



# DECLARATION

## Civic Participation – A Critical Need for the 100-Village Program

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In an effort to engage the non-public sector, **the Albanian Network for Rural Development (ANRD)** conducted several meetings on “Connecting Stakeholders and Local Initiatives on Sustainable Practices for Rural Development” in twelve regional centers and four development regions over the last two months. Attendants of these meetings included approximately 400 rural entrepreneurs, civil society representatives, and other stakeholders who exchanged ideas on developing a more functional organization of the ANRD at the local level with the aim of **establishing local forums as constituent parts of the Albanian Rural Parliament initiative**. To this end, participants agreed to invite regional and local public institutions to become part of **the regional forums of rural development** in the very near future so as to promote the country’s sustainable rural development on the agenda.

Participants focused their discussions on **recent advances in rural development**. They pointed out that public institutions and government agencies have demonstrated a heightened awareness by pursuing an agenda that supports and encourages various private initiatives. Likewise, they appreciated an initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to draft the Law on the Organization and Functioning of Local Action Groups (LAGs) to be adopted presently by the Parliament of Albania. This law will guide all efforts made by the private sector, relevant national and local public institutions, and civil society towards the development of the LEADER approach and EU policies on rural development.

An important issue discussed in the meetings across the country was the **Government of Albania’s policy known as the 100-Village Program**. The ANRD has supported this policy in its very first phases, considering it above all an opportunity to mobilize human resources for sustainable development in rural areas. All attendants of these meetings acknowledged that the involvement of citizens, communities, the private sector, and civil society in all phases of village development is a necessity that should not be overlooked. The development of each and every village in the 100-Village Program should be guided by the principle of community-led local development. If local residents are not part of local decision-making and decisions are made from the top, the Program will be perceived as an agenda used simply to pursue political interests of the moment and will fail to generate an inclusive approach that leads to sustainable development.

The ANRD urges the **Parliamentary Committee on Productive Activities, Trade and Environment** and **the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development** to reconsider the steps undertaken to date with regard to the implementation of the Crosscutting Strategy for Rural Development, the 100-Village Program structure, and the critical role of developing human capacities for sustainable development.

**The ANRD appeals to the donor community** to prioritize support for the 100-Village Program, and this support should ensure that the processes are participatory and inclusive while safeguarding the potential to encourage private initiatives.

**In the second half of this year**, the ANRD will convene **regional rural development forums in four regions of the country** and will invite all relevant institutions and stakeholders to join this process in order to build an active agenda towards the Second Rural Parliament of the country.