

COORDINATES OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT WITH LEADER PROGRAM IN COVASNA COUNTY, UNTIL 2014

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Abstract: *Two or more local action groups (LAGs) are acting in each county of Romania to promote and manage the projects proposals for rural development of the territory under their responsibility. In Covasna county there are three LAGs aimed at stimulating local initiative and implementation of rural development projects of LEADER program. This paper presents the LEADER program management in Covasna county, through analyses and comparisons of projects implementation activities within LAGs. It can be established a profile of rural development in Covasna county, depending on the nature of the measures implemented by LEADER projects funded until 2014, and the need to participate in further funding under National Program of Rural Development 2014-2020.*

Key words: *rural development, LEADER program, county profile, agricultural measures*

INTRODUCTION

"Unity in diversity" is not only the slogan of the European Union [8] but it constitutes the main idea of this paper. The significance of this principle is the fact that Europeans are united by the Union in their quest to achieve common objectives and to promote unity, peace and prosperity, so that the whole continent to become richer through the diversity of cultures, traditions and languages of the European peoples.

The principle of "unity in diversity" serves as the introductory part of the paper and suggests its background content. Creating Union of the 28 countries can be considered a remarkable political process, which contributes significantly to improving the quality of life of local communities. The proven effectiveness of this process could not materialize, however, without the local initiatives manifested at the level of any type of local community. It requires that local initiatives exist also in perspective, since the results can complement public policies, making the existing Community provisions become more effective. In these circumstances, the individual views or ideas, as the smallest constituent of a community, can be decisive, contributing greatly to improving the quality of life in their background, regardless of social position occupied.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

LEADER Program is a component of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), which contributes to an innovative approach of rural development policy and encourages the communities from rural territories to explore new ways to become or to remain competitive and to fully capitalize their resources.

The projects of rural development funded by LEADER program meet the requirements of local communities, identified by the operational structures of type LAG - Local Action Group - through appropriate measures specific to each county. Starting from 2008, three LAGs operate in Covasna county: Alutus, Angustia and Progressio.

This paper presents the LEADER program management in Covasna county, the activity of the three LAGs to implement rural development projects, the profile and the state of rural development in Covasna county, at the end of 2014.

The LEADER program management in Covasna county is based on the necessity of its rural development. The three LAGs established their own territories to cover the entire county and their own ways of action to identify the appropriate projects to be funded.

Description of LAGs' activity contains an analysis of projects implemented by each of them, on project types: agricultural, non-agricultural and cooperative.

Implementation of agricultural, non-agricultural and cooperation measures in Covasna county and highlighting the main financed measures could provide useful information for shaping a profile of rural development in Covasna, at the end of 2014.

The rural development in Covasna county is influenced by the improving of the three LAGs' activity and their active integration into the National Rural Development Network (NRDN) to participate in future competitions for funding projects under the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP) 2014-2020.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Management of LEADER Program in Covasna County

Covasna County belongs the Centre development region of Romania and it is located in the south-eastern part of Transylvania; it has at the east the Carpathian arc, in the Carpathian Mountains of Curvature. The county area represents 1.6% of the country [9], barely exceeds 3,705 km square [10], being on the third place in the ranking of the smaller counties, only Ilfov and Giurgiu having smaller areas. Covasna county is basically composed of five cities, including two municipalities, namely the county residence city Sfântu Gheorge, respectively Târgu Secuiesc municipality, and towns: Baraolt, Covasna, Întorsura Buzăului and 40 communes comprising 123 villages. The county's population is 211,000 inhabitants (2011) representing 1.1% of the country population [10]; 73.6% is Hungarian ethnic and the rest of county population is Romanian.

The agricultural area of the county is 186,416 ha, representing 50.3% of the total area of the county and is divided as follows: 53% pasture, 46.3% arable land, and the remaining 0.7% consists of orchards. Like ownership form, 4.6% of agricultural land is owned by the state, while 85.4% of the total area is private property. Non-agricultural area of the county is 162,000 ha approximately, 90% of which is covered with forests.

The share of rural population in Covasna county is 52%, being higher than the share from urban medium of 48% [2]. Rural development policy has an important role in supporting not only of the farmers, but also of those involved in the rural economy such as, for example: small businesses, farm workers, owners of forest fund, local organizations, that NGOs, rural communities etc.

In Covasna, 2008 onwards, there were established the following micro-regional associations: Association Regio Alutus Egyesület, which gather the places located in Olt valley and the Baraolt basin, Angustia Association consisting of the town areas Târgu Secuiesc, respectively the Progressio Association, representing the area of Covasna city and the region around Sfântu Gheorghe city.

The objective of LEADER program for the programming period 2007- 2013 was the development of Local Action Groups (LAGs). The measurement of this objective is the share of population covered by LEADER LAGs. In Covasna county the share of population covered by LEADER LAGs is 26.7%.

The Implemented LEADER Projects by LAGs in Covasna County

The LAGs are acting in order to analyze the current state of knowledge about population needs, identifying the weaknesses and strengths of the target segments from

rural areas. The analysis of LAGs' activity in Covasna county show the value and the structure of LEADER funded projects, depending on the nature of measures and the typology of funding opportunities.

The structure of value projects funded by the three LAGs in Covasna county is presented in Figure 1. LAG Alutus and LAG Angustia, both had close proportions of about 40%, face to less of LAG Progressio.

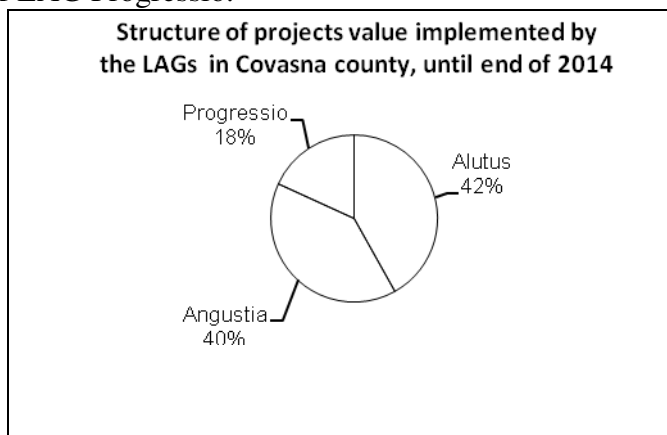


Figure 1 Structure of LEADER projects' value of LAGs in Covasna county

Figure 2 presents the structures of LEADER projects depending on LAGs for agricultural and non-agricultural types of projects.

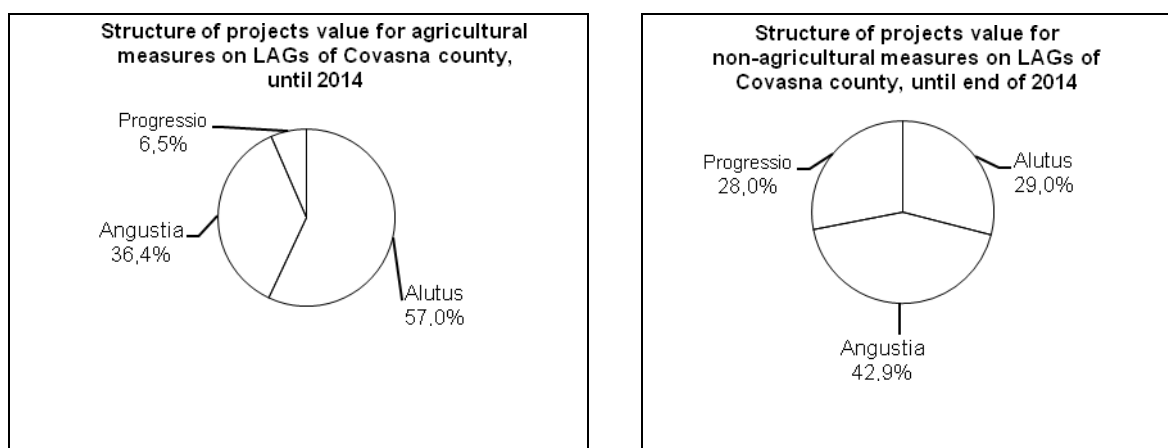


Figure 2 Structure of LEADER projects' value of agricultural and non-agricultural measures, implemented by LAGs, in Covasna county

The structure of agricultural measures' value of LAGs shows the greatest proportion 57% for Alutus LAG, face to the lowest at Progressio LAG of 6.5%.

The structure of non-agricultural projects financed in Covasna county shows more equal proportions at Alutus LAG and Progressio LAG not far below 30% and the greatest at Angustia LAG of about 43% of the non-agricultural measures financed.

Figure 3 presents the values of types of projects implemented by the three LAGs, after their typology in a comparative manner. The structure of cooperation projects' value are close to half both for Angustia and also for Progressio LAGs, as there can be seen the values of projects for measure 421.

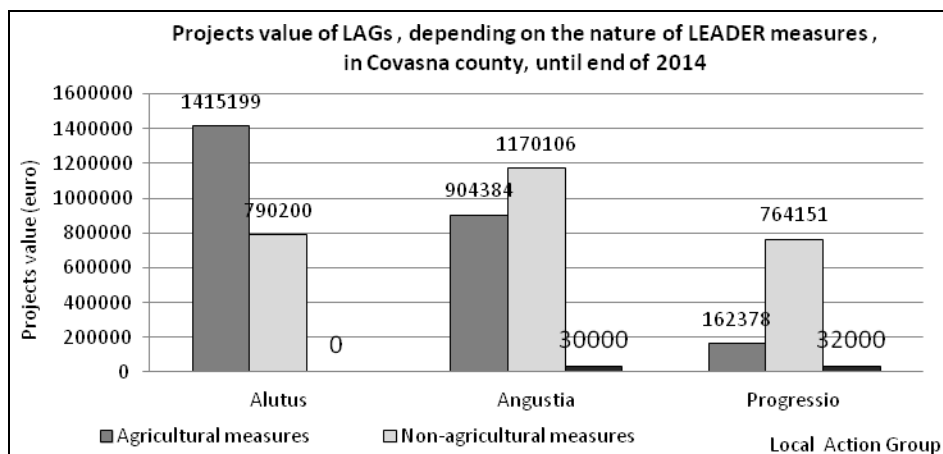


Figure 3 The values of implemented projects by LAGs, depending on their nature

Analysis of LEADER Projects for Rural Development in Covasna County

To characterize the rural development financed by LEADER program at Covasna county level there are analyzed the structure of projects depending on their nature and the envisaged measures.

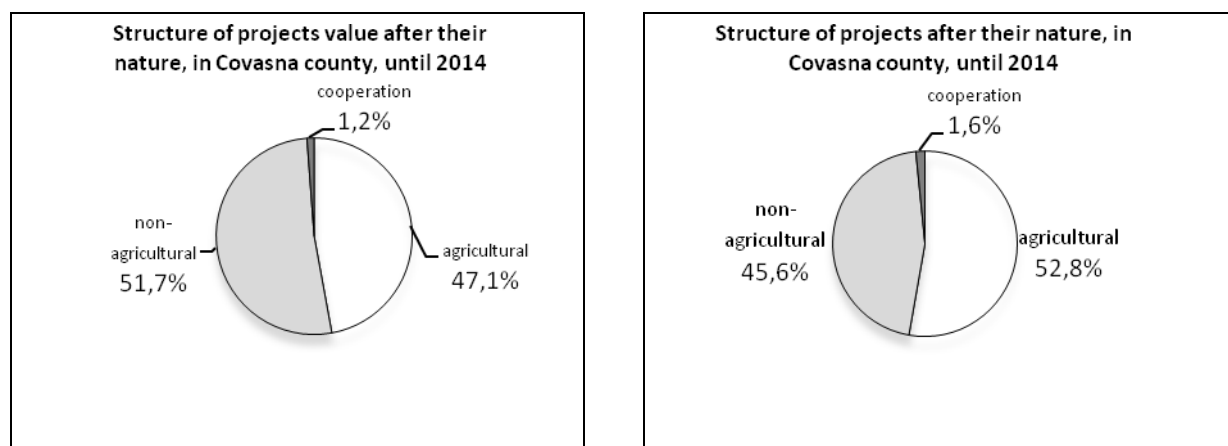


Figure 4 Structures of LEADER projects as values and as numbers, after their nature

The financed value of projects depending on their nature, until the end of 2014, shows the precedence of non-agricultural projects over agricultural ones, in Figure 4.

In Figure 5 there can be noticed the non-agricultural measures: 322 - development of villages, 312 - development of micro-enterprises and 313 - tourism development, which all summarize 51.7% as presented in Figure 4, in the structure of projects value after their nature; the measure 421 - cooperation is 1.2%.

The two important agricultural measures financed in Covasna county were: 112 – installation of young farmers of 17% and 121 - modernization of agricultural holding of 20% from the entire financed value of LEADER program.

The measure 112 – installation of young farmers has the objectives of improving and increasing the competitiveness of the agricultural sector by helping young people and supporting the process of modernization and compliance with the requirements of environmental protection, hygiene and animal welfare, safety at work.

The measure 121 - modernization of agricultural holding aims to increase the competitiveness of the agricultural sector through better use of human resources and production factors and the fulfillment of national and European standards.

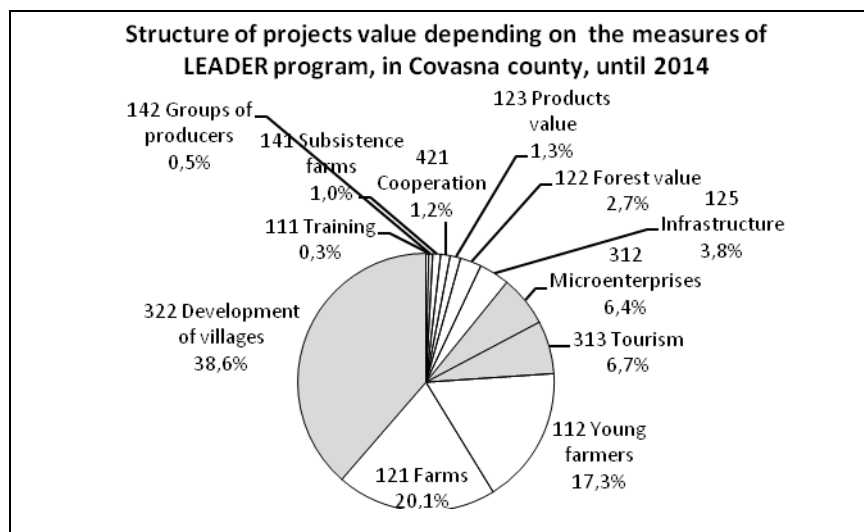


Figure 5 The structure of projects value depending on LEADER measures, financed in Covasna county until 2014

A greater proportion of the measure 121 - modernization of agricultural holding, compared to the percentage of measure 112 – installation of young farmers, shows that in Covasna county there already exists a high level of rural development, and now it follows the state of modernization.

The Rural Development in Covasna County

In Covasna county during 2007-2014, there were funded rural development projects, of agricultural and non-agricultural nature, without the activities of actual LAGs, because they didn't exist. In these projects it was included the measure 431 - functioning of LAGs with two sub-measures 431.1 - building public-private partnerships and 431.2 - functioning of local action group (LAG), acquiring skills and animating the territory.

The measure 431 - the functioning of LAGs, acquiring skills and animating the territory refers to the period preceding the implementation of LEADER program.

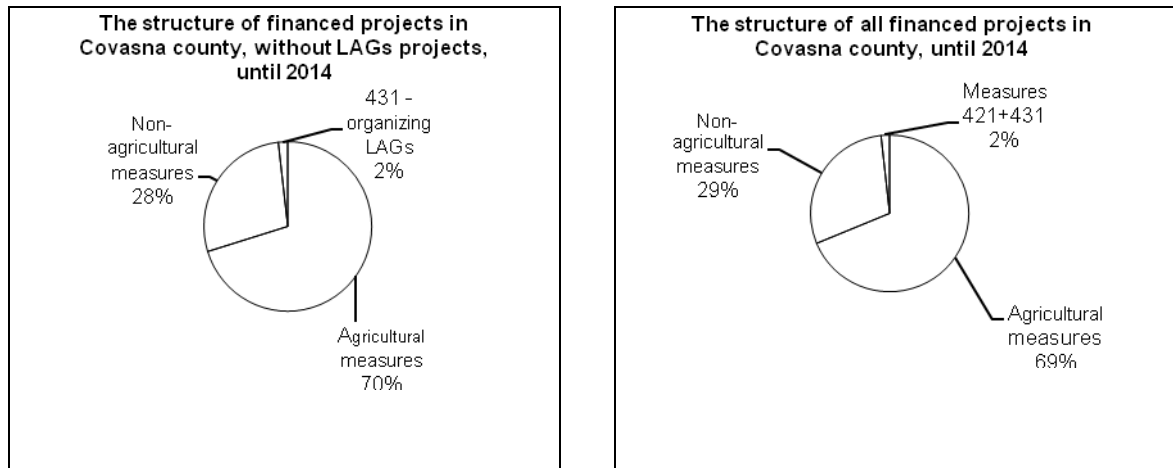


Figure 6 Structure of projects without LAGs and with LAGs, depending on their nature, until 2014

The comparative situations of projects depending on their nature without LAGs and considering also the projects implemented by LAGs, until 2014, are presented in Figure 6.

They are very similar because the value of projects implemented by LAGs is lower than that of the rural development projects in Covasna county without LAGs.

As it can be seen in Figure 7, the proportion of the LEADER projects implemented by the three LAGs represents only 6% of the entire value financed in Covasna county for rural development. Alutus LAG and Angustia LAG have close proportions, greater than Progresio LAG.

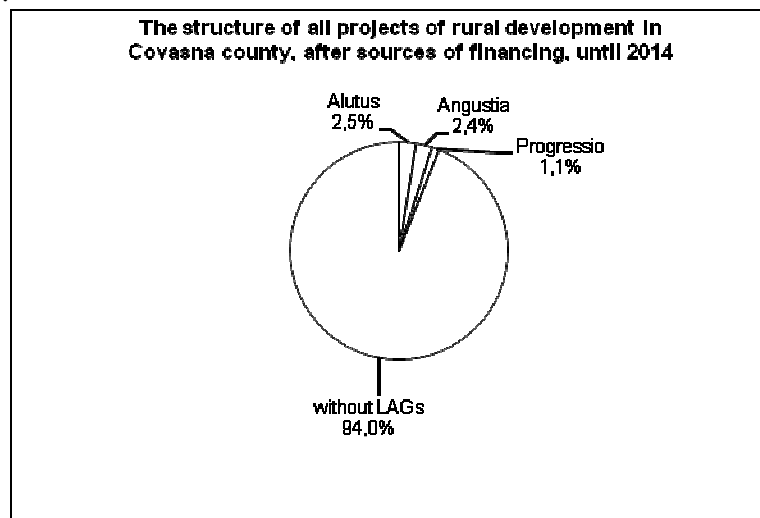


Figure 7 LAGs contribution at rural development in Covasna county, until 2014

CONCLUSIONS

The Profile of Rural Development in Covasna County

The profile of rural development in Covasna county concerning the nature of projects, is described by the following structure: 69% agricultural, 29% non-agricultural and 2% for cooperation-and organizational measures, as presented in Figure 6.

Comparing the rural development profile of Covasna county with that of the country level, presented in Figure 8, there can be noticed approximate percentages of financed projects on their nature.

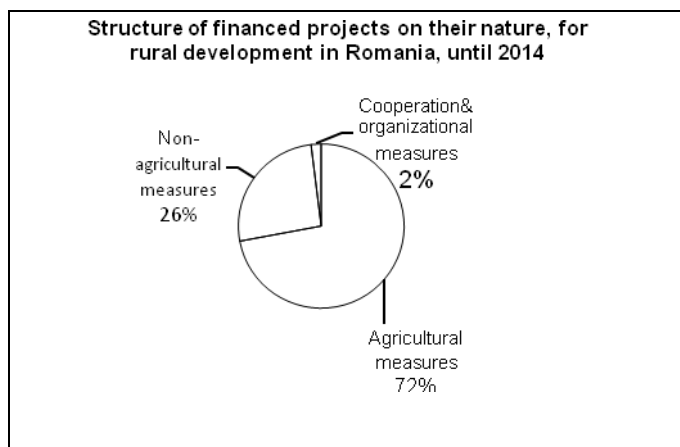


Figure 8 Structure of the projects financed by NPRD 2007-2013 on their nature

Moreover the profile of projects implemented in Covasna county respects the proposed structure of the four axes of EAFRD of the NPRD during 2007-2013, in a greater measure than the implemented projects at country level.

The proposed structure for the four axes of EAFRD: approximately 45% for the first axis of increasing the competitiveness of agricultural and forest sectors and approximately 25% for the second axis of increasing the environment quality and of rural areas – both represent approximately 70% covering the agricultural measures; approximately 27.5% for the third axis of improving the life quality in rural areas and diversification of rural economy, covering the non-agricultural measures and approximately 2.5% for the fourth axis of the LEADER local initiatives.

The profile of rural development in Covasna county concerning the structure of the measures implemented through LEADER program was described in Figure 5. Comparing the corresponding percentages for the same measures at the country level, presented in Figure 9, there can be noticed some differences which define a certain specificity of the rural development for Covasna county. The relative profile of financed measures show positive or negative differences face to the average profile of rural development in Romania, described in Figure 9.

At country level, the projects for non-agricultural measures has represented together 45.4% (the measures 322, 313 and 312 – in Figure 9), compared with 51.7% at the Covasna county level. The geography of territory in Covasna county has made possible achieving 6.7% of the projects value for tourism, face to 2.2% at country level. The value of projects for measure 122 - increasing forest value also was greater in Covasna county, but lower were the values for measure 123 – increasing product value, with only 1.3% face to 11.6% al country level. The agricultural measures 121 and 112 with the greatest weights in Covasna county has represented together 37.4% face to 21.6% at country level.

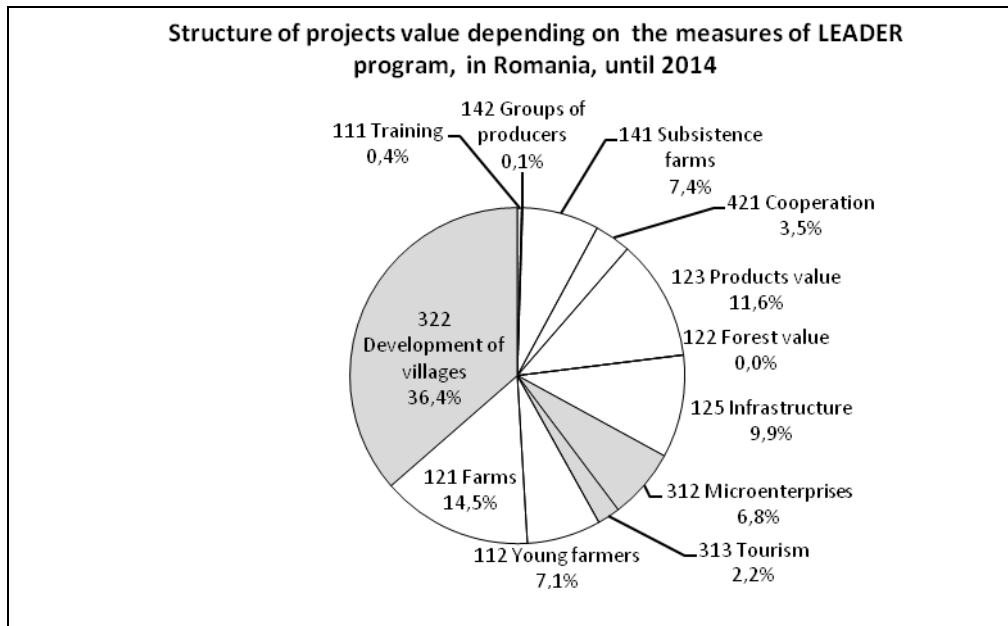


Figure 9 The average profile of rural development for Romania, until 2014

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During the period 2007-2014, the three LAGs in Covasna county have gained projects of 5,268,418 euro, representing 0.08% from the whole value at country level. Covasna county has attracted projects of 82,290,292 euro, meaning 1.32% from the entire value of NPRD. From the value of NPRD, 94.1% was distributed for all the counties and 5% for the LAGs of Romania. From the value of rural development of Covasna county, 6% has been obtained by the three LAGs and 94% of the projects value without the role of LAGs, as presented in Figure 7.

The program aims to encourage rural actors to identify opportunities for long-term development of the area, and to support the sustainable use of the identified opportunities. The experience has shown that projects funded by LEADER change the daily lives of people in rural areas, but still information is not competitively reach the population.

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