

# LOCAL PILOT PROJECTS

Capacity building and  
multi-stakeholder planning

## GUIDEBOOK



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| <b>Action</b>       | C9 Fostering replication and transfer at local level   |
| <b>Deliverable</b>  | C9.1 Guideline for local capacity buildings and multi-stakeholder planning   |
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| <b>Summary</b>      | <p>Action C8 of the LIFE BioBalance project focused on demonstrating and evidencing solutions to increase the capacity and knowledge of low-income rural communities to reduce firewood-dependency.</p> <p>This Guideline describes the steps and stakeholders of implementation, and the target group engagement in the context of local capacity building.</p> |
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# INTRODUCTION

As part of the LIFE BIO-BALANCE project's C8 Action, there were 4 local pilot projects – across three countries: Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania – implemented, aiming to test practical small-scale interventions (such as window-replacement, local savings group, attic insulation, and firewood drying and storage facilities) that best fit the identified needs of firewood-dependant, low-income communities. The summary of the interventions and best practices to reduce firewood-dependency and increase energy efficiency is available in the [C8.4 Local pilot projects towards the reduction of energy poverty and firewood use guidebook](#).

Implementation in each location was coordinated by the national Habitat for Humanity office (Habitat for Humanity Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania) – with support in the design of national WWF offices – in cooperation with local municipalities, community organizers, and coordinators. The selected municipalities and all local partners responsible for the implementation received 16.000 eur/locations for funding the interventions.

This Guideline describes the steps and stakeholders of implementation, and the target group engagement in the context of local capacity building.

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## PILOT LOCATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

More on this in the [C8.4 Guideline](#)'s chapter *CASE STUDIES: Interventions*.

The tested interventions and good practices can be grouped into three categories depending on whether they relate to (1) access to good quality firewood (2) improving the energy efficiency of beneficiaries' houses; or (3) awareness-raising activities to motivate behavior change for sustainable biomass use during the implementation. At each site, there were multiple types of interventions involving at least two of the above-mentioned categories (see table below).



|                               | Ág   | Botevgrad  | Comanesti                                       | Varga  |
|-------------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| country                       | Hungary  | Bulgaria   | Romania   | Hungary  |
| region/county                 | Baranya  | Sofia  | Bacau,<br>Moldavia                              | Baranya  |
| urban-rural typology          | small rural village  | urban segregated community   | suburban area                                   | small rural village  |
| population                    | 189  | 27 983   | 19 996  | 81   |
| firewood use                  | 100%   | 100% in the segregated area  | 100%  | 100%   |
| partner                       | local association  | the mayor and municipality + a local NGO   | local municipality                              | the mayor and its association  |
| no. of beneficiary households | 18   | 15   | 30  | 31   |
| type of interventions         | rotating fund for purchasing firewood (1); wood stove upgrade and replacement of old windows and doors (2); savings group-comm. treasury (3) | firewood storage and drying units for individual households (1); residential workshops (3) | attic insulation (2); residential workshops (3) | rotating fund for purchasing firewood (1); wood stove upgrade (2); community storage and drying facility for firewood (2); residential workshops (3) |

## STEPS OF IMPLEMENTATION

### Selection of pilot locations/municipalities

*More on this in the C8.4 Guideline's chapter CASE STUDIES: Selection procedure.*

One of the main eligibility criteria to be selected as a pilot site was that the local HfH partners responsible for implementing the pilot projects had an existing relationship and previous working experience with actors of the local government or other CSO/community organizations in the municipality.

The steps of the selection process were the following:

- National call – to reach out to local municipalities
- Application form – to be considered as a partner for the implementation
- Partnership Agreement – with the municipality or local association
- Funding – for implementation of the pilot project

Local implementing and coordinating partners outside the national HfH offices in each location:

- Ág, Hungary: a local association called Ág Szegényekért Egyesület (Association for the People in Poverty in Ág) and its founders (2 active local residents + a locally active external expert and mentor)
- Botevgrad, Bulgaria: the mayor and municipality + a local NGO: Local Active Group
- Comanesti, Romania: the municipality
- Varga, Hungary: the very active mayor and its local association called Vargáért Egyesület (Association for Varga)

The choice of local partners for implementation and coordination also depended on who was the initiator/ambassador and main promoter of the interventions locally: there was an interesting contrast in the Hungarian pilot sites; in the two small villages only a few kilometers apart, in one case the local community and individual residents had strengthened and empowered by participating in 10+ years of various community projects so they formed an association and became the main initiators of the interventions; i.e. a bottom-up management, while in the other case, the initiating role came from the top-down from the mayor.

## Identifying and designing tested practices

During this phase, stakeholders met face-to-face and online to decide which interventions to try out in the pilot project at the site. During the discussions and meetings, national Habitat and WWF offices presented several options – possible solutions for the sustainable use of biomass – to the local cooperating partners (municipality, mayor, association, NGO, and local coordinators). After the goal/objective setting and capacity assessment through discussions between the implementers, it was a joint decision to choose the type(s) of intervention.



*“As a first step, there were discussions between HFH Romania and the representatives of the Comanesti City Hall, the budget was analyzed in detail and it was established that one of the most important criteria for the intervention was the number of people helped in the project. Interventions that would have consisted in the purchase and installation of expensive energy-efficiency equipment were abandoned, because in this way the number of beneficiaries would have been reduced. Once the objective and purpose of the intervention were established, the design issue was also clarified: the purchase and installation in the attic of 30 houses in Comanesti of ISOVER basaltic mineral wool, a material which according to the manufacturer is chemically neutral, contains no corrosive materials and contributes to environmental protection.”*

(Robert Stan, HfH Romania)

*“There is a local NGO called Local Active Group, which works in the neighborhood with Roma families. The municipality invited them to the meetings and discussions as well, and we decided together what type of intervention to invest in. The Municipality of Botevgrad supported the idea of providing storage units for drying wood and assisted in their placement, according to a placement scheme prepared in advance by the chief architect of the municipality. The municipal enterprise BKS had taken similar actions before the implementation of the project, having provided storage (for other purposes) in other parts of the city. During the discussions, it occurred quite naturally that similar cells could be adopted for storing and drying wood as well. So the municipality already had a practice, but it wasn't good for drying the wood, so Habitat changed the design of the cells, meanwhile, the municipality chose the company (from 3 offers) for production and installation.”*

(Assya Dobrudjalieva, HfH Bulgaria)

## **Writing the Pilot Project Plan and Budget**

The next step was writing a project plan detailing the planned activities and goals, the target group, the major milestones, partners, and stakeholders. At the same time, the search for regional and local contractors, procurement opportunities, and requests for quotations started by the local coordinators, and finally, based on these, the compilation of a detailed budget plan as well.



## Household surveys

Prior to the start of the implementation, a face-to-face household survey was carried out at the pilot sites. The questionnaire asked about the socio-economic status of the household and its members (e.g. employment status), energy consumption and expenditure, heating difficulties, and the condition of the dwelling. This was the first point of inhabitants' involvement and participation in the process and has been instrumental in building trust and confidence in both the project and the implementers.

*“Starting with the household survey among the inhabitants has helped to correct community cooperation weakened by COVID. A significant number of residents have become open to thinking and planning together again. New members have stepped into the savings group to replace those who did not take up to contribute to the community treasury anymore. It helped to build, establish, and strengthen trust in the project and its implementers.”*

(Jász Kriszta from the local association in Ág)

*“Doing the personal household survey helped a lot, people had more faith that there would be help and interventions coming, and it wasn't just an empty promise. At our next residential forum, there was a positive response about it: people could see that the interventions would really happen, could meet the Habitat colleagues themselves and see they were kind – it gave validation to the whole pilot project happening.”*

(Lembachné Lukács Anita, the mayor of Varga)

## Selection of beneficiaries

More information can be found on the selection process of the beneficiaries in each location in the C8.4 Guideline's chapter CASE STUDIES: Interventions.

### Ág, Hungary

The eligibility criteria for taking part in the pilot project as a beneficiary were being a member of the savings group and contributing to the community treasury. Here, the local coordinators carried out personal, individual family visits among the group members to assess what was needed by whom. In the end – adapted to the types of intervention previously selected – there were 19 old windows and doors replaced in



12 households, and where this was not possible or necessary, old iron stoves in critical condition were replaced with new, better ones for 6 families in total.

### **Botevgrad, Bulgaria**

Once the storage and drying facilities for firewood were completed, the tenant families of municipal social housing had to apply for the use of the storage units: as the families were all of similar size and situation – low income, energy-poor, and disadvantaged – there were no additional criteria for approval and decision, it happened on a first-come-first-served basis; the first 15 families who applied were accepted. There was no individual needs assessment necessary in this case: uniformized look and single storage units were built next to municipally owned multi-apartment buildings.

### **Comanesti, Romania**

The beneficiaries of the interventions were families who were in the Comanesti Town Hall's database of families in need: families with low incomes who could not afford to make such an investment and cover the renovation costs on their own. The individual assessment was necessary to determine whether the existing structure was suitable for the intervention meant to be implemented. The local coordinators therefore visited more families so that in the end they could choose 30 households as beneficiaries of the project where the attic is accessible and implementation is possible.

### **Varga, Hungary**

The selection of the beneficiary families – where the heat columns were built – was based on socio-economic criteria and their participation in community works and events: among the regular participants, there was a simple call for applications, to which 4 applications were submitted to the mayor (a maximum of 5 heaters could've been built). All 4 families are low-income/unemployed and live in houses in bad condition, with low efficiency. Beyond this, there were no further interventions targeting single households in the settlement, but community ones: the setup of a rotating fund for purchasing firewood, and the building of a community storage drying facility for firewood. The whole of the community is eligible for the social firewood subsidy according to the local decree.



## Implementation process of interventions

The steps of the implementation process(es) in each pilot location are listed below.

### Ág, Hungary

#### Firewood

- purchase of firewood
- processing of firewood
- distribution of firewood (on a universal basis = all households are entitled)

#### Door/window replacement

- needs assessment
  - purchase of materials for window- and door replacement, and new wood stoves
  - installation of windows, doors, and wood stoves
  - feedback and evaluation interview on the whole process
- ⇒ continuous throughout the whole process: residential meetings (savings group), thematic forums, workshops, and events about the project, energy poverty, firewood-use, and energy efficiency

### Botevgrad, Bulgaria

#### Firewood storage and dryer

- choosing a manufacturer for the wood drying cages
- production of the single storage and drying facilities for firewood
- installation of the storage units in the designated places
- residential forum related to the installation
- production and installation of signs for every storage unit with instructions and information about the project



- organization of training and workshops for sustainable use of biomass and on energy efficiency
- 2nd round survey of residents in the target group to see if they perceived any changes in the amount of firewood used and improvements in air quality (compared to the heating season before the interventions)
- feedback and evaluation interview on the whole process

## **Comanesti, Romania**

### **Attic insulation**

- assessment of the target households
- purchase of mineral wool insulation material
- installation of attic insulation
- organization of training and workshops for sustainable use of biomass and on energy efficiency
- 2nd round survey of residents in the target group to see if they perceived any changes in the amount of firewood used and improvements in air quality (compared to the heating season before the interventions)
- feedback and evaluation interview on the whole process

## **Varga, Hungary**

### **Wood stove exchange**

- residential forum on the project and the Heat Columns
- call for applications for being a beneficiary in the wood stove exchange
- purchase of materials for the Heat Columns
- building the Heat Columns

### **Firewood storage and dryer**

- purchase of firewood



- processing of firewood
- the temporary storage of firewood established
- distribution of firewood (on a universal basis = all households are entitled)
- organizing workshops about firewood-use and energy efficiency
- securing municipal land for the community storage and drying facility for firewood
- purchase of materials for the community storage and drying facility
- construction of the community storage and drying facility
- year 2: distribution of social firewood which was dried for a season as the rotating fund enabled this

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## OUTREACH AND TARGET GROUP ENGAGEMENT

Involving residents in the implementation has played a significant role in local capacity building. It not only meant the full use of resources during the interventions, but also the empowerment of low-income, vulnerable families through education and awareness-raising, which helped to build new skills, develop new thinking and attitude towards the topic, and introduce new ways and methods of sustainable biomass use.

The following tools were used for outreach and the involvement and engagement of inhabitants during the implementation:



## Household survey

Doing a face-to-face household survey helped to build trust between the inhabitants and the implementers, and contributed to the subsequent open and willing participation of residents in the awareness-raising workshops.

## Forums and informational/educational posters

These were the means of offline promotion and outreach to present the project and the theme. There were residential forums to inform on the application process to become a beneficiary, and the workshops were announced as well. Also, posters were put up all around the pilot locations on how to dry and store the wood properly, how to use the dryer storage, and how to light the firewood correctly.

## Training and workshops for awareness-raising and attitude/behavioral change

The training and workshops focused on energy efficiency in general and the sustainable use of biomass: ways to reduce the amount of firewood used during the heating season; how to dry and store the wood properly, how to use the dryer storage, and how to light the firewood correctly. The discussions and educational events targeted not only the direct beneficiaries of the 'hard' interventions but the whole community or neighborhood. These forums were organized and held jointly by the national Habitat and WWF offices, and the local municipalities and associations. Feedback from the municipalities indicated that the workshops were very useful and effective, not only because the participants had the opportunity to learn about how the project interventions affect their lives, how they can achieve energy saving and reduce their energy costs, but also because it helped them to be more aware of their spending, analyze their household expenditure, and understand household management in general.

## Mobilization

### through local Facebook groups for community meetings, works, and events

This was the online recruitment for the workshops, community events, and works. In some pilot sites, community participation has played an important role in making someone eligible to become a beneficiary of the project. In addition, the mobilization of the inhabitants was essential in the processing and distribution of firewood.

## Community participation

### throughout the pilot implementation process

From a capacity-building perspective, beyond the knowledge transfer and attitude formation with the workshops, the greatest role was played by community building through participation in the implementation process – such as installation, construction, treasury, firewood processing, and distribution. Community effort and participation had an impact at both individual and community level: it taught new skills and fostered trust and solidarity within the community.