

# POVERTY SUSTENABLE STRATEGIES FOR COMBATING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN RURAL AREAS

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**Abstract:** Beginning of the XXI century catches Romania's rural areas in unprecedented decline, with a working population shrinking, aging and with short and mid-term economic prospects uncertain. This situation brings a worrisome phenomenon of widespread poverty of rural life. This widespread poverty penetrates all aspects of rural life: from poor education, lack of specialized medical and social service and lack of work force for agriculture to the migration of people to more developed urban areas or abroad. Furthermore, the markets for traditional foods, traditional crafts, traditional materials and traditional household products are shrinking. Despite all these, Romanian rural areas can and should be saved through a sustained effort, involving EU funds and grants, promoted by APDRP with help from non-governmental organizations and, why not, even with help from the Romanian Government. The XXIst century should continue to support local tradition. If not country life will be nothing but a memory depicted or archived in a photo album.

**Keywords:** poverty, traditional, sustainable development

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Beginning of the XXI century catches Romania's rural areas in unprecedented decline, with a working population shrinking, aging and with short and mid-term economic prospects uncertain. This situation brings a worrisome phenomenon of widespread poverty rural life.

The Romanian Village is considered the most extensive area of Romania able to preserve traditional Romanian values. It is the area of the highest birthrate, in other words, a fundamental medium for ensuring social existence of our country. However, the Romanian rural space and its problems is the Cinderella of legislative, administrative, political and economic concerns.

Moreover, certain disfunctionalities are largely ignored or inadequately addressed.

## 2. MANIFESTATIONS OF POVERTY IN RURAL AREAS

2.a. Rural poverty from the perspectives of aging of the population, lack of specialized social and

medical services and lack of specialized home care services.

Another worrying aspect is that the percentage of older population of Romania is rising, so at this point, from the total elderly population, 60% lives in rural areas, being affected by serious problems: poverty, lack of social and medical services and poor access to health services, which are mostly concentrated in towns and cities. Only 10% of family physicians provide primary medical assistance to rural areas, so, in rural communities the majority of older people have no access to any form of medical or social services (not even a family physician within the community).

Only 0.23% of the elderly in Romania is provided with home care services, given that at least 20% of the elderly population would need these services. Economic support of these activities would bring enormous benefits because home care is 11 times cheaper than any other form of residential care and the development of these services could provide jobs and qualification to at least 100,000 people, many of them from rural areas, unskilled and with no other opportunities of labor market integration. Also, it is required that services for the elderly to be established in all municipalities of the country.

2.b. Rural poverty through the eyes of a poor educational system

There are discrepancies in the educational system in rural areas when compared to the cities. Currently, the rural areas are still an area of weakness for the education system. Poverty, social inequalities, the level of knowledge, demographic decline, lack of employment opportunities, social, cultural and political isolation are representative for village youth. Another very important thing is that in reality we can only see lack of interest for development and for creating equal opportunities and, with future challenges ahead, education in rural areas is at a major disadvantage.

The biggest problem is that rural schools do not attract qualified teachers because road access is difficult, especially in winter, not to mention very low

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salaries which are contributing to the lack of motivation for teaching in rural areas.

#### 2.c. Migration of people from rural areas

The migration of people from rural areas, especially in foreign countries, witnessing the phenomenon of abandonment of traditional dwellings and households.



Figure 1 – Abandoned house

This depopulation cause serious social problems such as irrecoverable loss of staff (teachers, health professionals, caregivers, agronomists, livestock engineers zoo, veterinarians); excessive aging of rural population, which affects and will continue to seriously affect agricultural development in Romania; disappearance of traditional type of care (by family members), which requires the establishment and development of specialized services in a much larger number than was expected; growing of a new generation of children and youth with serious psychological problems; the emergence of immediate additional needs for care services for children and elderly left without caregivers.

#### 2.d. Rural poverty regarded as labor shortage for agriculture

Considering that at present most of the land for agriculture and livestock are operated and maintained by the elderly and sick, simply because young people have left for urban areas and much higher incomes, it is no wonder that Romanian agriculture generates the greatest number of poor people and that an increasing number of land areas are abandoned.

#### 2.e. Decline of traditionally produced foods

In terms of production, conservation and commercialization of traditional Romanian food, few people know that these products have been ecological long before it became trendy. Under-promotion for the domestic and foreign markets means that small producers basically cannot afford to meet conditions imposed by sophisticated supermarkets. The only forms of advertising that remain for these products are agro-tourism and the traditional fairs held sporadically in several places in the country or in the capital.

### 3. SOLUTIONS OF AID AGAINST THE GENERALIZED PHENOMENON OF POVERTY

Under these circumstances, one of the most popular forms of relief from this unprecedented situation is agro-tourism, associated with promotion of the cultural aspect linked to local productive traditions. These must become a sustainable source of positive rural regeneration, especially as Romania, through integration into the globalizing structures of the European Union will need to maintain local character and specificity inherited from generation to generation.

**Agri-tourism** - is the form of tourism practiced in rural areas, based on local households providing accommodation, meals, entertainment and more. Through agri-tourism natural and anthropogenic resources of the area are better utilized, thereby contributing to the raising of living standards of the rural population. Unlike rural tourism, agritourism includes: accommodation in peasant households (bed and breakfasts, etc.); consumption of agricultural products from that household, participation in a greater or lesser extent to seasonal agricultural activities. Both rural tourism or agro-business have the following coordinates:

**rural areas** - with aspects of size, population density, social structure, the use of land, and also aspects referring to hosting: type, comfort, location.

**inhabitants** - as keepers of traditions and customs as well as land owners, hosting equipment owners and even hosting services providers.

**products** - on the one hand, food products consumed by tourists staying in peasant households and, on the other hand, tourism products - what motivates tourists to visit.

Tourism, as a component of the rural economy as a whole, is a subsection with great potential for development, and as such represents an occupational alternative for the workforce in rural areas, as a way of diversifying economic activities and a powerful factor of stability and cohesion for the rural population. Its development can help mitigate imbalances arising between different areas, representing a more secure and steady source of income growth for the rural population, provided this does not exceed the absorption capacity relative to that environment, and provided they do not affect the natural environment and the traditionally built environment, knowing full well that thousands of rural pensions are located in natural areas unsuitable and thus destroying traditional households, directly or indirectly (by mass, shape, materials, location). Another problem that needs special attention when it comes to alternative economic activities in rural areas is undoubtedly identifying those activities that really have the best chances for sustainable development,

therefore creating stable jobs that are outside agriculture, to compensate for the high quota of employment in agriculture.

Economic development of rural communities depends largely on the same factors as urban development such as: access to critical services (education, health, technology, transport and

communications), well-paid jobs, a sustainable natural environment. Rural areas offer some additional advantages, such as cheaper labor, lower cost of living, less crowding, less expensive and greener building plots, a much quieter lifestyle, a growing attractiveness of rural areas and of developing areas with high tourism potential but unexploited, an increasing number of tourists benefitting from recreational services, maintaining traditions and crafts, production, preservation and marketing of traditional foods, production of wool, ceramics, wood and metals for making traditional household items, as well as the facilities used for such purposes.

Agrotourism is the only touristic-economic activity let's say, able to effectively and sustainably use the existing traditional fund, thereby contributing to increasing the quality of life and, consequently, the health and behavioral education of the local population; refreshing social life by providing activities that are complementary to agricultural activities by promoting recreational facilities in order to ensure broad access to natural areas of tourist interest; diversification and improvement of tourism infrastructure and services in the Romanian rural space. The value of tourism activity is of course, more beneficial if within that microarea are other monuments and historical sites, spas and other objectives of natural interest, nature reserves, caves, lakes etc. Another very important advantage for agrotourism is that it can be practiced in most parts of the country and in all seasons, thus resulting other forms, such as tourism in the Danube Delta, plain tourism, mountain tourism.

Promoting tourism products through agrotourism, namely through the host family's members will lead to positive effects on the development of special links between hosts and tourists, appreciating the relationship between the local values promoted and the standard of living of beneficiaries of the act of travel, communication, exchange of ideas and so on.

Novelty of a well design tourism product, competently expressed by people with high moral standards, coupled with interest, motivation, hospitality, tourism development will always lead to development of a truly traditional, sustainable tourism, and communities where these activities take place can become a pole of attraction within which all the local sustainable development elements merge.

Since 2010, we see an increasing interest in agrotourism development involving the use of grant funds provided by the European Union for generating alternative activities in rural areas, with the purpose of attaining the objectives proposed by measure 313 through APDRP and Ministry of Tourism and Sustainable Development, namely:

a) Investments in tourist accommodation infrastructure in building modernizing, expanding and equipping of accommodation facilities (agrotourism structures and other types of tourism accommodation structures made by a micro-enterprise), with up to 15 rooms for bed and breakfasts and up to 8 rooms for agrotourism pensions.

Accommodation facilities include: villas, bungalows, chalets, campsites, holiday villages,

tourist stops, camping lodges, guesthouses and agrotourism pensions. But beware: in the agrotourism pensions must be found at least one activity related to agriculture, livestock, orchards, growing of different types of plants. Full facilities of accommodation which include up to 15 rooms/accommodation must be at least 3 flowers standard for tourism and at least 2 flowers for those who promote agrotourism. It is imperative that current and capital maintenance work to be carried out with traditional materials, which the building must already contain: wood, natural stone, brick, mud, and the interior and the exterior needs to be consistent with such local materials, and in terms of endowments they need to be according to classification requirements, and interior space heating techniques must be as environmental and economic possible and to include controllable water supply and a local sewerage system.

One can use reconsolidation and not stacking techniques, these interventions being much cheaper and, of course, more effective technically and technologically. In this category are also included conversions of existing spaces on the ground floor, in the street side of the household.

b) Investments in recreational activities, namely in the infrastructure development of the independent or dependent recreational tourist accommodation unit, such as sports fields for team sports (football, basketball, volleyball, tennis, rounders, golf, miniature golf), camping areas, swimming pools, beaches, purchase of vehicles for traditional rides (sledges and carts with animal traction), trails for riding etc.

Also within this measure can be bought various new equipment for existing buildings and new ones such as: specific furniture for accommodation, including traditional brand equipment, home appliances, furniture for the own kitchen or for catering, ecological heating (wood, sawdust, pellets), heating installations (solar panels or even photovoltaic, strictly for family use and not for sale), air conditioning, lighting (interior courtyards, sports ground etc.), audio-video entertainment equipment hardware and software etc., transport vehicles for accommodated tourists: minibus 8+1 seats, carriages, boats, motor boats, pedal boats, jet-skis canoes, classic rafts of logs and so on.

Development eating places independent or included in accommodation facilities (restaurants, theme restaurants: hunting, fishing, traditional, traditional kitchen, wine cellar, traditional wine cellar) may receive financial support from European funds based on the objectives proposed by measure 312, through APDRP, with the Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism and Sustainable Development

It is through these features that agrotourism is and must remain the main mean of fully capitalizing on the natural environment's resources with its potential for agriculture, forestry, tourism, human and techno-economical.

In conclusion, the main objectives proposed by measure 3.1.3. PNDR are: creating recreational facilities in order to ensure broad access to natural

areas of tourist interest; maintaining jobs in rural areas by recreational activities, particularly for youth and women; improving and diversifying the infrastructure and tourism services in the Romanian rural space; improving the attractiveness of rural area and enhancing that of areas with high tourism potential but unexploited; increasing the value added and the number of tourists receiving de recreational services.

Successful example of conversion of a traditional house built in 1957 in the Romanian area, Cluj district Draganului Valley in agrotouristic pension . Dr. Iubu heirs claimed ownership in 2001, retaining stil, despite several renovations, the old charm of the building as certified in special lyrics written by poet Lucian Blaga , the inauguration of the house and that are exposed on the ground floor in the main hall. Currently working as a hostel with a capacity of 10 people and 4 rooms, 2 bathrooms with shower, upstairs, kitchen , dining room and a fireplace .



Figure 2 – Agoutouristic pension Iubu – with the principal acces

In order to diversify the rural economy it is necessary to invest in keeping young workforce in the countryside by setting up young farmers and increasing competitiveness of agricultural and forestry sectors, with the overall objectives: Improving and increasing the competitiveness of the agricultural sector by promoting installation of young farmers and supporting the modernization process in accordance with the requirements of environmental protection, hygiene and animal welfare, safety at work; Improving management of farms, by renewing the bosses generation, without increasing the quota active population employed in agriculture.

In summary, the specific objectives of the measure 112 are to increase revenues of farms run by young farmers and operational objectives are to increase the number of young farmers starting for the first time an agricultural activity as heads of farms and encouraging young farmers to invest (ie to develop holdings producing mainly agricultural products, crops or livestock (raw material) for human consumption and animal feed).

Therefore, actively supporting and promoting local application of EU funds designed for traditional agricultural system (agri) in deprived areas - mountain areas and Natura 2000. The very implementation procedures for these funds involves using new concepts for farmers, small rural producers and Romanian rural local authorities in Romania. The awareness of a more efficient use of these funds represents a sustainable alternative for protecting and ensuring biodiversity and increasing living standards in these areas. Another promotional option consists of developing and widespread using practical guides of the local food that includes all types of crops and animals in protected areas.

In order to improve the development of social services in rural areas, the Ministry of Agriculture and Development of PNDR through the measure 312, supports human healthcare, as well as veterinary in the Romanian rural environment, giving non-refundable public support for investment in developing human health services, outpatient and dental care, general and specialized medical care, including medical equipment and devices. At the same time measure 312 also has as objective the sustainable development of rural economy by encouraging non-agricultural activities, in order to increase the number of jobs and additional incomes: encouraging craft activities and other traditional activities: reducing the dependence on agriculture.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

It is gratifying that Romanian rural areas can still be saved but this can be achieved only through continuous effort and effective support by encouraging the direct involvement of rural population in various agricultural and non-agricultural activities, preservation of true spiritual values and traditional materials inherited so far, with the help of non-refundable EU funds, through the measures promoted by APDRP and other aid given by NGOs for social and human activities development and for the care of the poor and aged population and by the involvement of the Romanian government. XXI century will be still need to respect health, culture, history, traditional architecture, ethnographic traditions, folklore and local crafts so that they can remain sustainable, otherwise ... for the generations to come after us, life in the countryside will remain a mere memory depicted or archived in a photo album.

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