



Practice Group Feedback Report

Romania



Project acronym & number	FARMWELL
Project title	Improving farmers' wellbeing through social innovation
Project coordinator	E40 Group
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1. Context of the Practice Group meeting

Basic information

Date of meeting:	18/02/2022
Place of meeting:	CATTIA, Braşov (face to face)

1.1 Background

From the very beginning, the main objective of the Practice Group in Romania was to engage the selected farmers (especially young and females) and other relevant stakeholders in identifying the main social challenges, but also to scope and analyse the social innovations that could address the challenges or to help bringing a new perspective for the farmers and their communities. The national mapping report assessing the social challenges at national level represented the starting point of the PG process, as its members validated the findings.

The list of stakeholders and the methodology were analysed and agreed by both partners of the Romanian team – Highclere Consulting (HCC) and Tinutul Barsei Local Action Group, as well as the areas around Brasov that the project would approach and benefit of the support of FarmWell project.

The overall approach for the PG consists in:

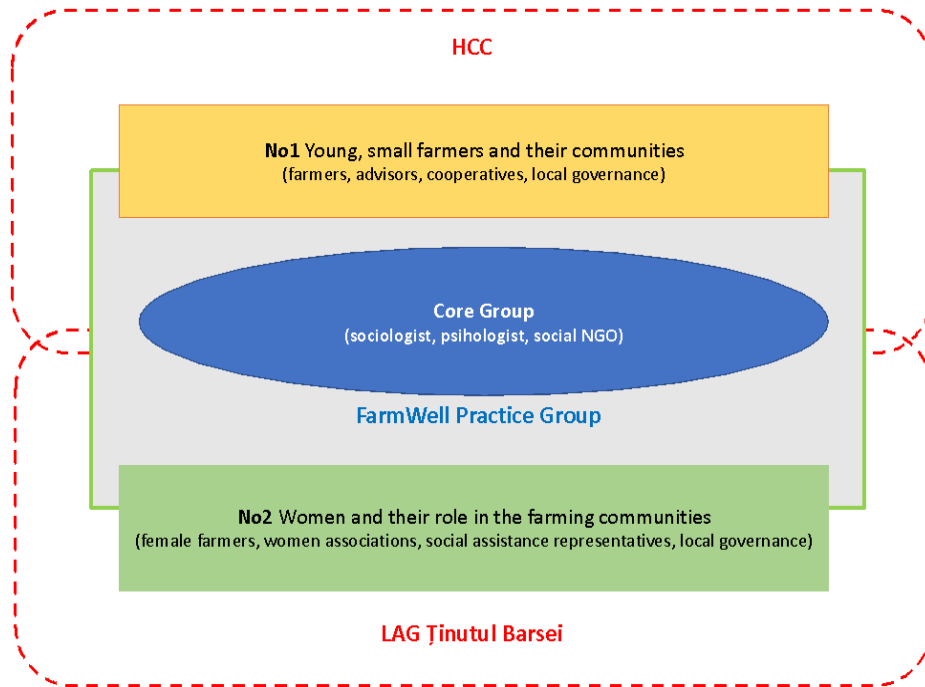
1. The **PG stakeholders mapping**: the potential members of the PG were identified among farmers, advisors, local decision makers (local governance), local action group representatives, sociologist, social NGO. The PG is structured around the two main groups: a) **young, small farmers and their communities**; b) **women and their role in the farming communities**. Both groups are strongly connected with the **core group** made up by sociologist, social NGO, psychologist, consulted for feedback and technical expertise, but also for validating the findings





identified in the national mapping report (national level).

2. The **area concerned covers the marginalised rural areas** (predominantly mountainous) that are also part of the LAG territory. Addressing such a sensitive issue such as mental health and wellbeing, we decided to start the range of PG meetings with a community we are most familiar/connected with, access being facilitated by the partner Tinutul Barsei LAG. In total we are targeting at engaging with farmers and women from 4 marginalised communities.



3. The unfolded **methodology** applied at the level of PG consists in:
 - a. Identification of the local leaders in terms of both young farmers and women in farming communities using mainly the LAG' connections in the territory. The local leaders are mobilizing the other members of their communities for meetings to identify both social challenges and innovations, and to collect feedback. HCC has identified the experts for the core group.
 - b. The engagement of PG members is done "in layers" – gradually extending the compenence and enlargement of meetings for both groups (No1 and No2), in order to create an environment of trust and comfort for the participants to open up and share their mental health and wellbeing challenges.
 - c. The tools and approaches used for engaging with the PG members consist in direct (physical) meetings, interviews, questionnaires, foresight analysis.
 - d. There are foreseen 4 meetings of the main groups, accompanied by two meetings with the core group experts – engaged for validating the findings and feedback.

1.2 Participants at the 2nd PG meeting

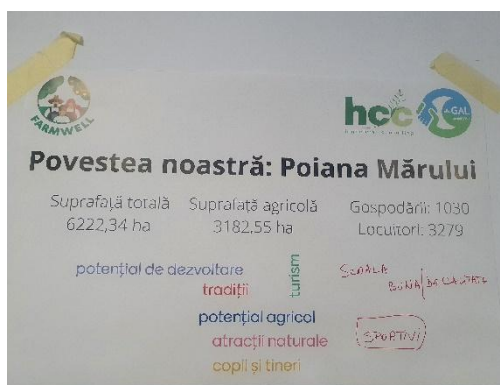
Number of participants:	18
Out of which farmers' representatives:	8





Out of which female farmers:	3
Out of which young farmers (e.g. under the age of 35)	2
Out of which older farmers (e.g. 65+)	2
Out of which social innovation presenters	3

The second PG meeting gathered together members of four different farming communities in Brasov County covered by the project, alongside with three innovators identified in the region. The total number of participants attending the meeting was 22 out of which 8 of them were farmers (part-time farmers). Besides farmers, among the participants there were also representatives of local governance - the mayor of Poiana Mărului, the mayor and vice-mayor of Șinca Veche, the local administrator of Bod, representatives of the agricultural, social, urbanism and public procurement departments.



1. 3 Purpose & focus

The main purpose of the 2nd practice group was to connect the farmers' communities with the innovators invited to present and share their experience, to raise awareness about social innovation solutions, and to jointly explore how such social innovations can respond to the most urgent needs of farmers and farmers' communities.

More specifically, the meeting aimed at exploring the specific short, medium and long-term impacts of social innovation solutions identified to a specific problem through the engagement of the farmers (as the main target groups) and relevant 'service providers'.

Another objective of the PG meeting aimed at bringing communities of farmers together and **create a space where they can share their problems** / challenges and see what lessons they can learn from each other, and **to create a network**.

Although sharing some common challenges (low household income level and low access to education





or out-migration), the meeting created the opportunity for them to express some specific challenges as well: former industrial infrastructure in the village, increase loss of farmland to residential houses development, mentality of former collectivised farming system at village level. It was acknowledged can help them to open up and regard their issues from different perspectives by receiving constructive feedback from the other. Therefore, instead of regarding it as a heavy heritage of communist regime, the participants from Bod village realised that the sugar factory (the only functional one in the country) is now putting the village on the map of the country, being part of their identity. The ones from Poiana Marului came to understand that, due to physical condition developed under difficult farming conditions (hay making on steep slopes) the village has produced “good sportsmen genes” (some of them part of the Beijing Olympic games in 2022) and that they should take pride in. **Identity and strong roots of farming communities are part of every village story**, important to be identified to build on for addressing the social challenges.

Being such sensitive (at time) subjects, communities representatives realised that the solution needs to come from local level too and the Local Action Groups were identified as potential innovators that can touch upon social challenges in their communities.

As mentioned in the national mapping report, most of the social challenges of the farming communities in Romania resides in economic challenges. The simple reality is that rural Romania – although richly endowed with natural resources – continues to be plagued by poverty and a huge gap in living / social standards between rural and urban areas.

Rural poverty in Romania has been well documented by research studies since the 1990s and these have most recently been reviewed in a background study (Tesliuc et al., 2015) for the National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction 2015-2020 (MLFSPE, 2015). These studies have repeatedly confirmed that poverty in Romania is not only an individual or family phenomenon, but it is also geographical and tends to be concentrated in “marginalized rural areas” within which the poverty is ‘transmitted’ from one generation to another – it therefore tends to be highly persistent and very challenging to address. An estimated 80% of all rural people living in poverty in Romania are in such persistent poverty.

Extremely poor families face multiple constraints in addition to monetary poverty, including long-term adult unemployment or joblessness, poor child nutrition, a high risk of child neglect and/or abuse (associated with alcohol abuse), poor parenting practices, young or single parenthood, unstable marriages, poor health or disability, low school attendance or dropout, poor or no housing, domestic violence, petty crime, and discrimination. There are also problems of low aspirations, low self-esteem, and learned helplessness. Therefore, families in extreme poverty represent a particular challenge, not just in terms of skills and physical capital but also in terms of psychological issues. All these factors affect the quality of life in rural areas, hamper economic development, increase out-migration and exacerbate health and environmental problems.

Income inequality remains well above the EU average. As shown in the Social Scoreboard accompanying the European Pillar of Social Rights, the income of the top 20 % of the population exceeds by 6,5 times the incomes of the bottom 20 % (EU: 5.1) (Eurostat). High income inequality levels are experienced particularly within the working-age population and can be attributed more to the poorer being relatively poorer rather than the richer getting relatively richer. The rate of in-work poverty is five times higher for low-educated workers than for university graduates. Men are more exposed to this risk than women.



However, women are twice as likely as men to be inactive¹, generating a feeling of undervalued and not socially recognized as being important. In farming communities, 12% of respondents of a World Vision survey² said that women who work cannot care for their children as well as non-working women, 36% believe that women do not need to be fulfilled both personally and professionally, so some choose to take care of the household and not become active; 16% think that men cannot take care of children as well as women; and 16% believe that men can manage businesses better than women.

Poverty, low access to education and out-migration reduction, as well as creating conditions to grow small businesses or attracting investors for increasing the income level in farming communities are strongly connected (if not conditioned even) by the quality of local governance, by the communities being encouraged to get engaged and come together for jointly develop actions.

In response, the second PG meeting was focused on introducing initiatives of farming communities that succeeded to be in control of their own growth and progress, that are based on working partnerships, or which they brought opportunities for increasing the income and build on a strong identity.

The two social challenges we focused in the second Practice Group meeting were: **Low household income level and Outmigration, both with impact on improving the access to education.**

We identified solutions coming from local level in farming communities near Brasov country:

1. Dealul Tarnavelor Local Action Group with the Women Neighbourhood (Vecinătatea Femeilor) initiative as an example of local governance and of mobilising small farmers communities.

This initiative started in 2015 with the implementation of the second Local Development Strategy through the LAG. Vecinătatea (neighbourhood) is the oldest form of organisation encountered in Saxon communities and the LAG supported the development of a women association called „Vecinătatea Femeilor din Saschiz”.

The associations focus more on gastronomy and food-related events, and they capitalised on a traditional local product in Saschiz – rhubarb - coming with new ways of using it as key ingredient for different foods (jams, syrups, pizza and pies). Each year, in the beginning of May there is Rhubarb Festival organised where women have a parade of all the dishes prepared out of rhubarb and offer them for tasting in exchange of small donations.



¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2019-european-semester-country-reports_en

² The research sample included 2.186 households, from 65 of the villages in which WVR carries or has carried out its activities. We collected information from 2186 adults and 2258 children aged between 7 and 18 years old. The data collected has been analyzed comparatively for the period 2012 – 2018.



Women in the Association are very proud of what they are doing, and they feel that they belong to the community. The Association is a great catalyst for newcomers in Saschiz too. Oana, a newcomer in Saschiz, told us in the meeting how she immediately felt accepted in the community, got to know the people, and **“found a place of her own”**. **This fuels with enthusiasm and confidence the farmer females and makes them feel useful in their community.**

The association also organises each fall (beginning of September) a festival dedicated to zacuscă (mashed vegetables).

One of the biggest projects that the Women Neighbourhood had implemented during the pandemic was Bucate din vecinătate, a basket with local products home delivered. As a result of this project a coop was created that applied for another project to continue delivering local products.

The entire work that the women do in the community is completely voluntary and the donations they get through the festivals are used to organise Health Fair (in September) where all members of the community get free blood test and interpretation to prevent some diseases (for ex diabetes).

One representative from Bod commune asked the innovators what is the secret ingredient that keeps the association engaged. **Respect, friendship and the love for the community** in Saschiz were the immediate answers to this question, **together with the good cooperation with the local administration, as well as celebration of who they are and what they do and represent for each other.**





2. **Transylvania highlands (Colinele Transilvaniei)** an integrated approach to the sustainable promotion of rural communities that responds to low-income level and outmigration challenges and touches upon raising the chances of children's education and long-life vocational training



Colinele Transilvaniei project is about a cooperation between four LAGs and covers 270.000 ha in 3 counties that brought into rural communities the concept of **Eco-tourism**. The Saxon villages area is one of the biggest eco-tourism destinations that values the cultural heritage and the landscapes. Since the beginning of the project the focus was on the rural communities and their needs and working to make them understand that they got the power to make a change, to make a something happen in their community.



Nature is the biggest asset we have and we need to value it and protect it. The project created 500 km of touristic paths and is proud to say that they bring information and knowledge about nature that make tourists excited to finding out about biodiversity, enjoy staying over farms and being part of the farming community for few days, but also the locals are happy to discover how rich they are, being stewards of a wonderful

landscape. With this project, the touristic services in the area increased bringing up the level of income in the communities too, young people choosing to remain in the area and to develop small agri-food or touristic businesses. The influx of tourists curious to understand more of the farmers' life and communities make farmers and their families to feel important and recognised for their work and role in the society, proud of their heritage.





2. Methodology

The overall approach of the meeting was “telling our story as a farming community”, approach meant to help setting the participants for the SROI exercise.



We started the day with an ice-breaking exercise that meant to encourage participants to getting to know each other *'story'*. Participants were asked to find a person they don't know and ask name, where they come from, what they like doing and after that each individual presented the person they met.

After knowing each other, the meeting continued by introducing the main findings of the mapping report, followed by a short overview of the challenges that emerged at local level.

Next, we have introduced the innovations, followed by a short session of questions and discussions after each of them.



For introducing the Journey of Change exercise, we prepared four A0 size posters mentioning the facts and figures of each community, alongside with values identified in the individual meetings or discussions. We split the group into four, one for every farming community. In the lower part of the poster, we invited the participants to jointly develop potential short – medium and long terms impacts of applying innovations or operating a change, as part of “how would you tell your story in 3 – 5 – 10 years time if such change would happen?”





The question the exercise started from was: “on a scale between 1 to 10, how happy would you appreciate you are in your community?” (and with yourself).



Participants then where asked to phase-out the impact of operating the change and to estimate what would happen at individual, family, community level. Each group was then ask to nominate one person to report the findings of the discussions and present them to the whole group, getting feedback, responding to questions.

3. Outcomes

3.1 Main findings on social innovations

Name of farmer/ farm business	Social innovation solutions expected to be tested
Luchian Miruna Stefania (Bod Village)	Women / young association (Dealul Tarnavelor)
Persoiu Alexandru Catalin (Poiana Mărului Village)	Colinele Transilvaniei) Transylvania HighLands) Eco-tourism

Main findings, outcomes, and key messages:

- It's important to meet and discuss about the mental, psychological state of farmers and members of farming communities.
- Most of the farmers problems are rooted in the either economic challenges or into the transition of social fibre of farming communities from socialist system towards a democratic one;





- Local Action Groups are seen as an effective cell for mobilizing local governance;
- By connecting with each other, farming communities can help each other to see issues from a more solution-orientated perspective;
- “Finding your own place in a community, gives you perspective to grow and feel important” (female farmer from Saschiz);
- Technological solutions are to be explored as answers to lack of labour.
- Out-migration can be reduced by help increasing the feeling of pride and social recognition of the farmers (esp young and female ones);
- Good local governance can make a difference in shifting people' minds towards growth and progress;
- Networking and collaborating with different stakeholders and initiatives (NGOs) can help attracting opportunities, opening new perspectives for farming communities to diversify and progress, to bring educational and medical services closer to the village and farmers;
- It is important to rehearse telling the story as an individual, but also as a community for building the feeling of belonging and self-esteem;
- Celebrating farming is not just attracting more tourists, but creates valuable memories for farming communities.

3.2 Main lessons from the process & next steps

3.2.1 Main lessons

The main challenge was connecting the SROI exercise with the social innovations, but also considering participants' perspective over the social innovations selected and presented. It was necessary to dedicate some time for the participants to assess how the innovations would contribute and impact in their case.

3.2.2 Next steps

The participants are very keen to meet again. They expressed their willingness to keep in touch and required information about the innovations presented. They took the posters with the SROI exercise on with them for asking other members of their communities to contribute with their points and views.





ANNEX I: AGENDA OF THE MEETING

9.30 - 10.30	Welcome and Icebreaking
10.30 - 11.00	Recap on the findings at national and local level: presenting FARMWELL project and the conclusions on the National Mapping Report
11.00 - 11.15	Coffee break
11.15 - 12.00	Discussing the challenge: Low-income level: how can farming communities contribute to enhancing the income level and how can local governance support / facilitate farming activities
12.00 - 13.00	Discussing solutions: presenting social innovation solutions
13.00 - 14.00	Theory of Change exercise
14.00	Lunch

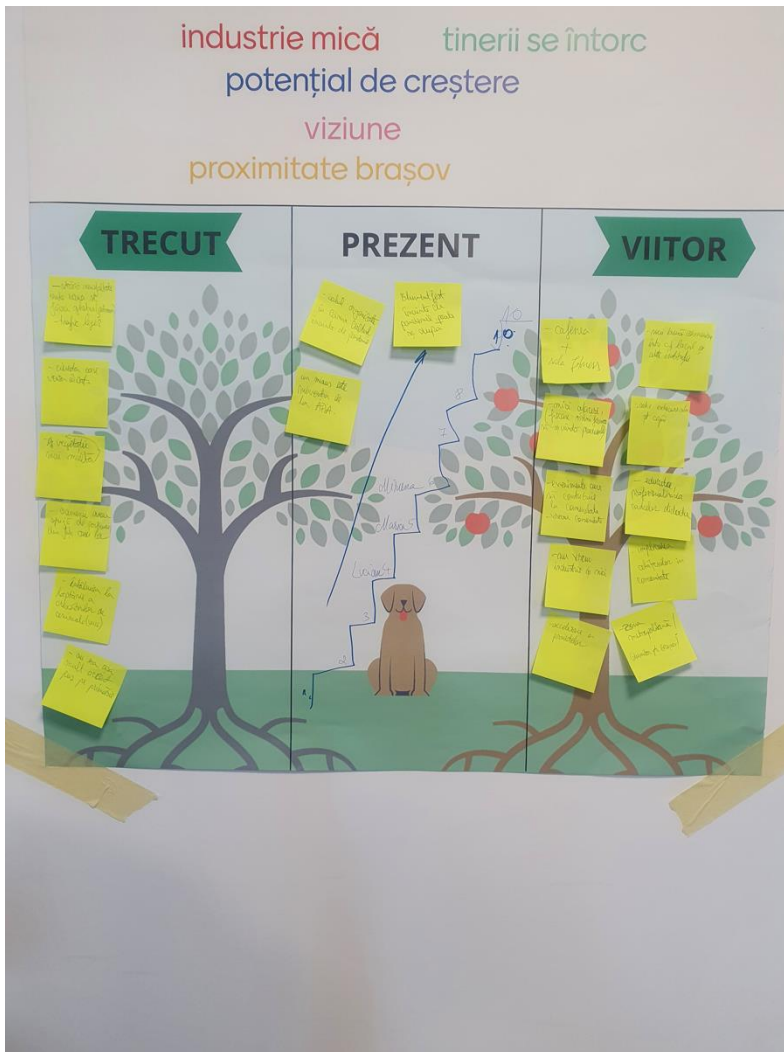




ANNEX II: JOURNEY OF CHANGE

Please attach completed 'Journey of Change' templates for at least 2 specific solutions.

“Following the workshops the facilitators will need to gather together all copies of the Journey of Change, flip charts, voice recordings and any other information they are likely to need to compile their Theory of Change table, which very simply will be along the lines of the following example.” (SROI Guide)



ANNEX II: SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

II.1: SROI MAPPING OF THE OUTCOMES (WP4)

To complete this Annex, [please refer to the SROI Guidance \(Section 2.1.4: Step Three: Mapping the outcomes and identifying final measurable outcomes\)](#). For instance, a solution might address several ‘root causes’ of challenges and these could be grouped into separate ‘thematic’ tables as presented in the SROI Guide (section 2.1.4). “A thematic approach therefore may help not only to consolidate and organise the outcomes, but also to accurately assign them to the relevant stakeholder groups.” (SROI Guide).

As presented in the SROI guidance: “In this step the facilitators (research partners) will produce a table that will be

used by the University of Gloucestershire research team to identify final measurable outcomes for the Practice Group’s SIs, and in turn begin to develop indicators to evidence change in them. This, together with the more creative ToC model is the principal output of the storyboard workshops. Any narrative which helps to contextualise the ToC outcome or explain or clarify any relevant points or issues will of course be useful to the UoG team as they embark on the initial steps of Stage Two of the SROI process.”

Solution 1 Title:

Stakeholder group*	Interim outcomes	Medium-longer term outcomes**
	Increase the level of income	Build on a stronger sense of belonging.





Young farmers	Increase attractiveness of rural areas	Value the natural and cultural heritage of the farming community => strong sense of direction and growth
	Continuation of farming (by adopting technologies to address esp. lack of labour)	Stronger communities
	- Getting more engaged in developing agri-food businesses	

* Farmers need to be one of the 'material stakeholders' / stakeholder groups. However, if you target specific group of farmers (e.g. women farmers, farm workers), please indicate these as separate stakeholder groups in separate lines.

** "Facilitators may find it useful – or more straightforward – to combine the short, medium and longer term timeframes to simplify the mapping of outcomes – perhaps distinguishing short-medium term from medium-longer term, etc. There are no strict rules, and this should only be undertaken providing that no important information is lost or downplayed. The most important thing is that the UoG research team can intuitively identify the final measurable outcomes, which are usually found towards the right of the table." (SROI Guide).

Solution 2 Title:

Stakeholder group*	Interim outcomes	Medium-longer term outcomes**
Female farmers	Strong communities valuing and recognising the importance of women	Reduce the migration of women looking for jobs abroad
	Increase number of farming businesses	Less fragmented farming communities due to less out-migration

* As above.

** As above.

II.2: INITIAL ELABORATION OF SOCIAL INNOVATIONS FOR THE SOCIAL INNOVATION DATABASE (WP3)

Please provide details about the presented (most relevant) social innovations – minimum 2 examples – in the social innovation database format (See Social Innovations Concept Note).

