

CIVIC ACTIVISM

LocalCommunities

August 2017



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Strengthening the Role of Local Communities – MZ in BiH

Armin Sirčo, Senior Coordinator and Head of the Social Inclusion and Democratic Governance Sector with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)



“Strengthening the Role of Local Communities – MZ in BiH” is a 14.5 Million KM worth joint project of the Government of Switzerland and the Government of Sweden, implemented by UNDP in BiH, in partnership with the 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, Rudno, Sanski Most, Stari Grad Sarajevo, Tešanj, Visoko, Zenica and Žepče.

In the past months, the project “Strengthening the Role of Local Communities – MZ in BiH” has continued to work successfully on promoting democratic and direct participation of citizens in local governance, whilst focusing on capacity building, infrastructure improvement and providing better quality services at the level of local communities.

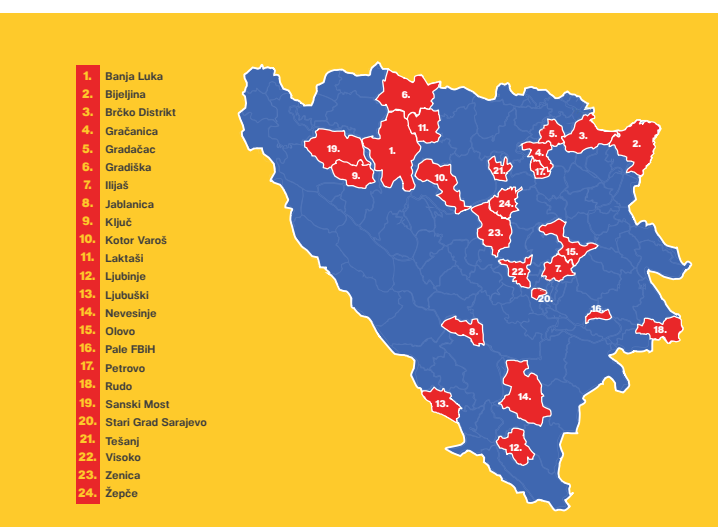
More than 2,700 citizens have participated in forums and trainings in their local communities since the day one of the project. Construction works have now been finalised in 32 local communities, and contracts signed for the implementation of 49 additional infrastructure projects. Civil society organisations are currently working on 18 projects focusing on socially excluded categories of population, and the implementation of 31 projects is to kick-start in 37 local communities in the coming period. These initiatives have brought about new roads, playgrounds, refurbished and warmer classrooms and offices.

Representatives of local communities, local self-governance units and civil society organisations have also undergone a number of training programmes that have strengthened their capacities and empowered them to participate more actively and responsibly in their communities, through trainings with the Centre for Civil Society Promotion. Thanks to our partnership with the Foundation Networks, after organising six Startup Days, we continued encouraging civic engagement through providing mentor support to develop socially beneficial ideas and projects. The Foundation for Development and Democracy has also teamed up with us and partner local communities and units of local self-governance to develop a political barometer, which will significantly contribute to strengthening the responsibility of all levels of government, as well as everyone involved in project implementation.

In just one year, the project has improved the quality of life of more than 100,000 BiH citizens in 24 local self-governance units, and 136 local communities, encouraging entrepreneurial spirit and promoting the stronger role of citizens in democratic processes, and with the same energy we continue to work on building social capital and social cohesion in communities across Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the coming period, we will continue to address the needs identified by citizens, through new public calls for projects and the implementation of significant initiatives in local communities. The focus remains on promoting participation of citizens, especially women and youth, exchanging experiences and good practices, and promoting the work that has been done through a new web platform

In order to promote an improved and better quality local government, working for the benefit of all citizens, new visions of local communities are to be discussed and analysed, including a planned consideration and review of the existing legal framework for the functioning of local communities and testing of the models for local communities, so as to identify the best conditions for democratic engagement and work at this level.



Check out the new project infographics:

[http://www.ba.undp.org/content/dam/bosnia_and_herzegovina/docs/Mesne%20zajednice%20MZs/INFOGRAPHIC%20ENGLISH%20\(ISPRAVLJENO\).pdf?download](http://www.ba.undp.org/content/dam/bosnia_and_herzegovina/docs/Mesne%20zajednice%20MZs/INFOGRAPHIC%20ENGLISH%20(ISPRAVLJENO).pdf?download)



Strengthening the Role of Women in Communities

The project "Strengthening the Role of Local Communities - MZ in BiH" is also working to promote greater and better quality engagement of women and youth in decision-making processes. To this end, a precise and thorough gender equality strategy was carried out at the onset of the project, so as to ensure greater involvement of women and girls in project activities.

"Our idea has always been for two groups in particular to act as our agents of change in the project - one being the youth, and women as the other. We have a solid action plan to additionally motivate women to engage in political processes at the local level, and to support women with ambitions, capacities and knowledge to engage, beyond a mere participation in political life; instead to be socially active in their communities. This project is a testament to the potential of women at the local level. Women often do not participate since they have no time. Community hubs need to be motivated to create the potential for women to engage in activities. Women should be encouraged to take part in the activities through their groups, businesses, forums, through networking - we aim to turn a sporadic into a systematic and consistent approach to strengthening the role of women in the community," Armin Sirčo, Senior Coordinator and Head of the Social Inclusion and Democratic Governance Sector with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

Before the project, women rarely attended meetings of local communities. The launch of forums and other activities in community hubs has motivated this group to participate in defining priorities. In cases where women



have already organized specific initiatives, the project provided them with an additional impetus to engage through various trainings and seminars, or civil society organisations and local communities. Today, women are now active participants in 136 local communities covered by this project in forums and in defining priorities, making up for 40 to 60% of attendees; they undergo trainings, work on the preparation and development of project proposals, attend meetings and are key actors in the project and community life.

"Before this project, there was a lot of apathy among citizens, especially women in rural areas. Thanks to regularly held forums, there are increasingly more women participating and advocating for their rights, and I am delighted, because the role of women in society is beginning to grow," Adisa Spahić, Manager of the Community Hub in Gračanica.

"The presence of women in this project is important not only for the sake of numbers, but also for the insight they can bring into a community-level situation considering that they tend to think outside the box about the actual needs.

Although our last-year's research had shown that women are very reluctant to engage in local policy processes or local community bodies, it is positive that they now really show the desire to attend both trainings and forums; that they are willing to learn, apply their own knowledge further and help others, so we really see progress in this direction, although we are aware that it takes time to go through the process of mentality change and capacity building," Majda Ganibegović, Project Manager, "Strengthening the Role of Local Communities - MZ in BiH."

WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION "PRVA", ŽEPČE

"We wanted to set up an association that would help women understand that changes in society, the municipality and the local community are possible, and that they must be the drivers of these changes and have a say in educational policy, health care, road infrastructure and other important issues. Our goal is for women to know where and how to engage, and also to know the process that their ideas need to go through before being accepted. Also, it is important for us that in the process women recognise their potential and skills they already have, as well as to adopt some new skills that would benefit the community," Marijana Matijević, President of the Association.

Its members and founders are women with more than two decades of experience in the non-governmental sector. The idea to establish a women's association has been around for a number of years, but the final step was made only in the late 2016. The name of the association "Prva" also stands for the mission of the association as initial letters stand for change, development, vision and activism in local language. As a part of the project "Strengthening the Role of Local Communities - MZ in BiH", Women's Association "Prva" has launched the implementation of the project "Our Empowered Community."

"We took it upon ourselves to make a change at the level of the local community, and use our own ideas and projects to lay solid foundation for women, men and youth who will continue our work. Without doing anything or without acting, we cannot expect a change," says Marijana.

Community Champions

Ferida Begović, MZ Kalošević, Tešanj

Ferida Begović is the Secretary of the Local Community Kalošević, with the population of 1801, but also one of rare women active in politics. She is also engaged in the non-governmental sector, promoting education and economic empowerment of women. Guided by her desire to achieve positive changes in the community, Ferida puts in her time, energy and skills to ensure a better life for herself, her family, but also other women in Tešanj.

Although her entire professional engagement was in public administration, an impetus for her to engage in politics came after she was left jobless. Having decided to take an active role in society, and contribute to community progress, she became engaged in local committees and women's associations, and also ran for the municipal council and at the cantonal level.

"Through my work and political engagement, I've come to realise it's very difficult for an individual to change anything and that we need to get involved in any way possible – whether through politics or non-governmental sector, to work actively on changes in the society. People are the key to changes at all levels, and if people change, institutions too will change. There can be no progress without a contribution from each and every one of us," says Ferida.

In our exchange, she underlines that the role of women in society is still limited, but what is missing is not only community support, but also the motivation of other women in her hometown to engage politically.

"I've worked hard to motivate women to get involved in politics, associations, local community bodies. The problem is that many of them are not interested, but if they do get involved, they can win the fight for better positioning on ballots. One thing needed before engagement is certainly training – women as well as men who get engaged in politics, must be familiar with basic competences, the organisation of the municipal council, cantons and other levels of governance."

Her active engagement in the community and this project has brought the desired results for Ferida also in professional terms, as she is now employed in her local community. In order to have as much knowledge and skills as possible needed for her work, she has taken part in all trainings offered under this project, including trainings for facilitators, the use of ICT, writing project proposals and project cycle management. She also had a chance to be part of the study tour to the city of Rijeka, which was very positive for her. In addition to education,



Ferida also stressed the importance of exchange of ideas and experiences with others: *"Apart from training, for us it was very useful to get to meet a lot of people from local communities, municipalities, entities, to exchange experiences with others, and come across so many positive and hard-working people."*

This project helps her, along with her fellow citizens, to address some of the burning issues in the community, such as building roads and other infrastructure-related issues, but Ferida points out that the most important element in the project is the social cohesion being built in the process.

Citizens are mostly involved through forums, and there they get motivated once they come to realise that it is them who get to decide about the work done in their local communities. Despite a still present certain dose of mistrust among the citizens, this trust is slowly being restored, since they are all equally motivated to see progress in their community. This involvement and engagement ensure greater accountability of everyone involved in community development, and more emphasis is put on capacity and work, with the community thus experiencing progress.

In addition to political engagement in the community, Ferida is also active in the non-governmental sector; she is a member of the Red Cross Assembly, and also a former member of commissions for gender equality and codes of conduct.

Some years ago, she made contact with the Association Women for Women International in Sarajevo, led by the desire to engage and educate women from rural areas, which is quite a challenge to have them motivated socially.

"Through my work with them, I was aware they were missing social engagement and mutual interaction, as a result of their workload. Through this organisation, we've had a chance to work on education related to women's health, women's human rights, as well as economic empowerment, through workshops on the production of medicinal herbs."

In co-operation with this organisation, Ferida has organised training for cultivating medicinal herbs, but soon realised that it will be easier to achieve goals through formal socialising, since it is very difficult for women individually to get funding and other incentives. As a result, Women's Association "Ruka" came to existence in 2011.

"My primary goal was the economic empowerment of women in rural areas, where a lot of women face a similar situation – they are middle-aged women, unable to find employment, of poor financial standing, with no higher education and thus have little chance of being independent. Also, in case they are employed, it is very difficult to send children to school on these salaries," says Ferida, whose son and daughter are both in college.

Following the initial co-operation with organisation Women for Women, Ferida continued her work on the production of medicinal herbs through the Farma project. Thanks to the project, a facility for drying herbs was procured for MZ Kalošević, which helped to expand the business. "I pride in being the founder of the association and the initiator of medicinal herbs," says Ferida.

"Several women had registered their business after the project, and I'm still planting herbs, for I'd grown to love it very much. What is most beneficial is that, apart from economic benefits, women do this also to benefit their own health."

Despite active political engagement, involvement in the project "Strengthening the Role of Local Communities – MZ in BiH", work in Women's Association "Ruka" and cultivating medicinal herbs, Ferida is not short of either ideas or energy for further work. She has just completed the training for beekeeping, and through this project and the non-governmental sector, she continues to motivate other women and youth to work together to achieve the new development goals in the MZ Kalošević.



Ferida Begović in panel discussion on behalf of the project "Strengthening the Role of Local Communities – MZ in BiH" at the presentation of the Swiss Cooperation Strategy in BiH in Sarajevo, organised by the Swiss Embassy in BiH.

Use of IT equipment – Technical Support for the Project

In order to create the conditions for more accessible, efficient and better quality services to citizens, the project has also provided technical support to all 136 local communities, through the award of a standardised set of IT equipment. The equipment has greatly facilitated the work of the staff in local communities and community hubs, which can now independently follow public calls, write projects, and apply for grants, as well as work on networking with local communities within the project, and beyond.

"The Community Hub, as well as the new IT equipment are there for citizens' wellbeing. Thanks to the equipment, here we can now jointly prepare projects with representatives of other local communities, and help each other," Adisa Spahić, Manager of the Community Hub in Gračanica.

In Žepče, the equipment was handed over on 30 March 2017, and then distributed to all six local communities included in the project. Equipment is currently being used

for communities' work, but in addition to everyday services to the citizens, the plan is also for this equipment to help with networking between social welfare centres and local communities, in order to ensure a fair distribution of social assistance, which would help implement the project vision.

"We have a number of those on welfare seeking financial assistance from various sources – social welfare office, municipality, local communities, but the database of the social welfare centre is not linked to the database in the municipality. Now we will work on linking also other local communities to set up a database and to know who had received social assistance and how much, to make sure that funds are distributed in a fair and equitable manner. With this kind of networking, it could be possible to explore other avenues, for example, for citizens to perhaps obtain their birth certificates or other documents from their local communities," Ivan Čurić, Deputy Project Coordinator, Žepče Municipality.

Support to democratic participation and activism

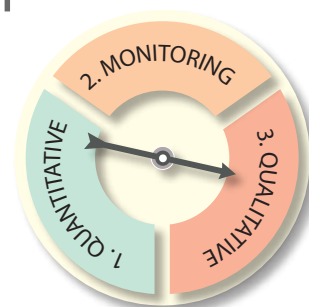
POLITICAL BAROMETER

In cooperation with the Foundation for Development and Democracy, open meetings have been organised with councillors of city and municipal councils and local communities, to discuss development plans of the local community through the prism of a civic engagement with a new role of local communities as a hub for direct civic participation in democratic processes. In the next step, questionnaires were filled out in all local self-governance units (LSGU) and local communities, while its results were used for the political barometer.

The barometer is conceived as a tool that can be used to:

- develop appropriate long-term accountability mechanisms,
- ensure transparency of stakeholders in the process, and key policies,
- provide an advocacy framework,
- define citizens' attitudes towards local issues and advance their engagement in local decision-making processes.

Political Barometer has so far been piloted in the municipalities of Ljubuški and Nevesinje.



The Barometer consists of three parts (quantitative, monitoring and qualitative part):

- The first, quantitative part of the barometer aims to measure the level of local community activities and the quality of citizens' participation in local processes.
- The second, monitoring part of the barometer follows the implementation of defined municipal development goals. Each municipality has identified four development directions, and will report independently on the steps taken to meet these goals.
- The third, qualitative part, actually represents an analysis of data obtained through the first two parts. Qualitative analysis is necessary, given that the functioning of these processes varies from one municipality to another.

Local communities in figures

In the period from May to August 2017:

- construction works were completed in 32 local communities,
- fitness equipment was purchased for three local communities, music equipment for two local communities and ultrasound for one local community,
- 18 projects of civil society organisations are currently underway with a focus on socially excluded population categories from 17 local communities,
- 77 MZ projects approved from 13 LSGUs,
- implementation agreements have been signed for 49 construction projects in local communities,
- procurement process for a vehicle has been initiated in one local community and the procurement process for equipment for multimedial classrooms also in one local community,
- 27 contracts have been signed for 31 more projects of civil society organisations in 37 local communities

- six Hack4MZ workshops were held on "How to finance your idea?", attended by 49 finalists from 18 LSGUs,
- six events held on motivational leadership, activism and entrepreneurship, gathering more than 200 participants,
- five contracts signed for rehabilitation of community hubs.



On 15 August 2017, in Sarajevo, UNDP signed new contracts with 27 civil society organisations in 35 local communities

Capacity Building and Development

SEMINARS AND TRAINING

After public calls for projects for local communities and civil society organisations, there was a clear need for capacity building in this regard. In order to successfully resolve the issue of project involvement and facilitate the application process, in cooperation with the Centre for Civil Society Promotion, trainings were organised for local communities and civil society organisations on how to prepare project proposals, as well as the Training of Trainers and lobbying training for the third group of LSGUs.



Project Cycle Management Training in Banja Luka

"As a local community, we went through trainings for facilitators, we now have the capacities to identify, define and address problems. We did not skip a single lecture or a training, and we are fully involved as a local community and really care to present it on the ground. Out of our ten priorities identified, including construction of a playground and chess table, education for children, energy efficiency, rehabilitation of existing buildings, streets and sections, almost six or seven have been resolved through this project," Fahrudin Pojskić, MZ Sejmen, Zenica.

NETWORKING AND COOPERATION

Within project activities, and as a continuation of focus on capacity building and the development of entrepreneurial spirit amongst citizens, after six Startup days in Sarajevo, Tešanj, Zenica, Ljubuški, Banja Luka and Bijeljina, support systems had been set up for those whose ideas were presented and awarded as socially beneficial projects of importance for the wider community. Together with the Networks Foundation, mentorship has been provided for the winners, including monitoring of the development of projects to ensure their implementation. To this end, six Hack4MZ workshops were held, as well as six events on motivational leadership, activism and entrepreneurship. During these events, the finalists and idea-makers had teamed up with relevant mentors and defined criteria to select five joint actions. Inspiration for further work during the events was also offered by motivational speakers Tomislav Cvitanušić and Almir Mukača.

The project has also inspired cooperation and better networking of local communities themselves, and now local communities within a certain LSGUs can work in an organised fashion on achieving common goals.

"After the meetings held as a part of this project, local communities in the municipality have their council (although still informally, for we are not a legal entity under the Law on Local Self-Governance), and they plan to use it to hold joint meetings periodically, and then present the municipality with our ideas and development projects, and therefore have a greater impact on the budget. Since we are not that many in numbers, but do have great solidarity in local communities, we could use this to define priorities for local communities and decide together where to invest and when it is most needed to invest," Brano Marjanović, Speaker of the Petrovo Municipal Assembly.



Citizens' Forum in MZ Paprikovac, Banja Luka

CITIZENS' FORUMS

In all local communities involved in the project, citizens' forums continued so as to define priorities and hold public hearings. The first forums were held in Banja Luka and Visoko, new local self-governance units that came on board of the project in May and June. More than 80 citizens attended the first forum in MZ Paprikovac in Banja Luka, on 21 June 2017.

"So far, we've had three forums, with a great turnout of more than 40 in attendance," Jasmina Čehajić, Secretary of the MZ Tešanjka.

Development partners visiting project activities

"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. In order to ensure a deeper insight into the activities and the extraordinary results of this project in communities, donors visits were organised in June and July 2017 to local communities. There, representatives of Sweden and Switzerland had the opportunity to visit project sites, get to meet representatives of local communities and LSGUs, as well as with citizens who directly benefit from funds invested in the project.

"Strengthening the Role of Local Communities – MZ in BiH" project, funded by the Government of Switzerland and the Government of Sweden, worth 14.5 million KM, includes 30% co-financing from LSGUs, which ensures ownership of the project for local authorities, and encourages their greater engagement. It is particularly important to emphasise that various activities implemented within the project were actually identified as priorities by citizens themselves, and include a large number of volunteers," Sukhrob Khoshmukhamedov, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in BiH.

ZENICA, 19 JUNE 2017

Swiss delegation from Bern and representatives of the Embassy of Switzerland in BiH had a chance to learn about the extraordinary results achieved during this and other projects in Zenica. Guests were informed about the functioning of local communities in the area of the City of Zenica, competences, work, as well as with the initiatives that are currently being implemented in the city.

"We were particularly pleased to host such a group and a visit to our local community, and an opportunity to showcase what we've done so far within the project," Fahrudin Pojskić, President of the Local Community Sejmen, Zenica.



PETROVO AND GRADAČAC, 24 JULY 2017

Representatives of the embassies of Switzerland and Sweden visited several projects in local communities in Petrovo and Gradačac. In the Petrovo Health Centre, they had a chance to see ultrasound –its procurement had a positive impact on the lives of all citizens. Also, they had a chance to learn more about the Red Cross's project organising volunteers from seven local communities in the Petrovo Municipality to work with pensioners, persons aged 60+ without income, but also women and others in need of assistance.

A visit was also paid to the primary school and a playground built in MZ Krtova, and also to MZ Vida in Gradačac, where a public lighting project was carried out. There was also an opportunity to meet and socialise with inspirational representatives of the Youth Council in the new community hub.



"It is my first visit to MZ activities, and I'm very much pleased to gain insight in project implementation and the functioning of local communities. This is one of my favourite projects, as it is delivering in places where people live. A project for me is a living one once I get to meet people and see what they do and how they are implementing it," Barbara Datwzler Scheuer, Cooperation Director, Embassy of Switzerland in BiH.

"Through this project and activities, we've learned that a lot can be achieved with the right people and good ideas, not only for our own sake, but for others too, as we change our environment through our actions," says Zlatko, a member of the Youth Council, MZ Vida 1.



MARIO VIGNJEVIĆ, Program Officer for Development Cooperation, Public Administration Reform and Local Governance Reform, and Anti-Corruption, Embassy of Sweden in BiH

The Governments of Switzerland and Sweden has started cooperating in BiH years ago, on a project working with local communities. Thanks to excellent results, we decided to pursue the same path. It is my pleasure to see that this project is already giving good results. The way of thinking we heard in meetings in Petrovo and Gradačac go along the same lines of the thinking that we support – namely, stronger role of citizens, stronger role of local communities in the life and work of the municipality, in project implementation in the municipality for the benefit of the population above all. What's most appealing to me in these projects are its tangible results and a smile on faces of its beneficiaries, whose proposals had made this project even more effective.



ALMA ZUKORLIĆ, Program Officer for Democratic Governance, Embassy of Switzerland in BiH

The project "Strengthening the Role of Local Communities – MZ in BiH" is of special interest, both for the governments of Switzerland and Sweden, and local governments in BiH and its citizens for it contributes to increased civic engagement and development of activism, which is the basis of a democratic society. Local initiatives that we witnessed during field visits go to show that engagement of citizens, especially women and young people, in decision-making processes, and the implementation of initiatives, indeed brings about concrete results, and thus impacts the transformation of local governments and greater efficiency and accountability of local authorities towards the citizens. We hope this approach will be also replicated in communities that are not part of this project, so as to enhance the processes of strengthening democratic society, and promote the establishment of partnership between citizens, local communities and local self-governance units.

From Activism to Change – Implementation of Priorities in Communities

Developing visions, forums and debates in local communities resulted in lists of priorities and development goals identified by citizens themselves. Based on these priorities, local communities and civil society organisations applied under the call for proposals with their own ideas and suggestions. Thanks to the support of development partners and UNDP, they have addressed numerous issues related to infrastructure and other priorities that have contributed to improved everyday life in communities, including road reconstruction, rehabilitation of premises of local communities, construction of playgrounds and community hubs. Activities in local communities and through civil society organisations have shown that citizens do care to be involved and contribute to solving problems in their communities.

IMPROVING STUDENTS' SAFETY, MZ OSTROŽAC, JABLANICA

During citizens' forums in October 2016, six proposals and priorities were presented, one including safety improvement and better access to school for students and employees of the branch of the Suljo Čilić Primary School in Ostrožac. The school has more than 80 students. Within the project, activities are underway to rehabilitate the schoolyard and facilitate access to schools, including construction of a support wall, a stone base, two lights, fence replacement and building ramps for people with disability, as well as setting up and connecting video surveillance. Locals were the initiators and the greatest advocates of this project, since their safety and safety of their children is in their own interest.

This project, worth 22,500 KM, of which 30% was co-funded by the municipality, improves traffic safety in one of the busy spots in Ostrožac. These activities will contribute to safety since the earlier school fence was not safe and children were not allowed to go in front of the school in the winter.

"In addition to this priority, thanks to forums, but also a scoring system implemented through the project, which makes activities much more transparent, other priorities had also been identified, such as the heating system in central school. The project has broader benefits for the community, since the school is used for other purposes, including citizens' forums, lectures of agricultural associations, presentation of projects," Adnan Proho, President of the MZ Ostrožac Council. Works are ongoing, and it is expected that by the start of the new school year, children as well as teachers and others using school premises would enjoy a safer access to the school building.

"The safety of children and all of us comes before anything else. Until now, we would bring and escort our children to school due to vicinity of the main road and unsafe access. Thanks to this project, the safety of children and all citizens coming to school will be improved. Also, a path for people with disabilities will facilitate access to children with special needs and contribute to their education. These works and the new fence will change and make our building and its surrounding much nicer, and I am thrilled to see this new school," Dženana Delalić, Head of Branch Department of the Suljo Čilić Primary School, Ostrožac.

Similar projects were also done in other local communities in Jablanica. One of the ongoing projects includes the introduction of heating in the primary school in the local community of Slatina, that has fifteen little children attending classes. The building is also used for other purposes, including holding of citizens' forums, seminars, trainings and workshops, and as a polling station.



INFRASTRUCTURAL IMPROVEMENT – PUBLIC LIGHTING IN MZ VIDA 1, GRADAČAC

Numerous infrastructure projects have improved the living conditions in the six local communities of the Gradačac Municipality. Some of these activities are public lighting projects, construction of a community hub, sports halls reconstruction, rehabilitation of the terrain and playground, road repair and construction.

Public lighting project was implemented in MZ Vida 1, worth over 38,000 KM, with contributions from not only the UNDP, but also the municipality and citizens themselves. Thanks to the project, public lighting coverage increased from 60% to 90%.

"A shift forward from the start of the project until now is visible both in terms of infrastructure and citizens. Public lighting is almost finalised, we now have a place to work at; we are working on two more public lighting



projects, building a youth centre and sewerage. And the citizens came to understand that they must get engaged and they also contributed either through participation or financial contribution to the public lighting project. There has also been a change in the council, and now we know that there are other options to finance and apply for projects, so we don't have to look at the municipality only," Mirel Bijedić, President of MZ Vida 1, Gradačac.

RECONSTRUCTION OF A PLAYGROUND IN MZ TEŠANJKA

In the Tešanj Municipality, roads were asphalted, paths paved, stands placed, sidewalks next to the primary school and MZ community premises and children's playground renovated. One of the projects that directly benefited more than 80 children in the Branch Primary School Kulin Ban is also reconstruction of the playground worth 28,930 KM. The playground was used this year to host events in July and the Memorial Tournament Zajim Kurtić. In the coming period, it is to be used as a venue for events of the Culture and Arts Association Behar from Tešanjka.

In parallel to the activities on the school playground, the Parents' Council of this branch school also launched an activity to renovate the school building. The works took place towards the end of the school year, and both children and teachers adjusted to these works. This type of activism shows that the citizens are willing and ready to engage, and stand for priorities that are important to them, and initiate and implement activities that benefit the whole community.



"Apart from this project, we also have other projects with the Municipality. There must be an initiator in everything, but when people see that something is being done, they too engage", Jasmina Čehajić, Secretary of the MZ Tešanjka.

In addition to projects already implemented in local communities across the country, numerous other infrastructure projects have commenced implementation in communities within the first and second rounds of the call. In the coming period, it is expected to see completion of works on the outer grounds of the Edhem Mulabdić Primary School and the construction of outdoor chess in **MZ Sejmen in Zenica**. This project covers both children and adults, not only from the local community of Sejmen, but other nearby local communities as well.

Youth Activism

The involvement of young people is also very important for the project as it encourages and motivates young men and women to be active members in their communities, and to advocate for positive changes in society. Through the planning and implementation of initiatives of social importance, young people also work on their own empowerment and capacity building, so that they can also be involved in decision-making processes and undertake certain responsibilities in their communities.

A group of young people from the Youth Council in Gradačac, with premises in the recently built Community Hub int MZ Vida 1, are committed to active engagement of their peers. Membership in the Youth Council is being passed on to the younger generations, who join gladly once they see positive results. Elma, a young activist, explains the process of motivating her peers: *"Young people get involved when they see us doing something good, and in this way, we make the best use of our time, and we do something useful for ourselves and for others."*

Their activities include the organisation of trainings, workshops on violence, and writing project proposals, cleaning the camp and the lake. Young people's creativity and their ideas, along with energy and motivation, are instrumental in community development. *"Someone can teach you how to write and manage a project, but no one can teach you how to come up with a project idea,"* says Zlatko, a young activist.

Young people need more support, not only from local institutions, but also from society. Sometimes they are faced with scepticism and criticism, but every year there is more and more young people joining their activities, and volunteer actions organised in Gradačac would often have as many as 100 and 200 participants.



"I would like to see everyone engaged, not only the young people, but from the youngest to the oldest, to have the same topic, the same issue we are addressing, and if we'd improved something in our community, not to leave it at that, but for someone to use our example and make it even better," says Amela.

YOUTH ACTIVISM IN OTHER LOCAL COMMUNITIES

"We have a team of young people we can count on and work with them. We do see that the youth is willing to get involved, but they need to be motivated. Now that they are motivated, we leave more and more activities to them, while we remain at their disposal in case they need something," Jasmina Čehajić, Secretary of MZ Tešanjka, Tešanj Municipality.

"Before this project, Olovo was missing something for the youth. This city has the potential and the capacity to give young people a good future and stability, but was missing something that would trigger the youth to participate. Now we have a really positive response from young people in our activities," Hedija Jamaković, Project Coordinator, Olovo Municipality.



Empowering socially excluded categories

In addition to the activities and projects of local communities, in all partner local communities, civil society organisations have also implemented projects of wider social importance, with a special focus on socially excluded population categories.

RED CROSS, PETROVO

"In the process of defining priorities, in two forums held in July and August 2016, in all five local communities involved in this project, there was a reoccurring idea about the need to provide support to marginalised groups, especially elderly with no income," says Marica Nikić, Secretary of the Red Cross and Volunteer Project Coordinator.

To respond to this challenge, the Red Cross founded a network of volunteers to volunteer and provide services to the elderly population that no one is taking care of, especially those in remote areas.

The project also contributes to a better quality of life for children up to 15 years of age, of which there are about 200 direct beneficiaries, pensioners with incomes below 400 KM, of which 750 directly benefit from the network as well as single mothers and unemployed women. In crisis situations such as floods or other natural disasters, the volunteer network would be invaluable for the entire Petrovo Municipality, with the population of over 7000.

This network of 21 volunteers, who have been trained, operates in all seven local communities of the Petrovo Municipality, and assists targeted categories with housework, preparing firewood for winter, buying medicines, food, cleaning, or driving to the health centre.



"The idea of volunteering in our community is a new one, especially in the form of organised networks, and our aim was to engage young people, but also engage all age groups to get involved in this initiative. Volunteers have no financial motivation, as they do not get paid, but they are driven by their desire to help and do something useful for their community," says Marica Nikić.

"The intention is to set up a database of marginalised groups, which will be the basis for our further work. Also, we would like the volunteer network in future to become a registered organisation with compulsory participation in municipal budget planning," Vlado Simić, Project Coordinator in the Petrovo Municipality.



"OUR CONCEPT", MZ VRATNIK, STARI GRAD MUNICIPALITY, SARAJEVO

One of the activities with a direct impact on the lives of women in the Stari Grad Municipality in Sarajevo are certainly workshops and trainings organised by the Association "Our Concept".

"I've been long staying at home, since I suffer from rheumatoid arthritis, but this work helped me change. Now I'm glad I can make something and give my own handicrafts and necklaces as gifts. This is also a psychological therapy – by doing handicrafts we become more relaxed and we would all love to continue socialising like this, we really need this," Alma, MZ Vratnik.

More than 40 women from all walks of life, whether unemployed, employed, pensioners, professors, hairdressers, those who graduated but have not yet found employment, women on the society's margins, or women with medical conditions, all take part together in workshops on how to make jewellery from wire, Fimo clay and woollen filaments, as well as crochet jewellery, and decoupage techniques. Apart from these training workshops aimed at economic empowerment of women, there is also psychotherapeutic effect, and also fitness classes attended by more than 60 women who cannot otherwise afford such classes. As a part of the project, there was also a painting workshop organised for children at the Hamdija Kreševljaković Primary School.

"We love to do work and learn, we got to know each other and we socialise, from pensioners to those who are employer or unemployed, all women, together we take part in these trainings," says Nazira, a training participant.

The project idea came from the President of the Association "Our Concept", Sanela Muharemović. *"Considering that we have many unemployed women with no activities, my vision was to organise something that will get them out of the house, and also have a psychotherapeutic effect. Some women have experienced tremendous psychological improvement with this work. They are happy to put so much love*



and creativity into making jewellery for themselves and others, and we look forward to giving them an opportunity to sell their work at an exhibition."

Women who are taking part in this programme have received basic work kits that helps them work actively on this hobby, so in the coming period they would have the opportunity to use it to ensure basic economic independence.

"Most women here are unemployed and could not participate in this activity had it not been free of charge. For me, it's the first time I'm a part of something like this. I come here to clear my mind, like some sort of psychotherapy. Trainers are great; they share knowledge with us and are dedicated. Women of all generations have come together here, and this is an incredible incentive for women of this age; it is good for us to socialise", says Narcisa and shows off her freshly made necklace.

The exhibition of works is planned in September and training participants have already shown some of their work gladly and proudly. They would all like to see these trainings continue in future, as well as some similar opportunities to spend time in contact with other women, working on their own skills, socialising, and talking. They all claim to attend every workshop out of love ...



Community Champions

Admir Kurić, MZ Slatina, Jablanica

Admir Kurić, President of the Local Community Council in Slatina, Jablanica, is an activist who motivates young people in Slatina to engage through their community not only in this project, but also other activities and initiatives of social importance, in order to contribute to creating better living conditions and ensure that young people stay and remain in this area.

Tell us about some of the priorities and problems you and other young people face in your local community?

One of the major problems in our community is population brain drain. According to the census, local community Slatina currently has the population of about 450 inhabitants, but there are far less of those who stay in this area every day. Also, the majority population here are elderly, while young people who are here have a problem with employment due to lack of jobs.

Apart from these problems, we also have other everyday challenges regarding infrastructure and organisation of our community. One of the priorities identified by most citizens is the lack of heating in the Suljo Čilić branch school, with 15 students currently attending classes under two curricula. At the citizens' forum, it was decided that heating is a priority for the school, since during the winter months, it is impossible to use other rooms. Thanks to the works that are currently underway, a new school year will welcome youngsters and teachers with warm classrooms and better working conditions.

We all use the school building for many activities. It is not only for classes, but it also hosts citizens' forums, it is a polling station, a venue for trainings and seminars, such as counselling for women from the Jablanica Municipality, and a seminar on raspberry-keeping prepared by the Farmers' Association; therefore, new heating in school will benefit our entire community.

Were there any other benefits under this project, save for addressing this priority?

Throughout this project, various types of seminars, training and networking have been of great help. MZ Slatina has no prior record of activities with the UNDP, but we joined the project through our municipality and it gave us the opportunity to work on building our own capacities. We had trainings in computer literacy, trainings for project preparation and management with the Centre for Civil Society Promotion, which were very useful, and trainings on lobbying. Many from our local community have been through these trainings, and are now trained to take over the local community after the end of my term. UNDP Team is providing constant support, while meetings with potential investors through the Networks Foundation have



been useful to encourage the entrepreneurial spirit. It was of great help for us that through this project we got to meet many with different thinking and these interactions give us new ideas and motivation for further work.

How are young people engaged in this project?

In the Council of our local community we have a lot of young people involved in functioning and decision making. They are willing to do the job, even if they are not formally part of the Council, but have participated in some trainings. A total of 15 citizens from our local community have undergone trainings as a part of the project, including facilitation training, computer literacy and preparing project proposals.

Our local community consists of three parts – Gornja, Srednja and Donja Slatina, and it is difficult to decide which of these areas is a priority. Now in the Council we have young people from all three areas so it is easier to identify and decide on priorities that are most important at a given time. So far, we had three citizens' forums, and also a hearing on the budget of the Jablanica Municipality and the priorities included therein, including reconstruction of water supply and sewage system. Forums and budget consultations have been the practice of the municipality even before, but not in this format, and not that many citizens attended. We now focus on our problems and priorities, and we are trying to draw attention of the mayor and municipal departments to these.

What about your previous experiences in cooperation with other community stakeholders, such as the municipality and civil society organisations?

We did a lot thanks to the cooperation with the mayor Salem Dedić, and we have exceptional cooperation with municipal bodies, and good communication with political parties. We turn to the municipality if we need help for socially vulnerable categories, especially for pensioners who need medicines, and the municipality always accommodates our requests with certain amounts. We have a list of those who are socially vulnerable as well as those who need assistance to buy seeds for planting. So, in cooperation with the municipality, we are working on helping the citizens.



Cleaning a beach in MZ Slatina, Jablanica

We also cooperate with the organisation “Under the same sun”, and we worked together to make a beach on the banks of the Jablanica Lake and the cleaning of the banks. This organisation has also carried out training for members of our local community, and provided premises and IT equipment to work in project preparation.

In addition to work on this project, and cooperation with civil society organisations, you have also been involved in many other initiatives in MZ Slatina. Which activities have you implemented so far?

We have launched many initiatives for construction, maintenance and improvements in our community. I’m not in favour of anyone else doing the work if we can do it ourselves. A lot of material and donations came from the municipality to help us address certain infrastructural problems through crowdsourcing, for example concrete and mixers for concrete, and then we work ourselves to build whatever it is that we need. Over the past three years, we’d installed 150 cubic meters of concrete, changed the site for electrical installation and poles in length of 2 kilometres, installed lighting, laid 2 kilometres of road towards the Jablanica Lake and the sewage is currently being set up.

Young people in our community mostly respond to every initiative, and sometimes it is difficult to provide transport for everyone willing to volunteer. We’ve been cleaning

the road towards the lake, mowing and cleaning the graveyard, repairing fences and making an entrance gate. We also had a project of bus stops, needed for children when they go to school.

Also, after I took over as the President of the Council of the Slatina Local Community, I’ve actively been advocating to have the mountain lodge improved. We soon obtained consent from the BiH Radio and TV to rehabilitate the old transmitter, and we got the material with the assistance from the municipality. Thanks to our work we now have an improved mountain lodge available for hikers, bikers and motorists.

What motivates you in your work?

This local community and people here are like my family. I believe I have a great responsibility to be in this position and it gave me the opportunity to be a leader and to stand up for solving problems in this area. My goal is to solve all problems in our local community through counselling. It is essential to gain trust and work based on agreement. Once people do recognise that we are doing something, then they trust us and are ready to engage.

I hope this local community will only more forwards and that the right person would follow in my footsteps. My wish is to involve young people more actively in development activities, and to stay here – but that requires greater focus on job creation and employment.



Works on the mountain lodge at the Pisvir peak



Mowing and cleaning of the graveyard

Community Hubs

Community Hubs are premises used by local communities and citizens to gather, network, collaborate, participate in decision-making, learn and develop themselves and their communities, and play an important role in the development of social capital and cohesion. So far, 12 Community Hubs have been opened and equipped within the project. Activities in these hubs are coordinated by managers, financed by municipalities.

COMMUNITY HUB OLOVO

Community Hub in Olovo, which is part of a sports centre with volleyball, tennis and basketball courts, attracts a lot of interest from citizens, and is already used for activities of associations and sports teams, book promotions, workshops on cultural heritage and environmental protection. Regular organisation of events, tournaments and sports events ensures that the Community Hub is indeed a centrepiece in the life in the community.

"In our discussions with citizens we've noticed there was a need for them to socialise, to be a part of the local community and a part of decision-making, and now through this project and the Community Hub, they have more chance to get involved," says Hedija Jamaković, Project Coordinator for the Olovo Municipality.

The plan is to also promote economic goods in the hub, hold handicraft exhibitions, and various classes, while the schedule in the sports centre and the hub itself are packed with programmes of civil society organisations and sports associations. New and modern premises also give an opportunity to young people, already active in sports and social engagement, to get even more engaged through the hub and implement their ideas, and be active promoters of progress and development of their community.

"I believe this to be a turning point in the development of the Olovo Municipality where every citizen can feel important and where their ideas can come to life. Associations that do not have their own offices or adequate premises can now use this space for their activities – the hub actually promotes the idea where every citizen feels part of this community," Community Hub Manager, Amir Muminović.



COMMUNITY HUB GRAČANICA

The Community Hub in Gračanica opened on 26 May 2017, and is open to citizens, associations and councillors of local communities. Projects are currently being prepared on these very premises for local communities of Gračanica, Orahovica and Malešica, and so far, 18 project proposals have been prepared here. Community Hub Manager Adisa Spahić told that the centre plans to hold various activities such as movie screenings for children, painting workshops for children and elderly, poetry nights, promotions of the newsletter Gračanica Glasnik, Henna Days and many other activities that will add value to everyday life in Gračanica. Citizens come to the hub to socialise, talk and discuss priorities and topics of importance for the community.

In Gračanica, the Community Hub is also used to pilot a platform, currently used to raise funding for folk dance and folk costumes for 35 girls and boys, and equipment for a football incubator for youngsters in the local community of Gornja Orahovica.

"The number of citizens participating in the activities, especially forums, is growing and in their votes, we also see a change in the way of thinking about priorities. It is interesting to observe how strengthening the role of the local community also implies strengthening of individuals in local communities because citizens feel empowered and engaged. This Community Hub will serve as a bond between the citizens, and the space where they can connect and work together for the benefit of the whole community," Adisa Spahić, Manager of the Community Hub Gračanica



EDIS DERVIŠAGIĆ, MAYOR OF THE GRADAČAC MUNICIPALITY

I am convinced that this project will contribute to even stronger cooperation between the Gradačac Municipality and its citizens. I believe that the future of the municipal development is based on this partnership with citizens, but also with development partners like such as the embassies of Sweden and Switzerland, and the United Nations Development Programme. Without this kind of cooperation and support, local governments can hardly achieve a significant step forward, but with our forces pulled together, citizens, local communities, municipalities, and donors can contribute to a better quality of life.



1. How did Gradačac get involved in the project “Strengthening the Role of Local Communities – MZ in BiH?”

This project is one of several projects involving the Gradačac Municipality, and somehow it coincided with the activities we have already carried out, such as actions which aimed to strengthen the role of local communities in decision-making processes in the municipal council and regulating the issue of elections in local communities. In these elections, citizens had an opportunity to choose their own representatives, and after the election, Gradačac got brand new councils in 36 local communities. In parallel to these events, we also applied for this project, and we were glad to have been selected in the first round.

2. Tell us about some of the main activities done so far to strengthen the role of local communities and promote active citizenship?

After selecting six local communities to participate in the project, forums were held in these communities where citizens had the opportunity to participate and learn more about all the activities. What is particularly important to us is that the project has motivated the local communities and citizens themselves to decide on the activities to be implemented. These six local communities have succeeded to form their own teams that have applied for and implemented projects on their own, with the support of the UNDP and the Gradačac Municipality, and we are already at the last stage of certain infrastructural projects.

3. How do you involve citizens in a project and how do you work with them?

Citizens are involved through forums and hearings, and it is very important to find a way to build trust between citizens and LSGUs and certain institutions which could and should work directly to improve living conditions. One of the key motives for citizens to now be increasingly involved is that we have built the trust and they know that their suggestions could be translated into concrete actions. It is important for the citizens to be familiar with a certain project from the very beginning and the idea,

through the application and administrative part, all the way to concrete implementation of the project, so as to achieve a positive result at the end.

Unfortunately, it can be concluded that certain groups of citizens are not active; there is a lot of confusion and distrust in certain activities undertaken. They look at these activities as bystanders, without active involvement, but the number of these is getting smaller, and there are many more who want to be active and participate for it is clear that such activities contribute to better quality of their life, and all this is seen through concrete deliverables.

4. Why are these projects and activities important to you?

It is especially important that such work also has an impact on activities of other local communities that are not part of this project and certain groups such as youth, women and socially excluded population categories. We insist on involving as many as possible, and not just the Councils of local communities. The project also facilitates conditions for concrete work, in terms of opportunities created with space, furnishing of rooms, equipping of community centres, all with a significant impact on the inclusion and the gathering of young people who contribute to the life in a particular local community through their own activities.

5. How do you see the role of the municipality, the mayor and the LSGUs in general in promotion of active citizenship?

Every mayor as a person in charge of a certain LSGU has a duty to work actively on promoting the rights of citizens. Without such synergy and links and concrete cooperation and everyday communication between the mayor and citizens at the MZ level, I doubt we could have positive result. We have so many good quality ideas and individuals who often do not have the chance to express their creativity, capacities and knowledge, hence the need to facilitate possibilities for these citizens to contribute with their ideas to solving problems in local communities.

A word from citizens

"Since I follow the work of the local community bodies, keeping in mind the role of the local community as well as that citizens through these bodies participate in improving living conditions in their own area, we believe that members of the Council should be constantly educated and motivated to work even more effectively. The project "Strengthening the Role of Local Communities – MZ in BiH" is exactly contributing to this aim. In all its activities so far, seminars and trainings attended by representatives of local communities and forums all citizens participate equally and actively. Also, study visits, assignment of IT equipment, training of local community representatives to write projects, and cooperation with non-governmental organisations, all contributed to the strengthening of activities of Councils of local communities as well as civic activism, which is at the same time one of the goals of this project. In the next period it is expected to see implementation of projects submitted by local communities after the public call," Aida Isaković, Project Coordinator at the Zenica Municipality.

"This has greatly assisted not only our work, but also medical treatment for our patients. We have over 120 cancer patients in our municipality, who previously had to go to Doboj or Banja Luka for diagnostics, so this has helped them avoid long waiting period," Toda Đukanović, Head Nurse, Health Centre, Petrovo.

"We've done a lot here thanks to you, because now citizens choose and decide in forums on priorities, which was not the



case before. We had excellent turnout in forums, and there is an increasing interest now in the second round, and we have identified priorities. Through this project I learned a lot in seminars and training, but not even I would always know what is most important," Brano Marjanović, Speaker of the Municipal Assembly Petrovo.

"Last year and half, we have a feeling that communication with the municipality has improved, we know who the contact person is, what the municipality requires from us and we are trying to join forces to overcome problems. Thanks to this project, six local communities got to know each other and each of them had their own partners, so we work better now," Mirel Bjedić, MZ Vida 1, Gradačac.

DID YOU KNOW?

Law on the Principles of Local Self-Government in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Article 43)¹ and the Law on the Local Self-Government of Republika Srpska (Article 106)² define the following ways of engaging citizens in the work of the LSGU:

- ✓ referendum,
- ✓ citizens' forum,
- ✓ civic initiative,
- ✓ local community (MZ),
- ✓ hours for citizens in assemblies and
- ✓ other forms of participation, in accordance with the Law.

Local communities in FBiH have the competence in the following areas:

- ✓ adopting spatial plans in the area of local communities, including utility facilities and facilities in general use
- ✓ development of economy and social affairs
- ✓ care for those in need of assistance and cooperation with the professional bodies in areas of social protection
- ✓ development of culture and sport
- ✓ preservation and protection of nature and man-made values in human environment.

¹ "Official Gazette of the Federation of BiH", no. 49/06 and 51/09

² Official Gazette of RS", no. 2.4.

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

In order to achieve a better and more prosperous life in the communities, a 10-steps guide was published as part of the project 'How to Startup your Community?'

Focused on individuals and human potential as a basis of sustainable development, this publication brings the concepts and the mentality of startups closer to community development, and it serves as a beacon to all those who are ready to take their communities forward, working according to the principles of activism, leadership and entrepreneurship. The Guide is intended for individuals from all walks of life with ideas how to contribute to transforming your communities through inclusive and sustainable development as well as for public institutions and their staff.

The underlying thread throughout the whole document is:

"If I do not act, then who else?"



UPCOMING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES...

"Strengthening the Role of Local Communities – MZ in BiH" in the coming period will bring ...

- more active civic engagement in initiatives and projects at the local level
- improved infrastructure in local communities
- more intensive engagement of socially excluded categories in the society
- analysis of the legal framework, and strengthening of accountability across all levels
- promotion of current activities through the new web platform www.mjesnazajednica.ba



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This publication was published within the framework of the project "Strengthening the role of local communities in BiH", funded by the Government of Switzerland and the Government of Sweden, and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in BiH. The contents of this publication, as well as the findings contained therein, do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government of Switzerland and the Government of Sweden, nor of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).