

# TRANSFORMING FOOD SYSTEMS



20 ANI   
ÎN ROMÂNIA

## AND LOCAL ECONOMIES FOR NATURE AND PEOPLE



# FOREWORD



**Orieta Hulea**

CEO, WWF Romania



*At WWF-Romania, we have learned that lasting conservation is built where people, nature, and local economies truly work together.*

*Over the past 20 years we have passionately endeavoured to reconnect food systems with local producers, bring science and farmers closer in the face of climate change and biodiversity loss, elevate pollinators onto the national agenda, and demonstrate that public food, education, and local development can all serve both people and nature.*

*We have partnered with local communities to turn biodiversity and cultural heritage into viable economic opportunities, while piloting and advocating for innovative ways which reward those who care for our landscapes and ecosystems, and investing in a new generation of engaged citizens.*

*Yet, these achievements also reveal the scale of chronic challenges: fragmented and inadequate policies, limited institutional capacity, fragile local economies, unequal access to development opportunities, to markets and knowledge, all of which continue to slow systemic change. Our task is to move from promising pilots to nationwide transformation, to come closer to the mission we believe in – build a future in which people live in harmony with nature.*

*We look ahead with determination and hope - to replicate and scale what works, to strengthen partnerships in the agrifood sector and across sectors, and to embed sustainability and diversity into the food system which shapes our everyday life and heavily influences the health of the ecosystems we depend on for our own wellbeing.*

“

*Our ambition is clear: a country where farmers, consumers, youth, local communities, civil society and institutions work better together and have the means, capacities and motivation to protect and restore nature while building a more fair, inclusive, diverse, and healthy food system for generations to come.*



# CONTEXT

Romania's rural and urban communities are deeply connected to nature through the way food is produced, distributed, and consumed, but also through traditions, education, and everyday practices that shape how people use and value natural resources and landscapes. From school meals and public procurement to farming practices, pollinators, local markets in rural areas and in towns/cities, activities in schools and communities, ecotourism destinations - these systems and practices influence both how nature is managed and how people relate to it.

Over the past two decades, Romania has faced persistent gaps in this area: food procurement systems driven by the lowest price, limited links between public institutions and local producers, insufficient environmental education, weak support for small rural entrepreneurs, shrinkage of access to market for small and local producers and a similar shrinkage of access to local and sustainable products for consumers, declining pollinator populations due to the intensification of farming practices and the loss of small and traditional farms, and inadequate mechanisms for rewarding communities and producers that maintain healthy landscapes with High Nature Value.

In this context, WWF-Romania has worked to identify the natural values and community practices that gave rise to a lifestyle in harmony with nature and to build together with local communities opportunities and frameworks in which they can be capitalised on in the modern era, taking into account political and economic pressures and threats, as well as unaddressed needs at the local level - all of which are capable of eroding natural heritage, social cohesion and civic engagement.

Rather than isolated interventions, the focus has been on piloting solutions with a high potential of generating meaningful improvements in public policies, market opportunities and consumption patterns, development directions at local level, as well as attitudes, behaviours and the way in which communities generate value from managing natural resources and landscapes responsibly.

The common thread is simple: conservation becomes stronger when people understand its value, benefit from it fairly, and are motivated and empowered to act.



# WWF'S ROLE IN THIS JOURNEY



WWF-Romania has acted as a bridge between nature conservation and the systems that shape everyday life: food, education, local economies, and civic participation.

**WWF contributes by:**

- conducting research and promoting public policies and practical models that can make food systems healthier, more local, and more sustainable
- connecting public authorities with local producers and community actors, and raising their capacity to and willingness to actively collaborate to sustain local economies and sustainable practices
- raising awareness and mobilising citizens and different segments of society around biodiversity, pollinators, and responsible consumption
- developing education tools that help teachers and young people understand, act for nature, and take part in growing healthier consumption patterns
- raising and channeling the voices of the unheard (e.g. youth, small farmers) amongst policy and decision makers
- supporting nature-based local economies that create value from protecting landscapes
- testing financial and community-based mechanisms that reward stewardship and support sustainable livelihoods in rural areas

WWF's role has been to help embed sustainability into systems and decision-making processes, from how public institutions procure food, to how non-formal education is delivered, how local economies function, and how communities manage and benefit from natural resources.

# HOW WE ACT



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## WWF-ROMANIA ADVANCES FOOD SYSTEMS AND LOCAL ECONOMIES BY:

### **1** TRANSFORMING PUBLIC FOOD PROCUREMENT POLICIES AT NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL

Supporting authorities to move from lowest-price food purchasing toward quality-price criteria that value local, certified, seasonal, and short-chain products.

### **2** ENABLING INSTITUTIONS AND PRODUCERS TO ACT AT LOCAL LEVEL

Building the capacity of public institutions and producers to use green procurement criteria and access public food systems effectively.

### **3 MOBILISING ACTION FOR POLLINATOR RECOVERY**

Bringing together civil society, researchers, beekeepers, youth organizations, companies and citizens to advocate for integrated action on pollinator decline, while already taking steps to enhance pollinator protection on the ground (e.g. conducting research on pesticides, creating pollinator-friendly habitats, raising awareness about the connection between pollinators and food, advocating for better policies in the farming sector).

### **4 EMBEDDING SUSTAINABILITY AND NURTURING THE MOTIVATION TO ACT IN EDUCATION SYSTEMS**

Developing curricula, teaching resources, youth clubs in biodiversity-rich areas, and practical learning experiences that connect children and teachers with nature and active citizenship.

### **5 GROWING NATURE-BASED LOCAL ECONOMIES**

Supporting and working alongside communities and local partners to develop products, services, and initiatives rooted in biodiversity,

cultural heritage, and sustainable resource use, and directly investing in ecotourism infrastructures and services in biodiversity-rich areas.

### **6 PILOTING INCENTIVES FOR NATURE STEWARDSHIP**

Piloting Payments for Ecosystem Services and community funds that link beneficiaries of ecosystem services with those who maintain them.

### **7 ADVOCATING FOR MORE DIVERSE FOOD ENVIRONMENTS IN TOWNS AND CITIES AND MORE THOUGHTFUL CONSUMPTION DECISIONS**

Campaigning and proposing policies to support food environments that make local and sustainable products more accessible to consumers, while engaging with consumers to support healthier and more thoughtful consumption patterns.

### **8 INFLUENCING FARMING POLICIES AT NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN LEVEL**

Conducting research, working together with different stakeholders and networks of specialists to build and propose policies/policy measures in the food and farming sector which support the transition to a more healthy and fair food system.



# MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS



# 1 FARMERS AND SCIENCE ALIGNED TO DISCUSS THE URGENT NEED FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE IN FOOD SYSTEMS, BUILDING ON YEARS OF POLICY PROPOSALS AND PROJECTS FOR HIGH NATURE VALUE FARMING AND SMALL PRODUCERS

Farmers engaged with climatologists, researchers, and authorities to co-develop solutions for climate adaptation and food security

## 1.A INITIAL CONTEXT

Romanian farmers are increasingly exposed to climate risks such as droughts, heatwaves, and changing precipitation patterns, with direct impacts on yields, soil quality, and farm income. Recent consultations and survey insights show that a large majority of farmers already experience climate impacts, while many report limited access to tailored information, advisory services, and practical adaptation tools.

At the same time, there is a clear gap between scientific knowledge and on-the-ground practice. Farmers often rely on fragmented information, while research and policy-making processes do not sufficiently integrate farmers' realities, constraints, and local knowledge, especially when it comes to small, local farmers. This limits the adoption of climate-resilient practices and weakens the overall resilience of food production systems.

The increasing vulnerability in the face of climate change occurs after years of gradual biodiversity degradation on farmlands and unfair subsidies as the Common Agricultural Policy and its national transposition has stimulated intensive practices, large farms and land consolidation, dangerous landscape simplification, while failing to develop and offer a rigorous, widely-available knowledge and capacity-building service to help farmers (irrespective of size) understand and integrate biodiversity and ecosystem services in their production activities.

## 1.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

Building on years of science-based, actionable policy proposals and advocacy for the integration and protection of biodiversity, High Nature Value farming practices and small producers in the agricultural policy at national and European level, WWF-Romania teamed up with the National Meteorological Administration and worked to bridge the gap between science and action in the face of new climate challenges. We started by creating a first structured, inclusive and informed dialogue between farmers, scientists, and public authorities, positioning farmers as key actors in shaping solutions.

### The approach focused on:

- connecting farmers with climatologists, researchers, and public institutions
- translating scientific knowledge into practical, locally relevant insights
- capturing farmers' perspectives to inform policy and research agendas
- creating a shared understanding of risks, needs, and opportunities across stakeholders



## 1.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

WWF facilitated dialogue processes and consultations that brought together farmers and experts to better understand climate risks and co-develop responses, taking into account the problematic background where biodiversity loss on farmlands and market-related constrictions are already eroding farm viability.

### Key results and learnings include:

- **improved understanding of climate risks and adaptation options** through nature-based solutions among participants, but persistent knowledge and support gaps confirmed with each interaction
- **strong interest from farmers in adopting more resilient practices**, combined with a clear identification of barriers such as costs, access to knowledge and advisory services, and administrative complexity
- **better alignment needed between science, policy, and agricultural practice**, with farmers' perspectives (especially those of small and family farmers) to be much better reflected in discussions on food security, economic viability, market access and climate adaptation
- **recognition of the need for integrated and inclusive solutions**, linking climate adaptation with soil health, water management, biodiversity, and long-term farm viability
- **High Nature Value farmlands and farming practices still benefitting from public subsidies**, but issues with policy design regarding the eligible area, **while other measures for the recovery and protection of biodiversity and ecosystem services on farms still very weak and insufficient** for the current and future climate challenges
- **small producers still regarded as a weakness** in policy-making, in the agriculture sector



Our efforts over the years contributed to strengthening the foundations for a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable food system, while highlighting the importance of farmer-centred approaches in climate and biodiversity policy and practice.

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## 1.D NEXT STEPS

The next phases will focus on maintaining an active dialogue with farmers on the ground, channeling their needs and strengths into policy discussions, while moving to implementation and scaling.

### Key priorities include:

- growing the understanding of the positive effects of healthy biodiversity on agricultural lands and agricultural production, amongst farmers
- supporting the uptake and mainstreaming of climate-resilient and biodiversity-friendly farming practices tailored to local conditions
- maintaining and consolidating the public support for High Nature Value Farmlands and small and family producers, while enhancing market access and opportunities for this segment
- improving access to advisory services, tools, and fair financing for farmers, especially amongst small and family farms
- integrating farmer knowledge and needs, especially those of small and family farmers, more systematically into national climate and agricultural policies
- strengthening the collaboration between research, public institutions, and agricultural communities

The long-term vision is a food system where farmers are equipped, supported, and incentivised to adapt to climate change while maintaining productivity, protecting biodiversity, and ensuring long-term resilience.



## 2 POLLINATORS GAINED PUBLIC VISIBILITY AND POLICY TRACTION IN ROMANIA

An integrated initiative connected science, citizens, youth, experts, and policy

### 2.A INITIAL CONTEXT

Despite their critical role in food production and ecosystem health, pollinators in Romania have faced increasing pressures from pesticide use, habitat loss, and lack of coordinated policy action. There is no integrated national approach to pollinator conservation, and public awareness remained limited, often focused only on honeybees. The next priority is moving from legislative opportunities and improvements already made to wide practical implementation at local level.

### 2.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

**The approach focused on:**

- building a broad coalition across civil society, research, and agriculture
- generating scientific evidence on pollinator status and risks
- mobilising citizens, including youth around pollinator protection
- engaging policymakers to open a science-based dialogue on proposed integrated solutions targeting pollinator species in need of protection in Romania (“umbrella-species”)



## 2.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

WWF's work on pollinators mobilised citizens, experts, and institutions around the need for a national action plan on this issue aligned with the EU New Deal for Pollinators.

### Key results include:

- **mobilising public support and awareness**, including a national petition with over 14,000 signatures and 5,000 messages calling for political action
- **establishing the first coordinated civil society platform on pollinators**, bringing together organisations and experts across research, agriculture, and biodiversity
- **generating new scientific evidence**, including field research detecting illegal pesticide use and identifying priority species for conservation
- **opening a policy dialogue at central level**, including the first government roundtables on pollinators hosted by the Department for Sustainable Development within the Romanian Government
- **engaging young people** and civil society through initiatives such as the Youth Manifesto for Pollinators

Since 2025, WWF has also started developing local partnerships in Bucharest to **create pollinator habitats together with companies and grassroots organizations**, connecting local action with European policy priorities such as the New Deal for Pollinators, the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, and the Nature Restoration Law. The first pilot intervention took place in the garden of the Museum of Maps in Bucharest, a green space of around 400 m<sup>2</sup> cared for by Club Clorofila, where existing perennial plants were reorganised and complemented with over 50 additional perennial plants and 135 spring bulbs with ecological value for pollinators.



All these efforts have contributed to building the foundations for a more integrated national approach to pollinator conservation, combining science, public engagement, policy dialogue, and local habitat creation.

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## 2.D NEXT STEPS

The next phase focuses on turning public mobilisation and evidence into policy and practical action.

### Key priorities include:

- continuing advocacy for a science-based and integrated national action plan for pollinators
- expanding research on pesticide presence in the environment through pollen sampling
- developing citizen engagement and citizen science initiatives
- expanding pollinator-friendly planting initiatives in Bucharest and other urban areas, through local partnerships that can gradually form a connected network of habitats for different pollinator species
- launching digital tools that connect plants, pollinators, food and citizen action
- maintaining a multidisciplinary civil society platform able to support research, advocacy, monitoring, and institutional dialogue



The long-term vision is an integrated national approach to pollinator conservation, addressing agriculture, pesticides, urban green spaces, research, education, and public participation.

# 3 GREEN PUBLIC FOOD PROCUREMENT HELPED SHIFT PUBLIC FOOD SYSTEMS TOWARD QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Quality-price criteria introduced for school food, benefiting children, producers, and communities

## 3.A INITIAL CONTEXT

Public food procurement in Romania has traditionally been dominated by the lowest-price criterion. In programmes such as the School Programme (“Milk and bun”) or Healthy Meal, in hospitals, military facilities, social canteens etc., public institutions often favoured food that was not adapted to local and seasonal realities, transported over long distances, of questionable quality, and associated with unnecessary packaging and plastic waste.

Although European guidance on green public procurement had existed for years, implementation in Romania remained limited. Public authorities often lacked confidence, practical tools, and examples, while local producers were not aware of this market or faced barriers in accessing public contracts.



## 3.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

WWF-Romania worked to demonstrate that public food procurement can support healthier diets, local producers, short supply chains, and eventually a more sustainable food system.

### The approach focused on:

- shifting procurement criteria from lowest price toward quality-price evaluation in the national School Programme
- supporting local authorities in designing practical green criteria
- training both contracting authorities and food suppliers
- using local pilots to inform national-level policy changes, including the first National Plan for Ecological Procurement (2025-2030)

WWF worked with partners including Braşov Municipality, Braşov Metropolitan Agency, BioCarpathia Cooperative, Sibiu County Council, and Sibiu Municipality to build capacity and test and scale practical solutions.



## 3.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

**Braşov became the first city in Romania to take over the School Program from the County Council and introduce quality-price criteria for food procurement. The criteria included:**

- at least 10% certified organic products
- at least 30% of products from local producers, farmers, cooperatives, or associations
- at least 10% of products supplied through short distribution chains

This enabled, for the first time, a local producer with high-quality certified organic dairy products (BioCarpathia Cooperative) to access the programme.

In the 2021–2022 school year, more than 22,200 children in Braşov received better food: healthier for children, better for nature, and more supportive of local communities.

In 2023, Braşov also introduced educational measures linked to food awareness. Children from public and accredited private schools and kindergartens were invited to visit the farms supplying food through the School Programme, with around 5,000 children benefiting from these educational activities.

At national level, the Ministry of Agriculture adopted the quality-price ratio in the standard documentation for the School Programme and introduced quality criteria related to food certification schemes and supply chains. This change has a potential impact on more than 1.9 million beneficiaries every school year.

WWF also delivered specialised training for almost 200 public officials and food producers in Braşov and Sibiu counties, with overwhelming positive feedback. Awareness efforts reached more than 24,000 people so far, while around 2,000 people interacted online with WWF on this topic, proving that food served via public institutions is of high relevance for the public.

## 3.D NEXT STEPS

The next priority is moving from legislative opportunities and improvements already made to wide practical implementation at local level.

### Key directions include:

- supporting public authorities to apply green food procurement criteria with confidence
- helping local producers understand and access public procurement systems
- creating opportunities where contracting authorities and suppliers can meet, learn, and solve practical barriers together
- further improving national guidance and legislation through consultation with institutions, NGOs, producers, researchers, and local businesses

Despite progress, major barriers still need to be solved - limited implementation capacity, institutional reluctance, complex procedures, insufficient budgets, packaging and other regulatory requirements and discrepancies that discourage and deter local producers, and a gap between new green targets and market readiness.



The long-term vision is a public food system that supports children's and vulnerable groups' health, local economies, responsible farming, and lower environmental impact.

# 4 NATURE-BASED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT LINKED CONSERVATION WITH COMMUNITY VALUE

Local initiatives demonstrated how conservation can support sustainable livelihoods and community value

## 4.A INITIAL CONTEXT

Rural areas in Romania often face economic decline, outmigration, and limited opportunities for education, professional development and income diversification. At the same time, many of these areas host some of the country's most valuable biodiversity and cultural heritage, maintained through traditional land use practices such as small-scale farming, pastoralism, handicrafts, and traditional forestry.

Despite this, there has been a persistent disconnect between conservation, local food production, and economic realities. Small-scale producers and rural communities maintaining biodiversity-rich areas have not (consistently and predictably) benefited from the value they generate, including through food production, traditional practices, and ecosystem services. Policy and financing frameworks have provided limited support for local food economies and nature-based livelihoods. As a result, conservation has often been perceived as a constraint rather than an opportunity, and younger generations have had few incentives and almost no support to remain, farm, grow a small business or invest in these areas.



## 4.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

WWF supported and co-developed practical models that connect conservation with local economic value, including local economic initiatives (such as ecotourism), local product networks, community partnerships, and nature-based entrepreneurship.

### The approach focused on:

- building long-term partnerships between protected area managers, local authorities, NGOs, and local entrepreneurs
- developing eco-destination strategies rooted in biodiversity and cultural heritage
- supporting local value chains (food, crafts, tourism services)
- creating local governance structures and shared brands
- investing in local ecotourism infrastructures
- linking conservation initiatives (e.g. species recovery - bison, habitat protection) with economic opportunities



## 4.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

Across these initiatives, WWF worked not only on individual projects, but on building functioning local systems, connecting actors, creating shared standards, and linking conservation with viable economic opportunities.

### Key results include:

- **Designation of nature-based destinations:** official recognition of EcoMaramureş (2014) and Transylvanian Highlands (2022), establishing long-term frameworks for sustainable development in large, protected landscapes
- **Local systems and partnerships:** durable collaborations between protected area administrations, local authorities, NGOs, and entrepreneurs to manage destinations and maintain biodiversity, cultural heritage, and local identity
- **Investments for sustainable economic diversification:** landscape observatories, tourism information centres, over 500 km of biking and walking trails developed and maintained, alongside a growing local ecotourism network (80+ members) supporting services, products, and experiences rooted in nature and culture
- **Local brands and governance:** creation and registration of the “Colinele Transilvaniei” brand and contribution to the establishment of a local association to manage the destination and its standards; creation of brands for local food products
- **Community-based economic models:** initiatives such as WeWilder, demonstrating how conservation actions (e.g. bison reintroduction) can anchor and revive local economies, generating income, jobs, and new partnerships with local producers
- **Public engagement and awareness:** initiatives such as travelling nature exhibitions in rural communities or the Danube Caravan (2015) which reached multiple river communities, engaging residents through interactive education and helping build support for nature protection and ecological restoration


These efforts helped reposition conservation as a driver of local development, showing that biodiversity, landscapes, and cultural heritage can generate tangible value. At the same time, they revealed structural limitations, particularly weak governance, fragile financing, and policy environments that do not yet fully support community-based economic models.

## 4.D NEXT STEPS

The next phase focuses on consolidating and scaling these models beyond pilot areas.

### Key priorities include:

- strengthening long-term governance and financing mechanisms for eco-destination management
- supporting local entrepreneurs, producers, and service providers to grow within sustainable frameworks
- improving policy and legislative conditions for rural economies based on natural and cultural assets
- ensuring that tourism and local development remain within ecological limits and do not lead to overexploitation



The long-term vision is rural landscapes where nature conservation, local identity, and economic opportunity reinforce each other, creating vibrant communities rooted in nature.

# 5 PAYMENTS FOR ECOSYSTEM SERVICES DEMONSTRATED INNOVATIVE FINANCING MODELS FOR CONSERVATION

Early schemes tested how nature's benefits can be recognised and supported by those who depend on them

## 5.A INITIAL CONTEXT

Conservation efforts often lack sustainable financing mechanisms that reward communities and land managers for nature-positive stewardship. Although Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) and other sustainable financing schemes had gained increasing attention internationally, Romania had no practical experience in applying them in rural landscapes, protected areas, or water-related ecosystems. There was also growing interest in integrated river basin management, but few financing mechanisms to support implementation on the ground.



## 5.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

WWF piloted PES to link ecosystem benefits with financial incentives, while testing how relationships could be built between those who maintain ecosystem services and those who benefit from them.

### The approach focused on:

- demonstrating PES mechanisms in different local contexts, including wetlands, protected areas, and community landscapes
- building trust between ecosystem service providers and beneficiaries
- connecting conservation with local development and livelihood opportunities
- placing innovative conservation finance on the institutional agenda and building awareness amongst policy-makers
- using pilot results to inform future scaling through national programmes and financial actors



## 5.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

WWF piloted the first Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes in Romania, demonstrating how ecosystem benefits can be linked to financial incentives.

### Key results include:

- **implementation of the first PES scheme in a Romanian fish farm**, at Ciocănești in Călărași county, linking sustainable aquaculture measures with bird conservation in a Natura 2000 site while maintaining economic activity
- **development of a local conservation fund in Historic Maramureș**, supported by local operators and citizens, **financing initiatives such as the “Poteca de povești” thematic trail in Pădurea Crăiască**, built with local craftspeople and young people
- **facilitation of relationships between ecosystem service providers (local communities, land managers, protected area actors) and beneficiaries (businesses, visitors, users of ecosystem services)**
- **international recognition of the Maramureș PES scheme** as a good practice example for valuing protected areas and biodiversity finance
- **increased recognition of ecosystem services as valuable economic assets** within policy and public discourse



These pilots showed that local communities can be rewarded for maintaining ecosystems, while also highlighting the complexity of scaling such mechanisms.

## 5.D NEXT STEPS

The next step is moving from pilots to more stable financing frameworks.

### Key priorities include:

- promoting PES and nature-based financing mechanisms at national level
- involving government institutions and financial actors in scaling conservation finance
- building on lessons from local pilots to design practical, stable and credible financing programmes
- strengthening legal, administrative, financial, social feasibility for future schemes
- supporting long-term relationships between ecosystem service providers and beneficiaries

The long-term vision is a system in which nature stewardship is recognised, financed, and shared fairly between those who maintain ecosystem services and those who benefit from them.

# 6 ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION HELPED EMBED SUSTAINABILITY AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

Education tools and youth programmes supported active citizenship for nature

## 6.A INITIAL CONTEXT

Environmental education in Romania has been uneven and fragmented, largely project-based, and weakly integrated into the formal education system. Teachers often lack practical tools, training, and confidence to address complex topics such as biodiversity, climate, food systems, and sustainable consumption. At the same time, students had limited opportunities to connect learning with real-life action in their communities.

This resulted in low environmental awareness translated into a passive attitude, and a gap between knowledge and action particularly in relation to everyday choices linked to food, waste, resource use, and civic participation for community wellbeing.



## 6.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

WWF-Romania worked to move environmental education from isolated activities to more structured and scalable approaches, linking knowledge with action.

### The approach focused on:

- developing curricula and practical teaching resources aligned with education for sustainable development
- training and supporting teachers as multipliers of change
- combining classroom learning with experiential and outdoor activities
- creating youth programmes that enable sustained participation, initiative, and local action
- linking education with broader themes such as food systems, biodiversity, and climate
- contributing to policy dialogue and national initiatives to strengthen environmental education integration



## 6.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

WWF's work on environmental education has contributed to building a generation of teachers, students, and young citizens better equipped to understand and act for nature.

### Key results include:

- **System-level education programmes:** development and implementation of the “Școli verzi” programme, reaching 120+ classes across 41 counties, with 1,200+ teachers trained and 1,500+ students engaged, alongside widely used digital learning materials
- **Integration into national education processes:** contribution to national initiatives such as “Green week” as well as participation in climate education working groups, helping bring environmental topics closer to mainstream education
- **Teacher capacity and multiplier effect:** training programmes and resources enabled teachers to integrate biodiversity, food systems, and sustainability into everyday teaching, both in classrooms and outdoor settings
- **Diverse learning formats and outreach:** educational kits (e.g. Black Sea Book), youth clubs for wild nature, international programmes (ESFALP), and hands-on initiatives connected students with real environmental issues across regions
- **Creative and accessible tools for nature discovery:** the comic book series “Beyond the horizon” translated biodiversity, rural life, and conservation into accessible narratives and discovery routes in biodiversity and culturally-rich areas (Transylvanian Highlands, Southwestern Carpathians, and Historical Maramureș)
- **Youth engagement and civic action:** programmes such as Zero Plastic Patrol, climate youth initiatives, and local action projects enabled young people to design and implement relevant solutions in their communities

These efforts helped move environmental education from awareness to action within a coherent, sustained setting, creating stronger links between knowledge, behaviour, and community engagement, including everyday choices related to food, consumption, nature protection and resource use.

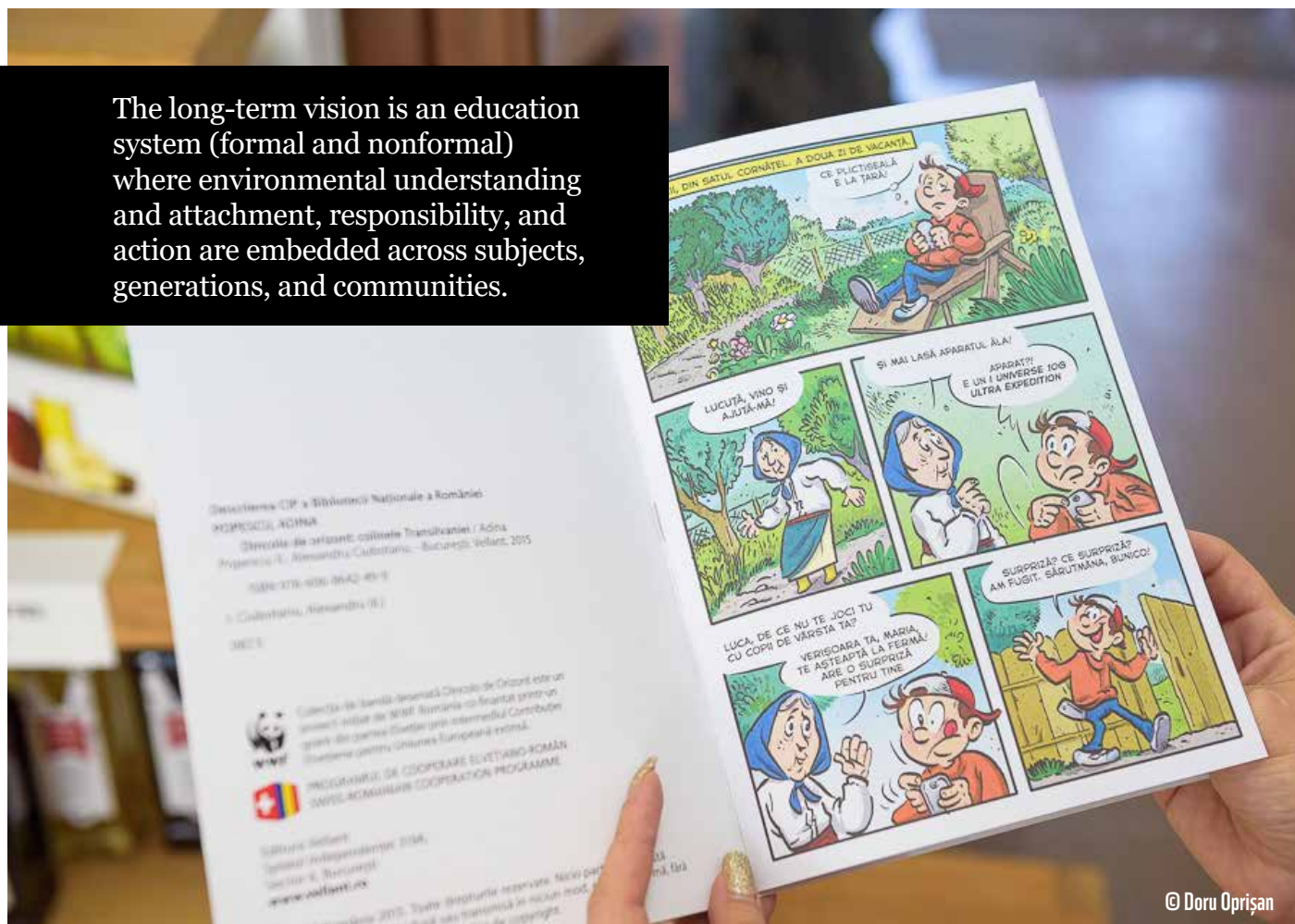
## 6.D NEXT STEPS

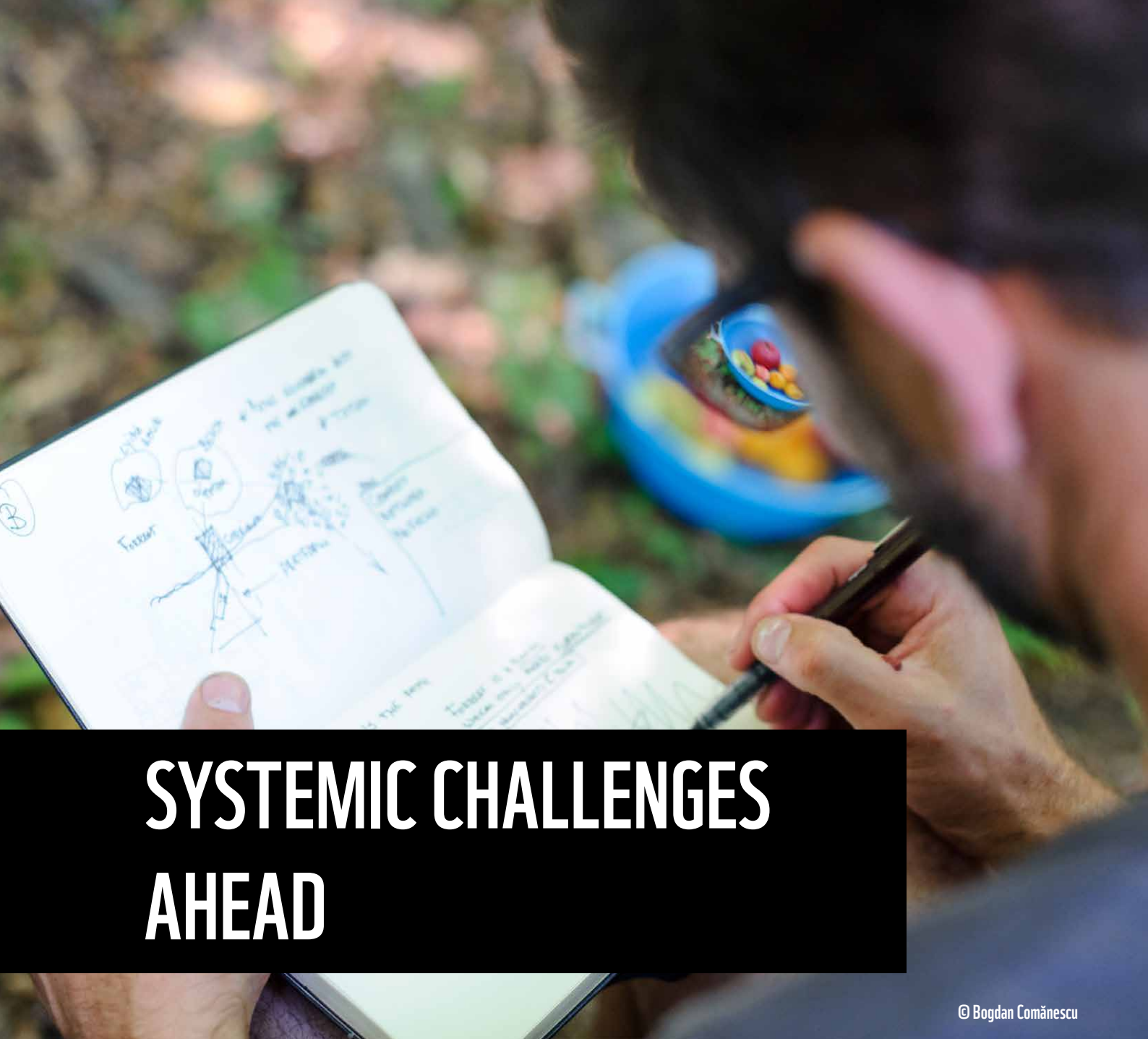
The next phase focuses on moving from successful programmes to systemic integration and long-term impact.

### Key priorities include:

- strengthening teacher training systems to ensure continuous capacity building and support
- expanding experiential and community-based learning opportunities that connect students with real-world environmental challenges
- linking education more strongly with food systems, consumption choices, and local community action
- reinforcing collaboration between education institutions, NGOs, and public authorities to sustain and scale impact
- expanding the comic book series "Beyond the horizon" into new areas rich in biodiversity and traditions (Danube Delta, Apuseni Mountains)

The long-term vision is an education system (formal and nonformal) where environmental understanding and attachment, responsibility, and action are embedded across subjects, generations, and communities.





# SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES AHEAD

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Despite tangible progress at pilot and local levels, structural constraints in Romania continue to limit scaling and system-wide impact:

- limited administrative capacity and uneven uptake of sustainable public food procurement within municipalities, schools, and hospitals, despite enabling EU frameworks
- structural and market barriers facing Romania's predominantly small-scale farmers, constraining their participation in short value chains and public or commercial markets
- the shrinking of short value chains (due to institutional inaction and the growing dominance of long food chains and large retail systems competing on price) generating issues with market access for local and small producers and making it harder for consumers to find local products
- the absence of a coherent national approach to pollinator protection, with weak and fragmented measures across agriculture, pesticides regulation, urban green spaces management and nature conservation policies

- fragile local governance arrangements and insufficient long-term financing for nature-based rural economies, particularly in High Nature Value and Natura 2000 areas
- early-stage development and limited institutionalisation of new conservation finance tools, including Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), within national financing frameworks
- uneven integration of environmental education, food literacy, and behaviour change across formal education, public awareness programmes, and community initiatives

Taken together, these challenges demonstrate that transformational change in Romania depends on aligning national and EU policies with local delivery capacity, strengthening institutions, securing predictable financing, and embedding long-term partnerships at territorial level, based on the principles of inclusion, transparency, equity, and responsibility towards future generations.

# LOOKING AHEAD



Building on proven local solutions and long-standing partnerships, WWF will focus on connecting policy reform with on-the-ground implementation to achieve systemic change across Romania.

## KEY STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS INCLUDE:

### **1 SCALING GREEN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT**

Strengthening implementation of sustainable procurement in public institutions and linking demand from schools, hospitals, and social services with Romanian producers applying sustainable practices

### **2 EMBEDDING POLLINATOR PROTECTION INTO AGRICULTURE AND NATIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORKS**

Advancing pesticide reduction, habitat protection and re-creation, and agri-environment schemes aligned with EU CAP and biodiversity objectives

### **3 SUPPORTING SMALL-SCALE PRODUCERS AND STRENGTHENING LOCAL/SHORT VALUE CHAINS**

Improving farm-level practices, product quality and differentiation, collective organization, and access to stable markets, while testing the New European Bauhaus principles for urban food environments transformation

### **4 CONSOLIDATING NATURE-BASED LOCAL ECONOMIES AND GOVERNANCE**

Reinforcing local rural economies, community leadership, and territorial governance models that integrate conservation with rural development

### **5 SCALING FINANCING MECHANISMS FOR NATURE STEWARDSHIP**

Expanding PES and complementary incentives, and embedding them within national policy, Common Agricultural Policy instruments, and private-sector engagement

### **6 INTEGRATING EDUCATION, BEHAVIOUR, AND CONSUMPTION CHOICES**

Linking environmental education and food literacy to everyday consumption, health, and community action across urban and rural Romania

# OUR PARTNERS IN THIS JOURNEY

In these 20 years of activity, we have had reliable partners from organisations and public institutions, to whom we thank for the passion and knowledge they put at the service of the common good, for the trust and openness to working together.

## **Among them, we mention:**

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