further development of the urbanization process is connected with the creation of a higher standard of living in the towns and villages as the spatial-planning and urban-development issues are settled and the technical and social infrastructure networks are improved.

The deteriorated condition of the settlement surroundings is connected to a great extent with the amortized public buildings and technical infrastructure networks, the neglected public works in the residential areas.

A special attention should be paid to the urgent need of territorial and spatial-planning sketches of the territories densely populated with Roma /Sliven, Nova Zagora, Tvarditsa, Shivachevo, etc./ The urban development projecting of these territories is not possible without changing the legislature in the sphere of spatial planning and development and creating specific norms and regulations which would consider the character of dwelling and building of the residential areas with Roma population.

The industrial territories are insufficiently developed and are built up with outdated, unattractive and amortized buildings. There is a risk for reclaimed production territories to be left without any rehabilitation and development because of the lack of interest and orientation towards new building. An opportunity for overcoming this negative trend is to examine the possibility for transforming these compact industrial territories into modern industrial parks where all necessary services for the immediate start-up of the companies' activities could be provided.

Another possibility for territorial development along these lines is connected with the building of the “Trakiya” highway which, together with a complex of natural, geographic, material and human resources, will be an important factor for the development of the district. The development of the small settlements will be urged forward. The access of the district economy to the largest trade port in Bulgaria – Bourgas, will be improved.

9. General SWOT analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic geographical location • Favourable natural and climatic conditions • Rich cultural and historical heritage • Traditions in several sectors of industry • Strategic foreign investor • Positive pro-investment attitude of the local authorities • Skilled experts in production sectors traditional for the district • Existing institutions of higher education, scientific institutions and departments • Well-developed engineering networks • Good infrastructure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - in the sphere of agriculture - in support of business • Ecologically clean region, rich biodiversity • Well-developed regional hospital network • Equal access to education • Good cultural and educational traditions and institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High unemployment rate among the risky groups of people • Disparity between demand and supply at the labour market • Insufficient use of IT and low technological level in industry • Ineffective interaction between the authorities, the business sector and civil society • Insufficient investments • Fragmented agriculture • Outdated transport and technical infrastructure • Amortized residential environment • Outdated and amortized material and technical foundation of public healthcare, educational and social relief institutions • Unsatisfactory maintenance of the cultural and historical heritage • Increasing number of students who drop out of the school system • Unsatisfactory quality of the provided health and social services • Low degree of socialization of the ethnic minorities • Insufficient capacity for absorbing the EU funds at local level
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heightened foreign interest in the natural, cultural and investment opportunities of the district • Construction of the "Trakiya" highway – a part of Corridor 8 • Opening the EU market for Bulgarian commodities and services • Increased demand for bio products at the world market • A trend towards improving the socio-economic setting in the country • Using national and international regional development programmes, strategies and policies • Access to the EU funds and other external sources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trend towards deterioration of the demographic indicators. • High EU standards and short transition periods • Low control on import • Delay in the establishment of a favourable legislative setting for business development • Insufficient national investments in the technical infrastructure • Ineffective social policy for the integration of the vulnerable groups • Insufficient capacity for absorbing the EU funds.

10. Strategic framework

VISION

Sliven district – Modern and prospering at the beginning of the third millennium, a worthy part of United Europe

STRATEGIC GOAL 1 Sustainable economic growth for higher living standards

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES/PRIORITIES/MEASURES

Specific objective 1.1 To achieve accelerated economic growth and to ensure a high employment rate through the promotion of knowledge-based economy - high-tech industrial production, diversified tourism and modern agriculture and forestry.

The low values of per capita GDP in Sliven district during the last years are an indication of its lagging behind in terms of economic development. At the same time, in some municipalities the unemployment rate is unacceptably high.

The analysis reveals that the shortage of investments in the district economy is a major obstacle to its development. The creation of a favourable investment milieu has become a priority of the local and state authorities in the last years. The objective of reducing twice the differences in GDP between the regions of Bulgaria and those of EU by the end of 2015, as it is laid down in the National Strategy for Regional Development, is a serious challenge. It calls for attracting investments in high technological productions with high value added.

Another key factor that contributes to accelerated growth is the support of the public sector to the local business. The NGOs which have such a mission have to provide a much more active support. The creation of more favourable conditions for the development of business and for boosting its export potential, innovation support and improving its capability to cope with the expected higher competitive pressure after the accession of Bulgaria to the EU are the major objectives of the stakeholders.

The differences between small and medium-sized companies and the big enterprises in terms of features, problems and the ways of their solving require a specific approach to each of them. The measures proposed under this specific objective are oriented mainly towards the small and medium-sized companies. While the big companies need most of all the removal of administrative barriers and red tape, SMEs on the other hand need a support system of complementary measures.

The development of the processing industry with its good potential in traditional, and why not in new high-tech productions, is an overriding priority. Agriculture is another priority sector with good development perspectives. Special attention is paid to tourism because of the existence of resources for the creation of various quality tourist products; besides, this sector has achieved great and sustainable growth over the last years in the country.

Priority 1.1.1 Supporting SMEs with a view to increasing their economic efficiency, competitiveness and innovation

The development of SMEs is an integral part of the national regional policy. Sliven district is one of the three districts in the country where SMEs generate more than 50% of GDP which is indicative of their significance for the local economy. The support to SMEs aims to increase

employment, incomes, productivity and technological renovation of the sector. Measures will be undertaken to facilitate start-up companies and strengthen the existing companies to enhance their competitiveness.

Measure 1.1.1.1 Improving the access to knowledge and information

The harmonization of our legislature with that of the EU has led to changes in many of the production standards. In most cases the introduction of the new requirements is connected with investments. The dynamic changes are yet at hand and the business support through the provision of an easy access to information is of great significance. On the other hand it is important to improve the access of the SMEs to information on programmes and projects of the government, the EU and other donors and credit institutions in order to meet the heightened requirements and to cope with the competitive pressure. Supporting the SMEs to introduce and effectively use the ICT will contribute to their active inclusion in the networks of information and knowledge exchange within the EU and will enlarge their opportunities. In this case the public sector has the leading role – the various sector ministries through their territorial units, the district administration, municipal administrations, NGOs. This measure is connected with the enhancing of the effectiveness of the organizations supporting business – Measure 1.2.2 as well as Measure 1.2.5: Strengthening the administrative capacity.

Possible activities:

- Inquiring the information needs of SMEs;
- Providing an easy access to information on the amendments to laws and regulations pertinent to business;
- Organizing information campaigns, workshops, focus group discussions and disseminating printed materials on the obligations undertaken under the EU accession negotiations;
- Developing ICT-related skills, needed for the active search for information.

Measure 1.1.1.2 Improving the services delivered to SMEs by enhancing the effectiveness of the organizations supporting the business sector

The organizations supporting SMEs can improve their activity through networking and service diversification cooperating with all stakeholders on the territory of the district. The municipal authorities on their part should work in closer partnership with these institutions. Developing and updating a database on the SMEs from various branches on the territory of the district would help to direct the necessary information to the respective stakeholders.

Possible activities:

- Developing and updating a database on the SMEs in the district;
- Providing information on business forums, exhibitions, stock markets and fostering the SMEs participation in them;
- Helping SMEs to obtain specific advisory services on the introduction of new quality standards, safe labour conditions, protection of the environment, as well as on the development of own trade marks, patent protection, etc.;
- Providing support for the improvement of the professional management and for the development of strategies, market researches, marketing, human resources management;
- Disseminating information on grant schemes, that provide financial support and technical assistance for SMEs;
- Helping SMEs to apply for grant aid and credit through business projects;
- Developing a credit guarantee fund for innovative SMEs;

- Developing the existing financial instruments - lease schemes, micro-credits, etc.

Measure 1.1.1.3 Fostering the establishment of regional clusters and regional associations of producers

The establishment of business associations is of particular significance for the district because the SMEs prevail not only in number but they also create the bigger share of the gross value added and jobs. This is a feebly used approach yet with negative examples rather than examples of good practices.

Under the circumstances of fragmented, small-area agriculture and limited financial resources the farmers are forced to take an active part in every stage of the production process which reflects on the production quality and quantity. The farmers' membership in trade organizations which protect their interests and their unification in marketing organizations which provide methodical assistance and production realization is extremely necessary and important for enhancing their effectiveness. That is why the farmers should be encouraged to participate in the existing regional trade associations and to establish new ones in conformity with the regulations.

The gradual improving of the legislature and gaining own experience as well as exchanging experience with EU partners in the future will contribute to the strengthening of the existing associations and establishing new ones. The NGOs supporting business have the leading role but it is also possible for the state and municipal administrations to participate.

Possible activities:

- Supporting the existing and establishing new horizontal and vertical regional clusters in cooperation with universities and research and development institutes /R&D/ in the field of agriculture, forestry, food production, tourism, textile industry, etc;
- Establishing trade associations in the priority branches of the local industry;
- Networking and exchanging experience and good practices among regional business organizations;
- Fostering the transfer of new technologies and know-how;
- Offering help for obtaining the right to use gratuitously the fixed assets – state or municipal property, in conformity with the relevant law;
- Helping stock-breeding associations to carry out selection and breeding activities (pursuant to the Animal Husbandry Law).

Measure 1.1.1.4 Establishing a high-tech business incubator

In the last years a business incubator was established in the town of Nova Zagora and the establishment of a business incubator in the town of Sliven is forthcoming. The efforts of the organizations supporting business – Faculty of engineering and pedagogy Sliven affiliated to Sofia Technical University and other higher educational institutions, companies, district and municipal administrations can lay the foundations of this project for a high-tech business incubator. It could become the place where newly established technology-oriented firms could find mainly a suitable intellectual milieu as well as support for the development of their business, access to markets, technologies, etc. Such a project requires a lot of funds and its start is not possible without a suitable grant scheme. But the preparatory activities, necessary for the application process, do not require big financial resources.

Possible activities:

- Establishing a consortium of science and R&D institutions, companies, NGOs, district and municipal administrations;
- Establishing a virtual high-tech business incubator;
- Developing and implementing a high-tech business incubator project.

Measure 1.1.1.5 Fostering innovative practices

The measure aims to improve the competitiveness and export potential of industry – that means a knowledge-based production, i.e. the introduction of new products, production materials and technologies, management and services.

Possible activities:

- Increasing the public awareness with regard to innovations and strengthening the relations between business, education and science institutions in the region;
- Disseminating information and popularizing innovative practices among companies;
- Surveying the innovation needs of the companies and their technological development capacity (technological audit);
- Participating in the Regional Innovation Strategy project of Southeastern planning region;
- Promoting market-oriented and industry-designated practical scientific researches;
- Establishing a centre for technology transfer;
- Direct subsidies for the production of the high-tech innovative industrial enterprises.

Priority 1.1.2 Creating conditions for attracting investments

With regard to attracting external investments the district competes with other districts in the country, considered far more attractive by entrepreneurs. Each undertaking oriented towards improving the setting for doing business and the living conditions tend to increase the competitiveness of the district; however, this priority is focused on promoting the competitive advantages of the district, building its image as a good location for investments and developing modern technical and business infrastructure in the big towns as a prerequisite for improving the investment milieu.

Measure 1.1.2.1 Establishing industrial parks

Some municipalities have already undertaken actions, within the existing legislature, to attract potential investors by offering sites in the industrial areas at attractive prices. As a result of the established public-private partnerships particular projects are implemented or are in a process of preparation. The industrial parks are established to attract modern productions and they are an important means for attracting investment. Passing the Investment Promotion Law and the amendments to the Municipal Property Law will foster the process. The law provides the transferring of property on sites, which are state or municipal property, without tendering or competing in case in which the future investor has been certified by the Bulgarian Investment Agency. By virtue of the law the construction of the technical infrastructure related to the respective production is allowed to be funded by the state or municipal budget. This measure requires above all identifying the suitable sites (more than 100 – 150 dka), feasibility studies, working out spatial planning sketches, carrying out procedures to change the designation in case they are agrarian lands. The feasibility studies will provide the opportunity to declare readiness to the Bulgarian Investment Promotion Agency. The existing experience reveals that the sites near the highways are preferred therefore the forthcoming construction of the “Trakiya” highway should be turned to good advantage. The vacation of

military properties some of them situated in the towns or near them provides opportunities for the application of this measure. The establishment of public-private partnerships is of a crucial significance for such projects.

Possible activities:

- Research on vacant not-built-up sites, property of the state and local authorities;
- Feasibility studies, developing spatial planning sketches, initiating procedures for changing the designation of certain lands, implementing technical infrastructure projects;
- Establishing public-private partnerships for the implementation of the projects;
- Developing the technical infrastructure of the business parks.

Measure 1.1.2.2 Marketing of the economic potential of the district

The measure aims to develop and provide in suitable way information to the potential investors on the economic potential of the district and the business opportunities.

It does not demand great financial resources. The district and municipal administrations and some NGOs have already undertaken actions to implement it.

Possible activities:

- Preparing information and promotional materials on the advantages of the district and the business opportunities it offers;
- Preparing information and promotional materials on sp pals on

Measure 1.1.2.4 Developing a system of investment incentives

Attractive incentives for the investors can be provided at local level within the framework of the existing national legislature. First of all a clear, understandable and transparent milieu for doing business should be created. The Investment Promotion Law provides certain privileges which could underlie in the regulations of the municipalities or in the acts of the mayors, the governor, the heads of the territorial units of the state administration. In most cases these incentives will not have a direct financial result but business should clearly recognize the benefit. This measure does not require big financial resources too and the implementation of the tasks ensuing from the measure can be planned in the short run.

Possible activities:

- Providing complex administrative services through the so-called one-stop shop;
- Shortening the time for carrying out the business-oriented administrative services;
- Reducing the charges, stipulated by the Local Taxes and Fees Law and other laws, for some companies that meet certain criteria;
- Awarding entrepreneurs with annual prizes in several categories.

Priority 1.1.3 Developing sustainable and quality tourism

The analysis of the tourist resources reveals that Sliven district has a considerable potential for the development of tourism, in particular the alternative forms of tourism - eco, rural, cultural and sports. This sector is deemed as very important for the local community, not only because Sliven district is in close proximity to the largest tourist market in the country - the South Black Sea Coast, but also because it has been making great strides over the last years. First and foremost, tourism has to be viewed from the point of its contribution to the overall sustainable development of the district economy. Such an approach is in accord with the government policy.

Measure 1.1.3.1 Supporting the establishment of local, regional and international partnerships

Tourism is a sphere which is entirely concentrated within private business. However it is necessary to establish partnership relations and to unite the efforts of the entrepreneurs from the tourist sector and the local and state authority to achieve the common objective.

Possible activities:

- Establishing a District Council for Tourism or District Tourist Association;
- Establishing long-lasting contacts with national and international tourist agencies for attracting more national and foreign tourists;
- Developing a marketing profile of tourism in Sliven district.

Measure 1.1.3.2 Developing a tourism-specific infrastructure and rehabilitating cultural sights that are object of tourist interest

It is necessary to improve the conditions for the development of tourism and to enlarge the supply of basic and complementary services in order to meet the modern tourism requirements. It is extremely significant to rehabilitate and improve the access to the existing cultural sights and tourist routes with the purpose of their preserving and more effective using. Small business has no capacity and resources to do it on its own and needs support to achieve it.

Possible activities:

- Establishing a district tourist information centre;

- Improving the existing tourist infrastructure;
- Developing a new tourist infrastructure;
- Rehabilitating and improving the access to existing cultural and tourist sights.

Measure 1.1.3.3 Developing competitive tourist products

Increasing the average spent per day during the stay of one tourist could be achieved through the diversification of tourist services and products. The natural, cultural and historic resources different in their character and from different epochs on the territory of Sliven district make it possible to work out various programmes which could be set into separate tourist products according to the visitors' interests.

Possible activities:

- Identifying the existing and potential demand of products and services in the sphere of rural, eco and cultural tourism;
- Developing demand-based tourist products;
- Integrating the tourist supply of Sliven district with that of the South Black Sea Coast;
- Promoting the competitive tourist advantages of Sliven district through active and focused advertising and information activities.

Priority 1.1.4 Improving the competitiveness of the agrarian sector in the district

This priority aims to increase the competitiveness of the agricultural products, produced in the district and their compliance with the requirements of the EU market.

The climatic and natural resources of the district offer wide opportunities for agricultural activities. Although the share of the agrarian sector in the gross value added of the district economy tends to diminish, there are good conditions for agriculture to take the lead over the other branches of the district economy. The soil and climatic conditions, the built infrastructure, the experience and traditions of the local agricultural producers, the activities of the regional trade organizations and the existence of many processing enterprises will contribute to the intensive development of the sector. Despite all these advantages, agriculture still suffers serious problems, which could be overcome, provided that all stakeholders direct all their efforts to the following areas: increasing the professional qualification of those employed in agriculture; introducing modern technologies, sorts and breeds, developing conventional and alternative productions in rural areas, establishing associations of producers, as well as new types of alliances - clusters aiming to coordinate the efforts of producers, processing companies, educational and credit institutions.

Measure 1.1.4.1 Improving the knowledge and professional qualification of the employed in the agrarian sector

Most farmers lack information and agricultural knowledge and these are some of the basic reasons for the problems which have been outlined within the analysis of agriculture of the district. It is necessary to improve the farmers' knowledge on the EU Common Agricultural Policy and the obligations under the chapter of Agriculture and to instigate the farmers to look for information and undertake adequate measures and actions. They also need to improve their professional qualification so as to make their production competitive on the Common European market.

Possible activities:

- Establishing a consulting agro-centre;
- Carrying out information campaigns in the towns and villages of the district;

- Issuing bulletins and specialized reference books;
- Conducting marketing researches;
- Organizing trainings for those willing to go into agriculture;
- Including agricultural producers in trainings, organized under the SAPARD programme;
- Preparing brochures with the legislative documents pertinent to the activities of the agricultural producers;
- Building a communication system between „science - producers - market“.

Measure 1.1.4.2 Developing the traditional productions and directing the agricultural producers to alternative activities

The trend to reducing the areas planted with the traditional for the district plants requires paying particular attention to the restoration mainly of the peach-trees and cherry-trees plantations and the grape variety vineyards.

It is necessary to make a full soil study aiming to get high yields with optimal utilization of the soil resources at hand – in its turn that will create prerequisites for the introduction of a crops zoning system in the district depending on the soil and climatic characteristics.

In relation to the obligations in the sector of Wine and Spirits it is of great importance to create vineyards towards the date of Bulgaria’s EU accession. The municipalities in their turn could foster the farmers by conceding lands from the municipal land fund to the farmers for a period of 25 to 40 years to create new gardens.

Possible activities:

- A thorough study of the soils in the district;
- Introducing a crops zoning system depending on the soil and climatic characteristics;
- Fostering the creation of new orchards, vineyards and shell- fruit gardens;
- Fostering the creation of centres for the purchase and processing of herbs and mushrooms;
- Surveying the opportunities of growing crops and raising breeds, not traditional for the district;
- Fostering and supporting the establishment of farms for the production of meet (beef and mutton) in the mountainous part of the district.

Measure 1.1.4.3 Fostering the use of modern technologies, sorts and breeds and the development of bio-production

Using up-to-date machineries and technologies, sorts and breeds is of primary significance for the farmers if they are to work effectively. The trade organizations could play an essential role for the implementation of this measure by popularizing the innovations and the trends in the development of agriculture among their members. One of the existing opportunities at this stage is the bio-production but the farmers still do not consider it. Applying bio-production aims to enlarge the agricultural activity by using the agricultural lands in conformity with the requirements for environment protection.

The increased demand of ecologically pure products worldwide is a prerequisite for the development of ecologically pure plant-growing and stock-breeding; on the other hand the high percentage of uncultivated lands in the hilly and mountainous areas of the district would favour and facilitate the introduction of better agro-ecological practices.

Possible activities:

- Creating pilot and demonstration gardens and farms;
- Organizing annual Regional exhibitions that demonstrate the innovations and trends in agriculture;
- Introducing bio-production incentives;
- Fostering the development of bio-productions;
- Renovating the irrigation fields;
- Developing projects for the creation of farms of various capacity and different breeds of animals in conformity with the European requirements for humane treatment of animals;
- Developing projects for afforesting lands with honey-bearing plants.

Measure 1.1.4.4 Ensuring the sustainable use of forest resources

The forests occupy 39.91% of the territory of the district. The sustainable use of the forest resources is extremely significant for the creation of a healthy living environment. Regarding the multi-functional managing of forests, the activities under this measure are directed to several aspects – economic, social and ecological aspects.

Possible activities:

- Using environmentally friendly forestry systems;
- Enlarging the forest areas and increasing their sustainability;
- Improving the protection of the forest resources;
- Improving the quality of the game and fish stock;
- Stipulating regulations on the use of herbs, mushrooms and forest fruits and creating conditions for their sustainable use;
- Improving the forest infrastructure.

Specific objective 1.2 To enhance the competitiveness of the human resources and to reduce social exclusion. To conserve and to develop the cultural and historical heritage

The enhanced competitiveness of human resources, social cohesion, good school environment, improved health services, protection and development of natural and cultural heritage are the major factors for attractive and high quality living conditions and standards in Sliven district.

Some of the main challenges facing the district are improving the skills of human resources with a view to their better adaptability to the social and economic changes; integrating the Roma population and other excluded ethnic minorities, as well as putting an end to the drop-out phenomenon among students.

Characteristic of Sliven district is the shortage of skills and qualifications, required by the new production technologies, inadequate coordination between education and the labour market, the lack of a policy for qualifying and training the labour force.

The access to quality health services is a basic indicator of the life expectancy. The district shows high infant mortality rate against the background of comparatively high birth rate. The large number of traumas and disabilities, together with the widespread unwholesome habits and unhealthy life-style outline the "key areas" of health interventions, included in the regional healthcare policy.

The natural and cultural heritage of the district is part of the national natural and cultural diversity; its conservation and good management underlie sustainable development which is the focus of the district policy.

Priority 1.2.1 Building conditions for the development of young people

The changes in Bulgarian education in the last years have not succeeded in moving it out from its "catching up" position. The experience of the European countries reveals that progressive education and quality human capital are a guarantee of stability and economic growth.

Measure 1.2.1.1 Overcoming the school drop-out phenomenon and creating an attractive and quality school environment

Improving the social and psychological milieu regarding the children's and students' education is a mighty accelerator for overcoming their drop-out of school. The children from the vulnerable minority groups need additional support when entering the educational system to equalize their initial position with the one of the other children.

Every society aims at quality education because it guarantees prosperity which provides grounds for economic optimism. Quality education includes: free to all educational system (providing opportunity for everyone to be educated no matter his/her place of residence, origin, social and health status); 100% literacy (covering all students of school age and providing opportunity for all of them to complete an educational stage or degree and to get a certain certificate); applicability of education (ensuring conditions – organizational and legislative, for putting the gained knowledge into practice, i.e. providing effective education regarding both the contents and the teaching methods).

Possible activities:

- Motivating children and their parents to enroll their children in preparatory pre-school classes;
- Including ethnic minority children in preparatory multi-ethnic classes;
- Rehabilitating the school premises and updating the material and technical foundations of the schools;
- Providing material assistance for students from socially disadvantaged families, who are at risk of dropping out from the school system;
- Improving the professional qualifications of the teachers and their skills to make use of the new information technologies and interactive education methods;
- Providing all schools with Internet access;
- Creating an accessible spatial environment at schools and kindergartens (construction of wheelchair ramps, lifts, etc.);
- Work with parents – establishing a "School for parents";
- Activating the work of the school boards and the school self-governance.

Measure 1.2.1.2 Providing conditions for effective extracurricular activities

Possible activities:

- Updating the extracurricular activities of the children to rationalize their leisure time;
- Stimulating the creativity of gifted children and ensuring publicity for their talents;
- Encouraging the young people to take part in the local (municipal and regional) decision making process in relation to those decisions that affect them.

Priority 1.2.2 Increasing the employment and reducing the unemployment

Although the number of the unemployed has dropped during the last two years, the demand at the labour market is increasing slowly and the supply is still considerably much greater. Another problem is the discrepancy between the quality of the labour force and the demands of employers, prompted by the higher and more specific requirements of the new machineries and production technologies.

Young people, people with primary or lower education, the Roma population, people with diminished working capacity, women, and people, aged above 50 are permanently affected by unemployment. These groups are vulnerable not only because they are at a higher risk of losing their jobs, but also because they have a lower chance of finding another one. Therefore, there is a strong probability of their being entrapped by long-term unemployment. The group of the long-term unemployed is one of the riskiest at the labour market, because long-term unemployment has an emotionally destructive impact on them and leads to their loss of basic skills. In the long run, such people drop out of the labour force due to discouragement and lack of motivation.

Measure 1.2.2.1 Improving the professional qualification

The process of accelerated economic restructuring, which started in 1997, is envisaged to continue in the mid run. Presumably the demand of labour force for particular professions will continue to be in a process of considerable changes which are difficult to prognosticate. This imposes increasing of the flexibility and improving the capacity of the vocational education and training system, introducing various forms of life-long learning to respond adequately to the changing demand.

Possible activities:

- Working out curricula overcoming the discrepancies between the supply and demand of skills at the labour market;
- Establishing contacts between social and economic partners and the educational institutions;
- Monitoring the needs of the labour market;
- Developing a modern system for professional guidance and information;
- Providing professional guidance for students, young people and children from the social care centres;
- Establishing a Centre for vocational training for adults and applying the modern methods for life-long learning.

Measure 1.2.2.2 Fostering entrepreneurship

Possible activities:

- Offering support for start-ups;
- Organizing trainings;
- Assuring internships for young people.
- Disseminating successful business practices;
- Organizing forums with a view to sharing experience in the sphere of problem solving.

Measure 1.2.2.3 Integrating the unemployed into the labour market

In order to achieve a lower level of unemployment it is necessary to encourage the unemployed to take part in the labour process and to provide particular support to the riskiest groups at the labour market – long-lasting unemployed, unemployed young people, women,

people with diminished working capacity and unemployed from the ethnic minorities. The imbalance at the labour market, where the supply considerably surpasses the labour force demand, suggests that the chance for these people to find jobs will remain minimal.

The increasing presence of these groups of unemployed at the labour market is a negative and sustainable phenomenon which requires urgent measures.

Possible activities:

- Organizing motivational trainings in order to stimulate the search for jobs;
- Conducting re-qualification courses in conformity with the demand of the labour market;
- Organizing entrepreneurship courses;
- Providing internship opportunities for unemployed young people;
- Opening family centres that would offer working women assistance and support for the care of children and other family dependants;
- Popularizing the job opportunities at the primary and secondary labour market and offering assistance in finding a job;
- Developing regional and local employment programmes to include the disadvantaged unemployed people in the labour market.

Priority 1.2.3 Developing social services and vulnerable groups' integration

The state outsources many social services to different NGOs or companies under certain conditions. In the district there are no NGOs which provide such services and the companies that offer them are insufficient.

Measure 1.2.3.1 Enlarging the types of social services, updating and restructuring the social infrastructure

Possible activities:

- Disseminating information on the provision of social services;
- Improving the NGOs' skills at designing and managing effectively socially significant development projects;
- Rehabilitating and refurbishing public buildings and the material foundation;
- Providing shelters for the people of the risky groups;
- Establishing day care centres for children in risk.

Measure 1.2.3.2 Integrating the Roma population and other socially excluded minorities

The integration of the Roma population is demanded not only in pursuance of the requirements of the EU membership criteria (the so called Copenhagen criteria) but also because of the demographic characteristic of Sliven district. That part of our society continues living in poverty, which considerably exceeds the poverty rate in the country, often in isolated residential areas with poor living condition; the illiteracy rate is extremely high among them as well as the unemployment rate. The consequences are: illiteracy, lack of rudimentary administrative and general knowledge, low qualification, poor participation at the labour market, social assistance benefits dependency, lack of knowledge on family planning, withdrawal within the group and finding ways to survive which are often not complying with the legal and commonly accepted rules of behaviour.

Possible activities:

- Increasing the literacy rate among the minorities;
- Establishing centres that provide administrative services and legal information to the minorities;

- Giving land to the landless ethnic minority families;
- Improving the living conditions in the settlements and residential areas, inhabited by ethnic minority population;
- Conducting trainings for non-formal leaders;
- Strengthening the administrative and consulting bodies that deal with ethnic and demographic issues.

Measure 1.2.3.3 Improving the healthcare services in the region

The main objective of the regional healthcare policy is improving, protecting and restoring the health of the population in Sliven district through the united efforts of the society to solve the health problems and to create conditions for realizing the “health potential” of all citizens.

The high infant mortality rate, morbidity rate and death rate, the mental disorders, the high trauma and disability rate of the population together the widespread unwholesome habits and unhealthy life-style outline the main activities included in the district healthcare policy.

Possible activities:

- Protecting the health of the pregnant women, newly born babies and children;
- Increasing the health culture and the knowledge of reproduction among young people;
- Restricting the risky factors related to the life style and ensuring safe work places and environment;
- Improving the accessibility of the healthcare services for the risky groups of people;
- Establishing a disease prevention information centre and a day centre for the treatment of addictions;
- Improving the public health-related activities and the prevention of diseases;
- Improving the management of the healthcare services, developing inter-sector cooperation and attracting financial resources from the European funds;
- Attracting funds for the construction of a modern balneological center at Sliven Spa.

Priority 1.2.4 Conserving and valorizing the cultural and historical heritage

The cultural and natural heritage is one of the strategic factors for the sustainable development of Sliven district. It is very important to undertake an integral approach to the conservation and valorization of the natural and cultural heritage in order to make the district more attractive, to increase the investments and develop a quality residential environment.

Measure 1.2.4.1 Improving the interaction between cultural and educational institutions and the civil society

Under the circumstances of globalization the cultural and natural heritage will further determine the choice of milieu and life quality. This heritage is a great resource not only for spiritual survival but also for a sustainable development. The cultural heritage conservation is a sign of a civilized behaviour – a heritage which is to be used not only for identification of cultural values but also for the modern life needs.

Possible activities:

- Activities oriented towards the conservation and promotion of the natural and cultural heritage;
- Involving the students in the implementation of projects, developed by cultural institutions;

- Setting up an aid fund for cultural events, scholarships, etc.;
- Granting the local cultural institutions economic independence;
- Rehabilitating the material foundation of the cultural institutions;
- Including the cultural sights and events of the district in marketing and tourist information bulletins.

Measure 1.2.4.2 Developing the local cultural institutes into contemporary intellectual centers

The cultural institutes should do their best to enlarge and variegate their activities if they are to have a better future. This means both improving the offered products and services and the way they are provided, and establishing a new type of relations between them and the consumers.

Possible activities:

- Promoting the design of programmes and projects related to the conservation and development of culture;
- Initiating and participating in national and international cultural exchange projects.

Priority 1.2.5 Strengthening the capacity of institutions and improving the provision of administrative services and information

With regard to the forthcoming EU accession of the country and the future decentralization and delegation of more competences from the state to the district and local authorities, the territorial units of the state administration and the local authorities need to strengthen their capacity for enforcing the amended legislature, for delivering better administrative services, for absorbing and managing the financial aid from various EU programmes and funds.

Measure 1.2.5.1 Strengthening the administrative capacity for the provision of new administrative and information services

Improving the effectiveness and transparency of the administration's work are priorities of the administrative reform. The introduction of new forms of administrative service provision aims to facilitate the consumers' access to administrative services and to provide intelligible information on their progress, terms, fees, etc. This requires improving both the material and technical conditions and the qualification of the administration employees.

Possible activities:

- Developing and improving the new forms of administrative services –one-stop shop, e-government, etc.;
- Updating the hardware and software of the institutions;
- Increasing the number of the issued universal electronic signatures in the administration;
- Improving the information and communication infrastructure linking the administrations;
- Improving the competence of the employees in the sphere of IT;
- Attracting well-trained IT experts in the institutions;
- Improving the coordination between the administrations, science institutions and IT business.

Measure 1.2.5.2 Strengthening the institutional capacity for attracting funds under EU programmes and projects

With a view to the forthcoming EU accession of Bulgaria it is more and more necessary to carry out discussions and information campaigns to popularize the obligations and the arrangements in line as well as the pre-accession instruments and the EU Structural funds. The role of the district administration, the municipal administrations, the territorial units of the state administration, business, farmers, educational institutions, local media and NGOs is extremely important for the preparation of our country for EU membership and more effective use of the funds under the pre-accession and structural funds.

Possible activities:

- Improving the skills in strategic planning and programming of the regional development by applying the partnership approach;
- Improving the project management skills;
- Conducting language courses for the state and local authorities and NGOs;
- Establishing a district training and consulting centre.

STRATEGIC GOAL 2: A quality living environment and developed infrastructure

Specific objective 2.1 To improve and to develop the quality of the technical infrastructure, to conserve and improve the parameters of the environment and to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources

The renovation and further development of the technical infrastructure is a prerequisite for developing the potential of Sliven district and overcoming the interregional disparities. The good technical infrastructure and environment are conducive to better living conditions, higher competitiveness of the district and its ability to attract investments. Sustainable economic growth will be achieved also by improving the parameters of the environment and the sustainable use of natural resources.

Priority 2.1.1 Developing the technical infrastructure with a view to improving the economic and social environment

Under the circumstances of the expected economic growth in the period before and after the EU accession of the country, the importance of ICT and ICT-related infrastructure is growing bigger. The well-developed networks of the technical infrastructure - transport, water and sewerage, power supply, are great assets of Sliven district but they need to be renovated. The measures which have to be undertaken for the implementation of this priority are:

Measure 2.1.1.1 Improving the communication infrastructure

It is necessary to plan measures related to the improvement of the communication network, provided the dynamic development of the information technologies.

Possible activities:

- Developing the networks that provide access to the ICT infrastructure;
- Improving and developing an infrastructure for the provision of high quality Internet.

Measure 2.1.1.2 Developing the transport infrastructure

The condition of the transport infrastructure is one of the essential factors, which hampers the integration of the regions with each other and into Europe as it limits the transport access, the labour force mobility, the provision of goods and services.

The development of the transport infrastructure in the district is directed to the rehabilitation and modernization of the existing road network and carrying out geo-protective activities within its scope.

The rehabilitation of the North – South roads of the Republican road network, parallel to the main road corridors, will be of significance not only for the local traffic, but also for the development of tourism in the mountainous parts of Sliven district and the neighbouring districts. Besides, in case of need, they will be used for relieving the TIR-traffic of the main corridors.

Possible activities:

- Improving the transport access to places of tourist potential;
- Rehabilitating the transport connections between and inside towns and villages;
- Developing the North - South roads by rehabilitating II-48 road (Omurtag - Kotel - "Petoluchkata") and III-662 road (Elena - Tvarditsa);
- Making a card-index of the landslides along the roads in the mountainous parts of the district and undertaking geo-protective measures and activities;
- Providing access to general transport and communication services for the areas outside the main urban centres.

Measure 2.1.1.3 Developing the water supply and sewerage infrastructure and hydro-ameliorations

The development of the water supply and sewerage infrastructure is related to the necessity of economical use of the water resources, quality drinking water supply, building sewerage network and a system of waste water treatment installations, rehabilitation and development of the existing opportunities for irrigation agriculture.

Possible activities:

- Solving the problem of insufficient drinking water in some settlements by installing additional drilling and water pumping equipments;
- Overcoming the shortage of drinking water in the municipality of Kotel and other neighbouring settlements by resuming the construction of the “Bratan” dam;
- Constructing water treatment plant at the Asenovetz dam for the provision of drinking water;
- Optimizing the water-supply system and renovating the pumping stations, dams and other equipments;
- Rehabilitating and renovating the inner water-supply network and reducing the loss of drinking water;
- Constructing and rehabilitating the sewerage networks, renovating the existing water treatment plants and building new installations for waste water treatment in the settlements;
- Preserving and reconstructing the existing irrigation equipment;
- Updating the agricultural irrigation plans.

Measure 2.1.1.4 Improving the parametres of the power supply network, examining the possibilities for using alternative and renewable energy sources and carrying out activities for enhancing energy efficiency

The enlarged use of natural gas is a worldwide trend and it is one of the basic means to reduce the noxious influences of energetics on the environment. The gas fuel makes it possible to create modern technologies for power production. The potential of the district with regards to the renewable energy sources should be used for power production from alternative sources.

Possible activities:

- Improving the safety of the electric power supply network, especially in those areas that possess tourist potential and in the industrial zones;
- Developing and expanding the gas supply network in the settlements;
- Constructing energy-saving street lightning in the settlements;
- Reducing the electricity costs by carrying out activities on energy efficiency;
- Researching and developing projects on the energy production from renewable and alternative sources (wind, sun, water, biomass energy, etc.)

Priority 2.1.2 Improving the parameters of environment

The deteriorated quality of environment exerts many negative effects on the health of the population and the quality of life. Moreover, it undermines the local economy. Many companies have already realized the need of investments in environment conservation, for it is one of the major factors for sustainable human development. Therefore, the maintenance and improvement of the natural capital is a priority of great significance for Sliven district, which is considered to be a district with clean environment and few ecological problems.

Measure 2.1.2.1 Developing a system for environmental monitoring, restoring and conserving the ecological balance

The control of the environment components quality helps to prevent potential pollution of the environment. Introducing the principle “he who pollutes he pays” and identifying the problems and reasons as a result of the ecological monitoring will contribute to effective decision making. On the other hand the EU policy is directed towards supporting the SMEs which judiciously and effectively spend the natural resources and do not pollute the environment.

Possible activities:

- Conducting training courses for improving the capacity of the administration in charge of environmental control;
- Devising models for the involvement of society in environmental monitoring;
- Carrying out activities for ecologically friendly behaviour;
- Studying the ecological and climatic potential of the district in support of the alternative forms of tourism;
- Supporting projects of SMEs on the conservation of environment;
- Re-cultivating the damaged territories;
- Conserving the biodiversity in the protected areas.

Measure 2.1.2.2 Constructing and developing an infrastructure for the restoration and conservation of environment

Constructing and developing an infrastructure for the conservation and rehabilitation of the environment is connected mainly with finding a solution of the numerous problems related to depositing and processing the solid household waste and leading and purifying the waste water.

Possible activities:

- Constructing a Regional plant for recycling solid household waste;
- Constructing hospital waste incinerators;
- Removing the illegal waste depots;
- Re-cultivating and sanitizing the area around the existing waste depots which have already depleted their capacity;
- Improving the waste collection system;

- Closing and re-cultivating the solid household waste depot in the town of Sliven.

Specific objective 2.2 To develop a quality settlement environment guaranteeing a sustainable social and economic growth and worthy living standards

The strategy for urban development aims to achieve a balanced network of settlements, sustainable and integrated urban development and improved urban surroundings.

Priority 2.2.1 Improving the urban surroundings

The transition from planned to market economy has widened the traditional scope of problems, encountered by towns as far as their development is concerned. The lay-out plans of the settlements are obsolete and to a large extent outdated due to the restitution and privatization processes. The public buildings in the towns and villages are in poor condition. The industrial zones in the towns need new planning decisions. There are many illegal premises in the residential areas, inhabited by Roma population, which violate the street planning regulations and do not correspond to the urban development norms and requirements. That produces a number of obstacles for building the infrastructure in these areas. The wide reach of the accumulated problems in the urban areas determines the diverse measures that could be undertaken to solve them.

Measure 2.2.1.1 Working out urban development plans and cadastre plans of the urban territories

The urban development planning is the basis of the all-round development and problem solving of any territory. The vicious practice of making modifications of the obsolete existing plans will produce serious problems to the management of processes of the populated territories. The possible urgent activities in this sphere are:

Possible activities:

- Working out a general urban development plan of the town of Sliven and the "Izgreve" settlement;
- Working out a street regulation plan of the "Izgreve" settlement /the Eastern exurb of the town of Sliven/;
- Working out detailed urban development plans;
- Working out specialized cadastre maps /underground cadastre/;
- Working out detailed urban development plans for areas, inhabited mainly by the Roma population;
- Studying the vacant military sites with the purpose of changing their status.

Measure 2.2.1.2 Restoring and renovating the urban areas

Applying specific measures for rehabilitation and renovation of the urban territories is related to the poor condition of the existing public utilities and the chronic shortage of investments for the public buildings as well as to the neglected housing stock in the big residential areas. Creating attractive urban surroundings is a prerequisite for increasing their competitiveness and new investments in production and services.

Possible activities:

- Improving the surroundings in the residential areas through public works activities;
- Rehabilitation and sanitation of the residential estates with a view to improving energy efficiency;
- Rehabilitating the public buildings;

- Resuming the construction works at sites that have been left unfinished;
- Sanitation of the old production and warehouse zones;
- Developing and expanding the green areas of the towns;
- Providing access to public buildings and transport for disabled people.

Measure 2.2.1.3 Improving the living conditions in the rural settlements and providing high quality services to the population

The population of the rural areas is characterized by considerably lower income, aging, high unemployment, strong dependency on agriculture - the basic sector of these areas. The low density of population and the depopulation also increase the risk of problems such as the lack of basic services and social exclusion.

To overcome the negative processes in the rural areas it is necessary to define key priorities at local level with regards to the improvement of the transport access, the access to public works and administrative services, education and healthcare. It is necessary to develop investment programmes for infrastructure provision. The implementation of such activities will result in increasing the attractiveness of the life-style in the villages and using the considerable uninhabited housing stock.

Possible activities:

- Restoring and maintaining the rural heritage /historical sights, monuments, folklore, cultural events/ as a supplement to cognitive tourism;
- Providing basic services for the population of the rural areas;
- Updating the obsolete lay-out plans.

11. Organization and coordination of activities to achieve the objectives

The activities for the implementation of the District strategy for development /DSD/ are an integral part of it. This stage is crucial for the strategy with a view to achieving its objectives and priorities.

The following principles should be observed when implementing the objectives and priorities of the DSD in conformity with the national policy in the sphere of regional development:

- concentration of resources to achieve the objectives of the regional development;
- partnership, publicity and transparenance when carrying out the planning, programming, funding, monitoring and evaluating;
- inter-departmental coordination of the activities of the competent bodies in the process of planning, resource provision, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The basic activities for the implementation of the DSD require on one hand the creation of tools and mechanisms for information provision and on the other hand – institutional building of the units participating in the DSD implementation.

▪ Information provision of the DSD implementation process

With that end in view *an information system for management* will be created – its purpose will be to assist and solve issues related to the organization, coordination and management of the processes and institutions in the district for which the Governor – being a central executive authority – is directly responsible. The Governor is supported by the “Regional development” department in his/her activity of information provision.

- providing up-to-date information on programmes and funds under which public and non-governmental organizations could apply for funding of their projects and activities;
- popularizing successful initiatives and projects through the Internet site of the District administration /www.sliven.government.bg/
- supporting the institutional capacity building of the local authorities /municipalities and regional state units/ for developing projects and applying for funding under various programmes and funds;
- supporting and cooperating with project developing organizations and structures and coordinating the efforts to implement the RDS activities.

▪ **Institutional strengthening of the units participating in the DSD implementation**

The institutional organization for the DSD implementation at district level covers the organization and activity of the main bodies – the Governor, the specialized structures of the District administration and the District Council for Development.

The Governor carries out the national policy in the district; organizes the development, the public discussion, the implementation and updating of the strategy, provides publicity and transparency of the regional development planning and programming, assists the design of the municipal plans for development, participates in the establishment of regional and local partnerships to prepare, fund and implement projects giving effect to the planning documents at regional and local level.

A District group for strategic planning has been established to assist the Governor's activity in the provision of publicity and transparency, active partnership, monitoring, evaluation and updating.

The Governor can enter into an association agreement with other districts to implement regional development activities having over-district significance and scope.

The District Council for Development has the following functions when carrying out the regional development policy in the district and for developing, approving and implementing the DSD:

- discusses and approves the DSD;
- assesses the initiatives of the municipalities and the legal entities related to the DSD and the proposals for including measures in the National Operational Plan for Regional Development;
- makes offers for entering into cooperation agreements with neighbouring districts to implement joint activities for regional development;
- expresses attitude on drafts of acts, strategic, planning and programming documents, related to the regional development planning and programming, which have been provided to the Council for consideration;
- interacts with the district councils for development, the executive authorities and their territorial units;
- monitors the DSD implementation on the basis of the measures from the programming documents developed in conformity with the Municipal and Regional Plans for development.

Coordination and interaction between the bodies and units participating in the implementation of the DSD of Sliven district

The coordination will be carried out both vertically – between the Minister of Regional Development and Public Works, the Regional Council for Development of the Southeastern Planning region, the District Council for Development and the municipalities, and horizontally – between the various units, departments and stakeholders at district level.

The local authorities take part in the DSD setting-up by approving Municipal Plans for Development and implementation programmes as they mobilize the local financial, human and organizational resources, including the private and NGOs sectors, to develop and apply initiatives with local and over-municipal level.

The participation of the social and economic partners, the NGOs and private sector in the regional development policy within the DSD was active during the development of the strategy. The partnership is envisaged to continue during the implementation of the strategy too. Many of these partners will participate directly in the implementation of projects and activities for regional development funded by European and national funds.

12. Necessary actions for monitoring, evaluation and updating (monitoring system)

The District strategy for development is a strategic document for applying the regional policy at district level which provides correspondence and specifies the expectations of the National strategy in line with the specific problems and potential of the district. The DSD implementation is a complex and multi-directed process related to the influence of different political, economic and social factors for a long period of time, within dynamic and changing micro and macro surroundings. Therefore the DSD implementation should be apprehended as a continuous process of monitoring, evaluating and updating, analyzing and adapting the existing guidelines of development and activities to the new circumstances.

Regarding the reporting of the outputs and impacts from the implementation of the activities for achieving the objectives, laid down in the strategic framework, it is necessary to create an effective **monitoring system** comprising of monitoring, evaluation and control of the strategic document.

It is necessary to differentiate between monitoring and evaluation. According to the specialists in this sphere it could be defined that “the evaluation starts at the point where monitoring ends”, that evaluation focuses on the effects, achievements and implementation while monitoring is directed mainly to the resources, activities, outputs and partially results. In this respect monitoring should be considered rather a current, continuous activity while evaluation is a more recurrent but not continuous activity.

The major components of the monitoring and evaluation system are:

- rules, procedures and responsibilities for modifying the plan;
- indicators for monitoring and evaluation and information sources;
- monitoring and evaluation regularity;
- responsibilities for carrying out the monitoring and evaluation.

According to the Methodological Guide for developing District strategies for development *the District Council for development* /DCD/ is the monitoring local authority; it monitors the DSD implementation and makes the intermediate and final evaluation after the close of the planning period. This district body for regional development approves and ratifies:

- the indicators for monitoring the DSD implementation;

- periodically carries out a review of the progress regarding the objectives, as it analyses the results from the implementation of the measures;
- considers the results of the intermediate evaluation;
- considers the proposals for changes of the measures;
- offers changes related to achieving the objectives of the strategy (updates the DSD).

Monitoring

The monitoring will be carried out by the affiliated to the DCD District group for strategic planning /DGSP/ including representatives of the municipalities, the Directorate “Labour Office Sliven” , the Regional Directorate “Social Assistance”, the Regional Directorate “Agriculture and Forestry”, the Regional Inspectorate of Education to the Ministry of Education and Science, the Regional Healthcare Centre, the Territorial Statistical Office, the Directorate “Sinite Kamani” Nature Park, the Faculty of Engineering affiliated to Sofia Technical University.

The monitoring will be carried out annually as the first procedure will be held two years after DSD entering into force.

DGSP will gather information and develop a **summarized annual report** of the achieved results containing a comprehensive analysis of the existing situation of the district, the achieved results, the degree of implementation of the objectives during the period under review, the changes laid down in the regional development at national or EU level. The gathered information and the report will be presented to the DCD.

The necessity of updating or modifying the strategy will be justified and grounded in the *summarized annual report of the achieved results* prepared by the DGSP. After considering the report at a meeting of the DCD and modifying it according to the approved remarks, additions and recommendations, the DSD will be updated.

The team developing the strategy, consisting of experts from the District administration, will organize and coordinate the work of the DGSP, gather and summarize the coming information and prepare materials for the DGSP meetings.

The monitoring aims to provide current information which helps to report the progress (success or failure) of the strategic document. In order to exercise control on DSD implementation, on the basis of the evaluation of the achieved results compared to the laid down objectives, indicators for monitoring the implementation, defined in advance, will be used.

Evaluation

The DCD is directly responsible for the intermediate and follow-up evaluation of DSD implementation. **The evaluation** of the implementation of the activities, laid down in the DSD, and their widespread influence will be assigned to independent evaluators – consulting organizations or experts under the Public procurement law.

Two evaluations will be developed for the period of strategy’s operation:

The intermediate evaluation, pertinent to the period until EU accession of our country, includes:

- evaluation of the initial results from the programme implementation;

- evaluation of the degree of achieving the respective objectives;
- evaluation of how the financial resources have been used as well as the procedures of management and monitoring.

The follow-up evaluation, reporting the entire period until 2015, will include:

- evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the inputs for the implementation of the strategy;
- evaluation of the general impact;
- analysis of the positive and negative factors influencing the strategy implementation;
- evaluation of the degree to which the objectives have been achieved and the sustainability of the results;
- conclusions and recommendations regarding the application of the regional development policy.

The follow-up evaluation will be done 6 to 12 months after the termination of the period of the strategy operation.

Updating the District strategy for development

The DSD will be updated:

- on updating the National strategy for regional development;
- on establishing essential digressions from the planned results;
- on essential changes of the macroeconomic and international conditions or legislature;
- depending on the evaluation;
- on essential change of the internal conditions;
- on changes of the international arrangements and requirements.