



PROJECT FACTSHEET

Western Balkans January 2017

REVITALIZED LOCAL COMMUNITIES REPRESENTING VOICES OF ALL CITIZENS



Ceremony of distributing certificates for local community/MZ and municipal representatives © SDC

Given the complex and difficult political and administrative environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina municipalities face serious challenges to serve their citizens properly, and citizens feel that their needs are not heard by politicians. The local administrative levels are considered the most dynamic and responsive ones to address citizen's concerns. The project **Strengthening the Role of Local Communities** focuses on empowering Local Communities (Mjesna Zajednica – MZ) to raise citizens' responsiveness, participation, and social inclusion in local development processes.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is suffering its most severe socio-economic crisis since the 1992-1995 war. Political deadlocks coupled with the complex institutional structure of Bosnia Herzegovina, with two constitutional entities – the Federation of BiH and the Republic of Srpska- have resulted in slow pace of reforms, low investment, unemployment and growing social inequalities. To address these challenges which hamper the integration of the country to the European Union, efficient and effective institutions are required responding to citizens' needs.

In this context, the MZs form the most responsive and dynamic level. These are community governance units at village or neighborhood level and have been established during the Yugoslav period. Considered as the best to articulate the needs of citizens and channel citizen participation in the municipal decision making processes, the MZs have degraded since the 1990s and now operate without clearly defined functions, assignments and budgeting. Furthermore, the citizens themselves have become discouraged and lethargic due to poor socio-economic living conditions, limited reform progress, and weak participatory approaches at the local level. Thus it is of great need to revitalize the work of local communities and increase community-led initiatives to improve services according to citizens' needs, especially those of marginalized and vulnerable groups.

NEW VISION OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN BIH

The project focuses on developing and realizing a new vision of MZs in BiH – one that will enable empowerment and inclusion of women, youth and other marginalized groups for economic, social and political participation. The vision setting process will include all government levels starting with the MZ level. First, the project will strengthen the capacities of MZs champions who will facilitate citizen forums to identify local needs and existing capacities. It will further seek to connect MZs with civil society organizations for co-creation of community-led initiatives and to address particularly the needs of marginalized people. Consequently, citizens will increasingly be able to voice out directly their concerns, take part in local decision-making and the creation of municipal plans and budgets. As such active citizen participation through MZ will improve the access to and the quality of public services and finally the quality of life

of local communities.
The project will include a total of 120 MZ from 20 municipalities

MZS SHOW PROMISING RESULTS AND DEDICATION

From 2001 to 2012 the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has been engaged in various projects to foster sustainable municipal development and to enhance community-based participation. Support to MZs has shown visible results in raising awareness among MZ stakeholders about their democratic rights, increased capacities to engage in decision making and significant improvement in communication between MZs and municipal authorities. The project Strengthening the Role of Local Communities (Mjesne Zajednice – MZs) will be a continuation on these good foundations and previous SDC interventions.

NEW:

In 2016 the first steps have been taken to prepare the basis of the project: To dress a better picture of the functioning of the communities as well as to gain an understanding of the legal possibilities, several studies and surveys were conducted. A comparative analysis in five countries permitted to elaborate some recommendations for future community governance in the Bosnian context. After the selection process of the MZ training sessions took place to prepare MZ facilitators for community meetings. A highlight of the year were the 156 forums, organized in 77 MZ between April and June 2016, where 4500 people gathered to address challenges and define priorities for their communities. MZ were also provided with tools to maintain forums on a regular basis so they become a standardized form of citizens' participation in local governance processes for better service delivery.



Citizens forum in this Local community/MZ Gradisce in Zenica
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THE PROJECT IN BRIEF

NAME

Strengthening the Role of Local Communities

DEPARTMENT

SDC – Cooperation with Eastern Europe

THEME

Governance

COUNTRY/REGION

Bosnia and Herzegovina

PARTNERS

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The MZs possess immense potential to articulate the needs of citizens and ensure their involvement in local decision making processes. However, the MZs now operate without clearly defined functions, assignments and budgeting. While at the same time the citizens are discouraged and lethargic to seek inclusion and exercise their democratic rights.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The project targets Local Communities to strengthen their capacities in order for them to successfully represent the interests of citizens to local governments. The project will seek to develop new, more inclusive visions of MZs and regulatory framework as a foundation for more participatory and accountable local governance. They are to be established as democratic spaces for civil initiatives.

TARGET GROUP

120 Local Communities in 20 local governments, country-wide

PHASE DURATION

01.11.2013 - 30.06.2019

PHASE BUDGET SDC

CHF 4'100'000

FURTHER INFORMATION

SDC activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (en): <https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/countries/bosnia-herzegovina.html>

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