

## COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS IN MARGINALIZED RURAL AREAS FROM THE APUSENI MOUNTAINS - ROMANIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study presents some of the most pressing contemporary social problems faced by members of the rural communities in the mountainous area of the Moti country. Thus, he starts from the idea that the early identification of the socio-economic problems in the disadvantaged areas of the Apuseni Mountains can contribute to solving these problems and implicitly to the increase of the social re-insertion of the vulnerable groups. The purpose of this study was to highlight the socio-economic problems faced by the members of the rural communities in the disadvantaged areas of the Apuseni Mountains and to identify appropriate community practices for diminishing the negative effects on the population in these marginalized areas. Thus, in the first part of the study are presented the main characteristics of the mountain areas in the Moti country and the socio-economic problems faced by the members of these communities. In conclusion, the paper proposes some community intervention practices involving both those interested in solving their own problems as well as local authorities and non-governmental institutions operating in this area.*

**Keywords:** *marginalized areas; disadvantaged communities; vulnerable groups; community interventions; social re-insertion; public-private partnership;*

### Introduction

In Romania, most people at risk of poverty or social exclusion live in rural areas. Poverty in rural areas is in various forms, ranging from poverty in small and aged people to low-skilled communities, poor formal employment and improper housing.

"The problems of the Apuseni Mountains communities have been, since the beginnings of Romanian rural sociology, a perpetual object of study. During the communist regime's years, a large-scale investigative campaign in the Apuseni Mountains was conducted under the leadership of I. Aluș in 1980, at the command of the political factors, in order to support the project of "territorial systematization"

Similar to these studies, the analysis of the current characteristics and the evolution of the rural communities in the Apuseni Mountains area must be circumscribed in the

analysis of the characteristics and evolution of the entire rural community in Romania "[1].

After 1998, T. Vedinaș realizes, on rigorous sociological bases, an extensive regional monograph of the Apuseni Mountains, from which two major problems of the villages from the Apuseni, the demographic and the economic decline [2].

This study focuses on the marginalized rural areas of the Apuseni Mountains, specifically on the specific aspects of Bistra (as closest to the town of Câmpești) and Avram Iancu (as the farthest locality of Câmpești), referring to some intervention actions implemented through a series of community projects designed to improve the lives of people living in these areas.

According to *Emergency Ordinances no. 24/1998 on the regime of less-favored areas* [3] are geographically defined territorial areas that meet at least one of the following conditions:

- a. have mono-industrial productive structures, which, in the area's activity, mobilize more than 50% of the employed population;
- b. there are mining areas where the personnel has been dismissed, over 25%, through collective redundancies;
- c. collective redundancies have been made following the liquidation, restructuring or privatization of economic agents, which have affected more than 25% of the number of employees domiciled in the area;
- d. the unemployment rate exceeds by 30% the average existing at national level;
- e. are isolated, lacking communications and infrastructure is underdeveloped.

### Conceptual delimitations

Because there is no definition of "marginalized areas," in the review of the literature, there have been searched for existing studies and documents that have proposed definitions for "poor communities", "segregated communities" and "marginalized communities" in Romania. In fact, marginalized areas are considered "pockets" of poverty at the local level, which means that marginalization is related to "extreme", "unacceptable" poverty (fig.1).

According to the National Institute of Statistics, there are 8.5 million people in Romania at risk of poverty or social exclusion, a figure that places our country in the first place in the European Union relative to the relative poverty rate.

**Office research** has shown that the specialty studies have documented extreme poverty in Romania since the 1990s, and it has been confirmed that it is not just an individual or family phenomenon, but geographically because it focuses on marginalized areas, both rural and urban, to whom extreme poverty is transmitted from one generation to the next.

By definition, these areas are census sectors where most of the population have graduated at the gym, gaining their living in the informal sector (especially in agriculture), and living in precarious conditions even under the usual low standards applied to rural areas which generally do not have much basic infrastructure or utilities (in other words, people live in overcrowded housing and do not have access to running water or electricity). We also find the term "marginalized rural areas", which are intravilanelly compact areas where people with a disproportionately low human capital, with few declared jobs and unfit living

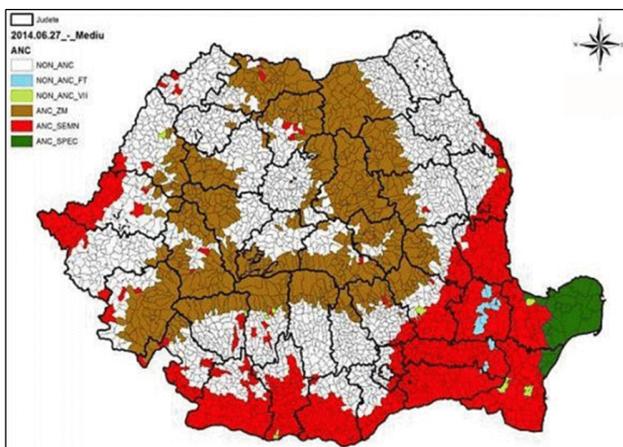


Fig. 1. Map of disadvantaged areas/administrative-territorial units (APIA, 2015)

conditions, live in comparison with residents in other rural areas.

### Investigation methods

So far, only a few local studies have been identified, and most of these are case studies based on qualitative research techniques.

To identify the features of marginalized rural areas, the methodology used was based on data from the 2011 Census [4].

**The premise** from which to investigate the specific problems of the disadvantaged communities was that the early identification of the problems faced by the respective community can lead to the diminishing of the negative effects on the members of the respective community.

The examination of the specialized literature indicated that the vast majority of studies on marginalization in Romania focus on rural areas and take into account "community poverty" or "community failures" at the level of the administrative unit (of the commune).

**On-site field research** has been done by combining several qualitative methods. Thus, in the two communes selected, the city hall representatives were contacted in the first instance to conduct one or more interviews with the mayor, deputy mayor, secretary or social assistant from the Public Social Service. In the next phase, the theoretically identified areas were visited as marginalized, and local group discussions were held with the locals, making some own findings about the respective community.

### Proposals for community social interventions

The social inclusion of vulnerable groups is a complex issue that goes beyond the scope of social services. This is often associated with education, health, adequate housing, access to employment, social services and benefits, anti-discrimination, etc. A strategic approach to the issues identified in several

sociological studies supports the implementation of community action to address socio-economic problems in disadvantaged rural communities.

The main specific objectives of Community interventions are:

- a. **improving the living conditions of the population** by developing and adopting a local strategy and an action plan for the strategy;
- b. **ensuring equal opportunities** and increasing access to education for children at risk of drop out (especially Gypsies) and their parents, through integrated local educational measures (summer kindergarten, school after school, teacher training), which will contribute to increasing the quality of education and school performance;
- c. **increasing the social inclusion of Gypsies** people in the multicultural local community through intercultural youth activities, volunteering and exchange of experience, promoting mutual knowledge and acceptance;
- d. **combating social exclusion** can be achieved by initiating participatory and inclusive local processes where people from different communities within the localities have a common "space" in which they can develop a common language and development plans that are based on the needs and their resources.

Currently, the design, coordination and implementation of effective actions is deficient.

### Examples of good practice

In order to achieve successful community interventions, it is necessary to create a solid database with appropriate methods and techniques. In this respect, it can be of great benefit to be the *Atlas of marginalized rural areas and of the local human development in Romania*, which measures the marginalization and the local human development at the community level and can provide the

policy decision makers with relevant indicators about the areas where they are most in need intervention [5].

Models of community involvement by supporting people, groups and communities in difficulty are based on the love of others, the aim being to improve the quality of life of people and groups at risk.

Specialists stress that the Community intervention methodology should be based on a "bottom-up" approach, which means that every community intervention will be based on an understanding of community needs and visions. That is why the aim of such an approach is to develop a common space for institutions, the marginalized community and the majority community to make possible a common understanding of the issues and a real collaboration for social inclusion.

**a. Community interventions** being prepared on an institutional level, the bottom-up approach is complemented by a "top-down" approach, the Community facilitation process alongside institutional facilitation. Institutional facilitation is typically focused on the mayoralty, but includes other relevant actors in terms of planned interventions. This process has the same steps as the community: identifying key departments and individuals, raising awareness of the identified needs in the marginalized community, preparing meetings between the institution and community members, providing support for the institution / town hall to make its own assessment of the situation, and develop development plans with the community, support implementation of plans by mobilizing resources, monitoring and constant feedback given to all stakeholders.

**b. Exchange of experience** to learn good practices in the field of social inclusion, organized in the form of study visits in order to know projects, initiatives, successful experiences in Romania in areas such as: housing; Employment; health; access to social services; education; the protection of

children, young people and the family in general; combating discrimination; community development. Thus, the transfer of information, experiences, ideas and best practices in the areas concerned can be realized, which can then be used in order to facilitate the inclusion of the local communities participating to the Local Public Administration.

**c. Involve local communities** in developing and delivering interventions. In support of this idea, local authorities could provide community members with training in participatory decision-making, accounting, and financial literacy. In addition, involving the local population in efforts to modernize local infrastructure could enhance their sense of responsibility, while giving them the opportunity to work and develop their skills;

**d. Assisting local public authorities** with communities at risk of social marginalization by social assistance specialists who select the themes for the problems identified when determining the needs, interests and motivations of community members, namely: inclusive education, human resources training, and occupation, community security, prevention of family separation, inclusion of young people, active participation.

**e. Educational activities** appropriate to concrete needs identified at school/ community level such as the existence of a large number of people who have not completed their compulsory education, or the existence of a large number of illiterates (and thus can not provide the necessary support for their children in solving themes).

f. Co-optation of the childrens from disadvantaged communities who do not have home at the most basic conditions to prepare for school in After School programs.

**g. Training of social inclusion specialists** to combat social exclusion. These training sessions address local social actors responsible for social inclusion and offer the opportunity for specialists to work together both those responsible for community

interventions and those involved in developing local development strategies.

h. In terms of **institutional facilitation**, the themes presented can refer to: networking, institutional and decision-making resources analysis, principles of restorative practices. With regard to Community facilitation, the themes presented can refer to the development of trust relationships, qualitative assessment of Community resources and problems, and the methodology of community intervention.

i. **The development of services** in disadvantaged rural communities in the Apuseni Mountains area is aimed at: preventing and combating social exclusion, interventions at disadvantaged groups, ensuring access to education, improving the situation of vulnerable people.

j. **Organization of varied social programs** offered to a variety of vulnerable groups: children, young people, elderly people, adults with disabilities, chronic ill people, alcohol or other drug addicts, unemployed, poor families, homeless people, other vulnerable groups.

k. Achieving **public-private partnerships** introduces a new paradigm in ensuring social welfare and is a means of achieving multiple goals: savings in public spending, improving the quality of public services, streamlining public administration organs operations, and enhancing the chances of policy effectiveness being chosen and implemented.

## Results

The inventory of the problems faced by the members of the rural communities Bistra and Avram Iancu as well as the analysis and processing of the data obtained through the application of the questionnaires revealed that:

- **social re-insertion projects** initiated in recent years have begun to cause changes in the mentality of people in the community as well as in the approach of

pupils from disadvantaged communities by teachers / school leadership;

- **the presence of school mediators** has been fully exploited, contributing to the exact identification of the problems faced by communities, not only in the field of education, but also in the field of street systematization, housing, labor market arrangements and lack of jobs work etc. ;
- gradually, **the school frequency** has also improved among pupils from disadvantaged communities;
- there have been **changes in parents' perceptions**, where education is a quality process that can result in a higher living standard among graduates (who will be more likely to be employed on the labor market).

There have been debated how to tackle educational issues specific to each community (such as early marriages that are the causes of school dropout, reduced school attendance, etc.).

Both mayors and school principals were able to get acquainted with the legal framework for the organization of "Second Chance" programs and "School after school" respectively and were encouraged to design /organize such activities from the year school 2016-2017.

Good ideas have been formulated by members of local communities who have understood the purpose of these actions, being aware that they can effectively contribute to solving problems only through collaboration and partnership. In addition to these data and theories, a basic question is whether there is openness from beneficiaries because it is not easy to get results in communities that have accepted their situation.

## Conclusions

This study attempted to capture some dimensions relevant to socio-economic development at the level of the rural area of the Apuseni Mountains. This area is an

extremely complex territorial context, regarding the level of schooling, occupational status and the most demanding skills currently on the labor market. It is also very important to evaluate and measure the effects of interventions from the poorest marginalized communities. In this respect, we believe it is essential for the various actors in the field of social inclusion to cooperate, formulate common goals and strategies, achieve the expected results and improve the quality of life of vulnerable people and groups.

Thus, within marginalized communities, direct involvement of community members is particularly important in order to provide

interventions that respond to their needs.

Every community intervention that neglects the involvement of those who are directly affected isolates or removes the community instead of providing support and understanding.

Institutions and members of the respective communities by participating in these joint actions / partnerships will facilitate the identification of solutions to existing problems, and collaborations that will take shape through partnerships can be a solid foundation in the process of attracting funds for initiatives to resolve various socio-economic problems faced by members of marginalized communities.

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