



Stories of Agriculture

Exploring the experiences of participants
and observers of Social Land Programmes

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Overview

Hungarian social land programmes help socially disadvantaged people with no financial means to engage with farming and to acquire the skills and resources needed in order to engage in household type agricultural activities. The land programmes support unemployed participants to produce agricultural products and acquire the competencies needed to sustain this activity. The main objective of the program is to strengthen independence, self-sufficiency and to decrease poverty by strengthening and recreating agricultural activities in rural areas.

To gather user voice on this topic we collated stories from a group of participants from various social land programmes in Hungary, and also students who had been researching and observing the programmes. Their stories provide an understanding of what the social land programmes bring to the communities in which they are run (i.e. rural), the types of agricultural activities they provide (i.e. rearing chickens) and the impact that they have had on people's lives (i.e. self-supporting).

Overcoming disadvantage and economic struggles

[Pálma](#) describes how in the village of Homrogd there are about 1000 inhabitants and around 60% of these people live in a disadvantaged situation. She describes how the local government combined the cultivation of people's own gardens with parts of the village's land. The crops produced as part of this cultivation are utilised by the families involved in the social land programme, and also shared with the community via the school and other local institutions. Moreover, unemployed people in the area participate in these activities through a public work programme, meaning that people with very little qualifications now have work and this has reduced unemployment in the area. The scenario is very similar in Magyargéc village. In his story [Imre](#), a participant and coordinator of the village's programme, describes how the programme is giving work opportunities to local people. Both [Pálma](#) and [Imre](#) talk about the social land programme in combination with a public work programme that is more widespread in the country. The public work programme is a government initiative to increase employment by instead of providing unemployment benefit, they give public work, which, in villages, is mostly agricultural work organised by the local government on their land. The social land programme, on the other hand, is done in people's own gardens and they are not paid for it. However, it does interlink with the public work programme as through the social land programme people can apply for funding for tools that can be used in the public work programme. Therefore, due to the interconnectedness of the two initiatives that support disadvantaged communities at a local level,

people generally discuss them as the same activity.

Speaking about how the social land programme specifically supports people at a local level, the [daughter](#) of the one the participants in the social land programme in Jászladány explains that whilst she doesn't know much about the programme, she does know that it saves her family money. The eggs produced by the chickens that they keep as part of the programme are used to cook with and they pass any left over onto other people. Her mother, [Zita](#), echoes this and says that *"there are always eggs and there is something to cook even at the end of the month"*. From these stories we can see how for these participants the programmes are providing routes out of poverty by providing job opportunities for people and food.

A local community approach

The vision for the social land programmes was that they would be organised 'bottom-up' and their activities designed and carried out at a local level. On a national level, the programme is organised by State Secretariat for Social Affairs and Social Integration of the Ministry of Human Resource Development. At a local level the participating municipality decrees regulate the projects.

A sense of local ownership of the programmes does come out from the most of the stories collated. [Zita](#) describes how in Jászladány over 30 families received chickens and feed as part of the programme. At their own homes they rear the chickens, using them to produce eggs and also to eat. In her story recorded with her daughter, [Zita](#), describes how in the future, *"more people will take part in it"* as it is *"quite effective"*. Similarly, [Imre](#) talks about how the expertise of local people is used to maintain the agricultural activities. In his village the local government do not have the finances available to purchase a secondary tractor that is needed due to the workload so instead they are using more traditional methods such as horses. This relies on the horsemanship skills of a Roma man who lives in the village. He takes care of the horses so that they can transport the goods from and to the fields. This 'bottom-up' approach and emphasis on community participation is similar to the social investment programme on the co-design of services in Kainuu, Finland. One of the practitioners working on this project, [Hannu](#), describes how it is important to support people so that they can look after both themselves and others in their communities.

A [student researcher](#) who has been observing the social land programmes stated that he was surprised to see the one in Panyola being successful, as the one from his own village had failed. Part of its success, is the relationship that the local people have with the Mayor. He describes how the people are on first name terms with him and the connection is closer. They refer to him as *"Zoli from the next street"* and the Mayor seems actively involved in supporting the villagers in the social land programme.

Becoming sustainable

A key aim of the social land programme was to create entrepreneurial municipalities instead of provider municipalities; in essence, creating sustainable ventures that local people are empowered to run themselves to meet their own needs rather than relying on municipality support provision. This goal is expressed in a number of the stories in this set. [Imre](#) describes how their social land programme through its combination with the public work programme is on its way to becoming self-sustaining. According to [Imre](#), the current yield from the agricultural activities is enough for the village and its institutions. They have established an animal husbandry that is currently providing meat for festivals, but if they establish a slaughterhouse they will also be able to use this meat products from it for public institutions (i.e. schools). [Pálma](#) too echoes this drive for sustainability in her story on Homrogd's social land programme.

[Click here](#) to view the extracts from these stories and [click here](#) to view the feature story.

InnoSI Themes

The social land programmes that the people in these stories talk about are a prime example of **regional and local implementation of a social investment policy**. It started as an experimental project in the 1990s, with the legal background of it being created with Act III 1993 Section 47. Local governments must formulate a decree outlining how the programme will work locally before being able to set it up in their area, and then families must sign contracts in order to receive the benefits provided by the programme. The stories of [Imre](#), [Zita](#) and her [daughter](#) all outline these benefits of the programmes at a local level, which include employment, food, opportunities and subsidies. Furthermore, many of the stories, such as [Zsolt's](#) recollection of the participation of the local Mayor and [Imre's](#) account of how local people's knowledge and skills are at the heart of what they are doing, suggest that there is real localised implementation and backing for this national programme. Through interlinking this initiative to the more widespread public work programme, communities are using agriculture as a means to alleviate poverty.

Summary of Insights

-  **Responding to People's Needs:** It is important that social investment programmes are designed in accordance to people's needs. The issues facing the rural communities in these stories (i.e. poverty and unemployment) are being addressed by the programme's agricultural activities.
-  **Empowering People:** From these stories a sense of local ownership of the initiative comes through. People are empowered to cultivate their own land to provide for the community.