

CIVIC ACTIVISM

LocalCommunities

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Let's move forward together!

By Andrea Rauber Saxer
Swiss Ambassador to BiH

The objective of the Swiss cooperation strategy in Bosnia and Herzegovina is to create more and better opportunities and perspectives for everyone. No-one should be left behind. This is easier said than done. Vulnerable persons are often excluded from the mainstream society and therefore not visible. There is also an obvious correlation between social exclusion and poverty.

For policymakers the question is how to draw excluded people into their programs and strategy. How can a city and municipality make sure that everyone gets the services which they deserve? Is there water and electricity service also all the way up to a Roma settlement at the outskirts of the village? When speaking about social inclusion, we are also talking about other vulnerable members of the society, for example about persons with disabilities or older people.

It is also the responsibility of a Mjesna zajednica to include everyone from the community in the solving of everyday problems. For example, have you thought of a child with the Down's syndrome when devising the new playground? Is the community building accessible to persons in a wheelchair? Does the new traffic light allow older people to cross the street safely? Where does a bus line stop?

In order to enhance social inclusion, good governmental policies are very important and necessary. It is necessary to change habits and perceptions. The MZ Project is unique because it animates citizens to take responsibility and become actively engaged in solving everyday



Swiss Ambassador to BiH Andrea Rauber Saxer explaining the importance of start-ups in BiH in her opening remarks at Sarajevo Unlimited 2017.



<https://www.facebook.com/vidiofonet/videos/512137702476200/>



problems and issues in people's lives. Active civic participation implies not only meaningful partnerships between citizens, civil society organizations and local governments but also active cooperation among all members of a society.

This should and must lead to enhanced inclusion of marginalized citizens of a local community. Together with civil society organizations, citizens can encourage community-led development and create the basis for changes from the bottom up.

In Switzerland for example, so-called *Bürgerinitiativen* (citizens' initiatives) often take up the interests of socially vulnerable persons. In my home town in Brugg, a group of active mothers and fathers have successfully championed safer ways to school for their children. In the canton of Basel-Country, a group of persons with different disabilities demanded equal access to work, education, mobility, and living. The fact that they got together made their voice stronger. Social inclusion requires information sharing, the strengthening of excluded groups, and ultimately changes in power-sharing patterns. In order to succeed, the building of alliances and creating trust is essential. Social inclusion is not a linear process, and it may imply trade-offs in the short term. It is a long-term process, basically a never ending challenge. Social inclusion requires differentiated solutions depending on the countries, actors, groups, or cultures concerned.

The fight against inequalities is about providing equal opportunities. It is also essential to discuss the problems openly. In Brazil for instance, soap operas contributed to discussions on disability and inclusive education on homosexuality. In Switzerland, it is often through public discussions at the market or in community centres in view of elections. In BiH, maybe humorous plays or TV shows with positive content and good stories could promote an open discussion on social inclusion.

Mjesne zajednice are by definitions well-placed to help everyone to move forward together.

MZs IN FIGURES

From September to November 2017:

- **33 projects completed in MZs**, including at least 45,000 direct beneficiaries
- **48 ongoing CSO projects** with a focus on socially excluded categories of population in 23 partner municipalities /cities
- **102 projects of MZs approved in 17 LGUs**, out of which two projects relate to procurement while all others relate to infrastructure or construction projects
- **Two vehicles** for two MZs and multimedia cabinet equipment procured in one MZ
- **5 new projects of CSOs** approved for implementation in 7 MZs in Visoko, Banja Luka and the Sarajevo Municipality of Stari Grad. The total value of these projects exceeds BAM 67,000
- Four workshops held on **“Community Hub Management”**, attended by 26 participants
- **4 motivational hours of female entrepreneurship** gathering 61 participants
- **4 Hack4MZ workshops** held on *“Crowdfunding and crowdsourcing campaigns for your idea?”*, attended by 100 participants
- 4 workshops were held on **“Content-creation, talent-mapping and community hub management”**, attended by 26 participants
- A dozen participants took part in the three-day **Sarajevo Unlimited** event
- **6 monitoring sessions “Meet&Match”** with 20 individuals visiting 6 companies
- 5 new **community hubs** opened.

“Strengthening the Role of Local Communities – MZ in BiH” is a joint project of the Government of Switzerland and the Government of Sweden worth 14.5 Million KM. Implementing partner is United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in BiH in partnership with the BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government of Republika Srpska, Ministry of Justice of Federation BiH, the Government of Brčko District and both entity Associations of Municipalities and Cities.

From July 2015 to July 2019, 136 local communities and 24 municipalities/cities are taking part in the first phase of the project, which will contribute to improving the quality of life of 300,000 people countrywide – Banja Luka, Bijeljina, Brčko, Gračanica, Gradačac, Gradiška, Ilijaš, Jablanica, Ključ, Kotor Varoš, Laktaši, Ljubinje, Ljubuški, Nevesinje, Olovo, Pale, Petrovo, Rudo, Sanski Most, Stari Grad, Sarajevo, Tešanj, Visoko, Zenica and Žepče.

Support to democratic participation and activism

CITIZENS FORUMS

Citizens' forums became a regular and standard method of direct participation of residents in 136 project MZs. The forums discuss community priorities and problems, citizens come up with ideas and opinions, find solutions in a joint effort and vote on the next steps needed for development and progress.

Forums are a good example of how civic activism delivers, not only when it comes to infrastructure projects, but also in terms of developing citizens' awareness, and show that positive changes are possible through joint action.

"Citizens have delegated their ideas, from road repair to building playgrounds, and priorities have been determined

based on the democratic majority. More importantly, these forums had restored citizens' trust. At first, citizens did not believe that their proposals would be implemented. Now, when they see that every promise is indeed delivered, they are willing to engage and to work on improving the lives of their community members. Both the citizens and we, as representatives of MZs, are very grateful to the United Nations Development Programme for the opportunity to participate in this project," says Branko Sorajić, President of the MZ Dubočica, Ljubinje.

"Citizens' reactions to forums are all positive, they are glad that our local community has entered this project," says Husein Holjan, President of MZ Širokača, Stari Grad Sarajevo.

Welcome to MjesnaZajednica.ba!

Web platform MjesnaZajednica.ba is an online home for activists from 136 MZs and 24 LGUs. The platform offers all information about activities in MZs, civic initiatives, CSO's projects and instructions on how to kick-start your

local community and implement projects of importance. This new space for citizens and MZs also serves as a venue for networking, learning, presenting the community champions, as well as a reminder of the mayor's promises.



Capacity building and development

PROFESSIONAL AND OTHER TRAININGS

Through the project “Strengthening the Role of MZs in BiH”, the United Nations Development Programme is working on building and developing capacities at the local level. In cooperation with partners, interactive trainings and professional trainings were held in the following areas:

- “Facilitation: Training for Trainers Facilitators in MZ”
- “ECDL Computer Training”
- “Project Cycle Management (PCM)”
- “Use of ICT for Citizen Participation in Public Life and Decision-Making”

- “Human Rights - Minorities and Socially Excluded Groups”

“Representatives of MZs have gone through various programmes and seminars where experts have trained them how to apply for projects on their own, how to connect with other MZs and citizens’ associations. This has been a very useful experience for all of us, and the knowledge we have adopted will be used for the development of our communities,” says Samir Sarajlić, President of the Council of MZ Jablanica 2 in Jablanica.

Its aim was to train active citizens-volunteers, as well as representatives of MZs and CSOs to independently develop and write projects and apply for funds and funding with the UNDP, foundations and legal entities, and implement such projects in their communities.

Merisa Huseljić, a law graduate and volunteer at the MZ Mionica 1 in Gradačac, participated in all trainings within the project, and has applied all her newly-acquired knowledge and skills to start a new project in her community.

“I’ve been involved in the project ‘Strengthening the Role of MZs in BiH’ from the day one and attended all trainings, including project management training in May 2016. After several months, the US Embassy announced a call for proposals, so I decided to apply and hand in a project. Had I not gone through the project cycle management training, I doubt I’d have written a good quality project,” says Merisa.

An environment-focused project “Recycling for a Better Future” worth USD 7,500 is currently in the implementation phase for the period of 18 months.

The project involves one primary school, with activities targeting students under 15. Children show great enthusiasm for participation in activities and are already bringing recycling material, including old notebooks, used paper and PET packaging.

Merisa believes that the project will have a great impact and be sustainable, since cooperation will be



established with local companies to buy paper, plastic and cans, apart from setting up recycling containers. It is expected that between 200 and 300 households and surrounding businesses will be involved in the process.

In addition to this project, Merisa is also actively involved in other projects in MZ Mionica 1, including the renovation of youth hall, building a children’s park, and the reconstruction of the Community Centre in the MZ. Even before this project, she was active in her community and had experience with NGOs through projects that encouraged economic empowerment of women, as well as projects on gender equality and combating domestic violence, where she actively participated, in particular in roundtables and workshops on these topics.

“My goal is to kick-start and activate my community by setting an example,” says Merisa. Citizens became active in the project ‘Strengthening the Role of MZs in BiH’ and are satisfied with what they see on the ground.

NETWORKING AND COOPERATION

The project “Strengthening the Role of MZs in BiH” provides representatives and citizens of MZs with opportunities not only for direct participation in democratic processes, but also for education and personal development, as well as encouraging civic entrepreneurship and creating opportunities for networking.

After six Start-up Days in Sarajevo, Tešanj, Zenica, Ljubuški, Banja Luka and Bijeljina, and six Hack4MZ workshops and events on motivational leadership, activism and entrepreneurship, with continuous mentorship support, six start-up teams and the finalists from Rudo, Zenica, Gračanica, Nevesinje, Ljubinje and Visoko participated from November 2 to 4, at the regional forum of innovation and digital economy, **Sarajevo Unlimited**, where they had the opportunity to present their ideas to other participants, potential investors, as well as representatives of BiH institutions, including the Chairman of the Council Ministers of BiH, Denis Zvizdić.

Projects presented in this forum include: “Along Vizir’s trails”, Rudo; “Sweeter life for persons with disabilities”, Nevesinje; “Greenhouse production of organic fruits and vegetables”, Ljubinje; “Extraktor”, Visoko; “Project Team for All”, Gračanica and “Exo-medic” - Association of Students of the Medical Faculty, Zenica.

Project teams that have worked hard over the past months on developing their ideas include inspirational secondary school students, innovative university students, youth councils, citizens’ associations, and active individuals and volunteers across BiH, and show that with little support and motivation, social entrepreneurs can translate their ideas into concrete development projects.

A team of young innovative students from Zenica is working to develop a new immobilization device to replace traditional cast, thus enabling patients to have a better quality life during rehabilitation, and reduce the costs of the healthcare system. *“In the future, we*

plan to establish a company on the foundations of social entrepreneurship, and thanks to new technologies we will work to improve our product and the overall healthcare system,” said Adi Hadžić, Elvir Mujčić and Denis Vejzović. They added that it is necessary for young people to think and act proactively, and to work on changing the mentality of society and promoting new technologies and innovations.

Slađana Đogić, President of MZ Vinogradi from Ljubinje, presented the project “Organic Fruit and Vegetable Production”, with a plan to purchase three greenhouses, facilitate conditions for training and employment of women, and improve their economic standing in society.

At the event, the Regional Eastern Herzegovina Multiple Sclerosis Association presented its project aimed at creating jobs in beekeeping for persons with disabilities. *“We are now starting a serious production of honey in two rural communities, and we plan to buy additional hives from our profits, in order to gradually expand production and include more of our members,” says Branimir Tamindžija, President of the Association, who proposed the idea of beekeeping at Start-up days in Ljubuški.*

“The idea was born during a study trip to Inđija, where we started thinking how to help communities that are not involved in this project. Thanks to our training as volunteers on behalf of the MZ, we realised that we could use this knowledge and presented this idea at Start-up Days in Tešanj where we ended up winning the 2nd place. So far we have prepared 37 proposals of which 24 approved in the field of culture, education, training and sports,” says Adisa Spahić with the Project Team for All from Gračanica.

Here you will find statements by other finalists:



Amila Alibegović, “Extraktor”, Visoko:
<https://www.facebook.com/vidiofonet/videos/vb.363262834030355/512545705768733/?type=2&theater>

Natalija Vidaković, “Along Vizir’s trails”, Rudo:
<https://www.facebook.com/vidiofonet/videos/512550492434921/>



Community Champions

Meliha Mešetović
MZ Ilijaš Grad, Ilijaš

Meliha Mešetović, a proactive member of her community and an inspiring mother, has been running the Association of Parents of Children with Mental and Physical Disorders "Be My Friend/Budi mi drug" since 2007 in Ilijaš.

"We have 55 members; some children are in boarding schools, some in regular, others in specialised schools. We have a lot of active children, and really after a short time, you can see the results. We do reading, writing, cooking, jewellery-making, organise excursions to the coast and the zoo, go for a walk around the city, and in a short time we managed to organise a range of activities," says Meliha, adding that children are delighted with every joint trip and excursion, which gives her additional motivation to work.

In renovated rooms within the kindergarten, where the Association has been working for the last three years, there are far more opportunities to work than before, and it is also a place for organising birthday celebrations, marking holidays, as well as providing treatments for children with a speech therapist and defectologist.

"As parents, we are quite versed, but a defectologist can help us in our work," says Meliha.

The Association works primarily thanks to Meliha's tireless work and initiative, and then also numerous partners and donors who recognise her work. *"The Municipality is supporting us, and we also had projects with various partners. Parents also take part in activities and fundraising, and recently, thanks to the support of the Municipality, they received a specialised van for transporting children, while parents collected money for vehicle registration."*

As a part of the project "Strengthening the Role of MZs in BiH," the Association "Budi moj drug/Be My Friend" is conducting activities aimed at developing the motor skills of children, working with a physiotherapist and defectologist, and hippotherapy treatment or therapeutic horse-riding.

Meliha argues it is important to set individual goals in work with every child in order to have measurable and visible results at the end of the project. *"For some children, it means learning to tie their shoelaces or to shave, for one girl, the goal is to learn to comb her hair, and for several young people, the goal is to integrate into society, by going to the town with a defectologist."*



Members of the Association also participate in the marking of the Children's Week, as well as in sports games and Special Olympics, and Meliha points out that they are not short of ideas for work, and that parents also have many other plans for future activities.

From activism to change – implementing priorities in communities

IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE

Most projects in MZs concern the issues of infrastructure. Problems such as water supply, lack of public lighting, and the need for better and new roads, community centres, playgrounds, refurbished schools, are all topics that are raised in citizens' forums and occupy the attention of local population.

Within its mandate, the project "Strengthening the Role of MZs" works to address these problems, and progress in this field is now visible in communities across BiH thanks to allocated funds. Water springs have been recuperated, public lighting and accessibility to public institutions improved, roads and new playgrounds built and parking lots landscaped thanks to the cooperation of citizens, MZs, LGUs and the UNDP.



RECONSTRUCTION OF THE GORNJI DREČELJ SPRING, MZ OLOVSKE LUKE, OLOVO

Adaptation of the Gornji Drečelj water spring in the MZ Olovske Luke was recognised at the citizens' forum as one of the key priorities for this community. Citizens have worked independently with their own resources even before to improve the water supply system. Thanks to the cooperation with the UNDP and donors, the problems with water supply system have finally been solved. The value of this project is BAM 24,211, and citizens themselves gave their in-kind contribution so as to have the project implemented as soon as possible.

"We all recognised this as our top priority. Now we are in the final stage of reconstruction of the two water reservoirs, which are already in operation and the water now reaches citizens, who are delighted and satisfied. Now we have a very high quality water, and the plan is to hire someone to work on maintenance and water quality, as well as monitoring of the environment and water protection area," says Zijad Busnov, President of the Council of the MZ.

EXTENSION OF PUBLIC LIGHTING IN THE MZ DOLJANI, JABLANICA

With the installation of public lighting in the MZ Doljani in Jablanica a network of public lighting was completed and connected in that community, thus improving the lives and safety of about 150 households in Doljani.

Huske Rizvić, President of the MZ Doljani, Jablanica, says that the implementation of this project is a direct reflection of the will of citizens.

"It is important to build trust among fellow citizens and work together. Solving problems in our local community is a common task, and when citizens see that something is done, then they are more willing to engage in future projects. This way, we can improve the living conditions and enable the conditions for the return of our locals and prevent displacement. There is evidence that the installation of lighting increases return by 10 percent, while the crime rate is reduced by half," says Rizvić.

NEW INFRASTRUCTURE FOR MZs IN PETROVO

Thanks to the project “Strengthening the Role of MZs in BiH”, citizens from Petrovo now have new and reconstructed road sections, facilitating their movement. The plan is to also reconstruct new roads.

In the first phase of the project, the asphalt cover along Česma-Selišta road in MZ Porječina was repaired in the length of 558 meters. This initiative reconstructed once destroyed road section, and two hamlets are now connected with asphalt road. In MZ Sočkovac, a critical section of the Stjepanovića Sokak road of 240 meters was asphalted, which contributed to a better quality of life for 845 inhabitants who use this section. Further works on the roads in these MZs are also planned, as well as the reconstruction and asphaltting of the local road Stanići in MZ Krtova.

Rehabilitation and asphaltting of roads has a direct impact on the quality of life for not only residents of particular local communities, but also those passing through and using their existing infrastructure. It is expected that the asphaltting of roads in Petrovo will bring direct benefits to over 5,300 locals.

CONSTRUCTION OF A SPORT COURT IN MZ ČARDAČANI, LAKTAŠI

The newly built multifunctional court for football, basketball and volleyball in the village of Miloševci in MZ Čardačani every day gathers dozens of young people from neighbouring settlements and MZs.

Construction of this court was proposed as a priority in one of the citizens’ forums in MZ Čardačani, as there was no adequate sport ground in the area populated by almost 1,400 inhabitants.

“The construction of this court and similar projects also has an impact on young parents who now do not go to live elsewhere because of the lack of social activities,” said Slaviša Četojević, a resident of Miloševci.

The plan is to use the new sport court for sports competitions between settlements but also municipalities, while amateur sports clubs are already emerging.



ULTRASOUND PROCUREMENT IN MZ GRČICA, BRČKO

In MZ Grčica, one of the main citizens’ priorities was the procurement of an ultrasound device for the family medicine dispensary, providing health services to about 5,000 patients. Ultrasound was procured in June 2017, and the total value of this procurement is BAM 21,700.

“Previously, there was no such apparatus in our dispensary, and all citizens had to go to the Health Centre, schedule for ultrasound and then wait a considerable time for results to come in, as queues were quite long. This was a problem especially for older patients. Now even patients from the central Health Centre come to our dispensary, because their ultrasound has only two functions, while the newly-acquired ultrasound here has seven shooting functions and two probes, and is used for abdomens, thyroid gland, breast and small tissue, among other functions,” says Vedran Jovičić, President of the MZ Grčica.

Patients’ interest for this ultrasound is high and has proven to be very useful to the community so far, especially since the dispensary had already had doctors trained to work on this equipment. This procurement also helped reduce the burden on ultrasound in the Health Centre.

Civil Society Organisations

PREPARATION AND A FAIR OF TRADITIONAL BOSNIAN DISHES, MZ DOLOVI, OLOVO

Women's Association "Sabina Jamaković" from MZ Dolovi in Olovo organised training for women in the preparation of traditional dishes, meals and winter preserves, as a part of the project "Strengthening the Role of MZs in BiH", followed by an excellent food fair on 25 August 2017. Dishes were prepared by 31 women, and some of them prepared several dishes.

"The fair was well visited, and women responded well to this activity. We had a competition for the best pie, cheese and cake biscuit hurmasica, and 30% of the proceeds from this bazaar are used for charity for those in need," says Nihada Salibašić, President of the Association.

The activity aims to bring women closer and help them help each other. Through education, conditions will be created for capacity building and further economic empowerment. Women's Association



"Sabina Jamaković" has a long tradition of activism in this field. This year, it marks 20 years of its work.

"Initially, the organisation was launched after the war as a place for women to socialise, and later it grew into a serious organisation. We've been working on various projects, from equipping the kitchen in our offices, to preparing winter preserves and catering," says Nihada, who also announced more trainings on how to prepare winter preserves.

CROAT CULTURAL AND ARTS ASSOCIATION "NAŠI KORIJENI/ OUR ROOTS" MZ BISTRICA, ŽEPČE

Croat Cultural and Arts Association HKUD "Naši korijeni/Our Roots" from MZ Bistrica, Žepče, works on promotion and preservation of customs and cultural and historical heritage in this area, through the project "Better to lose villages than customs". The aim of this culture and arts association is to increase the number of cultural events in their local community, and to include as many children and young women as possible in these activities.

"As a part of the project, children will learn the authentic folk dances, and also costumes will be procured. In addition, the plan is to work on playing string instruments such as šargija and dvojnica," says Cvita Zrno, secretary and choreographer of the Association. "We had 55 children so far and we are currently working with beginners and an advanced group that we are performing with."



These children had a chance to present what they learned to more than 2,000 visitors at the traditional folklore event "Bistričko prelo" in July 2017. Additionally, they participate regularly in events in Bugojno and Čitluk, as well as multi-ethnic folklore events.

"Children are overwhelmed, they come regularly to rehearsals, it is heart-warming to see them. They come accompanied by their mothers who also then socialise. We also have several children with special needs. This is good both for children and parents, especially because it's free, as many would not be able to afford it," says Cvita, who has been leading the folklore group for 16 years. Cvita is one of the few people who have been engaged in folklore for twenty years. "It's just something you love; I have an immense love for folklore, and it's a pleasure working with children," she adds.



CONSTRUCTION OF CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND AND ORGANISATION OF CHILDREN'S DAY, MZ SANICA, KLJUČ

Within the project "Strengthening the Role of MZs in BiH", the Municipal Youth Council in Ključ implemented a project to build a children's playground in MZ Sanica.

The aim of the project was to provide a safe and quality space for playing and entertaining children up to 12 years of age in this part of the municipality. The project brought joy to some 950 children from Ključ, and also provided some new fun activities and a leisure spot.

A swing, a slide, a seesaw, a pram-horse, a carousel, benches and a bin were placed on the playground. MZ Sanica provided and prepared the ground where the elements and toys were installed.

The Youth Council took the opportunity to mark the opening of the playground on the first Children's Day on 9 June 2017. On this occasion, several creative and entertaining workshops for more than 80 children were organised, as well as socialising with parents, teachers and locals.

"This playground shows how little it takes to change the life of a local community, to complete it with new content and meet the needs of citizens. We hope that the children from Sanica will use this playground and maintain it and keep it in order to have a place where they can spend their free time in fun and games. We've made efforts to add value to the park and give it a sort of purpose that will be beneficial to all citizens of Sanica. We also had great assistance and excellent cooperation with Senad Hadžić from MZ Sanica, and we expect to continue this cooperation in future activities," says Jasmina Banjalučkić on behalf of the Youth Council in Ključ.



Empowering socially excluded categories

HOUSE OF JOY IN KOTOR VAROŠ

Through this humane project, members of the Association “House of Joy Family Centre” in Kotor Varoš are trying to improve the local conditions for better care, socialisation and free time of their children with developmental difficulties by engaging speech therapists and providing didactic materials for work. The plan is to hold thematic educational workshops, where children learn to socialise, develop fine motoric and graphomotor skills.

The original idea was for the project to include 24 children with developmental disabilities and speech-language disorders, but the number has increased, so now the Association is working with 32 youngsters in this project.

“Eight children successfully completed the treatment and now eight children have come in their place. This project is due to end in late November. Unfortunately, there are many children on waiting lists, so we have taken children from remote MZs as priorities. With the help of local institutions, we managed to find adequate space in Kotor Varoš for our Association and working with children with disabilities. We managed to also equip this space, but staffing became a problem as we do not have a speech therapist or a defectologist, and the Health Centre does not have a professional staff that can work with children either,” says the Director of the “House of Joy Family Centre” Kotor Varoš Dragica Tepić.

Parents were forced to take their children to Čelinac and Banja Luka so that they would get the necessary treatments, which required a lot of time and money for treatments and travel expenses.

“Parents who could financially support it have done these therapies, and children of parents who do not have financial means for treatment were left to themselves,” adds Dragica. For this reason, in this project we requested financing of a speech therapist and managed to secure one for ten months. The doctor comes from Trapist near Banja Luka three times a week, and she has a service contract signed with us.”

“House of Joy Family Centre” was set up by parents of children with developmental disabilities so as to try to provide themselves better conditions for their children which were not available in Kotor Varoš.

“We did not have a centre where we could work with our children. Thanks to the assistance of the Municipality and other institutions such as the Social Welfare Centres and health centres, we have received lists of children with developmental disorders, there are over a hundred of them in our local community, and there are many children who have not passed the categorisation and are not included in any kind of educational institution.” Dragica underlined the importance of this non-material project value in working with children and how it would be good for similar projects to continue in the future.



INTERCULTURAL CAMP RUDO - STRGAČINA 2017

Association for Assistance to Persons with Special Needs "Nada" (Hope) has been organising the Intercultural Camp Rudo - Strgačina for eight years in order to increase the level of interaction and mutual understanding among the residents of MZ Strgačina and camp participants, children of different sexes and ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. The camp also contributes to the promotion of cultural-historical sites and natural beauties of the region, thanks to the organisation of excursions and visits to Rudo, Višegrad and the local excursion site in Biljevinu.

Thanks to the project "Strengthening the Role of MZs in BiH", two groups of participants were organised in August this year, and 77 teachers and students from primary schools from Sarajevo, Rudo, Tešanj, Mokro, Višegrad, Istočno Sarajevo and Šije were involved in the activities.

During the camp, volunteer campaigns were organised to arrange the campsite, provide assistance to elderly persons and one-day gathering events with 50 members of the Association for helping persons with special needs. In addition to the assistance provided to these households in cleaning the yards and stacking of firewood, this approach also creates a socially responsible population of citizens who in their communities can further spread such positive practices.

Participants also spent time learning about interculturalism and tolerance in order to develop awareness of the importance of multicultural dialogue and confronting prejudices. Numerous social gatherings, entertainment and recreational and sporting events were also organized for students and locals of MZ Strgačina. This kind of direct and concrete cooperation among young people helps student to get to know each other and strengthens ties between local communities across Bosnia and Herzegovina.





Mr. sci. AMRA BABIĆ
MAYOR OF VISOKO

"I am really glad that we are a part of this project and I am positive we will have good impacts. The project also helps to build this sense among those working in the local community that they too matter, that they are appreciated, that someone sees them, acknowledges them, listens to them, that they attend seminars where serious issues are discussed, that someone thinks they need a computer, they need premises. All of this is an additional motive for civic activism, which in principle comes for free. There is no financial remuneration other than personal satisfaction, and there is a positive atmosphere that needs to provide personal satisfaction to people not only to satisfy them, but to have them set an example to some other people, especially young people, that it pays off to work, someone still sees, acknowledges and values such work through some projects."

1. **How does the project "Strengthening the Role of MZs in BiH" contribute to MZs and the Visoko Municipality?**

The work of MZs has been marginalised for years and reduced only to the necessary form. Here in Visoko, we are trying to give our MZs the motives and enthusiasm to understand that they are legal entities and the lowest level in the structure of authorities in BiH.

Based on my experience from the previous term, when I took the office, MZs were left to themselves, and there was no channel through which they'd articulate their ideas. Instead, the selection went along political lines, which demotivated the citizens to work. It took time to change this way of working and develop a model where we first of all train people what their job and task is, and then we help them in doing their job, and that's what

we are doing through this project. This helps us install a sense of importance to people in MZs, we remind them that they are important, they have a say in the decision-making, and the local community considers them as their partner and appreciates them.

The main benefit of this project is that MZs have now realised that they are a full-fledged factor and a full-fledged level of authority in BiH, that they are an important link. They have a say and they are viewed as partners, and when they go through one project from the idea to its completion, then they can understand their other partners in the project, such as for example the Municipality, so this is the benefit that we get. This way, people can feel what it means to implement a project, not just identify the problem, propose and initiate. Instead, they see what it means to find a solution, find the resources and bring the project to its end.

2. To what extent does activism, participation and citizens' initiatives contribute to the community, and what kind of participation is needed in a democratic society?

My encounters and discussions with citizens on a number of issues were a true eye-opener. This civic activism, which I find very important, should not be boiled down to what we've been living in BiH for many years, meaning mere criticism. We need to change this awareness from only criticising to "we have a problem, we want to solve it", to motivate people to participate in the processes, to understand that this is not just the task of the executive and legislative branches, and that the administration and the mayor have limited time and limited capacities. It is very difficult not to criticize, but to remain affirmative and positive in diagnosing the problems that we all have together in their implementation.

3. What is your role and the role of the Municipality in the process of motivating citizens to understand that they should undertake these initiatives in development projects?

It's very important to get closer to people. This is a kind of job that you do not do from the office. You must be with people, experience and live what they are living through and share views with them. Very often with my associates, especially in preparing the capital investment programme for the next year, I go around the whole municipality and talk to locals. As experts, we propose our idea, but we have never imposed our own solutions; instead, we seek their opinion on problems and solutions. We also seek their help in collecting certain funds from citizens and businesses, and to contribute with their work, so that we would do as much as possible on the ground. This approach has had a lot of impact in the previous period and we have managed to implement quite a number of projects in this way.

4. What are some of the priorities and initiatives of citizens that the Municipality is supporting independently of this project, as well as some of the existing problems?

We are implementing a project called "Forgotten Villages", and we had people moving out of villages massively as nothing ever came there - not water supply, electricity, water, sewage or asphalt, or public lighting. So we started this project to keep people in places where they were born, where they have their own property, we create conditions for their life there, to avoid having abandoned property, which ultimately involves their stay there not only because of the property, but also because of jobs, that we help the development of agriculture.

People pay most attention to infrastructural issues, as their quality of life depends on it. However, very often, as an initiative, the issue of stray dogs was raised, and without cooperation with citizens, we cannot solve this problem.

Another problem is the illegal garbage disposal, and this is a problem that we have to solve together. We had disposal of large quantities of animal waste and household waste in the wider area of MZ Gračanica. Citizens have to report it, so that we can sanction it. In all MZs, we are aware of these problems and we are running in circles here; we do not have the solution for either of these two problems.

5. In your administration there are many young people and women. How do you promote and encourage their participation in political and overall democratic, economic and development processes in Visoko?

In politics, as social discipline, it does not matter if you are a man or a woman. What is important is good will; it is important to respect other people, to have a certain degree of ethics and ethical behaviour in your character and to have willingness to work.

We are a society of prejudice and the only way to fight these is by promoting positive examples and giving a chance to new people. By nature, there were always more women in the administration, and this is something that we, as a society, accept, but not so much in managerial posts. I do not find it a problem to appoint either men or women, irrespective of gender, to managerial posts, provided that they are the most prepared to meet the challenges of this job; that they are the most qualified to contribute with the maximum, or are the best at a particular time.

We do involve young people in processes a lot. Over the past four years, more than 60 young people went through the administration as volunteers. They got their first life experience, and based on vacancies in civil service, some of them started working full-time here and that's one thing you cannot do overnight.

We make changes here naturally, and hire new people with our colleagues retiring. We try to teach young people how to seek solutions, to be positive and affirmative at any time, and to bring in all their knowledge about new technologies to the administration and to motivate their colleagues to start applying these in practice. It is certain that the whole picture of Visoko has changed with the arrival of these new young people - in the administration bodies we see more kindness, smiles, sympathy, and thus also better performance.

The Visoko Municipality has 26 MZs and 88 settlements. The project "Strengthening the Role of MZs in BiH" includes six MZs: Zimča, Topuzovo Polje, Stari Grad, Novo Naselje, Gračanica and Kralupi.

Community Hubs

Community hubs are venues used by MZs and citizens to gather, network, cooperate, participate in decision-making, learn and develop themselves and their communities, and play an important role in the development of social capital and cohesion. From September to November, five new hubs were opened and equipped as a part of the project.

COMMUNITY HUB IN NEVESINJE OPENED

The Community Hub in Nevesinje was opened on 14 September 2017, after the completion of the adaptation of the town hall where it is housed. The Hub was equipped thanks to joint funds of the Government of Switzerland and the Government of Sweden, and the Nevesinje Municipality, in the amount of BAM 16,969.33.

The newly opened Community Hub is a unique place in this area. According to the Hub Manager Ljubica Benderić, the importance of opening the Hub in Nevesinje is great, given that MZs in Nevesinje are geographically quite far apart. This is a way for locals to have a unique a place to gather and hold joint meetings.

The space of the Community Hub is adequate for organising cultural and social programmes, activities of associations and NGOs, as well as workshops for children, seminars, trainings, screenings, social gatherings, presentations and forums.

“The opening of the Community Hub has multiple benefits for the citizens of Nevesinje. We now have a place for gathering, socialising and organising various programmes. It is also significant that Hub is housed in the town hall, which will certainly contribute to the improvement of communication and cooperation between the representatives of the Municipality and citizens, representatives of MZs and NGOs. I believe that in terms of programmes, the Hub will be focused on promoting the idea of civic activism and development of our municipality,” says Ljubica Benderić, the project coordinator on behalf of the Nevesinje Municipality.



Video from the opening of the Community Hub is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwwzBsDoheE>

COMMUNITY HUB ILIJAŠ OPENED

The Community Hub in Mrakovo, Ilijaš, was opened on 20 October 2017, in the presence of the Mayor Akif Fazlić and representatives of the MZ.

The Hub in Mrakovo will be used by not only this MZ, but also other MZs in Ilijaš, as a gathering spot, a venue for forums, civic activism, workshops and trainings, and social and cultural activities.

“The Community Hub is an idea that came from MZs themselves. In our field visits to local communities all of them highlighted the lack of premises as a reason for the absence of civic activism. This space is designed to help boost civic activism, improve the capacities that directly concern the absorption of international funds, for citizens to join forces in doing some volunteer actions, and in this way we will see how such hubs will function,” said Majda Ganibegović, UNDP Project Manager.

The Hub has already implemented a two-day training for representatives of MZs in Olovo and Ilijaš, and also plans to use this space for youth education, through the project “Equipping the Multimedia Centre in MZ Mrakovo with IT Equipment”. The facility is equipped with a set of ICT equipment, a tablet and office desks and chairs, to be used for trainings of young staff.



“The Community Hub equipped with IT equipment will provide space for training of young people and all those who will use it. In this space we’ll have various activities of the non-governmental sector, associations and all that is important in creating local development,” said Akif Fazlić, the Mayor of Ilijaš.

“The Community Hub is a project where we were all involved together and we want to send messages and ideas to the citizens how to be trained,” says Mehmed Smajlović, President of MZ Mrakovo.

Did you know?

In Bosnia and Herzegovina there are **2,587 formally established MZs**¹ of which:

- 1,451 in the Federation of BiH
- 1,058 in the Republika Srpska
- 78 in the Brčko District

¹ Mirna Jusić. 2014. *Local Communities MZs in BiH. Challenges and Perspectives of Institutional Development.* Social Research Centre Analitika, Sarajevo.

The financing of MZs in BiH is prescribed in a very general way. The law in the RS specifies that the local government should allocate special funds for the financing of MZs, and that the municipal statute should prescribe the ways of financing. In the FBiH, the law concerning MZs prescribes revenues in accordance with their powers, and emphasises the need for various sources of revenues, yet does not specify how to secure these funds.

In both entities and the Brčko District, funding of MZs is also foreseen through donations, gifts and payment for services provided by MZs, which means that these bodies have modest means for work and operating costs, and little financial independence from local self-government units.

What do citizens say?

ON PARTICIPATION AND TRAINING

“We have good cooperation with the UNDP, and the trainings we do with them can also be used for other projects, because we now know how to prepare a project and how to approach potential investors,” says Idriz Hota, President of the Council of MZ Dugandžići in Olovo.

“A positive side of this project is that it encourages inclusion, and helps us gain new knowledge and insights. We want to do something for the benefit of our community, we have the will, we have gained knowledge through trainings, and we are trying to contribute to the local community and social life in our setting,” says Emira Zečić, a member of the Steering Board of MZ Maoča, Brčko District.

“We are proud and happy that our MZ is included in this project. It so happened that we were the first MZ to hold a citizens’ forum in Banja Luka on 29 June 2017, after several seminars and instructions on the implementation of the project itself. We had a very good turnout of our citizens, and the forum was attended by over 80 residents. Citizens freely expressed their needs and delegated various proposals related to infrastructure, youth, women, sports, etc.,” Mirjana Lakić, President of the Council of MZ Paprikovac, Banja Luka.

“In the past year, we have held two citizens’ forums. This project is an example that a lot can be done from the local community itself; it is only important that we have good cooperation with residents. I think we moved many things from a deadlock thanks to our joint work and activism. Even before the UNDP came, we tried to make good contacts with the residents in our MZ and we jointly implemented some activities,” Željka Despotović, President of the Council of MZ Kočićevo, Gradiška.

ON NEW EQUIPMENT

“This donation will improve the work of our MZs. Now we can do our jobs much faster and more efficiently, and it is also important for improving our communication with citizens and the Municipality. IT equipment makes our work easier, we now have the opportunity to independently follow public calls, write projects and apply, as well as to work on networking with other MZs and organisations,” says Samir Sarajlić, President of the Council of MZ Jablanica 2.



ON COMMUNITY PROJECTS

“The citizens’ forum gave overwhelming support to our proposal for the extension of the branch school here in MZ Česma as we have two classrooms and five classes. The work is being done in three shifts and this is something that we’ve been already asking for in the past several years from the RS Ministry of Education and other competent institutions to expand the facility. This project with the UNDP is now a chance for the idea to finally come true. This classroom is something that is needed, and will mean a lot to students and residents of MZ Česma,” Miladin Maličević, President of the Council of MZ Česma, Banja Luka.

“Thanks to the funds from the UNDP and the Laktaši Municipality, we finally built a road in this part of Aleksandrovac. This road brings better infrastructural connection between citizens. These forums have shown the residents themselves recognise the priority problems in their surroundings very well. We will continue our participation in the project ‘Strengthening the Role of MZs in BiH’, we will hold forums regularly, go to seminars and we want to improve the quality of life in our community. The importance of this project for us is significant. We want to strengthen the social structures and build the infrastructure in MZ Aleksandrovac. Through workshops and roundtables, rural boards of MZ’s will be established and strengthened, and action plans developed to define the priority areas for the development of settlements,” said the President of MZ Aleksandrovac, Momčilo Dobrijević, Laktaši.

ON CSO'S PROJECTS

"It's common knowledge that parents are happy when their children are happy. In MZ Doljani, there is no place where parents could bring their children to have fun. One thing that children in towns have at their disposal every day, unfortunately, was not available to children in Doljani. We will now build a playground for children in our volunteer activities. All volunteers engaged in the construction of the playground will receive free membership in a fitness gym, planned as a part of the project implementation," says Haris Halilhodžić, President of the Youth Club "Pod istim suncem/ Under the same sun".

"This is the first project of its kind to be implemented in MZ Glogošnica. All who do enrol will have excellent preconditions to learn more about the basics of mountaineering, movement and behaviour in the mountain, providing first aid to the injured and many other issues to be addressed in the School of Mountaineering. For many, this will be their first contact with the mountain, and we want everything to go in the best possible way. We were surprised to see so many students, and we certainly expect many of them to continue with mountaineering, and that they will tell their friends only about nice things when it comes to our mountains. UNDP's support means a lot to us, since students will have all the

conditions needed to make it easier for them to master the School of Mountaineering," says Naid Keskin, Secretary of the Mountaineering Society and Project Coordinator for the School of Mountaineering.

"The project will contribute to improving the quality of life of the young people in Pale FBiH, through their training for launching entrepreneurial and innovative ideas. Young people are leaving BiH, and the society offers but few activities that support young people and their stay," says Nisad Crnčalo, President of the Youth Association of Pale Prača, explaining the need for investment in youth and their education.

"With this project we would like to motivate women in our community to socialise, enrich opportunities for their educational and creative expression, and improve their quality of life. Our goal is also to increase the membership of our Association and strengthen their capacity for traditional crafts," said Azra Jakupović, President of the Association "Women from Sana" from Sanski Most.





VIDEO: New vision of local communities (MZs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFXkcSp0trY&t=17s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9w6m10n8pE>



VIDEO: New models of local communities (MZs)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnmduHsdAzY>



UPCOMING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

In the coming period, "Strengthening the Role of Local Communities - MZ in BiH" will bring ...

- intensified citizens participation in local development and democracy processes
- implementation of new projects of MZs and CSOs
- mid-term project review
- new contracts with selected CSOs
- implementation kick-off of socially responsible ideas from Start-up Days
- conference for vision verification



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