

Rebuilding After the Nyikó Valley Flood

Participatory Tools for Community Rehabilitation in Transylvania

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UUPCC Assessment Team March 2006

Background

The Flood

On 23 August 2005, the villages of the Nyikó valley experienced a massive and devastating flood. This flash flood raced through the valley, washing away houses, barns, livestock, and the hay and woodpiles stored for winter. The force of the water destroyed crops and agricultural equipment. Hundreds of homes were damaged or completely destroyed. Roads and bridges became impassable or washed away. Civic buildings, businesses, and churches were ruined. Nearly one third of the people living in these villages were affected. Sadly, the flood claimed the lives of three people. Two were trapped in their houses and died as the flood waters rose inside their homes. The third, a four year old girl, died trapped in her family car as the raging waters swept it four kms downstream.

Although the damage was extensive in the fourteen small villages in the valley, the communities provided food and shelter for their impacted neighbors that very day. The following day, villagers organized themselves to address the larger issue of community rebuilding. They formed the Nyikó Valley Flood Relief and Rehabilitation Committee (Relief Committee), consisting of village leaders, church representatives, young people in the Dávid Ferenc Unitarian Youth Association, and other volunteers. This self-organized committee began fund raising, developing storage facilities for donations, and creating a system for the equitable distribution of resources.

This joint village effort succeeded in meeting many of the immediate needs of the villages in the months after the flood. Now, the village leaders and community members are looking towards the region's future. Not surprisingly, there are many visions of what this future may look like, including what steps are needed to reduce vulnerability to a similar flood in the future. One way to create such a plan is to hire outside experts and have them design a plan. A second option is to use participatory tools to enable the people of the communities to reach consensus on the kind of rehabilitation plan they would like and the projects that should be started first.

The Communities

The Nyikó valley is one of the most picturesque sites in Transylvania. Rolling hills, mountain streams, lush pastures, productive orchards, and hilltop churches dominate the landscape. This bucolic landscape suffered a tragic blow with the surging flood waters. Two of the valley's villages, Bencéd and Székelyszentmihály (St. Michael) opted to try a different approach to post-disaster planning and invited a team of volunteer facilitators to join with community residents and create a community rehabilitation plan. Székelyszentmihály is an agricultural community of 400 people that in earlier times derived almost its entire livelihood from its livestock, orchards, and fields. As much as half its income came from milk sales. In recent years small scale industries have begun reshaping the community's profile. One factory owned by a Dutch company manufactures airbag liners for automobiles. Employing more than 80 workers and shipping their products to many parts of the world, the factory is now in its second year of production. A second and locally owned firm employs 10 people to manufacture antennae and other communications equipment. These new factories are well managed, ecologically clean, and offer living wages to their employees. A third business, a locally-owned construction company, has about 30 workers.

Bencéd is about half the size of Székelyszentmihály and supports farms as well as several homes that have been constructed in recent years. Much of Bencéd lies on a hill slope and as a result was less affected by the flood than Székelyszentmihály. These two communities would be the site for the participatory rehabilitation needs assessment.

The Process

For more than 20 years, development and planning agencies throughout the world have been creating participatory tools that enable communities to become the primary architects of their own development. While the practices may be recent, some of the tools are very old. For example, one exercise asks village residents to work in small groups to prepare a map of their community. The goal of the task is, in part, to help residents to talk with one another and work together to produce something that they know a great deal about. A second and perhaps more important goal is to use the map as a foundation to begin conversations about their needs. Working together to create a map provides a setting in which they can cooperate to identify and eventually prioritize their needs.

Other tools, not all of which were used in the Bencéd/Székelyszentmihály assessment, include time and trend lines, transects, gender calendars, seasonal calendars, institutional analyses, household interviews, ranking, and community action planning. These tools, used in the hands of experienced facilitators, can help a community to organize what it already knows and mobilize resources they already have to come to consensus about an action plan to guide their development. Armed with a plan that the entire community supports provides strength for local leaders to negotiate with external partners such as government and non-government agencies to secure resources not presently available to the community. This participatory approach formed the basis of the assessment that the Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council, working in cooperation with the Unitarian Church of Transylvania, used in these two Nyikó valley communities.

The Findings Summarized

Attendance at the participatory assessment was good with between 35 and 40 community members participating each of the three evenings. Attendees were from both Székelyszentmihály and Bencéd. Although there was a noticeable lack of women on the first evening, their attendance increased greatly for the next two sessions.

Village sketch maps highlighted the severe impact of flood damage in Székelyszentmihály and the lesser damage in Bencéd. The maps fostered an open discussion that highlighted several areas of need in rehabilitation and infrastructure improvement.

The institutional analyses revealed similar institutions in both villages. The importance of church, school, and culture was clear. However the exercise suggested that only minimal collaboration existed between these three core institutions. They appeared to function independently of one another as well as separately from other small organizations and groups in both communities. In contrast, the highly successful institutional cooperation during the emergency flood relief proved that the Nyikó valley villages could act in a highly cooperative and effective manner if an urgent need arose.

The mapping and institutional analysis revealed two types of rehabilitation priorities: (1) core infrastructure needs shared by both communities and (2) local needs specific to the individual communities. Among the infrastructure priorities were water and sanitation, gas pipeline rehabilitation, health, and roads. Community-specific issues concerned a new parish house, sport facilities, rehabilitation of a milk collection station, a fire station, and orchard renovation. Ranking of these needs, carried out separately in each community, demonstrated harmonious and efficient cooperation. The ranking concluded with a set of priorities that all residents supported. The priorities, listed on pages 14 and 15, were transformed into community action and rehabilitation plans, as presented on pages 20 and 21. The challenge that lies ahead is for the community to implement the highest priorities in the immediate future and then turn to the items of lower priority at some point in the future.

The three day exercise revealed several important findings about the communities and the process.

- Institutions the communities' present institutions are designed primarily for subsistence agricultural villages and have functioned well over the years. However, the Nyikó valley communities find themselves in a transition to a cash economy in which major elements of its infrastructure are technical commodities (e.g. water and sanitation systems) that cannot be constructed solely through self-help actions. They require money, government collaboration, and professional planning. The needs assessment has identified opportunities for the community institutions to transform themselves into grant writing and government collaborating organizations. These new needs will require realignment and reorganization of at least some of the community institutions.
- **Leadership** restructuring of a community's institutions will require creative and forward-looking leaders and leadership. There is without doubt a core of such leadership available in the villages. But it may be helpful for some form of leadership training to be organized to help these leaders learn skills of contracting, proposal writing, project management, and group decision-making.
- **Physical Infrastructure** the present physical infrastructure is not adequate to meet the standards and expectations of the forthcoming membership (possibly as early as 2007) in the European Union. Issues such as the quality and standards for milk production are a good example. Implementation of the new action plan will be a splendid opportunity for the community to begin understanding what will be needed to transform their communities to participate in a cash economy.
- Economic Infrastructure the villages have been surprisingly successful in attracting several small economic enterprises that are functioning very well. This is a remarkable accomplishment for small villages and suggests that there is considerable potential for these communities to continue to attract and retain wage-generating companies. In this way there will be increasing reason for young people to stay in the villages and to retain the cultural elements that have made these communities strong in the past.

The Data

Sketch Maps

After meeting with key leaders and groups in the community and distributing copies of case studies and orientation booklets, it was time to begin the assessment. About 35 residents of the two villages participated in the first evening session. There was a noticeable lack of women as the session opened, something that the facilitators pointed out and a situation that changed for the following two evenings.

The sketch maps worked well to begin discussions almost immediately. Several facts became clear as the small groups each spent about an hour producing a total of six different maps (all six were combined into the two that follow):

- Bencéd was only slightly impacted by the flood
- Székelyszentmihály center was severely impacted with businesses damaged houses affected, and income sources devastated
- The relief efforts from the government, the army, church groups, and private

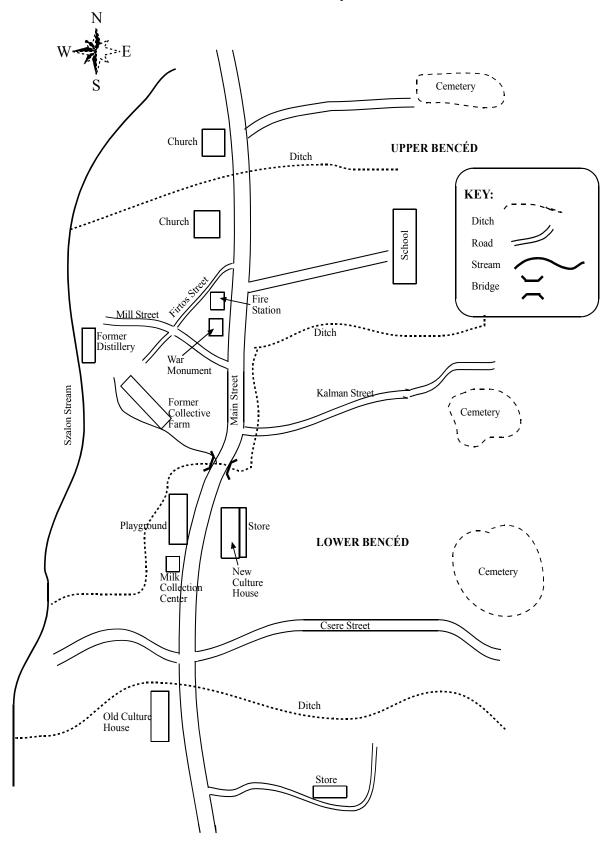
- enterprises were highly effective, as administered by the Flood Relief and Rehabilitation Committee of the Nyikó river region
- In particular, the committee established priorities including restoration of water, drainage, emergency feeding, use of vouchers to assure equitable distribution of food and materials, and house reconstruction
- As of March 2006, the needs of emergency relief had been met in the two communities and it was now time to begin work on developing long term plans of economic recovery, institutional reconstruction, and engineering work to prevent floods in the future from wreaking such havoc. The community appeared comfortable with these strategies as they produced their sketch maps.

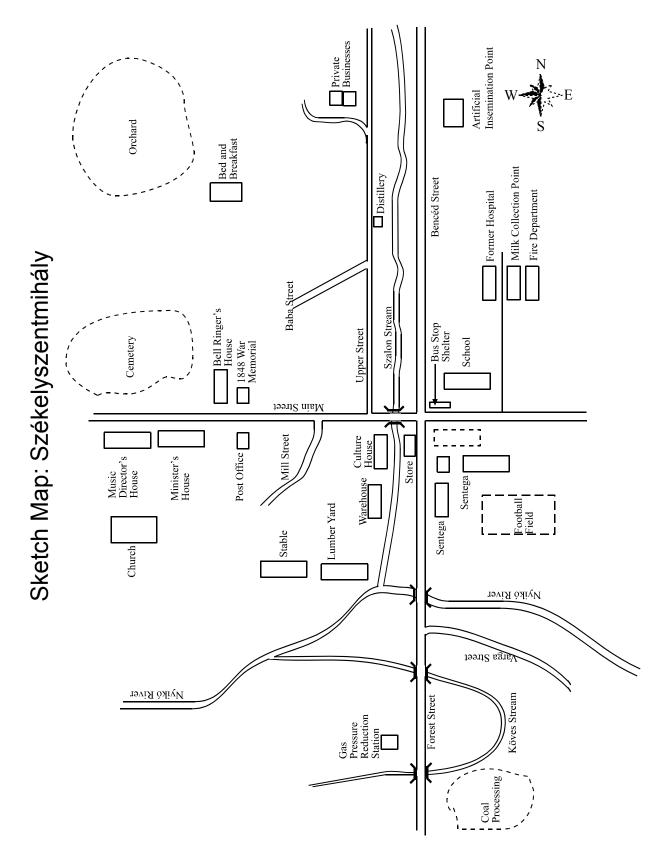
It was clear that the maps worked effectively to help identify rehabilitation needs.



Residents prepare their sketch map.

Sketch Map: Bencéd

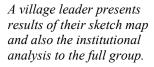




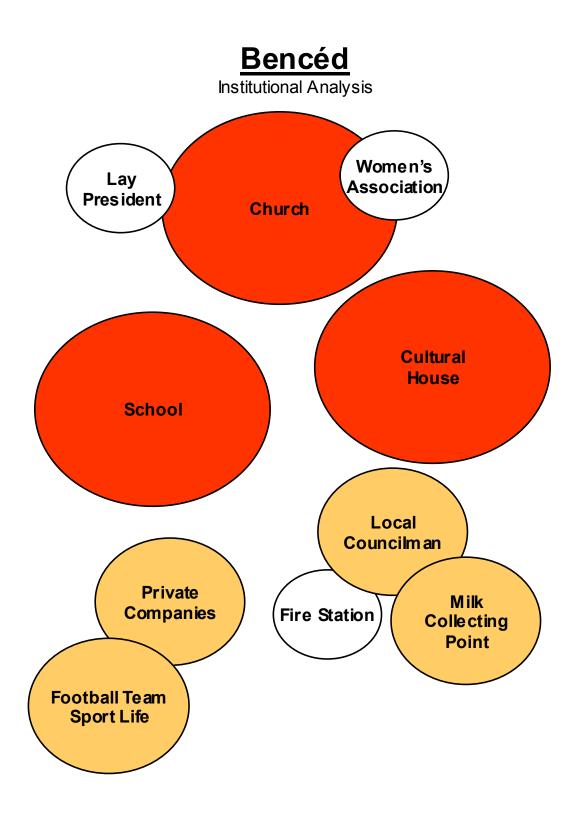
Institutional Analysis

The institutional analysis, also conducted on the first evening, was even more effective than the sketch maps. There were very close similarities in the two communities. First, it was clear that three institutions were central to the communities: church, school, and culture. Yet there was not a great deal of shared activity or cooperation among these three. Further, there was little connection between other aspects of village life — sports, business, milk collection, fire station — and the three central groups. The charts and the discussions that followed indicated that both villages had not worked closely together, either inside of the community or between the two communities, to solve their problems. The highly successful cooperation for the flood disaster was a marked exception to the norm of individuals and small groups working largely on their own. It is not clear whether these isolated institutions were a sharp reaction against the required "cooperation" that the previous communist regime imposed or whether it was simply the way the committees and organizations of the villages had behaved for many years. In either case, the flood, while creating enormous loss, suffering, hardships, and perhaps permanent health problems for some people, the aftermath of the tragedy became a time of action, production, recovery, and most important, cooperation. Some of the lessons of this cooperation were mentioned on subsequent evenings and ideally will become a vital part of the new infrastructure that the communities now seek through their new action plans.

Note in the two diagrams that follow that the size of the circle indicates the importance of the institution in the daily affairs of each community. The extent of overlap in the circles shows how closely the groups work together. In the later case, the isolation of the circles is the indicator of the loose collaboration among community groups.

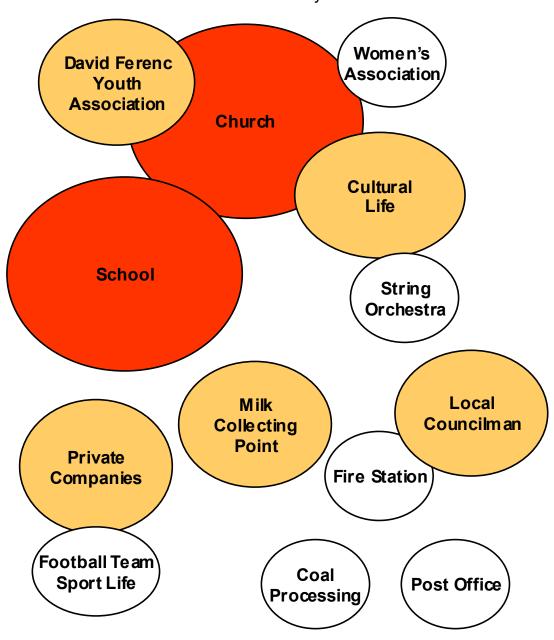






Székelyszentmihály

Institutional Analysis



Unranked Needs

As a result of the two previous exercises, the communities were able to identify a wide range of needs that they felt were important. Discussion among the facilitators and the community residents shaped and amended the list in a half hour discussion that began the second evening's meeting. The two lists that follow indicate the two communities' perceived and unranked needs. This list became the focus of the next exercise, pairwise ranking.

Székelyszentmihály

Health Care Fire Station Funeral Home

School

Cantor's House

Roads

Flood Relief

Coal Processing

Agricultural Association

Orchard

Sports Life

Culture House

Water/Sewage

Gas Lines

Village Center

Milk Collecting Point

Bencéd

Fire Station
Parish House
Gas Lines
Schools
Funeral Home
Roads
Culture House

Community Institutions

Water/Sewage Internet/Telephone

Orchard



Pairwise Ranking

Pairwise ranking is, by far, the most critical exercise of the entire assessment. It serves at least three purposes. First, it enables a community to meet as a group and debate the merits of one need vs. another. The discussion in which all members of the community have opportunity to speak and in which listening is the rule of the day offers opportunities to think through the merits of one need as opposed to another. Second, because there is no voting in the process, only working through to consensus, the tool enables the entire community to develop ownership over the ultimate list. Finally, the points raised during the discussion help to prepare the community members for the next exercise, problem analysis.

The unranked list of needs (previous page) indicated considerable overlap or commonality between the two villages. Even so, discussion during the map making and institutional analysis indicated that there were distinct differences between the villages and that it would be preferable to have each village meet separately for the ranking.

The results appear in the next two charts. The three highest priorities for each village show substantial differences. The residents of Székelyszentmihály had been unhappy for many years because the regional clinic had been removed from their community in a government–led administrative reshuffle. They had felt that the move reduced their access to health services and that the flood had dramatized the importance of having such facilities more accessible.

On the other hand, the Bencéd residents had been unhappy that their church had been empty for several years because they had no house for the minister and had been unable to attract a new minister. The separate histories of the two communities led to different priorities. While they agreed on need for improved water and sanitation, the rest of the list show several additional differences in priorities. These different preferences set the stage for the next exercise, problem analysis.



Pairwise Ranking: Bencéd

Need	Fs	PH	GL	S	£	~	당	5	8	E	0	Score	Rank
Fire Station		H	GL	S	FS	ď	CH	FS	8	╘	FS	3	8
Parish House			Н	Н	Н	ЬН	ЬН	PH	H	ЬН	ЬН	10	_
Gas Lines				S	GL	æ	СН	GL	W	⊔	GL	4	7
Schools					S	S	당	S	8	╘	S	9	5
Funeral Home						œ	당 당	ō	8	∟	FH	-	10
Roads							당 당	œ	8	∟	ď	5	9
Culture House								СН	M	∟	CH	2	4
Community Institutions									*	╘	CI	2	6
Water/Sewage										M	W	6	2
Internet/Telephone											IT	8	3
Orchard												0	11
			Ī										

Ranked Order

1. Parish House	4. Culture House	7. Gas Lines	10. Funeral Home
2. Water/Sewage	5. School	8. Fire Station	11. Orchard
3. Internet/Telephone	6. Road	9. Community Institutions	

Pairwise Ranking: : Székelyszentmihály

Need	НС	FS	FH	S	СН	~	FR	СР	¥	0	SL	ССН	W	GL	۸C	MC	Score	Rank
Health Care		НС	ЭН	HC	НС	НС	НС	HC	НС	HC	НС	НС	НС	НС	НС	НС	15	_
Fire Station			FH	S	S	~	FS	FS	AA	FS	SL	СГН	M	GL	NC	MC	3	12
Funeral Home				표	딩	Ŧ	표	Ŧ	H	표	SL	СГН	M	GL	FH	MC	8	8
School					딩	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S/W	S	S	MC	10.5	5
Cantor's House						끙	CH	CH	S	딩	СН	СГН	M	CH	СН	MC	11	4
Roads							~	~	~	œ	SL	СГН	×	GL	NC	MC	5	1
Flood Relief								FR	FR	FR	SL	СГН	M	GL	VC	MC	3	12
Coal Processing									¥	CP	SL	СГН	M	GL	VC	MC	_	15
Agricultural Association										Ą	SL	СГН	W	GL	VC	MC	3	12
Orchard											SL	СГН	M	GL	VC	MC	0	16
Sports Life												СГН	M	GL	SL/VC	MC	7.5	6
Culture House													×	GL	СГН	MC	10	9
Water/Sewage														×	8	MC	12.5	3
Gas Lines															GL	MC	10	9
Village Center																MC	6.5	10
Milk Collecting Point																	4	2

Ranked Order

1. Health Care	ē	5. School	9. Sports Life	12. Agricultural Association
2. Milk Collecting Point	cting Point	6. Culture House	10. Village Center	12. Fire Station
3. Water/Sewage	wage	6. Gas Lines	11. Roads	15. Coal Processing
4. Cantor's House	House	8. Funeral Home	12. Flood Relief	16. Orchard

Problem Analysis

Once the highest priority needs were established for each community, it was time to analyze why they had become problems. By this time interest among the community residents was building and more people were coming to the meetings. Forty appeared on a Saturday evening including about a dozen women.

For Bencéd, the need for a parish house was fully unrelated to the flood. But because the communities had come together to deal with the emergency of the flood crisis, they had determined to apply some of these lessons to other needs. Clearly some of the residents had been thinking about the need for a parish house for some time. Moreover, they had already thought about external partners to help, as noted in their problem analysis.

A similar situation prevailed in Székelyszentmihály as health care was far and away the greatest need, being the preferred choice for every ranking pair. The community was clear in its priority and focused on why the problem existed and what they could do about it. Farther down their priority list was a different story. Water/sewage and upgrading the milk station involved detailed technical information as well as substantial government liaison. The responses were less specific in their problem analysis and the past experience in dealing with these needs was less clear.

At the conclusion of these two exercises it was evident that the smaller needs — adjusting the health schedule or even renovating the old building as well as constructing a parish house were things the communities had done before and would not require extensive outside help. The other two priorities posed a new and untried challenge. Yet if the communities were to rebuild in ways that moved them forward in the post-flood circumstances, they would need to learn how to do more than simply familiar tasks. They would have to learn new skills and procedures. The discussions in creating their own action plan involved exactly these challenges. The actual plans appear in the last section and indicate some of the new skills that will be needed.



Preparing for problem analysis

Bencéd

Problem Analysis: Parish House (No Village Minister)

	CAUSES	PREVIOUS COPING STRATEGIES OPPORTUNITIES/SOLUTIONS	OPPORTUNITIES/SOLUTIONS	_	INSTITUTIONS
•	Church needed renovation	 Renovated the church tower. 	 Volunteer labor could be 	• Vil	Village Community
•	Parish house never existed	 Purchased a new bell. 	pesn	ပ် •	Church
•	Lack of independence from Szentmihály parish	 Purchased land for the parish house 	 There is lumber in the church forest 	• •	Private Companies
•	Shortage of educated people	 The local council has given a 	Ex-villagers may be willing	} •	cal Courier
•	Lack of funds to construct	rental house that can be used until the parish house can be	assistance		
	penol lelado	built.	 Private companies could provide funding 		

Problem Analysis: Water and Sewage

	CAUSES	PREVIOUS COPING STRATEGIES OPPORTUNITIES/SOLUTIONS	OPPORTUNITIES/SOLUTIONS	SNOITUTIONS
•	No drainage system exists	Relied on old system built by	 Fresh water springs exist 	Local Council
•	Current water pipeline is old	farm cooperative	 Apply for some grant 	
•	Lack of funds		proposals	
•	Lack of organization			

Problem Analysis: Internet and Telephone

	CAUSES	PREVIOUS COPING STRATEGIES OPPORTUNITIES/SOLUTIONS	OPPORTUNITIES/SOLUTIONS		INSITUTIONS
•	The phone calling center is	Sent requests to the telephone	Grant applications	•	Local Council
	inefficient	company without success	 Internet cafes 	•	Individual Requests
•	There is no antenna		 Send another request to the 		
•	No grant applications have		phone company		
	been written				

Székelyszentmihály

Problem Analysis: Health Care

	CAUSES	PREVIOUS COPING STRATEGIES	COPING STRATEGIES OPPORTUNITIES/SOLUTIONS	SNOILUTITSNI
•	The hospital that was here in the past was moved to	 Twenty years ago, a doctor came twice per week. 	 Renovate the old hospital building. 	 Individuals could send petitions to the Local Council.
	Siménfalva by the past government.	 There is only one doctor working for all 14 villages. So, he is not 	 Have a local government for only 7 villages. 	
•	The building that was used in the past is not ready to serve	able to come to this village.	Apply for grants to renovate the building	
	as a medical center or doctor's office.			
•	Lack of doctors, nurses, and pharmacist.			

Problem Analysis: Milk Collecting Point

	CAUSES	PREVIOUS COPING STRATEGIES	COPING STRATEGIES OPPORTUNITIES/SOLUTIONS	INSTITUTIONS
•	The current condition of the building will not conform to the EU norms	 They have already started to renovate the building 	 Apply for grants 	Local CouncilEU funds

Problem Analysis: Water/Sewage system

CAUSES	PREVIOUS COPING STRATEGIES	US COPING STRATEGIES OPPORTUNITIES/SOLUTIONS	INSTITUTIONS
 Because of the existence of own water sources (wells), the problem has not been raised 		 Apply for grants 	Local CouncilEU funds

Action Plans

By the time the group met to prepare the action plans, they were thoroughly familiar with the procedures and comfortable with the modes of analysis. Yet there were tensions and disagreements, especially in Bencéd. For the first needs of each community there was general agreement on how to move forward into action. But as the larger projects were discussed, frustration built. Several felt that a water system was too large a project for villages to consider. This, some said, was the kind of project that only a government should Others countered that it was undertake. unlikely that any government body would come to their assistance unless the community took the first step. And, they continued, if the community could agree on what steps they were prepared to contribute themselves similar to the health clinic and parish house it would be easier to get the government's attention.

At several points the discussion became loud and tensions were clearly evident. Yet the facilitators continued and gradually it became apparent that the communities needed to gather more information and consult with some of the government bodies that were available to them, largely to find out how to go about such a task.

Some of the leaders in the community described grant funds that were available for such projects and a visitor who worked for a local NGO added that often these funds were unspent because most rural communities did not know how to apply. If, he added, the villages could get their procedures in place, they could very well win the necessary funds. He concluded by saying that it would not be easy and they would have to persist, persist, and persist to achieve success. But there were funds available and opportunities did exist.



Community Action Plan: Parish House (No Village Minister) Bencéd

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY	NEED LABOR, MATERIAL, MONEY	WHO WILL ACT? WHO WILL FOLLOW-UP?	WHEN
■Church council meeting ■Meeting with village meeting ■Renovate the school building as temporary lodging until they build the minister's house ■File a petition to get a minister with the Bishop's office	Volunteer labor for the renovation Lumber from the churches forest Money provided from church members and from partner church villages in Romania and abroad.	Villagers Private entrepreneurs in the village Local Council Regional church district Church council will follow-up	April 2006

Community Action Plan: Water and Sewage

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY	NEED LABOR, MATERIAL, MONEY	WHO WILL ACT? WHO WILL FOLLOW-UP?	WHEN
 Grant proposal at the county level 	 Grant proposal from local county 	•Local council •Local councilman	At the next council meeting

Community Action Plan: Internet and Telephone

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY	NEED LABOR, MATERIAL, MONEY	WHO WILL ACT? WHO WILL FOLLOW-UP?	WHEN
 Grant proposal for an internet café project. Submit personal petitions for internet Start a local network 	 Grant proposal from the local council Some technical equipment 	 Local councilman All people who have a PC at home for the network Benczédi Levente will organize/supervise 	April 2006

Székelyszentmihály

Rehabilitation Plan: Health Care

Suggested Activity	Needed Labor, Material, Money	Who will act? Who will follow up?	When?	Indicators
 To organize a meeting to discuss and plan the creation of a new local authority 		András Gyula Pap Sándor Varga Béla	31 March 2006	

Rehabilitation Plan: Milk Collecting Point / Water and Sewage System

Suggested Activity	Needed Labor, Material, Money	Who will act? Who will follow up?	When?	Indicators
 Consult with a lawyer/legal adviser from Udvarhely about the legal status of the foundation Collect information 	To modify the actual status of the existing foundation	Pap Jenő Ifj. Pap Mózes Tarcsafalvi Zoltán <u>Follow up team:</u> Duca Miklós András Gyula	15 March 2006	
Contact local grant writersCollect information		Pap Jenő Horváth Endre Pap Sándor András Gyula Duca Miklós	31 March 2006	