Supporting better quality of life for the citizens of BiH

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Sweden has been in Bosnia and Herzegovina ever since the mid-1990s, contributing 1 billion BAM over the years in many sectors through various projects and priority areas. The motivation behind Swedish engagement is to contribute to social and economic development of the country, provide better quality of life and better future for the people and prepare BiH for a future in the EU.

“Strengthening the Role of Local Communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina” is just one of many initiatives through which Sweden supports political leadership and institutions at the local level, as well as the engagement of civil society and citizens themselves, particularly focusing on encouraging equal participation of women.

Working at the local level is crucial because municipalities and local communities are of vital importance for service delivery, and socio-economic development, and this project encourages more efficient and responsive local governance, and ultimately a better quality of services for the citizens.

“All levels of politics and public institutions are there for the citizens and not the opposite.”

Democratic participation and civic activism are of fundamental importance in this process, but many citizens in this country do not see the possibility of inclusion and ability to influence their political and social environment, which creates further social apathy. It is vital for everyone to be able to express their views, and if citizens are not finding it useful to contribute to their society in this way, they choose to migrate or not to take part in the elections, and media is often not really picking up views from the citizens, which creates further obstacles for democracy and development.

In addition to civic engagement and participation, Sweden also contributes to economic and social entrepreneurship at the local level. Civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina receives support either through organisations like UNDP or directly from Swedish civil society organisations. Swedish government also encourages business entrepreneurship, in order to create a decent environment in this country, through initiatives such as Challenge to Change fund, which gives support to 125 entrepreneurs over 3 years.

Bosnian diaspora in Sweden has been very successful and well integrated, showing a strong potential for entrepreneurship and setting a clear example that development in this country is possible. What is lacking for that potential to be expressed here is the welcoming and supportive environment, in terms of business climate and political reforms. Corruption also plays a role as an obstacle for investments and further development, and strong political leadership, commitment and willingness to take responsibility are needed to tackle this issue.

Besides for supporting democratic, social and economic advancement of society, promotion of gender equality and EU integration process remain to be cross-cutting themes in Swedish engagement strategy in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Gender is an important topic for the Swedish government because this is an issue of human rights, but it is also an issue of smart and sustainable management of societies, because an equal society provides many opportunities for all citizens.

The continued focus of development support will be on the rule of law, including public administration, development of economic integration and development including agriculture and entrepreneurship, and environment and climate, with most recent focus on air quality.

Air pollution has become particularly concerning, as the WHO has found that every fourth death in BiH is caused by air pollution, contributing to some 8.000 deaths annually. Swedish Environment Protection Agency has recently started to work with the authorities here to raise the awareness of the issue, contribute to capacity building and make it a political priority for the future.
**MZs IN FIGURES**
Since the launch of the project:

- Around 7,761 citizens attended 336 forums
- In total 166 MZs from 84 LGs across the BiH were consulted, together with representatives of CSOs, academia, representatives of economic sector and the media, to develop four potential models of local community action in BiH
- 3 international study visits to Sweden, Croatia and Serbia were organized in 2016 with 157 participants
- 132 MZs were provided with IT equipment
- 19 Community Hubs were opened in partner LGs
- 218 MZ projects were approved out of which 112 were completed by the end of 2017 and 106 are currently under implementation
- 69 CSO projects were approved of which 23 were implemented by the end of 2017 and 43 are ongoing
- 49 finalist from 18 LGs took part in Hack4MZ “How to hack your MZ” events
- 4 Hack4MZ workshop on “Crowdfunding and Crowdsourcing Campaigns for Your Idea?”, attended by 100 people
- 6 motivational leadership events were organised for 200 participants
- 4 motivational hours of women entrepreneurship organized and attended by 61 people
- 4 workshops were held on “Creating content, mapping talents and managing a community hub” with 26 participants
- 26 people attended 4 workshops on “Management of Community Hubs”
- 6 Start-up Days were organised in Sarajevo, Tešanj, Zenica, Ljubuški, Banja Luka and Bijeljina, resulting in eight start-up projects currently being implemented in different partner LGs
- 12 people participated in the three-day event Sarajevo Unlimited and presented their start-up ideas
- 6 “Meet & Match” monitoring sessions visiting 6 companies were organized for 20 participants of start-up events
- Different training modules and seminars gathered over 4,100 participants

**WHAT NEXT FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES - MZs?**

Although Sweden is strongly committed to supporting these priorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the good of its citizens, the role of Swedish government is not to compensate for bad management, but to work in partnership with national and local authorities and contribute in the areas where there is strong local ownership.

Sustainable progress requires political commitment and collaboration of different bodies at all levels, which depend only on the political willingness to constructively work together. We do often see very committed politicians particularly at the local level, as is the case with this project, and we are very happy to work with them and support them to create better living conditions in their communities.

The project “Strengthening the Role of Local Communities - MZ in BiH” will continue to promote civic activism and the active role of women and youth in communities, support projects of local communities - MZs and civil society organizations, and encourage cross-community networking across BiH. The plan is to expand work with institutions and partners, which will assume a more active role in networking and transfer of knowledge and tools.

A project vision, based on citizens’ wishes and priorities, has been defined and verified, and now it represents an agreed model for future project activities. Legal analysis and recommendations have been finalized, and they will serve as the basis for changing the legal framework. The finalization of local community - MZ methodology and the preparation of good practices are ongoing, and they will be useful tools for all the partner local self-governance units.

Promotion of project activities, public discussions, exchange of experiences and fundraising at community level will be done through the web platform [www.mjesnazajednica.ba](http://www.mjesnazajednica.ba), which officially started in February 2018. The platform will be an online tool for citizen engagement online and will enable local communities - MZs and citizens to have better networking and tracking of project activities across all partner communities.

“The Association of Municipalities and Cities of FBiH has supported the project “Strengthening the Role of Local Communities - MZ in BiH” from the very start, and we are particularly pleased that we will be more actively involved in implementation of certain components this year and contribute to the overall success of the project”, Vesna Travljanin, the Director of the Association of Municipalities and Cities of FBiH.
Support to Democratic Participation and Activism

CITIZENS’ FORUMS AND PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING AT LOCAL LEVEL

The project “Strengthening the Role of Local Communities - MZ in BiH” has given great support to civic activism and participation in democratic decision-making processes at local level. The forums have proven to be an excellent platform for proposing and prioritizing, inclusion of the whole community, as well as space for women and young people to advocate for their priorities and thus ensure a more prominent place for themselves within their communities. The forums have become an integral part of the decision-making process in all 136 partner MZs.

“Citizens realized that we all have the same goal, and that is to improve the living conditions in our environment. The Citizens’ Forum and its results have shown that, taking small steps, we can create big changes, if we communicate openly and work together,” said Bojan Zečević from the Local Community Zovi Do, Nevesinje.

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SUPPORTING WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVISM

The forums played a special role in Jablanica in advocating gender equality. Thanks to the project, there was a change in the citizens’ awareness and the acceptance of the role of women as leaders of the local community, which was traditionally considered as a male job.

The activism came as a results of project activities, as well as training and education of civil society. After their idea was voted second on the list of priorities at the MZ Donja Jablanica forum, Women’s Association “Most” (Bridge), began with the implementation of the project “Sewing Course and Training of Women Leaders”. Approximately 50 women have completed training on women’s activism and importance of participation in the decision-making processes, and they learnt about the work and method of functioning of MZ Council. Participants have also learnt how they can influence positive changes in their environment, be more socially active, and how to advocate for their interests and the interests of the community.

“Our goal is to develop activism among women and to encourage their inclusion in social life of our community. Women in our local community as well as in the municipality have not been sufficiently involved in social and political affairs, and in this way we want to motivate them,” Ćamila Imamović, the President of the Women’s Association “Most” Jablanica.

Džana Šehić, one of the active citizens and a member of the Association, said that after these training sessions and getting acquainted with the decision-making and prioritization process, women in this local community became active and realized the power of joint action and the importance of voting and supporting each other.

“This project helped me to implement my own projects independently. I improved my communication skills and gained confidence in speaking in public,” added Džana.

During the elections in MZ Donja Jablanica, which were held after training for leaders, there were 5 men and 4 women on the candidates’ list. After the vote, women received 4 out of 5 seats, and for the first time a woman was elected to the position of the MZ President. Citizens’ activism and women’s participation have not ended with the election of the MZ Council, and women continue to play an active role in the community through forums.

“At the citizens’ forum in January this year there were 23...
residents of MZ Donja Jablanica, of which 16 were women. Women actively participated in giving suggestions and solving community problems. In this forum, women's education, apart from infrastructural projects, was at the very top of the list of priorities. We hope that now we will have the opportunity to implement other similar projects” added Džana.

“I find participation in this project to be very useful for my further training and personal development. In addition to the previous experience on the project “Training of Women Leaders”, this project will further contribute to the improvement of the position of women in local communities,” said Sanja Zukić, citizen of Jablanica and one of the participants of the “Sewing Course and Training of Women Leaders”.

NETWORKING AND COOPERATION

Validation of the vision of local communities - MZs in the service of citizens

On December 16th 2017, a meeting was held in Sarajevo regarding the validation of the vision and new models of the role of local communities - MZs in BiH, whose goal is to represent the interests of the local population.

More than 100 participants attended the meeting, including representatives of the Swiss and Swedish Governments, heads of local self-governance units, project coordinators, local community representatives and activists, and civil society organizations.

Welcoming new organizations and awards for the best volunteers

A new group of civil society organizations, which signed cooperation agreements, joined the project on November 15th 2017. As a part of this meeting, certificates and acknowledgments were also awarded to the best project volunteers, the best team and the best innovations for the participants of Start-up Days #Kreni.
Project “Strengthening the Role of Local Communities -MZ in BiH” works on building and developing the capacities of citizens, MZ representatives, institutions and civil society organizations so that they can implement projects in their communities and thus become independent and self-sustainable. Trainings and seminars were also available to citizens and local community representatives who are not part of the project, in order to enable professional development of staff in other local self-governance units.

Aida Crnčalo is an employee of the Municipality Pale FBiH and an active volunteer in the Association of Youth and Women's Association. She has participated in all the trainings within the project and believes that this education has helped her to contribute to her community in a better way.

Aida joined the project as a volunteer from MZ Hrenovica on recommendation of Municipal Mayor: “When I joined the project, I was a sceptic, but after we started with the first training, I realized that this was a serious and professional project. At each of the workshops and trainings I saw an ideal chance to improve my knowledge and skills. Trainers are top experts, who convey their knowledge and skills to participants with great motivation and ease, so that we can continue to apply them in our local communities and organizations,” said Aida.

Aida believes that trainings have been extremely helpful for learning how to write project proposals, to think outside the box, and to be more proactive and professional in her tasks.

“Thanks to these trainings, I actually applied to a lot of public calls. I do not miss any public call which can help us to solve certain problems of women and young people in our community. I also have a significant support and encouragement from the Municipal Mayor Asim Zec.”

Besides for her work in the municipality, Aida is also active in the Youth Association, and since 2016 she has led the Women's Association as volunteer. So far, these two associations have implemented projects for refurbishment of public water fountains, improvement of the socio-economic standard of marginalized groups of women in Pale municipality through procurement of greenhouses and greenhouse production of agricultural products and through educational workshops for painting and decoupage for women and young people, project "Bosnian Podrinje festival", aimed at preservation of old traditions, "Promoting culture through painting and exhibition activities", project “Improving the social life of young people of Pale in FBiH through the construction of an improvised swimming pool and a volleyball court", and "Promoting culture through theatre", “Move” and “Construction of Eco-Park Turkovići”.

Aida has many plans for new projects, and the most important ones are those concerning the prevention of youth migration and long-term unemployment for women. Plans are also underway for projects aimed at improving tailoring and sewing skills, purchasing greenhouses and greenhouse production, production and branding of sweets made from blueberry and local teas.

“I am naturally a positive and ambitious person, always motivated in every situation. The biggest motivating factors for me are positive people in my environment, successful business people, and witnessing results and long-term effects we achieve through projects”.

Aida added that the key for her is also the support and trust of women from the Association and the local community, which make her more responsible towards her obligations and societal expectations.
Community Champions

Amna Halilović and Amila Alibegović, high school students from Visoko run the start-up project “Extraktor” Visoko

The idea for the extractor was initiated when students saw the call for Start-up Days in Zenica and decided to apply with two ideas - the extractor and the greenhouse production of plants that would be used in the production of essential oils and soaps. The “Extraktor” team won the first prize at Start-up Days in Zenica, and since then Amna and Amila, along with their day-to-day obligations in school and preparation for enrolment at the university, have had extensive training on project management, development of business plans and financial training. They point out that motivational speakers and participation at the Sarajevo Unlimited conference were especially inspiring.

The foundation of this project was set up three years ago, when a group of students from Grammar School “Visoko” decided to, as a part of “De Rama” chemistry club produce natural soaps and other products and sell them, in order to fundraise, so they can support their classmates in joining them for the 15-day excursion. For generations students have inherited and successfully implemented this humane project, which is entirely based on volunteerism. The plant extractor was needed to reduce production costs, and enable the production of essential oils. Besides for the extractor, their class collects the rest of the required materials on their own.

“Until now, we have been purchasing everything small-scale in pharmacies, which was pretty expensive, so we were aiming to produce essential oils ourselves, which would not only reduce the costs, but also ensure product quality,” said Amna. In addition to collecting plants themselves with the school ecology club, they also use the space within the school to prepare the soaps. They have also negotiated with the local cafés to gather their remaining citrus peels and use them for the production of lemon and orange essential oils.

“This is one way to raise our citizens’ awareness of the need to use healthy products within our community,” said Amila, adding that the project was a great experience for them. “This is a big lesson for us, we did not know what we were getting ourselves into. The project requires a lot of time and dedication, but it has helped us to broaden our horizons.”

High school students talk about their project:
http://www.thepictaram.club/share/8eENGnow2

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Their products are completely natural and affordable, and the packaging is also made from recycled paper.
Amna and Amila do not think of this project only as a fundraising activity to ensure their friends’ participation in the excursion, but also as one of the ways to influence their social context, and also to develop their knowledge and skills.
They believe that their participation in this project was priceless experience.
“We did a lot of work, but thanks to the project we gained a lot of knowledge and experience, we met a large number of people from different fields, with different views about the world, and all this broadened our horizons”, added Amna. During their work they were also confronted with the reality of what is needed to implement such a project.
Amna and Amila emphasized that they had significant support from the Association of Young Volunteers in Visoko, who provided them with the necessary bank account. They also received support from the Networks and UNDP:
“UNDP and Networks were our greatest support system - they had a particular understanding for us knowing that we were high school students and they were fascinated by the progress we achieved within a year.”
They added that their community did not have many expectations when they went to Start-up Days in Zenica and there was also a lot of scepticism towards them and the project itself. However, as the project expanded, their idea became more accepted in the community, and their webpage became more popular. The information about the “Extraktor” team spread across the internet portals, radio stations and television channels.
Seminars and trainings also helped them in the professionalization of the online platform - Facebook and Instagram sites, through which they conduct online sales and promotion of their products.
Amna and Amila also visited the production facility of the well-known Bosnian brand Dr Pasha, which gave them an opportunity to develop new ideas, exchange experiences on production, marketing and sales, and the challenges they face. In the coming period, they plan to test their soaps in Dr Pasha’s laboratory, and compare recipes.
The next step for these two young inspiring women is the establishment of the association, and the finalization of all the payments and project activities before they go to university.
Further work on the project within the school was taken by 3rd grade students who are currently raising funds for a new generation of students. Amna and Amila continue to set up the foundations of the new organization, which will give opportunity to young people in Visoko to become more active, learn something new and contribute to the community through their work.
In addition to the “Extraktor”, the funds are also raised in school through preparation and organisation of plays, with money collected through ticket sales being used towards covering the expenses for the excursion.
Amna and Amila added that everyone is aware of the difficult socio-economic situation in which they live and that they are never sure which number of pupils will need help for excursion. That is why they all work as if they are collecting money for themselves, and a combination of different talents - in sales, marketing, production, organization, and other areas is crucial to the success of such an initiative.

More information about “De Rama” can be found on their Facebook profile: https://www.facebook.com/deramabih/ and Instagram http://www.thepictaram.club/instagram/deramabih
From Activism to Change - Implementation of Priorities in Communities

IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE

The project “Strengthening the Role of Local Communities in BiH” continued to support MZ projects aimed at improving the lives of citizens. By the end of 2017 and early 2018, project sustained its work in improving infrastructure, including new roads, community centres, public lighting, and creating better conditions in schools, children’s playgrounds and sports fields.

BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS IN MZ BREZOVO POLJE, BRČKO

New infrastructure projects have brought many benefits to all residents of the MZ Brezovo Polje. During the citizens’ forum in this local community, the main priorities were the repair of the artesian water well and the construction of children’s playground. Renovation of the well was at the very top of the list of priorities, as it was necessary to get the water supply for the villagers of Brezovo Polje.

“The well was built some six to seven years ago,” said Hajrudin Ljuščić, Manager of the Community Hub, “but this well used natural pressure and the water level often dropped. We have installed a pump now, new reservoir, new filter and a new house.”

The project provided drinking water for the entire MZ and people from some neighbouring communities also come to get water from this well.

ROAD RECONSTRUCTION GOŽULJ - MOSTARSKA VRATA IN MZ LJUBUŠKI 3

The reconstruction of local road that connects areas Gožulj and Mostarska Vrata in MZ Ljubuški has been completed, thus significantly improving the safety of the population that uses this road daily. The Municipality of Ljubuški asphalted the remaining part of the section, which was not covered by the project.

“Reconstruction of this part of the road will facilitate the travel not only for the citizens of our MZ, but also for all others who use this road. I must emphasise that the representatives of our municipal authorities have helped us to prepare all the necessary project documentation to complete this project according to the plan and the agreement with the MZ Ljubuški 3”, said Hasan Mušić, the Secretary of the MZ Ljubuški 3.

Mušić said that previously citizens had been forced to use alternative, longer and risky routes, because this road was impassable. Now, some 900 citizens of MZ Ljubuški and neighbouring communities will benefit from faster and safer travel on this route.

This MZ has also been given a new space where children from this local community can safely spend their time and have fun. The works were completed during September, and the playground is now a play area for some 150 children from Brezovo Polje and neighbouring areas. The primary school is right next to the playground, which makes this play area even more adequate and useful for children and the entire local community.
THE FIRST CHILDREN’S PLAYGROUND OPENED IN MZ ŠIROKAČA, STARI GRAD SARAJEVO

In MZ Širokača, Stari Grad Sarajevo, the first children’s playground has been opened for children of up to six years of age. The playground is in front of MZ Širokača, and it was officially opened on February 1st 2018. Like other playgrounds in Stari Grad, the opening was supported by local businessmen who provided candy and balloons for children.

The playground has rubber pads, a playhouse, swings, a spring rider and benches.

This new space brought joy to the youngest, but also to kids from the Elementary School “Edhem Mulabdić”. Parents added that this space has long been needed in their local community.

“This is beautiful and the best thing done recently in our MZ. The kids are very happy. They meet here every day after school. Grandparents bring their grandchildren here,” said pensioner Enver Janjoš.

Playgrounds in Sedrenik and Mošćanica were also opened last year in the Municipality Stari Grad Sarajevo, and the construction of a playground in Vratnik is ongoing.

NEW AMBULANCE VEHICLE IMPROVED MEDICAL SERVICES IN MZ PRAČA

During the citizens’ forum in Pale FBiH and two partner MZs- Pale Prača and Hrenovica, it was decided that the ambulance vehicle should be purchased for the Prača Health Centre. The Director Medo Žigović said that the need for such a vehicle had long been present in order to improve the health services of the Centre.

The purchase of the ambulance vehicle in December 2017 connected not only the partner MZs but also different sectors, including the canton, ministries, municipality and the hospital. This joint initiative of all stakeholders will improve the provision of medical services and ensure better quality of life for all citizens of Pale FBiH.
Civil Society Organizations

**IMPROVING ENTREPRENEURIAL CAPACITIES OF WOMEN IN MZ LAKTAŠI AND MZ ALEKSANDROVAC**

The Association of Women “A Woman’s Smile”, Laktaši, implemented the project “Improving Entrepreneurial Capacities of Women in MZ Laktaši and MZ Aleksandrovac” from January to October 2017. The project provided support to women from rural areas in entrepreneurship, which directly contributed to the promotion and advancement of gender equality.

“The main objective of the project is to strengthen women’s entrepreneurial capacities, while providing professional and technical support, thus contributing to the development of economic and social cohesion. We also do the market research to explore the possibility for marketing of potential products and services. Within the project we had workshops on topic of market research for product placement, marketing mix, production organization and financial planning, as well as providing expert and technical support in the implementation of entrepreneurial ideas and market research. The project envisaged that at least 20 women from MZ Laktaši and MZ Aleksandrovac will be involved through project activities and it is expected that at least 3 project ideas will be finalized. This is one of the most significant projects for women’s entrepreneurship,” said Danica Bartolić, the President of the Association.

Ten theoretical and practical trainings were held for nineteen women and one man. 3 project ideas were submitted for which 3 business plans were developed. Association “A Woman’s Smile”, Laktaši was founded in 2010. One of the basic goals of the Association is to empower women in social and economic terms. Since its establishment, the Association has implemented a number of projects and activities, independently or in cooperation with other associations and institutions.

**NEW FOLK COSTUMES FROM LIJEVČA POLJE FOR CULTURE AND ARTS ASSOCIATION “LEPA RADIĆ”, MZ KOČIĆEVO, GRADIŠKA**

The branch of the Central Culture and Arts Association “Lepa Radić” Gradiška, in MZ Kočićevo aims to preserve the cultural heritage of this area, as well as to develop the capacity of women. As part of the project, it was decided to work on the purchase of costumes for children’s and youth ensembles. The costumes were hand-made, and in this way the members of the Association authentically conveyed the spirit of the old times.

“We applied for folk costumes of Lijevča Polje because they are traditional for our area. 50 to 60 costumes were made, and our members worked on specific embroidery decorations of our costumes and weaving of aprons”, said Željka Despotović, a member of the Association.

The Culture and Arts Association “Lepa Radić” Gradiška has 270 members, and the branch of this Association in Kočićevo has between 50 and 60 members. The folk costumes have already been used for numerous events, and Davor Sinišić, the President of the Association, emphasized that the costumes were presented during the promotion of the project, and used at the traditional annual concert in December 2017.
Empowering socially excluded categories

“SOURCE OF LIFE, SAFETY AND VALORIZATION” PROJECT COMPLETED IN NEVESINJE

In December 2017 “Source of Life, Safety and Valorization” project was completed in Nevesinje. The project was initiated at the citizens’ forum in MZ Bijenja, Nevesinje, and the goal was to repair and restore two sources of drinking water.

The Association of Persons with Multiple Sclerosis of the Region of Eastern Herzegovina started this initiative, and the project is implemented in MZ Bijenja and MZ Zovi Do. The project also involves the restoration of the tombstone - “stećak” necropolis and tourist route Radojev kamen – Bijenja. About 50 volunteers took part in the activities.

Project Coordinator Branimir Tamindžija said that it is expected that this site, with its cultural wealth, will contribute to increasing the tourist potential of Nevesinje.

As part of the project Zlatac and Pokrivenik water springs were also cleaned and restored. Žare Knežević, the President of MZ Bijenja reported that 448 residents of this community experience problems with drinking water, caused by draught. Two springs with potable water, Zlatac and Pokrivenik, were built at the time of the Austro-Hungarian rule, and all residents of this MZ used the water from these springs during the summer.

The springs have never been renovated, and in the previous years they have also collapsed.

“We have now secured a regular water supply with drinking water in MZ Bijenja for the locals, tourists, hikers, mountaineers and all citizens,” said Branimir Tamindžija, the President of the Association of Persons with Multiple Sclerosis of Eastern Herzegovina Region and Project Coordinator.

The Association of Persons with Multiple Sclerosis of the Region of Eastern Herzegovina has also implemented the project of reconstruction of the sports field and construction of a protective fence in MZ Zovi Do - “Play safe and enjoy”, creating better and safer conditions for sports and recreational events. As part of this project, equipment for football, handball and basketball was also provided, and winter football tournament was also organized.

Tamindžija said that he is always happy when he is working together with other stakeholders to solve specific problems of the people and his community and that good cooperation between the citizens and the representatives of the Municipality led to successful implementation of these as well as other important ongoing projects.
The play "Dženo, dženo Romanipe" (The Roma people shall remain), dedicated to the culture and tradition of the Roma people, was created in Gračanica as one of the initiatives within the project “Strengthening the Role of Local Communities - MZ in BiH”.

The project is carried out by the local Culture and Art Association “Adem Alić”. Seada Delić came up with an idea for this performance, and Mirela Trepanić, who successfully described Roma life, songs and tradition, directed the play. The first performance was in December 2017 at BKC Gračanica, and the acting team consists of six members of the Roma community from Gračanica and two Bosniak men who joined the play.

The goal of the project was to educate the Roma about theatre art through creative work on this play and to challenge prejudices about the Roma population and culture, as well as to familiarise other peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the language, tradition and lesser known elements of Roma culture, including music and beliefs.

The Roma are the most numerous of the 17 national minorities in BiH and are estimated to number about 50,000.1

"Before I got involved in this project, I thought I knew a lot about Roma and their culture and tradition. By getting involved in this play, and working on it every day, I realised that I know very little. At each new rehearsal I learned something new. We have tried to avoid some stereotypes about Roma, and we have replaced them with something that will, through humour, raise people’s awareness and help them to get to know Roma, their culture and tradition" said Amar Mujkić.

“I’m proud that this is a show about us - Roma. There are many prejudices about us, and this is a show that destroys prejudices, and we demonstrate that we can contribute to society as everyone else” said Ahmet Mehić, a member of the acting team.

Thus far the play has performed three times in Gračanica, with strong reactions from the citizens.

“We worked long and in great detail, for exactly three months or 82 rehearsals before the premiere, and the actors perfected all the scenes of dance, singing and acting. In addition to the actual performance on the stage, learning the skills of stage speech, transformation, mimic, movement, dance and singing, this playgroup has become a theatre group that played an 80 minute show without an error in front of 600 spectators,” said the director Mirela Trepanić.

More about this show can be found here:
https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/28945586.html
http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/dzeno-dzeno-romanipe

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1 Special Report on the Position of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ombudsman Institution for Human Rights
Community Hubs

As part of the project “Strengthening the Role of Local Communities - MZ in BiH”, in each of 24 partner local self-governance units, it is planned to adapt spaces which will serve as Community Hubs for citizens’ gathering and networking, decision-making, workshops, trainings and seminars. These spaces play an important role in development of social capital and cohesion in communities, and provide opportunities for easier organization of citizens and local activism. Three new hubs were opened and equipped in Ljubinje, Ljubuški and Nevesinje in the period from December 2017 to February 2018.

NEW COMMUNITY HUBS IN LJUBINJE AND LJUBUŠKI

New Community Hubs in Ljubinje and Ljubuški started working on November 20th and December 1st 2017. These new spaces will allow all members of the community to engage in a better way and participate more frequently in social life. At the opening of the Hubs, Darko Krunić, the Mayor of Ljubinje Municipality and Nevenko Barbarić, the Mayor of Ljubuški Municipality, emphasized that the project “Strengthening the Role of Local Communities - MZs in BiH” and the infrastructural projects implemented as a part of its activities, contribute to the development and strengthening of local self-governance units and MZs involved in the project.

“In our project, we give great importance to civic activism, which we consider to be an important part of the process of revitalizing MZs in BiH. In this regard, as a project initiative and in cooperation with local self-governance units, Community Hubs have been established and adequately equipped to encourage citizens to participate more in development initiatives in their communities,” Majda Ganibegović, Project Manager.

COMMUNITY HUB BIJELJINA

Community Hub at the MZ Vuk Karadžić in Bijeljina opened on July 6th 2017, but activities at the Hub started long before the official opening. The space for the centre was already there, and the project repaired the roof construction, insulated the building and technically equipped the Hub. In the process, the changing rooms of the local football club “Sloga United”, whose sports field is right next to the Hub, were also repaired.

MZ Vuk Karadžić has more than 7,000 inhabitants, including a very active Roma community. There are numerous civil society organizations: Youth Development and Education Association “Safe Step”, Association of Citizens “Otaharin”, Association “Nada” (Hope) and Roma Women’s Association. The Hub also houses a Roma Affairs Office, which began working in February 2018, providing legal and other counselling services to Roma and non-Roma population.

https://www.facebook.com/drustvenicentarbijeljina/
The Hub is the centre of many community events - workshops, trainings, social gatherings, local associations’ meetings, project meetings and forums. So far, training for the registration of real estate, training for Community Hub Managers in Gračanica, Gradačac, Brčko District, Bijeljina, Žepče, Petrovo and Tešanj, and Taekwando training for children were held at the premises.

In November 2017, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women was marked at the Hub through the organization of a forum theatre. Forum theatre is an excellent method for addressing community problems, and the audience has an opportunity to actively participate in the process, as the topic and the acting provoke reactions from participants and the theatre audiences. After the theatre, there is a counselling session to address the problems identified during this process.

At the beginning of January 2018, the Hub also organized a cartoon screening and distribution of new-year gifts for 60 children, and a photography session with Santa Claus. In this way, the Hub also became a home and a socialising place for the youngest members of the community.

In February 2018, the Youth Development and Education Association “Safe step” organized a workshop on “Advocacy and Public Speaking”. Milenko Jovanović, the President of the Youth Development and Education Association “Safe step”, regularly uses the premises at the Community Hub, and emphasises that the Hub really serves all citizens, the Roma community, children with disabilities and the local community. Milenko adds that he does not face problems in activating citizens, because the associations have been active for many years in this area, and that social networks also make their work easier.

“We did not have a strong response from the citizens initially, but then the population saw that it is benefiting from this project, and now we have a much better situation than at the beginning of the project. We have good working conditions, we are technically supported with new equipment, we can do trainings for our people, and thanks to this project we have a better starting point compared to other MZs in Bijeljina,” said Marko Krajšnik, the President of MZ Vuk Karadžić and Community Hub Manager.

Marko added that this project brought other changes to the community, indirectly influencing the construction of children’s playground, and now there is a plan to create a small sports centre with an open-air gymnasium.
A word from citizens

ON FORUMS

“I’m happy with the response, and these are the citizens who are responsible members of our society. This way of working with citizens will contribute to the development, but also to raising citizens’ awareness about the involvement in their local community. This will be the best way to highlight problems to the Municipality Ilijaš and the MZ Council and all those who can help. Everyone must take part in the community’s welfare,” said Almir Špodić, the President of the MZ Council, Podlugovi, Ilijaš.

“People were somewhat sceptical at first, but now that the implementation started, they are more serious about their involvement. They became more interested, and they call us and ask about implementation. When the implementation is successful, it brings back their faith in the initiatives, and they become more active and more interested. When they see that their opinion is respected, they are more willing to engage and propose initiatives themselves,” Aleksandar Vuković, the President of MZ Council, Pridvorci, Nevesinje.

ON NEW EQUIPMENT

“The equipment donated to us means a lot because it facilitates our work and enables us to communicate faster and more efficiently with the citizens and representatives of the municipality. Within this project, we have gone through various trainings, we learned how to use equipment, but also how to collect information ourselves and apply for funds to implement projects in our communities. I am sure that we will, together with the citizens and the municipality, devise a lot of projects that will improve the living conditions in Ljubuški,” Goran Simunović, President of MZ Klobuk, Ljubuški.

ON TRAININGS

“Apart from works on infrastructure, it is important for us to strengthen the capacities of local communities – MZs, through various programs and seminars organized by the UNDP within this project. Trust among the people is built through citizens’ forums, problems are raised and solutions are offered, and through this project we have significantly improved the communication with the representatives of the Municipality of Ljubuški,” said Jure Kozin, the President of MZ Hrašljani, Ljubuški.

ON COMMUNITY PROJECTS

“At the forums, citizens have recognised the projects they are interested in, and one of those priorities was the reconstruction of the roof at the Community centre, renovation of one of the rooms within the premises and purchase of furniture. It is important to note here that when citizens and our businessmen saw that work was being done at the Community centre, which stood unfinished for some twenty years, they pooled funds and installed heat insulation façade on the building. They also helped to furnish the room inside the centre, which was partially finished. We had not planned to repair floors through this project, but the businessmen also helped here, so now we have a completely finished Community centre in Raduša, and that’s a big step for us,” Jasmin Šišić, the Secretary of MZ Raduša, Tešanj.

ON CSO PROJECTS

“There is no kindergarten in Rudo, and we address this issue with these types of workshops. Currently, this is the only form of socialization that children have, and we have been trying for years to include rural children in our activities as well. As part of the workshop we planned various events, organization of costume ball, marking the Day of the Planet Earth, abracadabra games, song learning”, Svetlana Vuković, the Director of the Association Centre for Responsible Democracy “Luna” and Project Coordinator, Rudo.

“We built a playground and set up a protective net, goals and seats, and ordered sports equipment. We managed construction works on our own, and everything was done on a voluntary basis,” said Ernad Hadžić, the President of MZ Gornja Ozimica and coordinator of the project" Reconstruction of a sports playground, school of football and volleyball”, which is implemented by the Spektar Association, MZ Gornja Ozimica, Žepče.
RANKO KARAPETROVIĆ, MAYOR OF LAKTAŠI

Everything that is done through MZ Councils and the non-governmental sector strengthens the democratic capacity of a society. It is very important for us to support each other and to show appreciation to citizens and the private sector for participating in activities which are improving living conditions.

1. The Municipality of Laktaši has been involved in the project “Strengthening the Role of the Local Communities - MZ in BiH” from the very beginning. Have you seen some positive results in the MZs that are part of this project?

The project is very useful for our municipality and MZ Councils, as well as for the citizens. I was personally very pleased that our municipality is involved in this project, because I had very positive experiences with citizen’s involvement in the local development process through previous mandate.

Civic activism has increased considerably, because people have understood the conditions they live in, how realistic their demands are and what can be accomplished. They are aware that the municipality cannot achieve everything but that some things can be solved much faster if they are engaged.

Citizens’ participation, participation of entrepreneurs, and possibly local and foreign non-governmental organizations provide great opportunities for progress and this participation should be a central pillar of every successful local community’s working strategy. This was done sporadically before in some MZs, but there was no systematic approach, which adds enormous value.

What is particularly important is that, in addition to the six MZs involved in the project, five other MZs in the Laktaši municipality have also learnt from their experience, and used the same principle of work and cooperation between citizens and the municipality, and in those MZs projects for improving the living conditions in the community have also started.

2. What are some of the most important activities that have been done thus far in MZs?

There have been many small projects that are of vital importance to the population. These are projects that primarily affect the quality of life of citizens, such as sports grounds and community centres used by citizens of all ages for different activities, contributing to a better and higher quality of life. There have also been numerous infrastructure projects, including construction and modernization of roads.

3. How important are civic activism and participation for these types of projects and local development?

Civic activism is irreplaceable. It contributes to better project implementation, and greater effects are achieved. The added value is that in this way citizens include all available resources, they decide on the priorities, and contribute to project’s implementation and they value that their engagement will directly influence their quality of life. Thanks to this principle of work, it also makes more sense for us to invest in such a project, compared to some other initiatives, because the effects of such a project multiply.

The study visits as part of this and other projects, and examples of good practices form other countries, also shows us that it is easier and smarter to involve citizens and to do projects which are in their interest. In Sweden, Italy and the UK, I was able to see that where there is
activism, and where more people are involved, it is easier to solve certain problems and therefore to have more satisfied citizens. Exchange of experiences is very important in our work and we try to apply some useful solutions from other countries in our municipality.

4. How can citizens be encouraged to engage in local development processes?

We strive to involve citizens as much as we can, and now we have doubled the funding for municipal grants, to provide incentive for their involvement. We also try to work together with citizens and MZs to solve together problems such as maintenance of roads in winter and cleaning watercourses so that we can react faster and more efficiently where necessary.

We also have active civil society organizations in our municipality and we support their work on raising citizens’ awareness of issues such as environmental protection and waste disposal, and the importance of drinking water.

5. Are citizens and local businesses aware of the importance of their role in community development?

Citizens and entrepreneurs are aware of the need to be socially responsible, they are not alienated from their community, and they know that their engagement can contribute to finding better solutions to the problems.

Local businesses are also aware that they will be more successful if they do business in a well-regulated and positive environment, and that businesses that support civic activities are also valued by the community.

Also, all of us, as citizens, know that we can easily solve some problems if we engage and allocate our free time to work in the community. A person as an individual can do a lot, but he or she can do much more in an organized communal activity, through which, on a daily basis, they can primarily bring about better living conditions and better quality of life. When we contribute to our community, it makes us happy and satisfied, and creates a continuity in the process of local development and democratic dialogue.

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Did you know?

- Direct citizens’ participation is the primary purpose of local community - MZ.
- Laws on local government in BiH prescribe that local authorities should consult MZs in local planning.
- MZ has a role of mediator between citizens and local authorities. In BiH, MZs consider citizens’ complaints and submit them to relevant authorities.
- MZ has neither executive powers nor jurisdiction in the provision of services.
- In BiH, in smaller and rural areas, some MZs perform small communal and administrative tasks, and thus have a role of providing services to citizens.

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MZ Councils in BiH are elected as follows:

- By secret ballot in Republika Srpska
- Through public voting or secret ballot at citizens’ assemblies or by direct elections in FBiH
- Candidates for members of MZ Councils may be elected from a civic or party list
- Some municipalities in FBiH also have a council and a president or council and assembly of citizens as bodies²
- In Brčko District, MZs are citizens’ associations and consist of an assembly, composed of residents, managing board and president

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LEARN MORE ABOUT MZ PROJECTS

- MZ Saračica, Banja Luka: new sidewalks at the “Sveti Sava” Primary School in Pavlovac will improve safety of 110 students and other citizens
  http://bit.ly/2GHLUxN

- Stari Grad Sarajevo: The implementation of the project “Prevention for Health” started, led by the Association for Improvement and Promotion of Health “Generacija” in the MZs Babića Bašča, Bistrik and Hrid - Jarčedoli

- MZ Gračanica: new space in the Community Centre in Drafnići and premises for the Association of Parents and Children with Special Needs “Futura” have been equipped

- MZ Prača: Youth Association Pale FBiH organizes creative workshops for young people

- MZ Jelaške, Olovo: Project “Produce Healthy - Develop Our MZ”, implemented by the Association of Citizens “Eco brda - eco hills”, is working on strengthening the capacities of agricultural producers and promoting and marketing their products through a new website.

“This project is a big gain for the citizens, especially because in forums and debates they have a chance to express their real problems. We improved communication with the municipality and other local communities - MZ, and we have motivation to do more and work better. Our role is strengthened in this way, and citizens themselves are gaining trust in us as representatives of MZs and municipal representatives. A bridge of trust and cooperation is being built, and this can be felt on the ground. Citizens see that things are being built, that projects are implemented and this contributes to a positive atmosphere,” said Hasan Mušić, the President of MZ Ljubuški 3.

136 MZs and 24 municipalities/cities participate in the project “Strengthening the Role of Local Communities - MZ in BiH”, which contributes to improving the quality of life of 300,000 people across Bosnia and Herzegovina - Banja Luka, Bijeljina, Brčko, Gračanica, Gradačac, Gradiška, Ilijaš, Jablanica, Klujić, Kotor Varoš, Laktasi, Ljubinje, Ljubuški, Nevesinje, Olovo, Pale, Petrovo, Rudo, Sanski Most, Stari Grad Sarajevo, Tešanj, Visoko, Zenica and Žepče.

PLANNED EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES ...

- More intensive work with the institutions and project partners to strengthen local communities
- Focus on networking, transferring knowledge and tools, including local community methodology and good practices
- Advocacy and changes of the existing legal framework
- Promotion and use of a web platform for information on local community activities, exchange of experiences and fundraising