



Life springs from the village!

Third Albanian Rural Parliament 2023

11-13 OCTOBER 2023
AT THE PREMISES OF AGRICULTURE UNIVERSITY OF TIRANA

Organized by: Albanian Network for Rural Development
in partnership with its thirty-four member organizations
and Agriculture University of Tirana

DECLARATION



We, the residents of the rural communities of Albania,

Aware of the importance of sustainable rural development and of our efforts within the National Rural Parliament as an instrument to advance local democracy, social inclusion, and to promote progress in European integration and the achievement of the UN's global goals;

Aware of the abundant natural resources and cultural heritage of rural communities, as well as their importance in food security and biodiversity protection.

Concerned about the loss of livelihoods, exodus, the impact of climate change, the shrinking local economy, poverty and social exclusion.

Concerned about ineffective policies in sustainable rural development and unfulfilled expectations in the implementation of European policies for sustainable local development, such as the Leader approach.

"Life springs from the village!" calls us to undertake concrete actions to restore the human and professional dignity of the residents of rural communities: farmers, livestock breeders, shepherds, young people and women.

Today, many residents in various rural communities are facing the loss of their livelihoods due to various interventions that have an unavoidable negative impact on the local economy and biodiversity. The territorial capital in these areas, which belongs to the rural residents, is being mismanaged, causing the impoverishment of the residents and limiting the prospects for living, working and enjoying in these areas.

DECLARATION

This Declaration was drafted at the end of the 3rd Albanian Rural Parliament, which took place in October 2023 and gathered about 600 different stakeholders over the course of three days. This nationwide gathering prepared the ground for dialogue and concrete cooperation among stakeholders, to analyze the reality and better understand the needs and problems to reflect on the vision and priorities as well as collective actions aimed at improving the quality of life in rural communities throughout the country.

Participants of the Albanian Rural Parliament firmly demand concrete actions for responsible governance and the engagement of all government structures involved in agriculture and rural development

For this we demand:

Establishing a long-term partnership between the National Rural Parliament and the Assembly of Albania, in particular the Parliamentary Committee on

Production Activities, Environment, and Trade, to oversee the implementation of the legal framework and undertaking of new legal initiatives on various issues identified by different stakeholders participating in the Albanian Rural Parliament;

Institutionalizing the cooperation between the National Rural Parliament and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development for organizing this nationwide gathering every two to

three year period, as a necessity to analyze the reality and agree on the priorities of the national rural agenda, made possible by increased and genuine participation of various stakeholder.

The priorities agreed upon by the third Albanian Rural Parliament are:

Formulating and implementing active, clear and sustainable agricultural and rural development policies

to support the dynamics of the sector and address challenges related to the shrinking of sub-sectors, cases of overproduction, the issue of selling products below cost, and to insurance for damages in agricultural and livestock production.

Increasing budgetary support for the agriculture and rural development

sector through the national scheme to support all farmers who meet the criteria, without competitive bases. The scheme should be gradually restructured by applying the equalization effect of public funds, differentiating measures and funds according to regions to contribute to the cohesive and balanced development of local communities.

The scheme should be sustainable, with unchanging support measures for a period of 3-5 years, which are designed based on studies and participatory consultative processes.

Institutionalizing the drafting of the national scheme with the participation of farmers and other interest groups through rules and procedures for public notification and consultation is a must.

Formulating and implementing effective and genuine rural development policies are imperative

, especially against the backdrop of the lack of concrete results from the 100-villages Program. Despite the good intentions of the programs developed, their implementation requires responsible management, transparency, and accountability. Prioritizing the Leader approach for a potential nationwide undertaking has the potential to fill the gap created by the failure of the 100 Villages Program and the unfulfilled expectations of citizens towards the Program.

Supporting existing Local Action Groups to implement local development strategies for territory revitalization projects and small projects, as well as providing support for local Leader-type initiatives in the formalizing LAGs and drafting local strategies, are necessary to promote a national initiative of the Leader approach in Albania.

Formulating and implementing incentivising and stimulating policies for the development of mountainous and less favored areas.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development should clearly define rural areas and, among them, the less favored ones, integrate specific support measures, and a higher level of subsidies for farmers in these areas compared to those outside this definition.

Caring for the community of shepherds and pastoralists,

the bearers of our country's intangible cultural heritage recognized by UNESCO, who have lived in symbiosis with nature for centuries, is important for preserving the lifestyle inherited from generation to generation. By preserving the history, tradition and identity of the Albanian mountain areas, the community protects this precious heritage. Caring for this community would revitalize the alpine areas, which are listed by prestigious international agencies as must-visit destinations. The lack of support for this community risks the loss of cultural heritage, the extraordinary opportunities for tourism development, as well as habitat and biodiversity.

We believe in the extraordinary role and contribution of rural communities in the social economic progress of our country. According to our vision, rural communities are dynamic and have diversified economies through rural tourism. They offer opportunities for economic and social well-being, and they protect environment and biodiversity. "Life springs from the village!", - it is a great truth that the development and progress of Albania comes from its rural areas.

To achieve this vision, an active, sustainable and stimulating policy in sustainable agricultural and rural development is needed, one that focuses on the needs, priorities and aspirations of local communities. We need a policy that supports the rural economy, invests in public infrastructure, education and healthcare, creates opportunities for communities, especially for the young people, protects the livelihoods of residents, and offers a sustainable quality of life now and for the future, ensuring that villages are not abandoned.

The issues addressed in this statement are primarily matters of justice and social equality

Third Albanian Rural Parliament

The Albanian Network for Rural Development (ANRD) is a network of thirty-four local CSOs with consolidated profiles in rural development, established from 'bottom-up' in 2015 with the aim of contributing to the sustainable development of rural communities in Albania. ANRD is an active network in the field of rural development policies, to address the need for effective rural development policymaking through the direct involvement of non-public actors in the formulation and implementation of sector policies.

