

Note: This paper is based on the two pilot antipoverty programs organized by UNDP and on some other products of various experiences in the field in Romania. It has to be considered as being more a preliminary analysis that has to be farther refined, completed and corrected.

Poverty alleviation programs at the community level

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Section One - Types of community poverty in Romania

1.1. General profile of poverty in Romania

Romania could be characterized as having a mass relative poverty: most of the population is poor, absolute for some, but relative for most of the people. Prosperity is only characteristic of a minor segment of the population.

Romania is a country with a rather high degree of modernization of the social life, but suddenly impoverished. Large segments of the population live in a modern context: they work in a modern-type economy, they live in modern-type towns. The modern form of organization of the society imposes, thus, certain minimal requirements. In this context, the poverty in Romania is very different from that one in the traditional societies.

Romania is not only a country with a rather high level of modernization, but it also is a European country. Always, and even more after 1989, the level of aspirations of the population tended towards western standards of living. The rapid access to the worldwide economy and the increased number of contacts with the Occident, after 1989, had the inevitable result of an explosion of the aspirations and needs, under conditions where possibilities were, in fact, very limited.

However, there is something positive in this special situation: the feeling that this is something temporary; the hope and even the active attitude of getting out of poverty, of not being paralyzed by acceptance and submission. The level of aspiration coupled with the relatively high capacities of acting in a modern context are important assets in any antipoverty programs.

1.2. Community level antipoverty approach

Confronted with the magnitude of poverty problems, the standard welfare state mechanisms (insurance system and social assistance system) seem to have a drastic limited efficiency. The financial resources available at the central level are strictly limited.

In this situation, a community level approach of poverty could prove to be a crucial component of the national antipoverty strategy. Three distinct reasons could be invoked:

- a. **Many poverty sources are localized at the community level;** they are components of the community profile and should be dealt with by acting at this level.
- b. **The diversification of the antipoverty resources is a must.** The community has some resources that could be mobilized in order to significantly prevent and reduce the poverty impact. In the context of the severe financial restriction the state is coping with, identification and mobilization of local resources could be an important component of the antipoverty strategy.
- c. **Decentralization generates new possibilities.** In the line with the decentralization option, more and more resources and responsibilities will be transferred at the local level. The possibilities of developing antipoverty programs at the local levels are rapidly developing.

The experience of various countries, both with traditional social and economic structures and modern ones, has proved the community level approach could be exceptionally efficient.

The National Antipoverty Strategy, elaborated with the support of UNDP by the end of 1998, has focused especially on the macro-approach. The main objective of this project, as UNDP has pointed out very clearly, is to concentrate on the antipoverty strategies at the community level.

1.3. Types of community poverty in Romania

It is impossible and probably useless to develop a complete typology of communities with high risk of poverty. The list that is included here only tries to include as much as possible the most representative situations for our country in this moment.

This exercise is made on a methodological assumption of differences between **general, not specific** and **community specific** sources of poverty.

The general, not specific sources of poverty have a more abstract profile, related to the structural conditions of the whole population: low wages, large families, unemployment, alcoholism and so on. These sources are producing a diffused poverty in the mass of population, a non-specific community poverty. As far as they are concerned more general coping strategies have to be developed.

The community specific sources refer to structural characteristics of the particular communities. They are responsible for community specific poverty and in order to alleviate it, the community specific/ oriented strategies have to be adopted.

First of all we have to differentiate between rural and urban poor communities.

Rural poor communities

* **Geographically isolated rural communities lacking the adequate means of communication:** roads, bridges, sometimes even electricity, telephone. This isolation impairs the capacities of the members of the community to efficiently integrate in the market system - to develop profitable economic activities to find out jobs outside the community; cut it off from system of public services (education, health). Social isolation diminishes the opportunities of people to develop their economic and social and political capacities to solve their problems, to absorb the innovations, and even worse, creates a low level of aspiration that severely limits their motivation and innovative imagination.

Adaptation to isolation creates a closed economic and cultural system, with a low motivation and capacity to overcome the multiple deficits.

* **Villages with a low productive agriculture.** There are several conditions that are generating a chronic lack of efficiency:

- Land fragmentation. As a result of the land reform promoted in the first years of '90s, the most of people received relatively small pieces of land (average land ownership is 1.7 ha) and frequently also these are dispersed. From these small pieces of land it is not possible to built up efficient modern farms.
- Lack of investment capacities. Lack of necessary equipment and lack of borrowing opportunities.

* **Villages in which the modest agricultural resources used to be compensated by working in the industry.** The fall of industry in the area let the inhabitants of those villages without additional necessary incomes.

* **Villages with an aged structure of population.** Because of the massive emigration to towns and lack of economic and social opportunities

some isolated villages have suffered a rapid process of aging. Proportion of households made up from old and very old people is high.

*** Villages lacking adequate access to public services: transportation, electricity, education, health services.**

*** Villages in which significant proportion of inhabitants do not have land.** Because of the philosophy of the reform promoted by the beginning of '90s, those who did not own land before the process of cooperativisation of agriculture did not receive land. It is especially the case of gypsy communities. There are villages with relatively large gypsy communities who used to work as employees in the state or cooperative socialist farms and which have not received any land in '90s. They are lacking of any opportunities to work in agriculture and alternative economic opportunities are rather scarce. Very often, these families do not have even the land for their houses, let alone some land for gardens which could have provided a minimum for surviving.

Urban poor communities

*** Towns whose industry have suffered a severe decline in the last years.** Consequently the unemployment is very high. Especially the mono-industrial areas are at a very high risk.

*** Urban areas with bad housing conditions:**

- Blocks of flats of poor quality, at a high stage of deterioration, needing high investments, the inhabitants lacking the necessary resources.
- Poor environment areas, very often severely polluted.
- Urban areas with poor and illegal constructions, in which generally the poor immigrants from villages or poor areas have come and who have poor economic resources.
- Blocks of flats in which some families are not able to pay the common housing services (heating, electricity, water), generating the risk of disconnecting the whole block.
- Poor urban areas whose possible development is paralyzed by criminality.
- A special situation has urban areas inhabited by poor gypsy communities.

Section Two - Poverty diagnosis

2.1. Selection of the methodological approach

In order to make an estimation of the magnitude/ risk of poverty two main types of approaches can be adopted:

a. Measuring the poverty at household level. This is a standard approach used in any estimation of poverty. There are several classes of methods here. Two classes are the most general:

- Measuring the actual incomes of the households and the accumulated wealth. As a substitute is approximating the resources measuring the consumption. Comparing these indicators with specific poverty lines the state and the magnitude of poverty could be identified for each households.
- Relative deprivation: the minimum consumption/ possession items are identified for each households. The magnitude of the relative deprivation is used as an indicator of poverty.

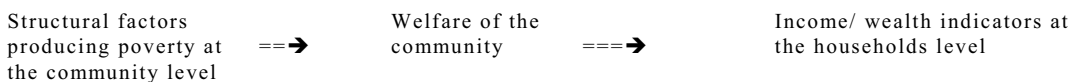
b. Identifying the structural sources of the community level poverty. This method start with an analysis of the community and its environment. Identification of one or several structural factors which are producing poverty at the level of the community is the core of this methodology. This method have been used in the Section 1 for identifying the types of communities with a high poverty risk.

The two types of methods are rather complementary.

The first one offer o statistical estimation of poverty at the level of the community. These data answer to questions like: how many poor households, how poor are they, who are they. The method does not provide direct information on the sources of poverty and does not offer an image of the structural characteristics of the community, inclusive of its action possibilities.

The second method does provide information on the structural factor responsible for poverty. It clearly indicates which are the strategic variables to act on in order to prevent and alleviate the poverty. But it does not provide very precise statistics of the poverty.

Measuring poverty at the level of households is very appropriated for estimation of general, non-community specific poverty. The community structural approach is more appropriated for identification of community-specific poverty.



For a complete diagnosis of poverty, both approaches are necessary to be used. But such an ideal combination has some inconveniences: it is time

consuming and especially is very expensive. The proportion of the diagnosis cost in the total cost of antipoverty program could be too high. In the same time, such a method could provide too precise information than the intervention program would ask for.

Generally, for a sufficient diagnosis in the context of practically oriented antipoverty programs, the community structural approach is sufficient and it has to be preferred: it is relatively cheap, it could be done quickly, it provide the most important information for the selection of poor communities, and for identifying the strategic variables to act upon.

2.2. Diagnosis objectives and some technical recommendations

In this paragraph, the community structural approach will be used.

2.2.1. Four main objectives of diagnosis

a. Identification of structural sources of poverty at the level of the community.

The following check list of structural variables could be used (**poverty structural variables check list**):

1. Profile of the economic activities in the community: strong points, weak points, unused opportunities. Number of enterprises, employment and so on.
2. Profile of the economic activities of the larger area: neighbor communities, county.
3. System of ownership, structure and distribution of ownership.
4. Infrastructure: of the community and the external connections of the community
5. Economic available capital: assets and financial resources of the population
6. Human capital: structure of the active population, education, qualification, business capacities; capacities for community mobilization.
7. Natural resources and possibilities of their economic exploitation.
8. Community structure: are there groups with high level of poverty? If yes, which are their main characteristics?
9. Are there some new process/ experiences in the community that are going to affect positively or negatively the welfare of the community?
10. What are the strategic variables specific of the community?
11. What are the possibilities of improving the community welfare ?

12. The network of possible active actors to be involved in a process of community development and/ or relaunching the economic activities.

b. Estimation of the magnitude of poverty (proportion of poor people, degree of poverty -poverty gap) **and distribution of poverty** (groups at high poverty risk).

Starting from the **poverty structural variables check list** and adding various indicators and qualitative data gathered from the local authority and community social actors, a profile of poverty could be identify.

The methodology developed by the Word Bank representation in Romania, related to the Social Fund in order to identify the poor rural communities could also be used, but more in order to identify which rural communities are really poor as compared with the others.

We think that in this context, the main objective is not **to separate the poorest communities**, but **to identify the communities with problems**, irrespective of their proportion and to help them to enter a community development process.

c. Identification of the possibilities of improving the community situation: economic, natural, human and social resources. The crucial component of the diagnosis is the identification of possible solutions: what can be done to improve the situation and what would be the cost of different solution.

d. Identification of the possible active actors and of the way of they could be activate in order an efficient developmental program to be designed and launched.

It is important in the diagnosis both to identify the sources of poverty and possibilities of preventing and alleviating it.

2.2.2. Methods of information gathering

a. Identification of available information at community level: National Commission for Statistics (local and county mechanisms), local authority, other sources.

b. In depth interviews, focus/groups, group discussions with members of the community, local authorities, police, school, health units, with possible local partners: employers, trade-unions, church, non-governmental organizations (women organization and so on). Social workers acting in the area have to be involved, too.

c. Interviews with representatives of the county authorities.

In diagnosis of a community is essential to combine two sets of information:

a. General information on social problems characteristic of the whole population. Many problems the community is coping with are not specific, but more general. Using the accumulated information on the social problems typical for all population offers a better perspective for understanding the uniqueness of each community.

b. Specific information on the community the object of the support action.

Section Three - Principles, directions and methods used in anti-poverty programmes

Poverty has many causes/ sources. It could have a large variety of configurations. Due to this reason, it is not possible to design a “typical” anti-poverty for a “typical” poor community.

Here some general principles, directions, types of practical approaches will be formulated. They could function as a methodological guide for development of community development projects.

1. Use the potentialities of the local authorities

The local authorities proved to be a **key factor** of the solutions for many problems, both individual and especially, collective, because:

- They have authority and important economic means to solve a large variety of individual and community problems;
- they are an important **initiating** agent for the programs of community development;
- because their legal, administrative and economic resources, they are in a privileged position to initiate **local partnership**: a network of all local actors who put together their own resources and plan together common activities oriented towards solving local problems.

2. Increase the confidence of people in local authorities and develop their capacities to address the public authorities in order to solve their problems and to mobilize their resources for solving the community problems.

The poor/ marginalized population has an important **deficit of capacity** to ask for the support of the local authorities and to use these instruments to solve their problems. This is complemented by the negative experiences of

such contact in the past. It is essential to increase the poor / marginalized population's capacity to use the instruments of the local authority to solve their problems.

In the same time, it is essential to develop the capacity of the community to take actively part in the local life, to use the possibilities of democratic participation in the decision-making process at local level. Especially the poor/marginalized segment of the community has to be supported to change its attitude towards public authorities and to learn to take active part in the community life.

Increase the **transparency** and **accountability** of the local authorities is an absolute means for confidence building.

3. Increase the sensitivity of local authorities towards community problems and especially towards the problems of poor/marginalized segments.

There still are a many bureaucratic procedures that are very complicated, exacerbated by lack of interest of some public officials for solving the problems of the population. The effect of these two combined factors is devastating for the poor / marginalized population. Its problems, often hard to solve, risk to remain unsolved even if in principle they can be solved. The state of discouragement that sometimes appears increases the marginalization and the lack of opportunities. The experience of Zăbrăuți highlighted some of them: the lack of papers, especially birth certificates, of vaccination records for children, etc. The negative effect is just that the problems of the poor / marginal population have the highest risk to remain unsolved, aggravating enormously the state of marginality. Many times, the public officials try to help solve such problems, but they are confronted with the lack of procedures or with very complicate methodologies.

To increase the capacity of local authorities to positively deal with the complex problems of poor/ marginalized population it is necessary to stimulate:

- a. A higher degree of **sensitivity of the local authorities to the specific problems** of the poor / marginalized population.
- b. Development of **suitable procedures** to solve the specific problems of this population. The tradition of the socialist administration is rather negative with this respect: it is a combination of the oppressive attitude of disrespect to people and use of administrative procedures more accessible for the middle class, than for the poorest, less educated segments. Accumulation of some very complicated personal problems (lack of personal acts for instance) frequently generates hopeless situations.
- c. Development of **administration's capacity to initiate / get involved as partner / sustain** programs of community development.

- d. At a national level: identification of the **legal-administrative problems and launching programmes to completely solve the problems**: the case of persons without papers, children without medical records, etc.
- e. A special **active implication of the administration** in solving the problems of the poor marginalized population.
- f. **A higher capacity of collaboration between the public institutions** in approaching the issues of poverty. On one hand, it is vital that every institution, within its specific mission, develops its capacity to respond to the specific problems of the poor population. On the other hand, it is imperiously necessary to consolidate the mechanisms of inter-institutional cooperation, both at local and central level, and to make it permanent.
- g. Increase of the local authorities capacity to attract the poors in **public programs of rehabilitation** of their collective conditions of living.

4. Encourage and support for self organization of different segments of the community and of the community as whole in order to solve its own problems.

The vast majority of communities are characterized by a **passive attitude** and a **learned incapacity to mobilize its own resources** and **to organize itself** in order to solve collectively their own problems.

Development of powerful central mechanisms of the state, especially the authoritarian socialist state structures, have inhibited even systematically discouraged an active attitude of the community in coping with its own problems. We could estimate that the community action capabilities are severely underdeveloped. In this context, community development largely means restoration of self confidence, developing community capabilities to mobilize its own economic and social resources, to plan common actions. To a large extent, not the lack of financial resources, but the lack of capabilities to mobilize itself is the main explanation of the chronic problems the communities are confronting with.

The following objectives/ methods have to be taken into consideration with this respect:

- a. Encourage the **participatory approaches**. Not only participation is a very efficient means for mobilizing resources and energies, but it is in the same time a very important capacity building method. It develop self confidence, mutual trust, communication and cooperation capabilities
- b. Encourage **local partnership and initiatives**: all local interested parties have to be stimulated to cooperate in defining together the problems, in identifying the resources, in planning the commune actions.
- c. Promotion of **sharing contributions**: it is very important for the community to contribute with its own resources, irrespective of their possible modest dimensions, along side with resources provided form outside.
- d. Promote **project approach**. Providing the needed resources to the unstructured communities or to their bureaucratic institutions frequently proved not to be very

efficient for solving problems. It is very important to finance project and to help community to design projects.

5. The differentiation and development of the agents for individual and community development: agents that develop opportunities versus agents that develop capacities.

In many cases, the poverty is not generated by the lack of opportunities, but by the deficit of the poor population's capacity to identify and use the available opportunities.

- a. **Increased accessibility** of the poors to the existing opportunities/ services: school, medical care, family planning, personal protection and security.
- b. **Development of specific opportunities** for the poors: access to jobs, development of public works, facilitate the access to credits for developing a self employed business, or a business in the cooperative system, access to social dwellings, support to build / arrange dwellings.
- c. **The co-operative system**, ignored during the past years, seems to represent an important instrument for community development. It is vital to develop quickly a satisfying legal base as well as the methodology of administrative and financial management of co-operatives.

6. A special attention must be paid to the protection/ security of the poor/marginalized population

The experience of the last years revealed a lot of cases of abuse whose victims are often just the persons with a marginal social position:

- many cases of legal abuses were reported whose victims belonged mainly to the poor segments of population lacking the capacities of dealing with legal system and especially the economic resources;
- an explosion of crime exploitation that proved to be a producer of poverty and marginalization characterized in the years of transition
- dispossession of dwelling by cheating, as a result of loans got on black market, in onerous conditions;
- the criminal systems have often proved to be incompatible with the programmes of community development and due to this reason they are an important source of resistance and sabotage.

Any program for poverty alleviation must include the protection of the vulnerable population against any type of abuse.

a. Development of the role and competence of the police. The evidence gathered in the last years shows clearly that the police still have a rather low capacity of support for the anti-poverty programs. A certain sensitization of the police to the specific of approaching the anti-poverty programs is vital, in order to increase the supporting capacity of the police.

Providing protection to the poor/marginalized population against abuses and criminal exploitation is an important direction of development. The law system and the internal methodology must be reviewed according to this perspective.

b. Sensitization of the legal system to the situations / cases / mechanisms of abuse against the poor / marginalized persons. The development of mechanisms of support for the legitimate interests of the marginalized persons that do not possess a capacity to do it in a satisfactorily manner by themselves.

c. Development of the capacity of the local authorities to protect the highly vulnerable population against abuse and criminal exploitation.

7. Children and youth as priority target groups of the anti-poverty policy

Children are, besides the care provided by most families, the sure victims of poverty / marginalization. The negative effects on children can transform into irreversible or hardly reversible characteristics in their future evolution to adulthood.

The program of poverty alleviation must include a priority provision regarding the prevention of poverty and marginalization reproduction through the young generations.

In the present conditions of Romania, the following direction of action have to be taken into consideration:

a. Food support by different means. In the poor/marginal communities, a chronic misbalance in children feeding is observed, having serious immediate and long-term consequences. Programmes of free meals are required during the current period of crisis.

b. The serious deficit of living conditions. Researches have identified that large segments of families with children have very inappropriate housing conditions. Building social dwellings for those in need and helping rehabilitation of severely deteriorated houses is an important objective to be attained by local programs, using both national and local financial resources. A special attention has to be given to the families with children living in inappropriate conditions.

c. Avoid the unwanted births and support the capacity for family planning. Many investigations show, in a convergent manner, that the poor and marginalized segments of population have a serious deficit of the capacity for family planning and birth control. The accessibility of the persons from these environments to these services is rather low. It is urgent to elaborate a national program for family planning especially oriented towards the poor and marginalized segments, as a part of the National Anti-Poverty Plan.

d. Ensure the participation in the pre-school forms of activity is a priority for poverty alleviation and for the absorption of its effects. The children from poor/marginalized families should have priority to enroll in

these forms. The support for preschool enrollment of the children coming from poor environment has to be one of the most important objective at the local level.

e. Provide for the complete enrollment of children in the elementary education and avoid any dropout at this level. The accumulated experience support the necessity for an approach at both local and national level. The development of alternative forms of recovery for the children who are lagging behind from one reason or another, is a very important and urgent need. Because the large variety of situations, a flexible and highly specific approach which could develop mostly at the community level is necessary.

f. All the children population must attend the compulsory cycle of education. The past experience of an active school at the community level has to be revived. School and professors have to be actively included in the local partnership.

g. Facilitation of an efficient integration of teenagers in the adult life. The discussions with different factors involved in this project showed the need to develop special programs for the period of transit of teenagers to adult life and even for the stage of pre-maturity. Socialization is very efficient at small ages. During the higher teen-years and especially during the period of integration in adult life, an extremely powerful process takes place, of socialization in the patterns and limits of community's opportunities. During this period appears the risk of canceling many of the assets of socialization acquired during the early school years, and of a resocialization in the patterns specific to poverty and marginalization. In the poor and marginal environments, this socialization in adult patterns starts much earlier. It may begin even in the early childhood, but as a rule, it is achieved during the early teen years. Due to this reason, this period is critical. There is minimal experience with this type of intervention. Three directions should be followed in this context:

- Make serious efforts to avoid school dropout during the early and middle gymnasium cycle
- Development of forms of post-gymnasium vocational training, based on realistic employment opportunities, with special programs of integration for the children from the disfavored environments.
- Developing community action free time programmes for the youth from disadvantaged areas, to sustain an efficient socialization, avoiding as much as possible the negative socialization.

h. Opportunities for the young. To break the cycle of poverty and marginalization it is very important to develop forms of support for the youth in the process of professional integration and establishing a household of their own. For those originating from poor environments, the lack of dwelling is the crucial factor that pushes them into misery. As long as the income of a young family, with rather low professional training, is by far not enough to buy / rent a modest dwelling, the situation of the youth from disfavored environments is extremely serious. An emergency solution has to be found. It

is probable inevitable that the program of construction of social dwellings will start by the construction of temporary shelters for the newly weds and of shelters for the homeless. The second problem concerns the support granted to the youth from the poor / marginal environments to get a job in the normal economy. By these two actions it may be considered that they are offered the minimal chances required to integrate into the normal adult life-style.

8. Support for the poor / marginalized Roma communities

Zăbrăuți is unique from this viewpoint. The community in Zăbrăuți is a mixture of Roma and Romanian ethnic, sharing some common fundamental problems. This is a unique experiment of community development not with an ethnic profile, but with a multi-ethnic profile. It proved with clarity that such multi-ethnic projects are possible and that they have certain important advantages: they contain forces that accelerate the change; set the basis of living together on the basis of understanding and mutual respect, avoiding the appearance of inter- ethnic tensions and conflicts.

A more general recommendation could be formulate: **when possible, the projects of community development including different ethnic populations should be stimulated, avoiding splitting the communities on ethnic criteria.**

Various community development projects, experiences in the last years, question seriously some **myths and stereotypes** that are often at the basis of the social policy options and of the actions of intervention:

- **The myth of ethnic separation.** It is often said that within communities, a natural differentiation on ethnic criteria operates. Zăbrăuți for instance proves the contrary: faced with common problems and opportunities, the members of the community have the tendency to relate more and more as persons, facing common situations, and not as members of different ethnic groups.
- **The myth of the socio-cultural homogeneity of the Roma population.** There is a perception that the Roma population has a specific way of defining them and their problems, different from the others. They have specific values and aspirations. This is why it is concluded that any cooperation is difficult, if not impossible due to the non-existence of a common framework to define the own life and its social environment. More often than not, the serious problems of communities are the same, irrespective of the ethnic group. The solutions considered are also the same. The cooperation is not hindered by different definitions of the situation, but by the lack of resources, by the personal histories, by the concrete contextual patterns. The ethnic differences are secondary compared to the commonness of the presented situation.
- **The myth of the high inner cohesion of the Roma population.** It is often assumed that there is a primary inner solidarity of the Roma, which makes difficult the trans-ethnic cooperation. Most of the Roma

poors perceive themselves as being alone in their extremely difficult situation. They do not count on the ethnic solidarity to confront difficulties, and often expect little support from the enlarged family, which is also usually confronted with difficulties. This loneliness in poverty and marginalization could be turned into an important resource of community cooperation beyond the ethnic differentiation. Furthermore, criminal exploitation is a frequent characteristic of the inner relations of the ethnic group. Most of the Roma are tempted to wait for the protection of the public institutions even against other Roma, or protection from the other members of the community.

The myth of high cohesion and closeness of Roma population is extremely dangerous if it forms the foundation for the behavior of certain public institutions such as the police. It seems the police is sometimes tempted not to interfere in the problems of the Roma community, considering that the issue will be solved according to the Roma's own internal rules. This withdrawal of the public authorities from the Roma population is extremely dangerous, perpetuating a state of alienation, impotence and abandon.

One of the main direction of community development programs is to reconsider with attention the pre-assumptions and stereotypes regarding the Roma population deep rooted in the conscience and behavior of the public institutions and which could be responsible for some of the actual problems.

Any program of community development must also be funded on a systematic analysis of the ethnic pre-assumptions it is based on.

Section Four: Management of poverty alleviation projects/ programmes at community level

The poverty alleviation projects at community level could present a large variety of approaches. They could be:

- initiated by local authorities themselves, by some local actors (institutions, organizations or groups), or by external agents;
- addressed to some general community problems or to the problems of some segments of the community;
- imply common interests or possible conflicting interests.

Irrespective of the profile of the projects, some general managerial principles have to be respected:

- **Identification of the problems/ objectives:**
 - in the case of the agents from outside the community is crucial to avoid in the process of diagnosis the projection of

their own perception of the problems; a correct diagnosis is a necessary starting point;

- a participatory process has to be organized: the community itself has to establish its problems/ objectives and priorities;
 - internalization of the problems at the level of the whole community is an essential prerequisite; this is especially important in the cases in which the problems affect differentially the community; very frequently they affect more the poor segments than the well off ones;
 - the process of assuming a problem as a common problem is a difficult exercise of communication inside the community; **documentation of the problem** affecting a part of community for the other parts of that community is a step for assuming globally that problem and require specific techniques: information on the magnitude of the problem and of its significance for both the people affected directly by it and by others.
- **Identification of the possible solutions and their evaluation.**
 - It is essential that all the process to be realized through a participatory process, involving all the community.
 - The evaluation of possible solutions have to be very carefully realized before adopting one or another.
 - Identification of resources is a key step. The communities with a high poverty incidence have usually very limited resources. The resources provided from outside are also limited and usually conditioned by resource matching procedure. Consequently, the community capacity of identifying and mobilizing its internal resource (financial, labour, natural) is crucial for both developing its own projects and attracting external resources. Besides, such an exercise is vital for development of general community capacity to mobilize itself in coping with its own problems. More often than not, the most of resources needed for a community project could be covered to a large degree by internal resources, mostly in labour and exploiting the opportunities provided by the natural environment, adding a few financial ones.
 - **Building up the community capacities.** Very frequently, as various experiences have proved, not the technical capacities are the critical variable, but the social capacities. A community development project has as its secondary most important output community capacity building. A special attention has to be paid to:
 - development of the mutual trust; lack of mutual trust is probably the most paralyzing factor of community action;

- development of communication capacities
- development of capacities for managing community project: how to identify problems, solutions, how to adopt the objectives, how to design a project, how to identify and mobilize resources, how to motivate people.
- the **transparency** of all the process. Lack of capacity to ensure full transparency proved to be the main source of mistrust, suspicion, lack of participatory motivation.
- A special attention has to be paid to the process of assuming of the project by the local authorities and by other actors, governmental or non-governmental.
- **Transparency, large participation, built in feed-back** are the most important characteristic of the design of the project implementation ensuring its efficiency. Any project has to have in its own organization a feed-back mechanism having multiple functions: helps monitoring the activity and produces the adequate corrections in due time; provides the necessary transparency of the process; stimulate the participation of the community; motivate the effort.

Check list of steps and questions

Any agent who wants to support/ initiate a poverty alleviation program at the level of community has to have in mind the following list of steps and questions:

1. Preliminary documentation of the community

- Information on the community
- Discussions with people from outside the community who know about/ have some public responsibilities with respect of that community; NGOs who used to work or work in the community

2. Preliminary contact with the community

- Local public authority, local public services (education, health, police, social workers).
- Other community actors: church, employers, trade-union representatives, non-governmental organizations, people from the community.

3. Decision: go on stop the programme

4. Identification of the problems

- Formal contacts with the key institutions and actors of the community in order to initiate the project
- Documentation on the social-economic situation of the community
- Organize the participatory mechanism for identification of the problems and select the problem/ problems to be addressed by the project.

All important local institutions and actors have been involved ?

The people from the community segments most affected by the problems have been involved ?

- Support with managerial and technical resources the process of problems identification and problems diagnosis
 - Support the process of selection of the problem/ problems to be addressed in the project
 - Support the process of selection of the problem/ problems to be addressed
 - Is the process of selection of the problem/ problems to be addressed a fairly participatory one ?*
 - Is the process highly transparent for the all community ?*
- 5. Decision to start the project**
- Is that decision a joint one: community and external agent if any one is implied ?*
- 6. Design of the project**
- Built up the coordinating team of the project
 - Is the team enough representative ? The main local institutions, the most important actors, people from the most affected segments by the problem/ project*
 - Design of the project:
 - Selection of the objective
 - Identification of the internal and external possible resources
 - detailed project elaboration
 - Is the transparency of the project ensured ?*
 - Does it have an built in feedback mechanism ?*
 - Getting the project commitment: from the community and from the external donors
 - Is the community committed to the project ?*
 - Is the community committed to provide its own resources ?*
 - Is the external donor committed to provide the resources ?*
- 7. Project implementation**
- Built the executive project team
 - Plan in details the implementation of the project
 - Ensure the permanent monitoring of the project
 - Ensure the evaluation of the progress after each stage
 - Ensure a continuous transparency of the project

Section Five: Evaluation

Multi-perspective evaluation.

The project evaluation has to be multi-perspectives, multi-criteria and multi-stages.

Perspectives. The perspectives of the main share-holders/ beneficiaries:

- The direct beneficiary: community as a whole and/ or the segment most affected by that problem
- The local public authorities, responsible for the welfare of the community
- The external agent/ donor

Criteria. Two types of distinct criteria have to be taken into consideration:

- **The end-product criteria:** to what extent the problem addressed by the project has been solved. A large set of criteria has to be developed, specific for each project:
 - *Means criteria:* in order to prevent and/ or alleviate poverty, some specific objectives have to be attained: building lacking infrastructure components, job creation, income generating activities, improve social services, increase education and qualification, prevent and solve social conflicts etc.
 - *End criteria:* to what extent the project has improve the standard of living of the community, and especially decreased the poverty.

• **The capacity building criteria:** One of the most important product of any project at the community level is increasing the community capacities to solve its own problems. In fact all community project has to be thought of as being in the same time *community development projects*.

Implementation of the project has to pay a special attention to the involved community processes not only because they are important efficiency factors, but also because they are very important side-products.

The community capacity building effects of the project have to be systematically measured as one of the main performance criteria.

Stages evaluation: a quasi-continuous evaluation of the project is vital for ensuring its high effectivity. Several evaluation procedures/ mechanisms have to be developed:

- **Ongoing evaluation.** It is vital, especially for large and complex projects, to have build in continuous evaluation mechanisms. These mechanisms have to be:
 - *Alarm mechanisms:* rapidly detect any negative event/ process
 - *Risk mechanisms:* detect in time any possible risk
 - *Day by day standard evaluation.*
- **Mid-term evaluation.** After accomplishment of each important stage or the project, a special evaluation has be made. Necessary corrections have to be promoted.

- **Final evaluation.** It is essential all the stake-holders to be involved in the final evaluation of the project. All the criteria (end-product and capacity building) have to be measured and considered in this evaluation.
- **Post evaluation.** In order to track the long term effects of a project and the sustainability of its positive effects, it is very important for each project a post evaluation component to be included in the project. The point of time in which such an evaluation will be planned has to be decided specifically function of the profile of each project.

Circulation of the evaluation information

Accordingly with the type of evaluation, the following beneficiaries have to be systematically taken into consideration:

- Project managerial team
- The community as whole: local authority, the significant social actors/ partners, member of community, the direct beneficiaries of the project.
- The external agent/ donor
- The national/ international community interested in the experience of that type of projects.

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