



## **MANIFESTO of the 1<sup>st</sup> Rural Parliament of Kosovo**

Organized by: Network of Organizations for Rural Development of Kosovo

MANIFESTO has been approved at the conclusion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Rural Parliament of Kosovo

held from 22 to 24 October 2020 in Prevala - Prizren, Kosovo

with attendance of 53 participants from all over Kosovo, including two present representatives from Albanian Rural Development Network.

Representatives of the regional, european and international networks, joined and contributed to the sessions through Zoom platform in real time as other participants.

We, the representatives of the rural community of Kosovo have adopted this Rural Manifesto of Kosovo as a joint statement of aspirations, commitments, and demands of the rural community, drafted based on meetings with rural community residents, meetings with representatives of rural community organizations, and based on the results of the working groups during the holding of the First Rural Parliament of Kosovo 2020:

**1. Diversity of rural areas:** We appreciate the wide diversity of regions and population of Kosovo, derived from local culture and traditions, long history of human activity, and natural resource resources. We see this diversity as an opportunity for improving well-being and standard of living.

**2. Shared values:** We appreciate the common values that bind the people of Kosovo together - such as democracy, equality, social welfare, the rule of law, recognition of human rights, and a spirit of cooperation. We are committed to upholding these values in order to create a peaceful and equal society.

**3. Quality of life:** The basis of our quality of life represents; nature, villages and towns, mountains and forests, landscapes, flora and fauna, a healthy environment, cultural heritage, and mutual support between rural communities. We express our concern that these rural characteristics and values are challenged by the migration of people and rural youth.

**4. Rights:** We support the right of rural areas and rural communities to full recognition by all residents and institutions of Kosovo, to a quality of life and standard of living equal to that of the urban population, and to full participation in political processes. We urge the Government of Kosovo to uphold the right of the rural community in all aspects of policies and actions related to them. They should be given equal rights, regardless of age, color, gender, language, ethnic origin, religion, political opinion, wealth, ability, place of birth, etc.

**5. Need for action:** We firmly believe that the challenges faced by the rural community should be addressed in higher instances and especially in policymakers, for the benefit of the entire population of Kosovo. We all need food, wood, fiber, energy, water, and minerals which are produced in rural areas. Farmers, enterprises, and other actors in rural areas create a commonwealth for Kosovo. Rural areas contribute to improving climate change, recreation, public health, and social, economic and spiritual well-being. Therefore, the villages deserve the respect of urban citizens!

**6. Leadership:** We know that we have a responsibility to provide leadership and to act toward our collective well-being. Leadership in rural development should involve collective action at the local, regional and state levels, and should be characterized by commitment, communication, cooperation and trust.

**7. Concerns about the undervaluation of rural values and conditions:** Kosovo residents and rural community are concerned that many regions are affected by lack of employment opportunities, low wages of employees, migration of the population and especially of young people, gender imbalance, declining services, poverty, lack of affordable housing, exclusion from social schemes of people in need, lack of infrastructure, and environmental degradation. The diversity of rural areas, resources and capacities should be seen as development potential or economic added value in the political scene.

**8. Vision:** Our vision for the future is that of Europe, with vibrant rural communities, inclusive in society, sustainable, supported by diversified rural economies, with efficient environmental management and full respect for cultural heritage. We believe that rural communities shaped by this vision can be key long-term contributors to a peaceful, just and equitable Kosovo, as well as for a sustainable global society.

**9. Partnership:** Realizing our vision requires a genuine and equal partnership between citizens and government at the country level. We, the community and rural organizations, are aware that we have a responsibility to lead and act towards our collective well-being. However, we also urge the government, including other institutions present in Kosovo, to work to achieve this important partnership.

**10. Review of the situation in rural areas:** The situation in rural areas varies from time to time. We call on the Government of Kosovo to conduct a detailed assessment of the situation of rural areas within Kosovo. Examine the contribution it makes to the well-being of the rural community and the opportunities it may offer in the future for the well-being of the rural community.

**11. Reversal of the downturn:** Many regions are affected by the 'downturn' in the life force of rural communities. The migration of the population (especially young people) causes reduced opportunities for rural services and the weakening of the local economy, which further encourages abandonment from this area. We call for joint efforts by all stakeholders, all relevant agencies and governments of both levels (central and local) to 'reverse the spiral', promoting pride in rural living instead of promoting urban norms, strengthen rural services, to diversify rural economies, and by creating better conditions to enable young people to stay and those who have migrated to return to rural areas.

**12. Young people:** Many young people are willing to stay or return to rural areas and take responsibility for the future well-being of rural economies and communities. Young people need attractive employment opportunities, programmed vocational education and training systems, land access, social and cultural activities tailored to young people, as well as concrete support with reasonable loans for business that can be developed in rural areas. We call on the Government of Kosovo and civil society to meet these needs. We also support the call for young people in rural areas to organize their Rural Youth Parliaments, where they can present problems and challenges and seek solutions to overcome them.

**13. Poverty and social exclusion:** We recognize the progress that has been made in the fight against poverty in Kosovo. However, thousands of people are still affected by poverty and exclusion from social schemes of various kinds. Social and territorial cohesion is an integral part of our vision for Kosovo and Europe. We call for sustaining efforts to promote inclusion and full participation in society. Of particular concern are the needs of Roma communities, who are among the poorest and most excluded of all rural populations. They should be recognized as citizens with equal rights to the provision of adequate education and employment for their children.

**14. Gender Equality:** Women in rural areas are the main pillar of rural development, especially development through rural tourism. Rural women are the community that promotes traditional culture through dress, food and traditions. We call on the government to act in the spirit of supporting women in rural areas, especially in equal ownership of land and family material goods, as well as to favor the leadership and management of small and medium-sized rural economies. Women should also be supported in the economic, legal, legislative, administrative and financial fields.

**15. LEADER and CLLD:** We strongly support the idea of a territorial approach, integrated and based on public sector partnerships with the private sector, civil society and volunteers, guided by a bottom-up approach. We would like to see the widespread implementation of the LEADER principle and its spread in Community Led Local Development (CLLD) both inside and outside Kosovo. We are quite concerned about the malfunction of most of the LAG. We call on the institutions and the government within the country to show confidence in the Local Action Groups, to expand funding for them, to adopt regulations and procedures for the needs of rural communities, as well as to provide a truly integrated approach to local development, giving you enable the use of additional funds.

**16. Rural infrastructure and services:** Basic rural services, such as shops, postal services, schools, primary health care, public transport, and social infrastructure, are vital to support the quality of life in rural areas. Adequate physical infrastructure such as water supply, sewerage systems, electricity supply, transport system regulation - are also vital. However, in many rural areas, rural services are already weak or are being lost, while infrastructure is inadequate, which creates conditions for continuous migration from rural areas to urban areas and western countries. We call on the government and service providers to take measures to regulate infrastructure in rural areas and to enable rural communities to take decisions and actions to provide services and infrastructure for their needs.

**17. Telecommunications:** Access to mobile telecommunications has become extremely important for cultural and economic activities, as well as for the provision of vital services to the rural community. Due to the large distance and lower population density, rural areas have special need for efficient means of communication. We appeal to the government, financiers and telecommunications service providers to work towards access to high-speed mobile services and broadband devices for the entire rural population and to enable rural communities where the need arises, that they themselves take action to provide this service.

**18. Local and regional small and medium economies:** Kosovo's rural regions have many small and medium-sized business, which affect the lives of rural communities and contribute greatly to Kosovo's overall economy. We defend the great importance of increasing the vitality and sustainability of these local and regional economies or business throughout the rural area of Kosovo. Support for small and medium-sized economies or business may vary from region to region depending on the capacity of these areas. In these areas, initiatives can be supported in many different sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fishing, energy production, processing industry, tourism, services sector, business that rely on information technology, etc. Relying on local and regional economies of rural areas creates the conditions for cooperation and mutual connection with urban areas and the possibility of economic, and social development of rural areas.

**19. Small and family farm:** We recognize the great contribution that commercial farms make to Kosovo's economy. However, we are seriously concerned about the loss of farm labor and the well-being of many small and family farms within Kosovo, especially in remote rural areas. These farms provide livelihoods for thousands of families, provide food for local markets, are a major factor in community populations, and preserve the traditional ways of life on which land health, landscapes, ecosystems, and cultural heritage depends. These farms can maintain sustainability by forming social cooperatives and agricultural enterprises, adding value to their produce collectively, diversifying the income of their farms and local economies, and gradually forming larger land units. We call on the government, donors, civil society organizations and other relevant actors to support the development of family farms as a sustainable model for the development of Kosovo's rural areas.

**20. Towns:** Kosovo towns are vital as social, economic and cultural centers for rural communities. They are centers of commerce, public and social services, high schools, and health care. They offer great opportunities for tourism and together make a major contribution to regional and national economies. However, they are not recognized as a target of national programs and policies and are often seen as neither urban nor rural towns. We support European Union policies for towns, recognizing all their important contributions to the economic and social structures of rural areas and their vitality. We call for increased cooperation between communities, organizations and authorities in rural and urban areas in order to take full advantage of the social, cultural and economic ties that such cooperation can provide, as well as for the energetic exchange of good ideas and practices between the parties involved in rural and urban areas.

**21. Climate change and natural resources:** We defend the great role that Kosovo's rural areas can play in combating climate change and conserving environmental resources, and we also recognize the need to help rural areas adapt to climate change. . Over 42% of the land area in Kosovo is forest, which can absorb carbon and which contributes greatly to renewable sources of raw materials and energy. Rural areas are well-positioned to meet the growing needs of renewable energy from wind, solar, geothermal resources, and wood fuel, in ways that respect the untouched nature and environment of land and water and bring direct benefits to rural communities and employment. We call for the conditions created by climate change to be taken into account in defining marginalized regions in the context of assessing the allocation of financial support.

**22. Leadership in rural development:** We recognize the importance of leadership roles at all levels. We recognize that the primary responsibility for identifying needs and providing solutions lies with us, the rural actors. However, leadership in rural development involves collective action by local, regional, national and European levels, and is characterized by commitment, communication, cooperation, and trust-building. We call on the government, the private sector and civil society to work in partnership to provide capacity building, resources and support to foster an environment that encourages creativity, sustainable and accountable leadership, inspiring and engaging future leaders.

**23. Civil Society Networks, Associations and Organizations:** The National Civil Society Networks, Associations and Organizations that have led this campaign of the First Rural Parliament of Kosovo are based on local actions and participatory democracy. Their membership includes organizations, action groups, local associations, cooperatives and other structures, which provide essential services and promote cooperation between rural actors. We call on the government and other institutions to respect the independence of NGOs and their networks and to support their activities. We also call on the Ministry of Agriculture to enable national networks for rural development, especially the Network of Organizations for Rural Development of Kosovo, to have equal access to the measures of the Agriculture and Rural Development Program, same as some local action groups.

**24. Partnership between civil society and government:** We believe that efficient rural development requires a genuine and unbiased partnership between civil society and government, side by side as equals. We call on rural stakeholders to cooperate with the government, while the government, international organizations and relevant agencies to enable rural stakeholders to participate in policy design and implementation, as well as to lay a strong foundation for a partnership of fruitful between rural interest groups and government at all levels.

**25. Supportive climate through development programs:** For sustainable development of rural areas should be applied some additional facilities for the rural community. Additional measures to support rural communities are: Reducing the criteria for receiving grants, creating the opportunity for 100% funding (without co-financing) for special promotional programs in rural areas, facilitating administrative procedures for application by regulating the aspect legal, provision of start-up grants for youth and women of rural areas by MAFRD, engagement of consulting companies to assist applicants by municipalities, the establishment of associations of young people and women for the promotion, advocacy and development of tourism.

**26. Education:** Same as an urban community, the rural community needs a constant increase in their ability to adapt and innovate in social and economic activities. For this reason, education and training played an important role in the rural community in ensuring and fully participating in development processes. Education is of particular importance to enable young people to understand the opportunities for a rich and sustainable life in nature, to acquire and continuously update the necessary skills, as well as to participate as citizens. We call on educational institutions to provide rural communities with effective access to educational services, the provision of scholarships for vocational studies, including distance learning and vocational training tailored to the needs of living in rural areas.

**27. Exchanges of experiences and practices at the regional and international levels:**

Achieving sustainable rural development in Kosovo can be greatly assisted and accelerated by the exchange of good practices between rural parties at the regional and international levels. We call for a genuine approach to the exchange of experiences and programs, through cooperation between governments, NGOs, donors and other actors inside and outside the EU. A major contribution to this process should be provided by the European Networks and Platforms for Rural Development in cooperation with the Network of Rural Development Organizations of Kosovo.

**28. Advocacy and action.** We are appealing to the Associations, Organizations, Cooperatives, Women's Associations, Farmers Associations, Youth Organizations, etc. which were collaborators and partners in the organization and maintenance of the First Rural Parliament of Kosovo to lead on advocacy and action program based on this Manifesto, working closely with their memberships and all partners.

**29. Our Commitment.** We are committed to continuing to pursue the vision and activities outlined in this Manifesto. We believe that the rural communities, the government and the institutions of Kosovo, by working together, can achieve sustainable development of the rural regions of Kosovo.