Empowering Roma Communities in Monitoring and Influencing Local Agendas

Contents

Executive summary

The aim of the project was to set the first steps towards the empowerment of local Roma communities in Romania and to design a model of action replicable in other cases. The primary group were 103 communities from the list of most destitute Roma communities in Romania, but it included also as indirect beneficiaries the public local authorities, as partners of dialogue and strategic planning, as well as local / regional NGOs whose capacity was strengthened in monitoring and evaluation, advocacy, data collection etc, in order to take over the role of the implementing organisation and carry on the task of ensuring the sustainability of the working methods and the representation of the interests of the Roma on the local and regional agendas.

The project offers a number of valuable lessons, in virtue of the complexity of its design. First, it entails lessons related to the working methodology at local level for the aim of empowering Roma communities. It shows that coordinated action on several levels, including various stakeholders (local authorities, facilitators, local and county level NGOs and public institutions, mentors, as well as structures designed to implement various measures of the strategy for the Roma) multiplies the positive effects on the Roma communities. Second, it offers a model of action which links up with other funding resources and opportunities in order to enhance the level of investment in the communities of the project, thereby reaching a visible effect and fostering among communities capital for further mobilisation and empowerment. Third, it shows how positive effects at the level of communities can trigger a chain of changes and empowerment of the Roma in local decision-making processes.

There are a few elements which could be taken over and replicated in other countries with significant Roma population, provided the basic ingredients are in place. The case study will go deeper into the details of these ingredients and of the lessons learnt.

Introduction and basic information about the case

The project „Empowering Roma Communities in Monitoring and Influencing Local Agendas in Romania" was implemented by „Împreună" Agency between 2008 and 2010 at national level, in approximately 100 communities with a high percentage of Roma population.

The project specifically addressed the issues of empowerment of Roma communities through the participatory methods used in community development, as well as increasing the public participation of the Roma through monitoring local agendas with regards to actions directed at the Roma.

The aim of this initiative was to identify, mobilise and concentrate the most important resources of the Roma communities as well as of those of the local authorities, with a view to identifying the measures, initiating, implementing and monitoring the projects to be financed by either the Government, local authorities through the State budget or by other donors involved in the Decade for Roma Inclusion.

The basic hypothesis stated that the poorest Roma communities lacked the information, confidence, abilities and capacity necessary to change their own life for the better and that, consequently, they needed support and

guidance all along a process of discovering their own power, identifying their own concrete needs and the ways leading to solving at least part of their problems.

Consequently, this project was meant not only to provide facilitating services to local communities, but also to ensure the empowering of the civil society on the local and regional levels, with the support of the NGOs and of structures of community representation, in the implementation of participation mechanisms for the monitoring and evaluation of the measures meant to support the social inclusion of the Roma.

The main objectives of the project were:

- Providing support to the Roma communities in the process of their self-management, i.e. in becoming actual partners of the local public administration bodies, by the direct participation of the Roma representatives in the local planning process;
- Providing support to the Roma communities for the identification and setting of priorities regarding their own needs;
- The empowerment of the civil society on local and regional levels through the support offered by the NGOs and by structures of community representation, in the implementation of participation mechanisms for the monitoring and evaluation of the measures meant to support the social inclusion of the Roma.

The methodology applied within the programme *"Empowering Roma communities in influencing and monitoring the local agendas in Romania"* was based on the stimulation of the process of community development by facilitating activities. Thus, the methods of community facilitation were supplemented within this programme with innovating elements, inserted into the "classical recipe" used with previous similar projects, with such additional main elements as: the introduction of the public participation-type approach into the community facilitating process; the promotion of teamwork: The Local Initiative Group (LIG), The Local Public Authorities (LPA), a Roma non-governmental organization on a county level (a partner NGO) or a county facilitator, and a mentor during the second part of the programme; the initiation of community projects financed with local resources, involving all those previously mentioned.

The project results can be summarised as follows: approximately 30% of the local initiative groups reached the highest level of empowerment, in which they had achieved results by taking action as a group for the benefit of the community and were able to mobilise themselves without any external support; four times more resources than the initial investment were drawn in the communities, with the aim of fulfilling some of the needs which the communities themselves had identified as being prioritary; a measured increase in the capacity of Roma NGOs to deal with Roma issues at local and county level and to promote the interests of the Roma on the public agendas.

The strategic importance of the case lies within the fact that it contributing to empowering the Roma community to manage its life without assistance from external institutions, by building self-confidence while solving some of the most pressing issues Roma communities face. Also, another aspect of strategic importance is the methodology of the project, which encompassed a clear methodology of action while allowing for enough flexibility to adapt to the local context and needs.

Context and locations

The project started in 103 communities from 24 counties. Typically, the communities in which the project was implemented were identified in a 2005 World Bank study[1] as having medium and high problems regarding indicators of social inclusion, and had one or more Roma compact settlements. The communities are mostly rural. The large number of communities induced a large variety in their characteristics; in some of the communities, facilitation activities had taken place previously, while in other communities the project was the first intervention aimed at the Roma settlements; in some of the communities, there were already community based organisations, be they formal or informal, while in other communities there was no such embryo of community organisation. In terms of the diversity of Roma, they were both traditional and non-traditional communities, both Romani-speaking and having other languages as mother-tongues (Romanian or Hungarian). The map of the project can be found below, representing the communities which finalised the project in 2010[2].

Figure 1. Map of the project communities (2009-2010). Source: Final narrative report of the project (2010).

The project was documented by the World Bank and showcased as good practice[3]. Also, the Roma Decade website hosts a video documentary on the methodology of the project and its results[4].

---

[1] Sandu, D. (2005). *Comunitatile de Romi din România. O harta a saraciei comunitare prin sondajul PROROMI* [Roma Communities in Romania. A map of community poverty through the PROROMI survey]. Bucharest: World Bank.

[2] While county Mureș had also been included in the first year of the intervention, it had to be excluded from the project for administrative reasons. Therefore, the project started with 103 communities and ended with 98.

[3] http://siteresources.worldbank.org/ROMANIAEXTN/Resources/Steps_Towards_Empowering_Roma_Communities.pdf
http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/0,,contentMDK:23274529~menuPK:258612~pagePK:2865106~piPK:2865128~theSitePK:258599,00.html.

[4] http://www.romadecade.org/empowering_roma_communities_2010.

The genesis of the case and the activities in the framework of the case

The 2005 World Bank report presented the data gathered within 848 Roma communities including more than 20 households and was elaborated as a contribution to the setting up of the foundation of their social development. In its synthesis, this study mentions the fact that *"The Roma population is one of the poorest and most vulnerable populations in Romania. The Roma are poor not only in terms of their private consumption level, but also as far as the consumption of goods and of public services and utilities is concerned"*. The community poverty, resulting from the precarious social and material infrastructure, as well as from the low level of private consumption, is to be found to a greater extent within Roma communities than it is with other groups. The association between social rejection and community poverty is a feature characteristic to the Roma population.[5]

Also in 2005, The Government of Romania obtained a loan amounting to 58.5 million US dollars granted by the World Bank, with a view to supporting the fulfillment of the pledges taken in the Joint Inclusion Memorandum, which provides support for the improvement of the living standard and the social inclusion of some of the most disadvantaged population categories, including the Roma minority. The Social Inclusion Programme in Romania concerns the improvement of the living standard and the social inclusion of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable persons in this country, and its structure includes four components. The first component is the Priority Intervention Programme, amounting to 11 million EURO and implemented by the Romanian Fund for Social Development, in partnership with the National Agency for the Roma. This component facilitated the obtention of grants designed to fund projects for the benefit of the poor Roma communities living in some 100 destitute localities. Against this background, it was necessary to undergo an intermediary stage of preparation of the Roma communities, in order to ensure the direct participation of their members as well as the implementation under the best possible circumstances of the projects to be achieved at the local level. This complex task was given to Impreuna Agency through the programme "Empowering Roma communities in influencing and monitoring the local agendas in Romania", funded by the Japanese Social Development Fund under the management of the World Bank. The project was composed of two consecutive components (A and B), which will be summarised below.

1.1 Component A

The implementation of component A started after the selection of the counties, communities and county facilitators. The working formula was: one facilitator assigned to one county, each county including 4-5 selected Roma communities. From every county was subsequently selected a Roma organisation, to become a partner of Impreuna Agency in the implementation of the programme at the local level. Generally, the logics according to which the programme was established followed the pattern: training, then the immediate implementation of the activities on site, by means of the knowledge, tools and techniques thoroughly studied during the training sessions. During the first visits to the communities, the facilitators gathered the data necessary for the community profile. One of the dimensions included in the community profile refers to the existence of Roma civic structures within the community (NGO, LIG or other forms of organisation). In the communities where forms of organisation of the Roma existed, cooperation was established with these, but in most places the Roma were not organised. In such cases, the facilitators identified community leaders wishing to become

---

[5]Among the approximately 850 scrutinized Roma communities, more than 100 of them, located all over this country, were classified as Roma communities facing very serious difficulties, of a HIGHPROB type.

involved as potential LIG members. Once identified, created or reactivated (as in the case of those formed during previous projects), the first meetings of the LIG took place, during which the facilitators followed up the transfer of knowledge and abilities to their members. The members of the communities were supposed to replace the facilitator in due course, after the termination of the programme. After the first meetings, when the LIG members understood what was going to happen in their communities, the gathering of data started, as a necessary step in the analysis of the community. The instruments elaborated to this effect were: the community profile, the SWOT analysis and the inventory of problems. All these were achieved by the facilitator, with support from the LIG active members (between 2 to 4 persons) through interviews, gathering of administrative data from local institutions, face to face or group interviews, together with the community members and with the stakeholders at the local level. In order to secure the participation in the process, the documents initially drawn up by the facilitators (the SWOT analysis and the inventory of community problems) were discussed and finalised during a number of community meetings. To these meetings were invited community members, alongside stakeholders active in various fields. Regarding these meetings, the main concern was to ensure the active participation of all those present; to this effect, the facilitators used the participative methods which were tested and simulated during the training sessions. At the end of these meetings, each community produced a SWOT analysis and a list of priority matters, these documents being agreed upon and accepted as the first results of working together and a good start of the community development process.During the period September 2008 – February 2009, the project activities focused on two parallel targets: the empowerment of the civil society on a local level and the capacitation of Roma communities in influencing and monitoring the local agendas.

The introduction of the county NGO in September 2008 (the third month of the facilitating process) resulted in the diminishing of the role played by the county facilitator. From that time on, the county facilitators acted as a support to the partner organisations and to the LIGs within the communities. This working method was preferred in order to ensure the sustainability of the programme, by capacitating local structures even after the intervention of the county facilitator ceased.

The subsequent actions were meant to be an exercise along which the Roma structures on a local level would learn, by putting into practice specific methods and techniques of community mobilisation, direct involvement of the Roma community in the decision making process and, last but not least, capacitating the Roma to be responsible actors in influencing and monitoring the local agenda. Initially, the NGOs - supported by the county facilitator - had the task of gathering all planning documents[6] which referred to the communities included in the programme, at the local level, as well as at the county and regional level, documents which contained measures for the Roma as beneficiaries of social inclusion policies. Once these documents had been collected, they were studied during analysis meetings organised by the NGO. These meetings were attended by local and county level stakeholders, by members of the LIG and the NGO, with the county facilitator as moderator of the meetings. The analysis evaluated to what extent the Roma were present on the local, county and regional agenda, how relevant these documents were in relation with the realities existing within the Roma communities, the extent to which the Roma were involved as beneficiaries in the elaboration of the documents and, last but not least, the implementation stage of actions concerning the Roma. The result of this analysis was then rendered concrete in a county report elaborated by the NGO, the LIG and the facilitators, and included the description of the Roma situation in the county, as well as conclusions and recommendations. These reports were subsequently discussed within the framework of county meetings, which were organised

---

[6] "Planning documents" is the generic name of all types of programme documents focused solely on the Roma or referring to the Roma, such as: The County Action Plans for the Roma, The Plans for the Social inclusion of the Roma, Local Strategies, Local Development Plans, Local Plans of Actions for the Roma, sector strategies for various fields, Strategies for regional development, education development plans, etc.

and moderated by the partner organisations and attended by facilitators, local groups' representatives, by mayors of communities as well as by representatives of the relevant county institutions.

The introduction of the public participation type methodology aimed at the concrete application of various methods and instruments through which the members of the local communities could directly influence the local agenda. This exercise was a learning opportunity, as well as a method of immediate empowerment and enhancement of self-confidence on the personal, organisational and community levels, of all the involved actors (the NGO, LIG and the community members). This was also a concrete way of testing and demonstrating the way in which the Roma get involved when given the necessary attention, as well as their capability of taking part in the act of local administration in an organised way, as active citizens of the community. The teams made of the county facilitators and the NGO representatives elaborated a **public participation plan**. This plan was subsequently finalised during several meetings with the NGO and members of the LIGs. The document includes the planning in terms of activities, time, human resources and persons involved in the following stage of the programme – the pubic participation exercice. Thus, after the stages of informing and consulting the community, a **local project of public participation** was designed, whose aim was to solve one of the priority issues which the community had identified during the previous stage. The selection of the issue to be included in the local project was based on the following criteria: to be of a real concern to the community; to be of local interest; to involve as many members of the community as possible; to be solved within the shortest possible delay; to be solved by means of local resources; to depend upon the decision of the local authorities; to involve the local community in all the stages leading to its solution, i.e. identification, decision-making, implementation, monitoring; to require the joint activities of the local authorities, county facilitator, NGO, community. The matters approached in the local projects were either of a material nature, aiming to attain a concrete and immediate target such as a fountain, a park, a playground, a garbage collecting space, the restoration of a public building, etc., or they were linked with the solving in time of a certain problem, such as hiring a health mediator, a school mediator or a local expert for the Roma, or with an information / awareness campaign focused on a certain field. One of the criteria was the involvement of the Local Public Authorities and the proof thereof had to be the approval of the project through an official document of the authorities; as a rule, this ensured the main material and / or financial contribution of the Local Public Authorities to the project proposed by the Roma. The reason why this criterion was introduced was the very wish that the Roma would learn to apply the principles, instruments and method in order to influence the local agenda on a long term, with the aim that this would become a common practice on a local level for both the Roma and the Local Public Authorities. As a result of this process, during the implementation of component A, 107 local projects were elaborated for the 103 communities included in the programme. The figure below summarises the steps undertaken within component A, as well as the actors involved.
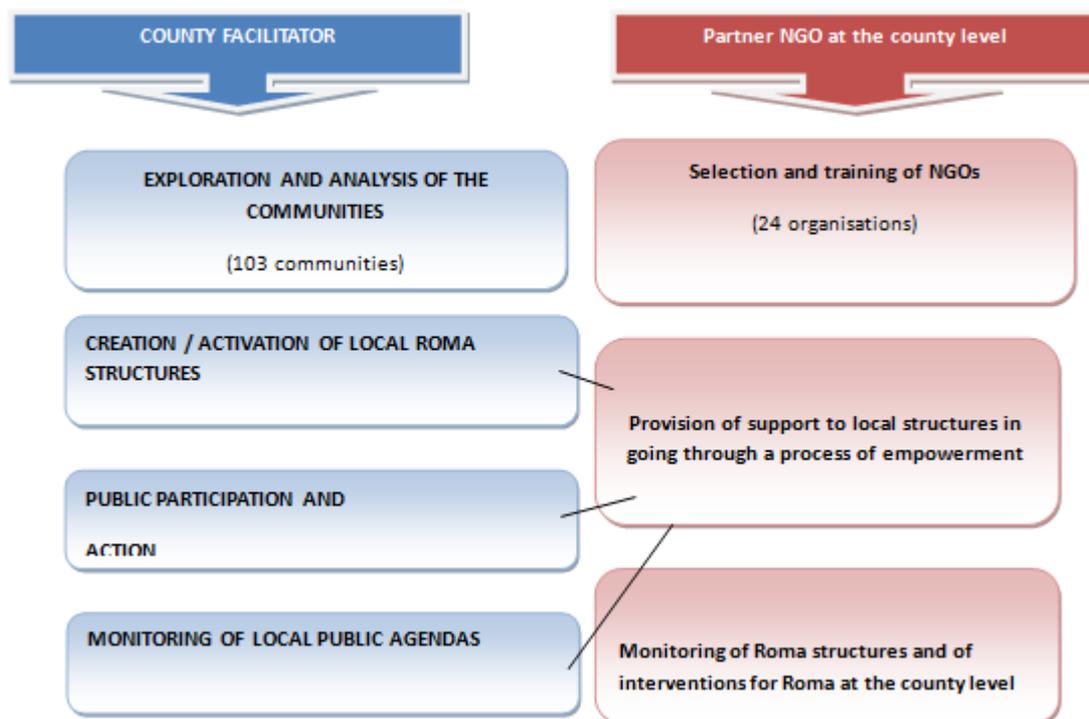
Figure 2. Actions and actors – component A. Source: Final narrative report of the project (2010).

1.2 Component B

One of the weaknesses of component A was that the support which the central team – made only of three staff members – had provided to the local teams (facilitators, members of partner NGOs) proved to be insufficient. As a result, the team took the decision to supplement the support to the local teams by introducing the mentors, as an interface between the management team and the local level. Thus, the initial activities of component B were aimed at introducing the mentors in the programme. In May 2009 took place the selection process of the nine mentors, as well as a preliminary information meeting, and the mentors were allocated to the counties which they were supposed to support in the months to come. We took into account the specific situation of each county, the time availability of each mentor, as well as the geographic proximity of the counties and the place of origin of the mentors. As a result, each mentor was allocated from one to four counties to support.

Another lesson learnt during component A was that the partner NGOs from the county level needed a more consistent support within the programme, in order to develop themselves to such extent that they could, in turn, provide empowerment to the Roma at the local level. This is why, alongside community development activities (which continued the process initiated in component A), the major objectives in the second part of the programme were:

- The empowerment of the civil society at the local and regional level, through the support provided to non-governmental organisations
- The implementation of participative mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation of measures meant to support the social inclusion of the Roma.

In order to provide a realistic image of the development stage of partner NGOs, necessary for the elaboration of a personalised plan of activities aimed at organisational development, the mentors had a first meeting with the 17 partner organisations from component B. During this first meeting, the members of NGOs had the

opportunity to elaborate, together with the mentors, **an initial evaluating form of the organisation**, regarding the main areas of organisational development: human resources, organisational structure, elements of identity and promotion of the organisation, material resources, external relations and communication. For each of these areas, the mentors evaluated the current stage, the training and support needs, and issued conclusions and recommendations to be included in the activities of the programme.

After a three-months break between the two components of the programme, the mentors, together with representatives of partner NGOs or county facilitators, visited the local communities and reestablished the link with actors at the local level. On this occasion, they contacted the local structure of the Roma (the Local Initiative Group or the Community Based Organisation active during component A), reinstated the contact with the Local Public Authority and other stakeholders, in order to inform them on the objectives of component B and to reinforce the partnership between the Local Public Authority, the Local Initiative Group and the NGO. During these meetings, they also updated the **community profile** and the **list of interventions** for the Roma at county level, documents which had been elaborated during component A. The aim of these documents was to have an overview of the changes which had intervened at the local level during the previous year.

Following the same mechanism which the mentors used together with the partner organisations, the county facilitators and the NGOs teams elaborated, together with members of the Initiative Groups, an **evaluation form of the initial development stage**, as well as a **plan of development of the Local Initiative Group**. These instruments had a simplified form and their aim was to identify the needs of the Local Initiative Groups which could be met during the programme, in order to bring about an evolution of the Initiative Groups as a representative structure of the Roma at the local level.

After reestablishing the contact and analysing the initial situation, each team organised **a county level workshop**, with the participation of representatives of the local authorities, county level authorities, members of the Initiative Groups, representatives of other county level organisations, and other stakeholders involved in the situation of the Roma. During this workshop, the teams presented the situation of the facilitated communities, the results of component A and the objectives of component B. Another aim of these workshops was to draw in the support of all stakeholders for the activities planned in component B. The county level workshop represented a good opportunity to supplement the list of interventions for the Roma at county level with existing documents which had not been identified so far (such as the strategy of the County Inspectorate for Education regarding Roma pupils, or the action plan of the County Employment Agency).

The 17 partner organisations from component B ranged within a wide spectrum of development stages: from organisations handling their first project (county Vaslui), to organisations which had already implemented PHARE-type programmes and had applied for structural instruments, either as main applicants or as partners (Bihor). As a result, their development needs were extremely diverse. Regardless of the organisational development stage of each NGO, the team of the programme considered it very important that all organisations have a **development strategy** and **an action plan** for a period of time of minimum one year. Thus, with the support of the mentor, each organisation has elaborated its development strategy (or updated the existing strategy), and its operational plan. These documents were the results of a participative process of strategic planning, which was facilitated by the mentor according to a calendar commonly agreed upon.

During component A, the exercise of mobilisation of the local community produced visible effects in all facilitated communities. This has encouraged us to repeat the experience in component B also. Thus, members of the Local Initiative Groups, with the support of facilitators or partner organisations, have repeated the learning process from component A: identifying the needs and the community resources, prioritising the problems during community meetings, elaborating local projects in order to tackle and solve one of the

identified issues, introducing the local project on the agendas of specific institutions. Monitoring public agendas materialised through two types of activities: gathering data regarding the situation of Roma communities from the point of view of education and housing conditions, and monitoring and evaluating the interventions for Roma. For **data collection**, the teams used quantitative and qualitative instruments and applied methods specific to the two approaches. The data was collected at the local level (in the facilitated communities), as well as at county level (in specialised institutions). For the **monitoring activities**, the local teams selected a number of interventions for the Roma from the list of interventions at county level elaborated at the beginning of component B. We have focused especially on projects in the framework of the Social Inclusion Programme, as well as on Phare 2005 and 2006, but also on the local projects implemented in component A and other Decisions of the Local Councils with a potential impact on the Roma communities.

Within the framework of monitoring activities, the local teams elaborated **reports regarding the existence and functionality of structures for the Roma within each county**: the County Bureau for Roma, the Mixt Working Group, the Local Roma Expert, school mediators, Romani language teachers, health mediators and Roma Inspectors from the County Inspectorates for Education. Every team organised then a round table for all stakeholders, in order to disseminate the conclusions of the monitoring activities. Also, the round tables were used as an opportunity to present the results of the programme, as well as ideas on how to continue and collaborate to improve the situation of Roma at the county level. The figure below summarises the actions and actors involved in component B of the project.
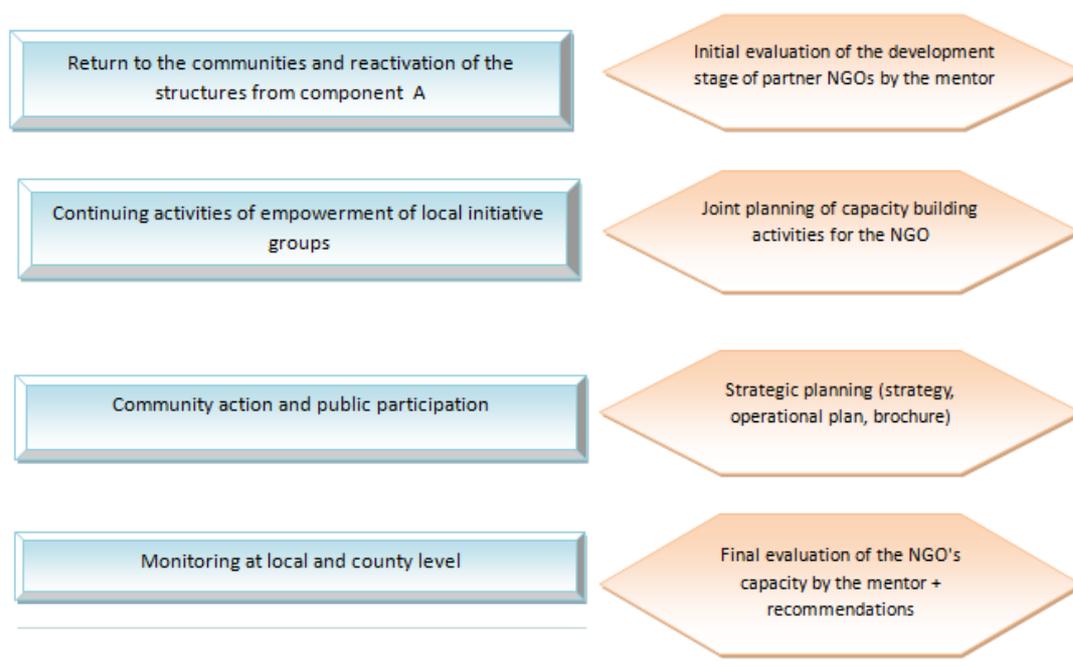

Figure 3. Actions and actors – component B. Source: Final narrative report of the project (2010).

Results of the case so far

At local level, the intervention aimed at the first two objectives, namely supporting Roma communities in

identifying their needs and voicing their priorities and in self-organising to become real partners for local governments – by participating as legitimate stakeholders in local planning processes. With regards to the first objective, the intervention covered all communities where the mobilisation of a core of representative members was possible. The goal was reached through the transfer of participatory assessment tools and the organisation of several community meetings in which the LIGs and other community members were supported in identifying their problems and needs, prioritising the issues which needed urgent attention, and identifying potential resources to solve them. In both components, with the support of the facilitator / the local NGO, all communities have gone through this process successfully. If at the beginning of component A, according to the monthly reports of the facilitators, a great number of people focused on individual matters and had trouble voicing their common needs and identifying possible common actions, at the end of component B most of communities had already gone through the learning process, and the learning-by-doing activities implemented during community meetings reached positive results. In only 9 communities out of 98, where the creation of a LIG had proven difficult, the objective was therefore hard to be met since the communities did not respond positively to the mobilisation efforts of the facilitators.

The project included a comprehensive framework of measuring the empowerment of the LIGs, included in the table below.

Indicators	Degrees of Empowerment		
	1 **Opportunity**	**2** **Use of opportunity**	**3** **Achievement**
ability to draw material resources	**>** at least one person in the group has the potential to draw material resources	**>** they have the potential to draw material resources for common actions	**>** they have already drawn resources for common actions
self-perception as a group	**>** the formal „group" does not perceive itself as a group, it is no more than the sum of its individuals	**>** they perceive themselves as a group	**>** they perceive themselves as a group and they have organised actions as a group
perception by the community as a group	**>** they are not perceived as a group by the community	**>** they are perceived as a group by the community	**>** they are perceived as a group by the community, the community resorts to them for help
perception by the local authorities as a group	**>** they are not perceived as a group by the local authorities	**>** they are perceived as a group by the local authorities	**>** they are perceived as a group by the local authorities, there are consultations between the authorities and the group
ability to mobilise the community	**>** they cannot mobilise the community as a group	**>** they have the potential to mobilise more than 10 members of the community for common actions	**>** they have already mobilised more than 10 members of the community for common actions
self-mobilisation	**>** the mobilisation of the group is difficult even with external input	**>** they respond positively to external impulses, but remain dependent on external input for self-mobilisation	**>** they get together without external impulse
ability to pursue common interest	**>** they do not pursue the common interest but rather personal interest of members *AND / OR* **>** the group is dysfunctional because of internal conflicts	**>** they have the ability to express concern for issues of common interest	**>** they have the ability to pursue the common interest and have already implemented actions for the common interest
ability to take common action	**>** they do not have the ability to take common action	**>** they have the ability to take common action under external impulse	**>** they have the ability to take common action without external impulse and have already done so
ability to express a	**>** the group has no vision of	**>** they are able to express a vision	**>** they have a group strategy and

vision of the future as a group	itself as a group in the future	of themselves as a group in the future	have researched the means to accomplish it
participation in meetings of the Local Council	**>** no one participates in meetings of the local council *OR* **>** if members participate in meetings of the local council it is on their own, individual behalf	**>** at least one member participates in meetings of the local council as a member of the group	**>** at least one member participates in meetings of the local council as a member of the group
existence of succesful initiatives as a group	**>** they have never tried to implement local actions as a group	**>** they have already tried to implement local actions as a group	**>** they have already implemented successfully local actions as a group

Table 1. Framework for measuring empowerment. Source: Final report of the project (2010).

When applying the framework to the communities, the results showed that the communities could be divided into 4 categories: the 9 communities mentioned in the previous paragraph continued to be at degree 0 of the empowerment process; 30 communities were still reliant on external help but had undergone learning-by-doing activities preparing them for further empowerment; 30 communities were evaluated as potentially capable (or nearly capable) of mobilisation and common action, but still somewhat dependent on external impulses; 29 communities were deemed capable (or nearly capable) of self-mobilisation and achievement of common actions aimed at improving the situation of Roma communities. These results are displayed in the figure below.
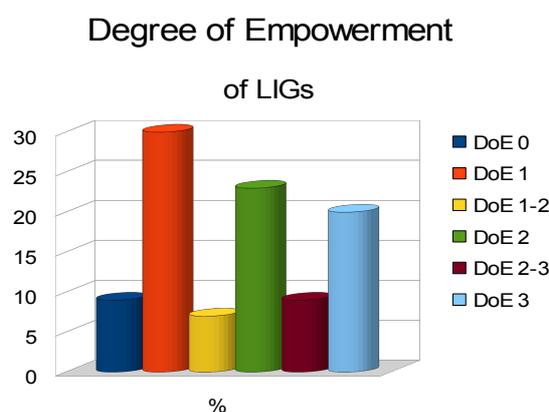

Figure 3. Degree of Empowerment (DoE) of LIGs. Source: Final report of the project (2010).

The intervention also had results in terms of capacity building of the NGOs involved. Thus, through mentoring and tailored training, the project has contributed to the organisations' skills and abilities to:

- manage a relationship with the media through means of organising meetings, press releases, trainings in the area of public speaking and communication
- manage instruments for accountability and transparency (instruments for demanding access to public information and for consultation with structures of decision, participatory tools in processes of local governance and county level consultation)
- build and manage partnerships with public services providers and structures of the local and county level authorities. In total, an estimate of 150 institutions at local level and 70 at county level were included in partnerships and joint activities with the NGOs.
- collect data on interventions regarding the social inclusion of Roma (including the assessment of the stage of implementation of these projects)
- assess the effectiveness of structures aiming at the social inclusion of the Roma and issue recommendations for the improvement of service provision by these institutions
- write reports on the situation of the social inclusion of Roma at the county and local level

- conduct lobby and advocacy activities aimed at influencing the agendas at local and county level.

The evaluation of the progress made by NGOs in terms of capacity building used an adapted McKinsey grid and revealed that the project helped the organisations progress on several dimensions, presented in the tables below.

Area of capacity building	Average of scores at the beginning	Average of scores at the end
Aspirations	2,2	2,5
Strategy	1,9	2,2
Organisational skills	2	2,3
Human resources	2	2,3
Systems and infrastructure	1,9	1,9
Organisational structure	1,5	1,5

Table 2. Progress in capacity building. Source: Final report of the project (2010).

Level of organisational development	Initial number of organisations	Final number of organisations
Beginner (23-40 points)	7	3
Intermediate (41-55 points)	6	7
Advanced (over 55 points)	3	6

Table 3. Progress of organisations from „beginner" to „advanced". Source: Final report of the project (2010).

An unintended result of the intervention is the creation of 6 local NGOs which emerged from the LIGs mobilised and trained during the project, and the reactivation of another NGO already founded in 2005, but which had no significant activity until 2008.

Another unintended result of the project was the reactivation, by means of the lobby efforts of mentors and / or facilitators, of two county level Mixt Working Groups, public structures whose role was monitoring the implementation of the strategy for the Roma, but which had been inactive for a long period of time.

During the project, facilitators were supported to apply for different lines of funding available at the time, for the benefit of the Roma communities. Thus, more PHARE funding was pooled in to solve some of the problems identified by the communities (infrastructure, education, job creation etc.).

In the context of the broader policy framework, the project contributed to the implementation, at local level, of the strategy for the Roma, since it supported the implementation of numerous projects aimed at the inclusion of Roma communities. At county level, the project contributed to the monitoring efforts with regards to the implementation of measures aimed at the Roma.

Resources spent

The staff involved in the project comprised, besides the central management team formed by one project manager, a community development consultant, a monitoring and evaluation expert (only in component B) and a project assistant, an operational team made of 25 county level facilitators (component A), 8 mentors (component B) and 17 members of county level NGOs included in component B.

The project amounted to a total budget of 469.273 euro, which represent an investment of 4556 euro / community in 2 years. The budget was used to cover the salaries of the management and operational team, as well as the grants to NGOs, the organisation of county level roundtables and community level meetings. The resources were used in a very efficient manner, given the fact that external resources were pooled in for the implementation of local action plans, which surpassed the amount of the initial project investment.

Involvement of stakeholders

The stakeholders involved covered both the county level, with the decentralised institutions, and the local level, with the public local authorities.

At county level, the prefecture and decentralised institutions were the lobby and advocacy target of the county level NGOs. Representatives of these institutions participated to the county level roundtables organised by the NGOs for sensitisation on the importance of monitoring the implementation of initiatives aimed at the Roma and provided information to the NGO representatives who elaborated the county level reports on monitoring the implementation of measures aimed at the Roma. The NGOs used their networks at county level to secure the involvement of the county level actors in the project activities.

At local level, the public local authorities were involved in the implementation of local action plan elaborated in a participatory manner by local initiative groups, with the technical assistance of county level facilitators and / or NGO members involved in work with the Roma communities. The involvement of the local authorities was secured through a sustained lobby process and encompassed passing through the local councils a decision (with power of decree at local level) adopting the local action plans, but also securing at least a share of the funding necessary for the implementation of the local action plans. The incentives used for the local authorities focused on the win-win aspect of investing in Roma communities.

The county level NGOs involved in the project had the role of monitoring and evaluating the stage of implementation of projects, programmes and public policies for the Roma and of advocating for the representation of Roma interests on the county level agenda, but also of mediating and stimulating the dialogue between Roma communities and public local authorities. Also, they had both the role and opportunity of ensuring a higher degree of sustainability of the project, by intervening in communities after the project funding ended and by further contributing to the empowerment of LIGs. The incentives used for the NGO, besides the grants covering their activity in the project, consisted in the allocation of a mentor to further assist the organisations in building their own capacity, by means of working on a strategy and operational plan, PR material, networking at county and regional level etc.

Last, but certainly not least, the Roma community was the main stakeholder involved in the project. The bottom-up approach of the project and the participatory methodology used to design the project ensured a high degree of participation and influence of the Roma communities, especially through the local initiative groups. They identified and prioritised the needs in each community, ensuring that the local action plans reflect the real needs of the communities instead of needs perceived by external actors; they designed the local action plans, implemented them with technical assistance from facilitators and NGO members, monitored the implementation of measures from the local action plans and participated in the local government through the local councils. Finally, the local initiative groups were stimulated to further work on their own capacity and empowerment and had the role of advocating for the inclusion of Roma interests on the local agendas, for the further development of their communities. The incentives used for the involvement of the Roma communities themselves focused on demonstrating the local initiative groups that they can influence the decisions at local level for the benefit of the entire Roma community, thereby triggering a chain of sustainable change.

Evaluation of the case

The project has a number of strengths which make it an interesting case.

First, the fact that the project design allowed for a great degree of flexibility made it possible to respond to a larger extent to the needs identified by the communities themselves. Typically, Roma communities are affected by a number of often interrelated problems linked to infrastructure, housing and access to jobs, education and health services. A project which can tackle any of these problems through pooling in external resources can bring along a sustainable change, as well as the confidence of the communities related to the possibilities of changing their situation. In turn, this constitutes a necessary capital for the mobilisation of communities towards solving their problems through influencing the local decision-making process. One of the most important successes of the project was the fact that it managed to pool in four times more resources than the initial investment in order to contribute to solving some of the pressing needs of the communities in all relevant areas. External resources were drawn by informing the facilitators and members of the county level NGOs, who wrote, in partnership with the local initiative groups and public local authorities other project proposals during the project and applied for available funding. Thus, 24 PHARE projects were implemented during the project, intensifying the level of investment in the project communities.

Second, the project methodology is comprehensive, aiming at action on several levels and involving several types of stakeholders. At local level, it had an impact on the self-confidence and capacity of communities to mobilise and undertake action towards solving their problems. Also, the project sought to lobby and advocate towards the public local authority to take into consideration the needs of the Roma communities, co-interesting the decision-makers in solving the problems which affect the Roma settlements by using the argument that raising the well-being of all neighbourhoods, including the Roma, is a win-win situation. The lobby and advocacy activities were not conducted according to one strategy, but took into consideration the networks of interest at local and county level, the political orientation of the mayors and local council, as well as the networking capacities of the facilitators, NGO members and mentors involved at different stages in the project. By adding the mentors into the equation of the project within component B, the project acquired added value with regards to the lobby and advocacy activities, since the mentors were typically professionals well-linked into the county, regional and national networks of stakeholders active in Roma issues.

Third, the sustainability of the project was ensured through passing on working methods and instruments towards NGOs active at county level, much closer to the Roma communities with which they worked than the central project team located in Bucharest. The focus on building the capacity of these organisations during component B was aimed directly at them taking over the intervention methodology and further working towards empowering the communities which needed it past the final of the project.

Fourth, training county level organisations in monitoring county level agendas linked the project with the wider political context in which monitoring the implementation of the strategy for the Roma was supposed to be the job of NGOs. Thus, the project contributed in raising the overall capacity of NGOs to monitor the implementations of measures for the Roma.

There are also some weaknesses related to the project design.

The first is related to the fact that no more funding was secured immediately in order to continue action in the communities in which empowerment had not reached the highest degree. Stopping prematurely the process of empowerment entails risks related to the confidence of communities and their potential to mobilise themselves at local level.

The second weakness is the lack of monitoring of action subsequently undertaken by the county level NGOs in the communities of the project, in order to enhance the sustainability of the project. While some of the organisations continued working in the project community, taking advantage of the networks built through the project and the relationships with local public authorities and other county level stakeholders, other organisations could not manage to find the resources to continue action.

The third weakness of the project is the fact that the participatory methodology of work did not seem suitable for the most destitute communities which suffered from multiple dependencies. Where the degree of passivity was very high due to interrelated problems (poverty, debt collectors, lack of openness of the public local authorities etc.) the bottom-up approach seemed to have serious limitations and scarce results. For sustained, visible results in terms of empowerment, the communities needed to be at least free of severe problems such as debt collecting, and afford to devote some of their time to the involvement in community activities.

The mix of components, levels of action, stakeholders and methodologies makes the project innovative and rich in lessons. The implementation of the project showed that a few ingredients need to be in place for a similar initiative to succeed:

- flexibility of design

- participatory methods of work with the communities

- at least some degree of openness of the local public authorities

- persons at community level willing and able to invest some of their time in community activities and to take over leadership roles

- a sufficiently long period of time

- mentors and NGOs well connected at the local and regional levels

- pooling in extra resources from other sources of funding.

It is also necessary and desirable to make use and / or activate existing mechanisms for the implementation of national level strategies for the Roma, in order to enhance their results at grassroots level.

Sustainability, outstanding issues and plans for the coming 1-2 years

The project ended in 2010 and since then no activities have been undertaken in the same communities. The evaluation of the project shows that sustainable change has been triggered in approximately one third of all the communities in which the project intervened. The sustainability consists in the fact that the local initiative groups in those communities are capable of self-mobilisation without any external support or incentive, meaning that they can continue to influence the local decision-making process in favour of initiatives and measures for the benefit of the Roma communities.

It can be said that structural change has been achieved in these communities by means of capacity building of the local initiative groups to the extent that they are able to influence the decision-making process at local level. In most of these cases, parallel lobby and advocacy work managed to influence the openness of the local public authority, thereby building a relationship between Roma communities and the authorities.

In one third of the communities, the level of empowerment is not yet deemed sufficient for the communities to take action in a sustainable manner without any external support; however, the prerequisites of further empowerment have been set through capacity building of local initiative groups and advocacy and lobby towards public local authorities; in these communities, further action would be necessary in order to reach a sustainable degree of empowerment.

Finally, in one third of the communities it can be said that the intervention methodology was not suited for the initial goal. Typically, these are communities in which structural dependency, poverty and lack of human resources are paired with negative phenomena such as debt collecting, and in which very little was possible to do in order to empower the communities. In these situations, more sustained action is needed to empower the communities, as well as the eradication of the problems which keep the communities in a dependency trap, but there are currently no plans to intervene in such communities at large scale.

The intervention in such a wide range of communities also allowed „Împreună" Agency to get to know the problems at grassroots level and adapt its strategy for the coming years. Thus, the experience at the grassroots level was used by the organisation in its advocacy activities, since data from the communities materialised in two research reports launched in 2010, in the field of education and on the implementation of the national strategy for the Roma at local level.

Transferrable elements – lessons for the toolkit

The transferrable elements are listed in the table below.

Elements	Rating of elements in terms of transferability	Possible challenges
Participatory working methodology	Easily transferrable	It can be difficult in communities entrenched in several dependency relations, characterised by a high degree of passivity
Mix of community empowerment and lobby and advocacy directed at local authorities	Easily transferrable	Lack of openness of the public local authorities to Roma issues; structural racism
Pooling in external resources (ESF, other European / international funds) as to maximise the investment during the period of the project	Easily transferrable / transferrable with adjustments	External resources depend on the national context. Funding sources are country-dependent

Ensuring sustainability through county/regional level Roma and non-Roma NGOs	Easily transferrable / transferrable with adjustments	Roma NGOs are preferred because of their expertise in Roma issues; however, in other countries the level of development of a Roma civil society might be still at the incipient stage
Using mentors to build capacity	Easily transferrable / transferrable with adjustments	Mentors need to have both expertise in Roma issues and work at grassroots level and a wide network of actors from public structures, in order to facilitate networking of NGOs / facilitators / community members with decisional stakeholders
Plan intervention for at least 3 consecutive years in order to reach the maximum level of community empowerment	Easily transferrable	Interrupting the intervention before reaching any results can erase any effects; take into consideration that at the beginning of the process of empowerment it is highly necessary to continue working until sufficient self-confidence is built; otherwise, the effects of initial confidence undermined by lack of success can make it very difficult to regain trust of the communities
Flexible design of the project in order to adapt it to local context and needs	Easily transferrable	Finding suitable donor ready to compromise on flexibility of project design

Table 4. Transferrable elements

Methods of data collection and references

The data was collected through interviews with the implementing team, held in June 2013, as well as analysis of the internal documents of the project: monthly reports of the county facilitators and of the NGOs; final narrative report; final technical report of the project.

1.3 References

Sandu, D. (2005). *Comunitatile de Romi din România. O harta a saraciei comunitare prin sondajul PROROMI* [Roma Communities in Romania. A map of community poverty through the PROROMI survey]. Bucharest: World Bank.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/ROMANIAEXTN/Resources/Steps_Towards_Empowering_Roma_Communities.pdf
http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/0,,contentMDK:23274529~menuPK:258612~pagePK:2865106~piPK:2865128~theSitePK:258599,00.html
http://www.romadecade.org/empowering_roma_communities_2010