

Practice Group Feedback Report

Romania



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1 Context of the Practice Group meeting

Basic information

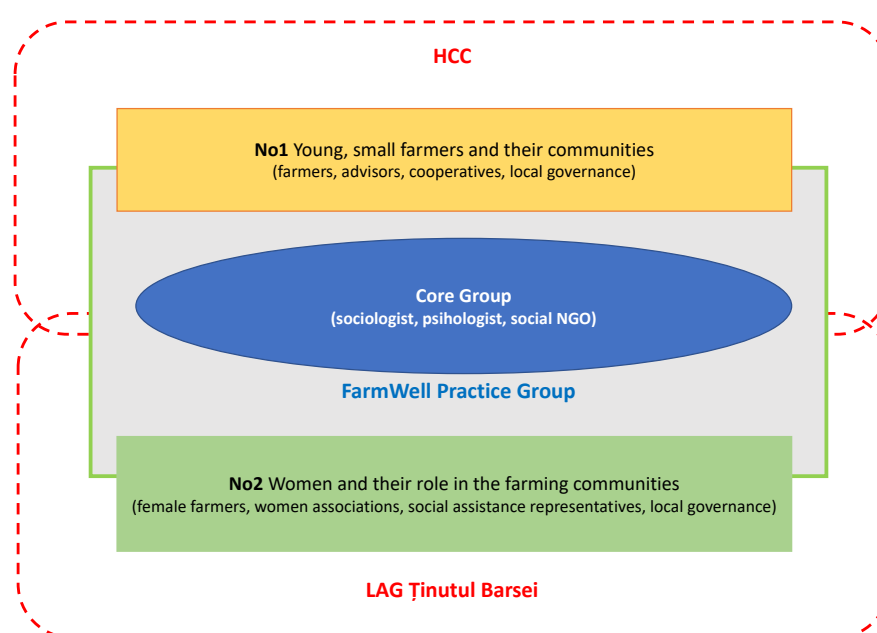
Date of meeting:	23 June 2021
Place of meeting:	Group 1, Young farmers, and their communities, Sinca commune, Brasov

1.1 Background

The main objective of the Practice Group in Romania is to engage, along the entire project implementation, the selected farmers (especially young and females) and other relevant stakeholders in identifying the main social challenges, but also of the social innovations that could address them or bring a new perspective for the farmers and their communities, when looking for solutions. Also, the members of the PG played an important role in validating the findings of the national mapping report.

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 competence 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 Membership, methodology and feedback of the first PG meeting (No1 Young, small farmers)

This report provides the findings and feedback of the first meeting of **No1 group – Young, small farmers and their communities**, together with the description of the methodology and the identified challenges and findings.

The meeting was organised on the 23rd of June, physically, in Sinca commune – where the LAG is mostly connected with the members of the community, but also where there are still young farmers active.

The membership of the group:

Number of participants:	8
Out of which farmers' representatives:	4
Out of which female farmers:	1
Out of which young farmers (e.g. under the age of 35)	2
Out of which older farmers (e.g. 65+)	2

Total number of participants to the preliminary meeting was 8, out of which 4 of them are farmers. The young farmers participating at the meeting are part-time farmers, being active in another job, in comparison with the older ones, which are fully engaged in farming. The main reason for the young ones to be part-time farmers is supplementing the family income with a more constant source of revenue.

Besides farmers, among the participants were also the mayor (age 62) of the village and vice-mayor,





the officer in the agricultural and cadastral department (land situation being a reason of discord between generation in the rural areas and regarded by young farmers as a break in their attempt to develop farming businesses). The mayor is committed to support the young farmers to remain in the community and to attract new opportunities for them, but the model of development seems to a rather old school one, compared with the vision of the vice-mayor – also a young farmer.

Being in a mountainous area, farmers manage mainly pastures, meadows, arable fields and some livestock (buffalo). There are 4 small cooperatives organised in the area, the focus being to keep the land together and not selling what is regarded “the most precious resource of the community and which is feeding us and our families”. By this, we noted that young farmers remained in the area, as well as the old ones, have still a strong bond with the land and the area, representing the main value of the community.

The community is mainly driven by men (most of the decision-making positions are occupied by men), with women engaged in running few cultural activities in the community

1.3 Purpose & focus

The main purpose of the 1st PG meeting has been to identify into more depth the social challenges of young farmers, to analyse and develop an understanding of the dynamics within the young farmers community, and their needs, identified as key themes during the mapping of challenges (WP2). In particular, the practice group aims – in a participatory and engaging way with farmers - to reflect on:

- The root causes of the specific problem(s) of farmers;
- The specific needs for support of farmers, highlighting existing innovative solutions.

2 Outcomes

2.1 Main findings on challenges & solutions

Overall, the first meeting revealed that young farmers value farming and land highly, the level of stress generated by lack of support (financial, access to modern technologies and skills), a certain level of abandonment, frustration due to intergenerational differences (old versus modern), disengagement and socially not recognised as being important for society (for producing food, working the land). Also, the attractiveness of rural areas for spending free time or getting engaged with cultural actions could help greatly for creating a more active environment for young farmers.

The participants found the meeting very useful and insightful, taking many of the points raised as food for thought. They didn't make a connection between the level of insecurity generated by lack of market predictability for their products and level of stress and frustration.

2.1.1 Challenges

- While farming as a business is regarded in a different way by the young farmers – they are aiming at producing for bigger markets, outside the region, for better revenues, their older colleagues – who inherited the communist regime techniques (age over 65) - are more content with feeding their families and the community. This approach is generating frustration among young farmers, who, although very respectful with their community, feel unsupported (especially financially) by the local governance and the state (there are no functional public advisory services available for farmers in the region).





- Also, there is a certain level of isolation and abandonment expressed by the young farmers, feeling away from modern technologies and unequipped with skills that could create better opportunities for them (adding value to products, modern farming techniques etc).
- This is also the main reason for which many young people choose to leave the village, some looking for “greener pastures”. Some of them succeed, some don't and come back home with a little money gain abroad. Some decided to stay home and make a difference – candidate and become vice-mayor (age 32), getting engaged in the local governance.
- Agricultural activity has decreased in recent years due to declining labour force, people refuse to work, gradually moved to mechanization.
- Young people leaving the village for better work opportunities, they are attracted by new technologies rather than working in agriculture.
- The tradition of raising animals / farming is no longer known and due to this, the local product are lost.
- Farmers do not have a recognized social status, while Roma communities (high natality rate) benefit from social assistance that provides social insurance (guaranteed average income)
- The isolation/abandonment, feeling of frustration and being left-out are the most frequent challenges encountered by young farmers in rural areas in the region. These represent the main obstacles for developing a more confident approach not just in farming, but also in other areas of life.
- There is a certain nostalgia over the time of glory that farming was seen during the communist regime (over 30 years ago) that the old farmers still invoke as being perceived the most “safe time” for farming communities.

2.1.2 Social innovations

Title of social innovation	Coordinator (lead partner)	Country (of the coordinator)	Objective (Which social challenge does the innovation attempt to tackle?)	Activities	Key target group
EduBuzz	EduBuzz Association (NGO)	Romania, Brasov	Provide educational support for the communities with school dropping issues	Provide after-school activities for children with missing parents	Children with high risk for school dropping in rural areas
Increase the local governance and women engagement	Dealul Tranvelor LAG	Romania, Mures	Activate and galvanise the local governance in rural areas by better engagement of different social groups (women, young people)	Setting-up small association and active groups of young people (for developing new projects for the communities) Setting up and activate	Young farmers communities Women in farming communities





				association of women at community level (for addressing medical services, cultural actions)	
Volunteers for ArtFest	Association of volunteers for the ArtFest movement	Romania, Brasov	Encourage young people in farming communities to get engaged with cultural activities	Organise and host cultural activities for farming communities	Young people in farming communities
Young farmers engaged in adding value to food products	Community Development NGO – Adept	Romania, Mures	Increase the added value of local products in small farming communities in order to increase the economic value of farming	Organise a community kitchen for processing and packing local products Branding local products	Young farmers Women in farming communities
Women in action	Association of Women	Romania, Brasov	Engaging women in playing a more active role in farming communities by organising food fairs	Organise food fairs for small farming communities, by mobilizing women and encouraging local authorities to support them	Women in farming communities
Together is better	Milky Way Cooperative	Romania, Cluj	Engaging young farmers to get associated and increase the profitability of farms and create more certainty for farming activities	Organise and facilitate the association of farmers managing buffalo farms Accessing the market with dairy products	Young farmers

2.2 Main lessons from the process & next steps

2.2.1 Main lessons

Although challenging to break the ice at the beginning, the farmers and the other participants gain trust and confidence in sharing their problems and needs with us. We've learnt that such processes require time, therefore the meeting extended 1,5 h over the initially planned closing time.

The meeting also required facilitation, as there have been few moments of slight tension between generations – old and young people, but also difference of perception between full-time farmers and part-time farmers regarding the more innovative approaches that could help the farmers community to thrive (conservative versus modern).

There is a relatively high level of agricultural knowledge and educational background among the old





farmers that could be disseminated among the young ones with less access to information and advisory support. One proposal that came from the participants side was to establish a cooperative they can form a Cooperative of cooperatives and become a informational hub where they can preserve the farming traditions and teach them to the younger generations.

2.2.2 Next steps

When discussing the future perspectives, they had different perception over the faith of their community. We agreed that the next meeting we will focus on organising a scenario developing and foresight analysis exercise in order for them to develop a common vision, better identify the challenges, but also what local resources have the potential to be mobilise to address them. Such a meeting is foreseen to take place for mid of September 2021.

ANNEX 1: AGENDA OF THE MEETING

23 rd of June 2021 - No1 Group Young Farmers and their communities	
Time	Theme
11:00 – 11:15	Introduction of the participants
11:15-11:30	Presentation of FarmWell Project
11:30-12:00	Presentation of main findings on social challenges in rural areas at national level
12:00-12:20	Discussions
12:20-13:45	Local context – which are the main challenges of young farmers in rural areas in Brasov region – Sinca commune
13:45-14:30	Potential solutions – examples from the region
14:30-15:00	Final discussion – next steps

