

# Participatory Mine Action and Development in Mine-Affected Municipalities of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)

During the period 2009-2011, the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) was involved in a pilot project to provide support for the Handicap International South East Europe (HI-SEE) Regional Programme in implementing a project to address the social exclusion of the mine-affected population in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The broad aims of the project were to provide guidance for establishing and operating Local Partnership Groups (LPGs) in two municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to provide support for community appraisal and mapping of priority needs and opportunities.

## Background

An innovative and pioneering approach was developed to enhance the benefit of those affected by landmines or, more generally, all the Explosive Remnants of War (ERW). Despite increasing recognition that mine action needs to be complemented with a development approach, there is widespread doubt as to whether mine action and development can actually be linked in practice.

Despite 15 years of mine action, ERW continues to affect the quality of life, and the safety and development, of many communities in BiH. The aim of the project was to examine the potential for enabling local economic and social development to take place in areas that are still heavily mined. Two rural communities, Stolac and Berkovići were selected for developing and testing participatory approaches.

## Taking a participatory approach

Absence of civil society organisations, low levels of trust, lack of reliable information on socio-economic conditions and a culture of reliance on the state action hampered early work in the two communities. The project used local facilitators to help develop LPGs made up of community representatives and local authority personnel. It was essential to gain support of the local authorities in each community in order to provide legitimacy to the project. Once the Mayor of each community had indicated support it became easier to encourage other community representatives to join the groups and take part.

It was realised that some 'early wins' were required in order to maintain support of those involved in the LPGs: a project to disseminate seeds was used to raise awareness about mine risks and the need for development, and a project to improve a local fishing river started the process of getting people to work together and rebuild trust. These early projects, although small, provided an indication to the members of the LPG of what they might achieve and helped to bring different organisations together. The river improvement project was particularly significant as, for the first time since the war, it brought organisations in Berkovići and Stolac together to work towards a common goal.

Building on this experience, the LPGs then initiated a range of projects through small-scale grants to local organisations that were deliberately selected to provide wider community benefits; for example, upgrading sports facilities and provision of support for children with special needs in Stolac, and support for the local judo club in Berkovići.



Border with Republic of Srpska, alongside river Bregava

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## Outcomes

Two local partnership groups were established to engage different parts of the communities in creating strategies for development and to implement projects at the local level. The groups were able to operate effectively and undertook two rounds of grant giving to support local development. At the same time, a number of representatives of two civil society organisations became qualified mine risk assessors, thus providing capacity at the community level for both mine risk assessment and local development. The role of local facilitators to work in both mine action and rural development was essential in providing a successful outcome to the project.

Integrating mine action was, in some ways, the most difficult part of the project, and was achieved through direct and indirect methods. In the first instance, mine-impacted communities were identified using a household survey to provide information on the nature of localised impacts. The survey was carried out by members of an existing women's organisation. Secondly, the concept of a mine-impacted community was widened to encompass mine 'affected' communities, a notion that makes sense in areas deprived of access to large areas of land and resources, with consequent damage to the economic base and social lives of the people living there. Thirdly, local people were trained and certified in mine risk education in order to enhance awareness about mine location and appropriate behaviour.



Farmers in a mine-impacted village discussing problems caused by mined agricultural areas



Entrance to an area where de-mining is actively taking place on the edge of a village

The participatory approach meant that solutions for mine action and development activities were created by the communities themselves. Traditional mine risk activities had been previously applied in the communities but were not changing behaviour with regard to use of mined areas, which is why the new approach of linking development issues was initiated. An innovative mine risk management assessment was developed and was successful in getting information about where people were approaching or entering suspected and hazardous areas.

The table below highlights strengths and weaknesses of the project. A key strength is the development of social capital that has occurred; a key potential weakness is related to the long-term viability of the LPGs in each community once direct funding and technical support is removed at the end of the project.

Strengths	Potential weaknesses
The establishment and operation of the Local Partnership Groups.	Many LPG members have full-time jobs and find it difficult to make a time commitment.
Positive support and involvement of the municipalities is part of the success.	Overloading the LPG with work when skills and capacity are limited.
Positive impacts that benefit potentially large numbers of the community.	Leadership of the LPGs when funding for the local facilitators is ended.
High 'social value' projects with potentially long-term impacts.	The importance of obtaining funding to ensure sustainability of the groups.