

Serbia: Sustainable Development in the Southern Region 2012-2014

Sector: Housing

The Evaluation Report

by James A Newkirk

**Serbia:
Sustainable Development
in the Southern Region 2012-2014**

Sector: Housing

The Evaluation Report
by James A Newkirk

May 2013

Preface

This report was prepared by the evaluation expert James Newkirk, proposed by the Institute for Territorial Economic Development (InTER) to perform this assignment based on the contract signed with Caritas Luxembourg.

The evaluator wishes to thank the interlocutors from the City of Vranje, Bujanovac Municipality, representatives of Caritas Luxembourg and representatives of NGO Vizija and INTERSOS, as well as project beneficiaries, for their contributions to this report.

The evaluation was undertaken during May of 2013.

Disclaimer: The views and comments expressed in this text are the responsibility of the evaluator and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of Caritas Luxembourg or InTER.

Table of Contents

Acronyms and Abbreviations.....	1
Introduction	2
Scope of the evaluation	2
Evaluation Methodology	2
Key Findings	2
Is the current project effective?	2
Housing	3
Income-generating Activities	4
Is the current project empowering local actors and beneficiaries?	5
Which additional measures should be taken to improve it?.....	6
Which potential stakeholders should be involved in the future, which have not been involved yet?	6
Summary of Conclusions	6
Annexes	8
Annex 1 - Documents Reviewed.....	8
Annex 2 – List of Interviewees	8
Annex 3 – Terms of Reference	8

Acronyms and Abbreviations

IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IGA	Income-Generating Activities
InTER	Institute for Territorial Economic Development
ToR	Terms of Reference
CSW	Centre for Social Work

Introduction

The Foundation Caritas Luxembourg has been implementing development projects in the Balkans for more than ten years. The Foundation Caritas Luxembourg is currently implementing a development programme in Serbia, in the sectors of Education, Income Generation Activities and Sensitization and Information. The overall objective of the programme is the improvement of living conditions of the population in Serbia and the activities are mainly implemented in the municipalities of Vranje and Bujanovac. The programme is being implemented through a participatory approach.

The Foundation Caritas Luxembourg engaged the evaluator to undertake an external evaluation of the Support Through Housing Solutions For Vulnerable People In The South Of Serbia project. The project has run from April 2012 through April 2013, with an intention to extend it, until the end of 2014. The original budget of the project was Euros 181,190.78, of which Euros 139,350.78 was provided by Foundation Caritas Luxembourg. The implementing agencies for the project were the Italian NGO INTERSOS and the local NGO Vizija.

The project focused on residents of Collective Centres in Bujanovac and Vranje in Southern Serbia. The intent of the project was two-fold: to provide a sustainable housing solution for 13 refugee/ IDP families through a 'village housing' solution and to assist these 13 beneficiary families to gain some level of financial sustainability through an 'Income-generating Activity' (IGA) programme.

Scope of the evaluation

Per the Terms of Reference, the key questions to be addressed in the evaluation report were:

- Is the current project effective?
- Is the current project empowering local actors and beneficiaries?
- Which additional measures should be taken to improve it?
- Which potential stakeholders should be involved in the future, which have not been involved yet?

Evaluation Methodology

In order to address these questions, the evaluator studied all project documentation made available by Caritas Luxembourg and by the partner organizations; carried out a number of interviews with Caritas Luxembourg staff in Vranje, with partner organisations (INTEROS and Vizija), with beneficiaries of the project and with representatives of Centres for Social Work (CSW) and the Commissariat for Refugees in Vranje and Bujanovac.

Key Findings

The findings of the evaluation are structured against the evaluation questions as detailed in the Terms of Reference.

Is the current project effective?

The project has been effective.

Housing

The project was effective in providing village housing for 13 beneficiary families, as intended. Of the 13:

- 12 come from Collective Centres in Bujanovac.
- One comes from the Rasadnici Collective Centre in Vranjska Banja.

The 12 families from Bujanovac come from:

- The Salvatore Collective Centre (4 families).
- The Decji vrtic Collective Centre (4 families).
- The Motel Kamping Collective Centre (two families).
- The Stara Ciglana Collective Centre (2 families).

A total of 50 family members have been housed with these 13 families.

The 13 beneficiary families have been provided village housing in a number of different locations across Serbia:

- Four families remained in Bujanovac (14 total family members).
- Two families were relocated to Zitoradja (9 total family members).
- Two families were relocated to Becej (6 total family members).
- The beneficiary family from Vranje was relocated to Kragujevac (3 total family members).
- One family from Bujanovac was relocated to Vranje (5 total family members).
- Two families were relocated to Smederevo (9 total family members).
- One family was relocated to Vranjska Banja (4 total family members).

All respondents within the interview process were supportive of and positive about the well-delivered, positive and successful outcomes of the housing component. As one beneficiary said, ‘Look, we could not even dream about this only a little time ago. We had a *room*, of 7 x 2.5 metres at the collective centre. Now we have this.’ (*This is two houses for two brothers and their families, farm-type buildings and a yard. In other words, a home, with a facility for and plan for raising sheep.* Another beneficiary said ‘It has been so important to get our own place. It is so very nice now. We have our own house now after a very difficult 13 years in the collective centre. Now it is just great.’

Another particularly relevant comment, about the importance of the project, was that ‘beneficiaries, in this process, become active, they become pro-active even. Collective centres are all about reacting – with this process they become active.’ This psychological change is indicative of importance of the project’s activities and outputs.

The evaluator visited two beneficiaries, neither of which had completed the renovation of their new houses. Both had received the requisite materials but had not found the time and/ or money necessary to finish this work. It is the view of the evaluator that within the framework of the project extension these, and any similar circumstances, cannot be allowed to remain. There are two reasons for this:

- The housing assistance process includes an independence component – the ability of the recipient to complete with their obligations is one aspect of this independence. It may be that some revisions are required to the financial aspects of the housing programme, but in any case it is critical from an independence perspective that renovations are not left incomplete, and that provided housing does not contribute to any level of dependence on the state or donors.

- It is inappropriate for Caritas (and Vizija/ INTERSOS) to provide assistance to beneficiaries that can appear to be incomplete, or that leave beneficiaries in houses with incomplete sanitary facilities.

Income-generating Activities

The project has been somewhat effective with its IGA, although not as effective as with the housing component.

Following field interviews, it is the view of the evaluator that the project proposal was somewhat overstated in its comments on ‘dependency syndrome’ and ‘professional training’. The proposal document leaves the impression that some serious change is expected in these areas, an impression that does not reflect the intent nor possibilities of the project. The size and timeframe of the project do not allow significant change in these areas, and it is clear from the field work that the real intent of the IGAs was to strengthen the positive nature of the experience of beneficiaries – to ‘reach an improvement in their level of satisfaction with their economic situation’, and this improvement in level of satisfaction is indeed apparent. As was stated in field interviews:

Based on our experience in the past, we know that an IGA does not change people’s income situation. Based on an UNHCR-funded evaluation of our work over many years, an evaluation that got detailed feedback from over 500 of our earlier beneficiaries, we anticipate that there will be a contribution to levels of satisfaction within the beneficiaries perception of their economic life. No real improvement in income, but improvement in their level of satisfaction with their economic situation.

Further, the size of the IGA, relative to the size of the house, is important – it adds quite a lot of value to the overall sense that beneficiaries of their involvement in the project, and its benefits. Just a house is not nearly as strong a contribution as a house and an IGA.¹

Further, the ‘professional training’ was much more focused on a) ensuring the IGA was appropriate to the skills and experience of the beneficiary and b) that beneficiaries were provided with enough advice and practical inputs, upon receipt of their IGA, to ensure the IGA was used as effectively as possible.

Project reports do not discuss the IGA in sufficient detail, nor in these reports does the discussion canvass the outputs and outcomes (if any) of the IGA. Rather, reports focus on the delivery of animals or machinery. Greater emphasis should be placed on how the contributions are understood as the *tools* with which the IGAs assist in breaking through the sense of dependency, *not* the actual assistance that is being provided. The following is the complete discussion of the IGA from the 2012 Annual Report of the project:

Intersos’ agronomist has visited all selected families, assessing their background and potential for agriculture Income Generation Activities. A list of items to purchase and donate has already been drafted. However, some of the beneficiaries have not taken any decision yet about the kind of support they need. In particular, some are considering the possibility to start an economic activity out of the agricultural sector. Further consultations with beneficiaries are ongoing to assess their capacities and to agree on the kind of assistance that might be in better accordance with their skills and background.²

The most recent report (April 2013) provides the following detail, which, again, does not provide sufficient comment on outputs and outcomes, but focuses on inputs and activities:

- ‘To procure items opted by beneficiaries, INTERSOS used three quotation procedures to assist 10 families – 40 individuals (including 5 Roma families – 20

¹ Comment from field interview.

² Project Annual Report – 2012. Vizija and INTERSOS.

individuals) approved at the first and second Selection Commission meeting. Beneficiaries opted as follows: 2 beneficiaries opted and received various types of tools (motor saw, welding apparatus, lock smith kit), 3 received power diggers, 2 green houses with equipment and 3 sheep. INTERSOS contacted 6 companies to present their offers and following companies were awarded with contracts: Stridon group d.o.o-Beograd-various tools, MIS Sistem d.o.o-Cenej- power diggers, TR Agrovjet-Novovo selo, Nis- greenhouses with equipment. As for past experience within similar projects, INTERSOS procured the livestock and part of fodder directly from the nearby registered farmers identified by the beneficiaries. This is to avoid long transportation distance which can result in stress for the animal and at the same time to decrease considerably the costs. In purchasing livestock, INTERSOS applied the single tender (direct agreement) procedure with precondition that all sellers are registered agricultural producers.

- Among the remaining 3 families – 10 individuals opted for various types of tools (2 beneficiaries) and green house with equipment (1 family). For procurement of opted items INTERSOS contacted 3 companies and following were awarded with contract: TR Agrovjet-Novovo selo, Nis- greenhouses with equipment and Mabo Komp d.o.o-Kragujevac –various tools.
- Moreover, after CARITAS approval, INTERSOS used unforeseen funds to complete the input packages distributed to 4 families. 3 of them received a water pump for irrigation while the fourth one received a lifter that we were not able to purchase earlier but that is particularly important to work in the construction sector.’³

These concerns can and should be addressed during any extension of the project, and are further discussed below.

Is the current project empowering local actors and beneficiaries?

The evaluator was impressed with the quality of commitment, understanding and professionalism of Vizija staff, and points to this group as a good example of the project ‘empowering local actors’. Knowledge of beneficiaries, management of project processes and a commitment to quality outputs are all indicative of a group that has been empowered to deliver effective outcomes. There are no other specific examples of ‘empowerment of local actors’. While representatives of Centres for Social Work and the Commissariat for Refugees are aware of the project, and have participated in project activities and contributed to outputs and outcomes, there is no specific indication that they have been ‘empowered’ through this involvement in the project. They see the project as important, and as contributing in valuable ways to their work.

It cannot be assessed at this stage whether or not beneficiaries have been ‘empowered’. As one interviewee said, ‘maybe ‘empowerment’ is the wrong word. Their idea is that the local community is prepared to accept the new people, IDPs, Roma, other nationalities. We work with local NGOs, we teach about diversity, we assist them to be more open to and effective in dealing with these new people/ families.’

It is possible to state that the improved housing situation for each of the beneficiary families is important to their health and well-being. It is possible to say that the changes in housing, and in physical location, *may* contribute to improvements in employment and education for beneficiaries (which would contribute to empowerment), but this cannot yet be assessed. It is also possible that the IGA may empower beneficiaries, economically as well as in other tangible and intangible ways, but at this stage of project delivery (and given the comments on the IGA above) it can be assessed that, at this stage, this empowerment has not happened.

³ Final Narrative Report – 30 April 2013. Vizija and INTERSOS.

Which additional measures should be taken to improve it?

Recommendation 1 - The IGA should be re-assessed, with a detailed discussion by Foundation Caritas Luxembourg staff and Vizija personnel addressing in detail the intent of the IGA. It is recommended that this re-assessment take the form of a one-day, or half-day facilitated workshop of relevant staff from both organisations, assisted by a national consultant recognised for their knowledge and skills in local economic development. The anticipated outcome of the workshop would be a detailed plan for Vizija's work with IGAs, and the development of the intended focus on outputs and outcomes, for beneficiaries and for the project. It is understood that time frames are limited, but this is a necessary starting point for discussions. Intent is the key, and the 'footing' on which relevant Vizija staff place themselves as they develop project outcomes.

Recommendation 2 - It is recommended that the level of funding to be provided to beneficiaries be re-assessed. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, it is anticipated that other Village House programmes funded through the Commissariat for Refugees will have budgets on the order of Euros 11,000 per beneficiary family. There is sense in working to maintain some parity with these other, similar programmes. Secondly, in relation to the discussion above on completion of facilities, an allocation that allows the engagement of a tradesperson to complete kitchens or toilet facilities would ensure that no purchased house is left in an unfinished/ unsanitary state.

Recommendation 3 - It is recommended that Caritas give consideration, within the budget of the project, for the costs of the search for housing to be included in the programme. The financial situation of potential beneficiaries does not lend itself to paying what can be a significant amount of money.

Which potential stakeholders should be involved in the future, which have not been involved yet?

No change is proposed in the type of beneficiary. Indeed, a continued focus on collective centres in Bujanovac is recommended. It is understood, particularly from feedback from the Commissariat for Refugees, that there are no potential beneficiaries in Vranje, meaning the only collective centres with potential beneficiaries are in Bujanovac.

With regards stakeholders, it is understood that INTESOS will no longer be working in Serbia, and that it will not play a role in the extension. In this context, it makes sense for Vizija to engage a new partner, and preferable one with experience in income-generating activities or related initiatives at the local level, or with beneficiary groups such as refugees/ IDPs. It may well be that the workshop proposed above would be undertaken by exactly such an organisation, as a way of addressing the specific planning needs while engaging itself in work with Vizija (and Caritas) that will develop the professional and working relationships of personnel from this new partnership.

Summary of Conclusions

The housing component of the project has been completed effectively, although it very important that the housing provided is also completed, in terms of renovations/ upgrades, as part of the project, and within the project timeframe.

The IGA component is not complete, and does not appear to have been implemented as effectively as the housing component. However, from field inputs it can be said that the IGAs have the potential to provide some lasting benefit to beneficiaries.

Project outputs are of benefit to recipients, but it cannot be said that beneficiaries are being

‘empowered’.

Summary of recommendations:

- Recommendation 1 - It is recommended that the IGA be re-assessed, in the form of a one-day, or half-day facilitated workshop of relevant organisational staff. The anticipated outcome of the workshop would be a detailed plan for Vizija’s work with IGAs, and the development of the intended focus on outputs and outcomes, for beneficiaries and for the project.
- Recommendation 2 - It is recommended that the level of funding to be provided to beneficiaries be re-assessed, and potentially increased.
- Recommendation 3 - It is recommended that Caritas give consideration, within the budget of the project, for the costs of the search for housing to be included in the programme.

Annexes

Annex 1 - Documents Reviewed

Project Proposal.

Project Annual Report 2012. Vizija and Intersos.

Project Monthly Reports (various). Vizija and Intersos.

Final Narrative Report – 30 April 2013. Vizija and Intersos.

Caritas Serbia Strategy - *Serbia: Sustainable Development in the Southern Region - 2012-2014*

Annex 2 – List of Interviewees

Caritas

Pedrag Ranic, Head of Mission

Davor Tilinek, Project Assistant

Implementing Agencies (NGOs)

Vizija - Zdravka Damajanic, NGO President

Vizija - Dragana Marinkovic, Social Worker

Intersos - Guido Pietrosanti

Partners/ Stakeholders

CSW Bujanovac – Milka Milanovic

CSW Bujanovac – Darinka Spiric

CSW Vranje – Slavica Stanojevic

Commissariat for Refugees Vranje – Zorica Peric

Beneficiaries

Dejan Arsic, Beneficiary in Bujanovac

Robert Agusi, Beneficiary in Zitoradja (meeting also attended by a number of family members who also contributed to the conversation).

Annex 3 – Terms of Reference

Introduction

The Foundation Caritas Luxembourg has been implementing development projects in the Balkans for more than ten years.

Caritas Luxembourg is currently implementing a development programme in Serbia, in the sectors of Education, Income Generation Activities and Sensitization and Information. The overall objective of the programme is the improvement of living conditions of the population in Serbia and the activities are mainly implemented in the municipalities of Vranje and Bujanovac. The programme is being implemented through a participatory approach.

The Foundation Caritas Luxembourg is currently looking for a consultant in order to carry out an external evaluation of the project “Support through housing solutions for vulnerable people in the South of Serbia” within the Housing sector.

Scope of the evaluation

The scope of the evaluation concerns the project „Village housing“, supporting refugees and IDPs living in collective centers in the South of Serbia.

The evaluator shall assess:

- the effectiveness of the project in contributing to the Housing sector's goals as well as the program's goals;
- the empowerment of local partners.

The evaluation report shall contain:

- a comprehensive overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the project;
- options and potentials for the project's next phase (May/June 2013-December 2014), in order to address weaknesses identified through the evaluation.

Key questions:

- is the current project effective?
- is the current project empowering local actors and beneficiaries?
- which additional measures should be taken to improve it?
- which potential stakeholders should be involved in the future, which have not been involved yet?

Evaluation method

The evaluator shall:

- study documents made available by Caritas Luxembourg and by the partner organizations;
- carry out interviews with partner organizations and beneficiaries;
- carry out interviews with potential future stakeholders.

Requirements

- University Degree in Social Sciences or Economics
- At least 5 years professional experience in the field of development projects
- Excellent knowledge of English
- Flexibility to travel
- Excellent knowledge of the Balkan context
- Excellent computer skills
- Analytical skills

Working conditions

The evaluation should be carried out in maximum 5 days consisting of minimum 3 days of field work and maximum 2 days for desk study and writing up of the evaluation report;

Besides the assignment fees, the following costs will be covered: accommodation, travel to and from Vranje from any city in Serbia and local travel. No other costs will be covered;

The evaluation report has to be submitted at the latest two weeks following the assignment dates.

The evaluation has to be carried out between the 7th and the 16t of May 2013.

The deadline for applications is the 25th of April at 14h00.

Offers containing evaluation costs and terms of payment have to be sent to Predrag Ranic (predrag.ranic@caritas-vr.org).