



***Project End Report
PERA
(Peoples Empowerment in Rural Areas)
2009 – 2011***

***The project applied in
20 Municipalities and
100 Villages in
Bosnia & Herzegovina***

April 2012

Financed by
 Sida

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The following report, being the final report for the PERA project, follows different format compare to the regular progress report submitted to the donor Sida during the implementing period. The regular by-annually progress reports provided more detailed information on direct activities and results thereto. This report on the other hand is more analytical in nature and focuses more on the following:

- a) Why the project was established and which references were used
- b) The ideology behind the methods and implementation
- c) The outcome and which effects it created and how that can be used in the future

This report is based on the findings from 28 municipalities and 208 villages in Bosnia & Herzegovina, which have been visited and studied by the PERA project. There are further references to more than 80 meeting minutes from municipalities and 1.023 meetings in villages in addition to interviews with 5.235 individuals.

1 Background

It is found important to provide an insight into how the organisation behind the PERA project was established and why. The implementing organisation for the PERA project, PEP International, was formally founded by the director of PEP by late 2002 and registered by the State Registry of Iceland as a membership organisation. Current members originate, in addition to Iceland, from a number of different countries including Albania, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, Greece, Macedonia, Sweden and UK.

Since the start of PERA project, experiences of PEP staff working on projects in Macedonia, Albania and BiH have been used. They have visited PEP office in Sarajevo on several occasions. Together with the new staff they also conducted joint field visits analysed the

situation and participated in planning of the new activities.

Picture below:

PEP ex-staff from Macedonia with the PERA field officer Esad Hamidović



The establishment of PEP International as an independent organisation was basically initiated and encouraged by the Director of Sida Stockholm, Department for Eastern Europe and Sida Sarajevo Balkan Representative during the early days of reconstruction in Kosovo 1999-2000. The main intention by establishing the organisation was to explore the experience of the current Director of PEP and to develop and implement a strategy to strengthen the democratic process on the Balkans and beyond. Particular focus was to be placed on the involvement of citizens and their relationship with their local authorities. Thus the concept idea has been developed over the last decade mainly by early experiment with a “community base approach”, the AMPEP Project in Albania and Macedonia 2001-2004 where few basic ideas

were tested and later only as AMPEP in Macedonia until end of 2007 where the basics for the current PERA project in Bosnia & Herzegovina 2008-2011 were formed¹.

The basic philosophy for the PERA project was; that by strengthening the social capital within a number of villages they would become capable of; organising themselves, identifying their common community problems, prioritising issues to be solved, organising and planning a solution to their problems and presenting their demands on the local authorities to help solving their problems. This would increase the pressure on the local governments to pay more attention to the needs and preferences of their citizens and ultimately lead to increased involvement of citizens in the decision makings. This would directly provide a stronger base for improved policies, more strategic orientations and better governance.

2 Summary

PEP International in cooperation with Sida launched the PERA project in Bosnia & Herzegovina in September 2008 with the aim to establish procedures and practices that would strengthen the communication between villages and their local governments.

The official opening of PERA was launched by formally handing over to Sida the inception report for PERA in December 2008. This picture shows Audunn Bjarni Olafsson the Regional Director of PEP formally handing over the Inception Report to Anders Hedlund, the Country Representative of Sida. This completed the documentation guiding the implementation of PERA for the project period.



The project was based on a set of democratic principles in line with the BiH governmental strategy on local governing to increase the involvement of citizens in the decision making. The timeframe for the direct implementation of the project was 3 years plus the preparation, evaluation and reporting period, thus it covers the period from September 2008 until April 2012.

The original goal of the PERA project was sustainable development of rural villages in BiH, which ultimately would lead to improved quality of life in a number of rural villages in line with observation made by UNDP and NHDR in 2007². The three-year operational objectives of the PERA project were:

¹ It is worth mentioning here as there are references to the experience of PEP Director that he has almost two decades experience from humanitarian and development works on the Balkans as well as extensive prior experience from local governing and governmental institutions in Iceland. Projects in his portfolio related to humanitarian and development category include; basic shelters and food production and distribution for war affected people as well as reconstruction of houses and infrastructure and local community development.

² Social exclusion is a process whereby certain individuals or groups are driven to the edge of society, prevented from living a decent life with full participation in society due to ethnic origin, age or gender differences, disability, financial hardship, lack of formal employment and opportunities, and/or lack of education. This distances them from access to health and social services, as well as social and community networks and activities. They have little or no access to power and decision-making and are thus unable to have any control over decisions that affect their daily lives (UNDP, NHDR 2007).

- Structured communication is established and sustained between village councils and Local Governments.
- Measurable positive changes on issues of local governing are verified and documented in the villages.
- Projects of public service nature are completed through the cooperation of villages and local governments within the targeted areas.
- The targeted local governments are actively disseminating the practices established by the project through their municipal association.

Early 2009 a Memorandum of Understanding were signed between PEP International and 20 municipalities to target 3-7 villages within each municipality and jointly work towards the goal of improving the communication with these villages.

The main challenge for the project was to overcome the apathy and distrust so widely visible in the rural communities. From 100 villages originally invited for cooperation already 4 dropped out during the first few weeks of implementation mainly due to their internal apathy and distrust towards each other.

The remaining 96 villages formed formal cooperation with PEP International and went through a set of capacity building activities. These activities focused on; establishing formalities around citizens gatherings, problem identification and prioritization, project planning, financing and finance control and finally monitoring and evaluation of actions. All main decisions on the cooperation with PEP and the internal organisation within each village were established at openly published village meeting attended by 15-30% of the population in each village. The basic idea for the project was introduced and the possibility to receive a grant amount of 5.000 € + VAT for each village that would complete the processes and develop their own idea on what is the most important for the village. PEP staff emphasised that each idea should focus on joint and un-discriminated benefits for the whole community and that the whole village would contribute financially to the solution of their idea. At these joint meetings every village appointed a workgroup that would lead the process regardless of their village organisation before.

Following the capacity building exercise all partner villages could apply the methods they had been introduced to and approach PEP for a financial support to realise their ideas. Only precondition by PEP International was that the project should be of public service nature and that the Local Government would have to guaranty that the legality, technical solution and ownership were clear and acceptable.

The main results in terms of development objectives, verified through the repeated studies, are as follows:

- In all 20 municipalities, 2-3 contact persons were assigned to the project to secure constructive communication with the targeted villages. This has led to a much better understanding among the municipalities of the potentials and resources within their villages.
- In all partner municipalities repeated studies show a steady increase in the directly targeted villages in terms of involvement of citizens, women inclusion and general communication between villages and their authorities. This has increased optimism and reduced the apathy and distrust recorded among citizens in the targeted villages at the beginning.

- In 93 villages, projects of public service nature have been prioritised and planned in open meetings in the villages, which then selected the work groups, and implemented in direct partnership with the Local Government. The whole process has increased the transparency and communication between villages and their municipal authorities. Direct and formal communication practises have been established and in many municipalities functioning mechanism is now in place to secure better communication with the villages.
- The municipal associations have publicly identified the PERA project and the partners involved as major contributor to the development of Local Government strategies on the involvement of citizens in the decision making processes. Practices established through PERA are now being referred to as constructive and productive tools to strengthen the communication with citizens.

In addition to these direct results related to the original objectives PEP International initiated in September 2011 a Villages Gathering in Sarajevo with the aim of establishing a foundation for continued cooperation and communication between rural villages in Bosnia & Herzegovina. This meeting highlighted the success of the project as more than 130 people representing almost all PERA partner villages and municipalities met and expressed their interest and commitment to continue building on their experience and to form a nation wide network of villages organisations based on the groundwork established by PEP.

3 The Preparation

As initially discussed and agreed with the donor Sida, the main focus was to be on a sufficient number of villages to secure the sustainability of the processes. It was further agreed that the project would be applied nation wide rather than regional and target less developed rural areas in an attempt to address the poorer communities. Thus all the 20 municipalities invited for cooperation had been categorised as under developed according to official statistics³ and cover basically the whole area of Bosnia & Herzegovina.

3.1 Staff preparation

During the preparation of the team and prior to any field activities all staff went through an intensive training session for almost 10 weeks focusing on developing the necessary analytical and facilitation skills among the staff.

- **Developing the approach strategy;** Staff preparation started by addressing issues that would define the basic strategy for the PERA project. Available documents outlining the BiH Governments strategy to strengthen Local Governments to increase the involvement of citizens in the decision making processes and the donor Country Strategy for BiH were studied and the approach strategy developed with the focus on the democratic right of citizens to have the possibility to influence on the decision making at the governing level. This preparation followed the LFA principles (Logical Framework Approach) and resulted in the completion of the Inception Report which combined with the Project Proposal completed the Project Document for PERA.
- **Selecting target areas;** Following the approval of the Project Documents the initial selection of partner Municipalities and villages was carried out via intensive desk study and continued analyses of available information and statistics. This very much contributed to the development of the staff as official statistics and information turned out to be very unreliable and contradicting which required frequent and time consuming cross checks. The results were that the staff became aware that official

³ A major challenge for the project is the very unreliable official statistic for BiH, no census information since 1991 and very poor municipal statistics on population in villages.

statistics and information need to be taken with cautions before used as a base for major decisions.

- **Defining intended activities;** In accordance with the approach strategy and the LFA matrix a set of activities were defined as necessary to reach the intended results. This contributed greatly to developing the resource management skills among the staff.
- **Developing the Monitoring and Evaluation system;** A precondition for measuring any changes in term of attitude and opinions was to develop a baseline study that could be compared to further studies later on in the process. The staff fully participated in developing a set of questions to measure a number of issues related to; the village organization, people's involvement in decision makings, local government communication with the village, gender mainstreaming and environmental awareness.

During the preparation PEP placed special emphasis on the selection of the 10 strong staff. The recruitment was based on public announcement inviting candidates with University degrees, good communication and presentation skills and the willingness to learn. This resulted in receiving over 170 applications from which these 10 people were selected. The selected team represented a mixed field of higher education and experience including Master of State Management and Humanitarian Affairs, Master of Environmental Sciences, Master of Business Administration and Bachelors degrees in; Law, Psychology, Philosophy, Civics and Technology. The team represented 4 different religions and had diverse ethnical background. The staff has been very well received by all partners involved in the project and at mid term evaluation in June 2010 the following remark was made by the evaluator⁴:

“At the outset it should be said with no reservation that PERA is implemented by a highly committed, hard working and able set of staffs. They share a clear understanding of what the objectives of the project are and the significance of the process. There is a demonstrated consciousness of the significance of how to relate to villagers with the liability of being well educated and “city people”. The field visits confirmed the success of the staffs.

3.2 Memorandum of Understanding with Local Governments

PEP International is a participatory oriented organization that establishes formal partnership with those directly engaged in the implementation of the project. In the case of PERA project each partner municipality was involved in structuring a Memorandum of Understanding⁵ where the particularities were stated. Although these MoUs stated particular issues for each municipality, the common goal for PEP and the municipalities was specified as:

“Overall goals of the Project are to increase the involvement of citizens in decision making at the local level and the responsiveness of local governments to citizens’ needs and requests. These goals are in line with the ongoing efforts of local governments in Bosnia and Herzegovina to strengthen their roles, broaden the scopes of their responsibilities and improve the services they provide to citizens.

The Project will promote the principles of democratic governance, transparency and non-discrimination and will strive to achieve sustainability of its results by being process oriented, i.e. placing importance on continuous and productive dialogue between citizens and LGs”.

⁴ Lars Erik Birgagard, Mid Term Evaluation of PERA June 2010, page 10

⁵ ANNEX 1, Example of MoU.

After it has been concluded that a village is appropriate for PERA project implementation, a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed with the municipal representative in the respected municipality

Picture on the right:

The mayor of Foca Ustikolina Kunovac Zijad and National Program coordinator PEP International Samir Hajrulahović at signing the MoU.,



The following are examples of particular goals as stated by individual municipalities:

- *Strengthening citizens' role in decision-making in municipal projects*
- *Including all groups of citizens in the work of the community, without gender, ethnic, or any other discrimination.*
- *Animating and educating the population to participate in the making of decisions that are of key importance to improving living standards in rural and urban areas*
- *Joint and transparent acting of the Municipality and citizens in the process of selecting and realizing priority projects, which ultimately leads to an increased citizens' trust in the Municipality and the Administration.*
- *Improvement of formal mechanisms of communication between LGs and Local Communities (LC);*
- *Capacity building of civil servants through direct work with LCs;*
- *Recognizing local resources and creating conditions for local ownership by implementing small projects prioritized by citizens themselves;*
- *Creating opportunities for LGs to be directly involved in implementation of local projects and better informed of local priorities determined by citizens;*
- *Improvement of general living conditions in Local Communities;*
- *Observance of human rights, in accordance with Constitutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and entities;*
- *Promoting legal conditions for ensuring environmental protection.*

The following results were expected to be achieved through the cooperation between PEP and Local Government:

- *Local Government is more responsive to the needs and requests of citizens;*
- *Local Government involves citizens in decision-making processes through strengthened formal mechanisms of dialogue;*
- *Local Government increases involvement in activities at Local Community level by having trained staff who have direct responsibilities for work in Local Communities;*
- *Local Government integrates local priorities determined by citizens into its policies and strategies;*
- *Citizens' trust in Local Government increases;*

- *Local Communities become more functional and represent interests of all citizens, without discrimination;*
- *Dialogue among citizens in Local Communities becomes a tool for prioritizing and problem-solving;*
- *Dialogue between citizens and LGs is sustained through its institutionalization;*

To secure the direct involvement of the Local Governments all municipalities appointed minimum two key persons from their administration team that would act as liaison officers between the project and their local government.

3.3 Letters of Intent with villages

Similar to the agreement with each municipality all targeted villages were invited to form the cooperation agreement with PEP International. In total 96 villages entered into formal cooperation with PEP and signed a Letter of Intent specifying the common goal of the project as follows:

“Overall goals of the Project are to increase the involvement of citizens in decision making at the local level and the responsiveness of local governments to citizens’ needs and requests”.

After the citizens have confirmed their commitment and interest for the PERA project by participating in the open village meetings, and by selecting their members of working groups, PEP signed Letter of intent with representatives of each village.

Photo: PEP field officer Selvir Tabak signing the Letter of Intent with representatives of village Drum in Vlasenica



The following results were expected to be achieved through the cooperation between PEP and each village:

- *Village regularly organizes open meetings for citizens;*
- *Dialogue among citizens in local community becomes a tool for prioritizing and problem-solving;*
- *Village strengthens cooperation with Local Government;*
- *Village more involved in decision-making processes at local level;*
- *Citizens’ trust in Local Government increases;*
- *Village more functional and represents common interests of all citizens, without discrimination;*
- *Local Government integrates local priorities determined by citizens into its policies and strategies;*

In every village a work group was selected at an open villages meeting to secure a productive cooperation between the village and PEP International. These work groups were selected

regardless of the village inclusion in a formal MZ but most often had at least one person who had some role in the MZ.

3.4 Cooperation with other stakeholders

To secure regular flow of information between other stakeholders in the project a Panel Group was formed to maintain bi-annual consultation meetings between PEP International and the following organizations:

- The Donor Sida
- The Government Accountability Project (GAP)
- The Associations of Municipalities and Cities

These Panel Group meetings were first held in the premises of PEP International in Sarajevo but later extended to include representatives from project partners on the field and for that reason were moved to different field locations each time allowing a direct field visits to some of the partner villages and municipalities.

From a Panel Group meeting in Lopare in 2011. Participants from Sida, GAP, Municipal Associations, CPCD and PERA. This meeting was also attended by Municipal officials and villages representatives from Lopare as well as from across the entity line from neighbouring Maglaj. Following this meeting all participants visited village Milino Selo to look at their newly completed renovation of the school.



During these last rounds of Panel group meetings other interested NGOs were invited as observers.

4 Methods

During the preparation the main principles for the working methods were defined. It was concluded, based on a number of reports from UN organisation, OSCE and other human right organisations, that Bosnia & Herzegovina is still in a transition period and has a long way to go to adopt democratic principles in spite of frequent elections. Thus every step taken should follow the principles of detailed preparation and direct participation of targeted villages. The main characteristics of the methodological approach was to develop the project from a clear bottom up approach with continuous presence in the villages⁶ over a period of minimum 2 years and direct engagement and dialogue with selected representative from each of targeted municipalities. It was further decided that a stepwise approach should be applied, providing information and training for all villages completely before moving to the next steps in the approach

4.1 Approach based on identified needs

The analyses set forward during the LFA workshop and displayed in the Problem Tree provided the background for all planned project activities. On-field observations further confirm that citizens indeed are passive and expect other to solve their problems. Therefore the main strategy of the project was to systematically tackle this issue by engaging citizens in

⁶ Villages in Bosnia are not administrative units but form the base for each rural municipality in many cases around 30-40 villages per municipality.

discussion about their concerns and problems without any direct engagement in their decision makings. The engagement of both LG and villages is voluntary following their invitation to join the project. Based on this a facilitation methods are used, introducing governing rules and regulation for citizen's involvement through open public meetings, involving community leaders in the process and LG representatives as carriers of the process. It was deemed more important to follow this principle of voluntary participation than to bend the principles of PERA to secure the continued engagement of all targeted villages. The project staff would thus avoid taking any lead in the process apart from the directions specified in the cooperation agreements with partner municipalities and villages. On every aspect of the approach, formalities should be introduced and meeting invitation, agenda and minutes and decisions to be published in a transparent way .

4.2 Strong team of experts

PEP special emphasis on the selection of staff and the staff training is at the core of the methodology. The team which represented different religions and ethnical background was received with the highest level of regard and are recognised, as intended, very professional and trustworthy. Staff was very well aware that their personal behaviour and professional approach needed to be spotless as they were indeed displaying the best example on how official representatives should act.

Employees of PEP international have frequently participated in meetings with municipal contact persons, mayors, and other partners of PERA project. In this way they had continuous insight into project status.

Photo: PEP team after the regional meeting in front of the municipal building in Bosanski Petrovac, with the Mayor Ermin Hajder



4.3 Conditioned financial support

PERA project introduced as working methods to have available small grants of € 5.000 + VAT for each village that completed the process. To access these funds a series of activities had to take place; the identification and prioritisation should be based on general consensus among the citizens of each village. The planning and preparation for each project is lead by the village and all main decision carried by the citizens themselves. The engagement of the LG by providing permissions and technical support should secure that necessary EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment), ownership and other legalities is done in accordance with Bosnian laws. This method has been very well received although in some municipalities the LG have tried to influence the selection of projects.

4.4 Effect orientation

The methodology to apply systematic capacity building activities had clear result orientation on establishing functioning communication and links between villages and LG. All project

activities were believed to have dual or multipurpose implications as capacity building and trainings also are effective as;

- Joint activities will enhance the social capital and lead to increased improvements in general attitude and responsiveness.
- Identification and prioritisation of problems through simplified SWOT leads to new ideas and solutions well beyond project of public service nature.
- Improved infrastructure and public service increases the awareness for the surroundings, it effects general improvements at homes and in nature.
- The gender mainstreaming and un-discriminated inclusion of all citizens in project implementation affects the tolerance and acceptance of minorities and differences.
- Project cycle management and capacity building for making claims has proved to be very useful for individual planning for commercial activities or new entrepreneurship.
- The direct engagement and trainings in budget planning and procurements for villages project is used on personal investments and farming activities.

The reports from the field suggest that this methodology of PERA was understood and accepted and produced the intended effects in the villages.

4.5 Constant evaluation and monitoring

A project that intends to influence peoples attitude and perceptions can not only rely on statistical information and progress reports. Thus the methodology included a longitude study on issues related to transparency, citizen inclusion, gender and environment. The study should be applied in the targeted villages and for comparison in neighbouring villages and villages completely outside the PERA project. Further studies on particular issues would then be conducted through direct interview and discussions.

It is believed that by the end of the project a clear picture can be displayed on how the project succeeded and furthermore on what could be done to continue the much needed capacity building at local community level.

5 The Implementation

Following the preparation the actual implementation of the project started. The project staff was fully prepared for the challenging task of applying the project all over the country and all major decisions on methods had been agreed on. Basic ideas for guiding the implementation were developed internally as a part of the staff training and preparation and strategy was developed with full engagement of the staff. In chronological order the main activities evolved around the following topics:

5.1 Approach

The development goal of the PERA project is sustainable development of rural communities in BiH, which ultimately shall lead to improved quality of life through improved communication between citizens, villages and municipalities in the targeted areas and beyond. The approaches for all decisions related to implementing the project were based on this.

5.1.1 Geographical coverage

The first issue was to define if the intended coverage of the whole country was feasible and manageable. It was concluded that a regional approach might look more practical for the organisation but a more holistic approach would better secure the sustainability of the project. Thus to secure a necessary impact that would be visible and meaningful for the whole country the decision was made to targeted for direct engagement 15% of all municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina with special focus on the least developed ones and more rural. The same

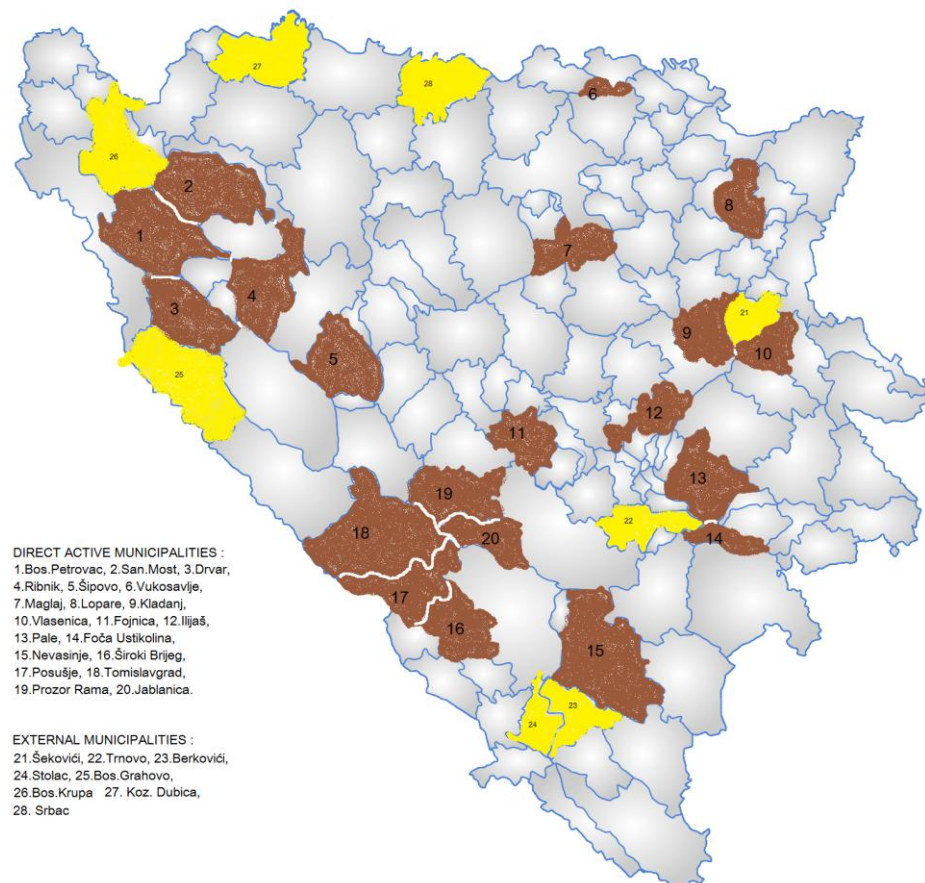
applied for targeted villages as in every municipality 15% of villages were involved.⁷ The list of selected 20 partner municipalities and 100 villages engaged in PERA as follows:

| Table 1 Municipalities and Villages targeted for PERA project 2009 - 2011 | |
|---|---|
| Bosanski Petrovac Bjelaj Janjila Jasenovac Smoljana i Krnja Jela Vrtoče | Pale Jahorinski potok Jelovci Prača Prutine |
| Drvar Donje Vrtoče Drvar Selo Mokronoge Šipovljani Vidovo Selo Zavođe | Posušje Česića Draga Jurišići Megdan Polići Zagomile |
| Foča-Ustikolina Cvilin Filipovići Mrđelići/Gajevi | Prozor-Rama Gornji Krančići Lapsunj Orašac Uzdol |
| Fojnica Merdanići Otigošće Podcitonja Smajlovići Turkovići | Ribnik Čadavica Čukovi Donji Ribnik Marčete Rastoka Sitnica Velijašnica |
| Ilijaš Balbegovići Donja Bioča Dragoradi Gornja Bioča Ivančići Gornji Solakovići | Sanski Most Bartikovci Lušci Palanka Modra Tomina |
| Jablanica Doljani Dragan Selo Ravna Zlate | Šipovo Duljci Mujdžići Pljeva Todorčići |
| Kladanj Crijevčići Gojsalići Goletići Plahovići Ravne Rujčići Turalići | Široki Brijeg Donja Britvica Gornji Crnjac Izbično Gornji Mamići Čerigaj |
| Lopare Koretaši Lipovice Milino selo Mirosavci Pukiš Smiljevac | Tomislavgrad Bogdašići Bogdašići Hambar Mandino Selo Oplećani Srdani |
| Maglaj G. Ulišnjak Oruče Ravna Straište | Vlasenica Dragasevac Drum Jevtići Piskavice |
| | Vukosavlje Jezero Josava Modricki Lug |

⁷ Unreliable official statistics complicated the selection process

| | | |
|------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Nevesinje | Donja Bijenja Donji Drežanj Mijatovci Pridvorci Zalužje Zovi Do | Pecnik Srna Gnionica |
|------------------|--|----------------------------|

The following picture shows the location of partner municipalities and control sample for study:



5.1.2 Stepwise process

A project of this nature calls for gradual changes in knowledge, attitude, perception and mental changes towards progressive thinking. It was concluded that a stepwise process to achieve the above mentioned would be the most suitable. In other words every step was to be completed in all target villages before moving to the next step. This also allowed for a better preparation for the staff as everyone equally participated in the preparation for each step and was thus equally capable of applying the agreed working methods. The following steps were applied during the project in addition to a number of meetings where information was shared between other organisations and the participating villages and municipalities.

- Introduction of PERA to 24 municipalities from which 20 were selected for future engagement.
- Signing of project agreements (MoU) with 20 partner municipalities.
- Baseline study in 28 municipalities and 188 villages
- Introduction of PERA in 100 villages.
- Signing Letters of Intention with villages (4 dropped out in the process).
- Sharing information from baseline study and informing about final selection of 96 villages in all 20 partner municipalities

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- 1st step in PCM (Project Cycle Management) training; organisation and formalities for conducting meetings and formal communication.
- 2nd step in PCM; SWOT analyses and project idea selection.
- 3rd step in PCM; project planning and resource allocations.
- 4th step in PCM; project financing and finance management and reporting.
- Second study in villages.
- Discussions and advisory meetings (2-5 meetings in each village) on project selection and planning.
- Monitoring the implementation of selected project in 94 villages, 2 times in each.
- Handing over and completion meetings in all villages.
- Last study on PERA in 208 villages.
- PERA conference on lessons from the project, September 2011.
- Presenting final findings and draft reports in 20 municipalities.
- Handing over final reports in all partner municipalities and villages.
-

For information sharing a number of meetings were organised including; 4 regional meetings for Mayors and representative from the project. PERA also initiated Yearly Information meetings with all the Mayors and contact persons from partner municipalities including village's representatives, and finally on ad hoc basis PERA staff attended meetings and seminars organised by; The Association of Municipalities and Cities.

5.2 Capacity building

The basic philosophy behind the PERA project was to focus on the capacity building for everyone directly engaged in the project. As explained earlier the staff training and preparation was at the core of the implementation and every step had at least one or two training sessions before applied on the field. On two occasions previous staff from AMPEP in Macedonia visited and shared their experience from the field work they had been engaged in.

5.2.1 Engagement of municipality officials

There were two main assumptions guiding the decision to include municipal officials in the project, through every step of the implementation, to secure the sustainability and dissemination of the experience from the project;

- That the municipalities were interested to have access to information about how the project would be applied and the conditions and desires of their citizens.
- That by direct engagement the municipal officials would gain knowledge and interest to maintain and disseminate the experience from the project within their municipality.

Every municipality appointed 2-3 people from their administration team to engage in the project. In most cases those assigned had direct role in municipal development departments or other offices that had the communication with citizens as their main objective. In some municipalities the appointment was more questionable. There was additional assumption by the PERA team, which proved to be wrong in relation to the capability of municipal officials to engage productively in the project. In basically all the municipalities engaged in PERA, a number of organisations had already applied capacity building project to strengthen the local governments or the MZs. While working with the municipalities very few indicators were found suggesting that these efforts had yielded any real capacities to the administrative workers engaged with PERA. The outcome of PERA capacity building activities seems therefore to be pending on the willingness or capability of the municipal authorities to engage these people in activities where their knowledge can be fully explored.

5.2.2 Open villages meeting

The open meetings invitations were part of the transparency orientation in PERA project. In every village invitation were published and citizens encouraged participating and listening and commenting on the introduction to the project idea. This resulted in around 20-25% of all

adult citizens attended those meetings and received information and actively participated in discussions on the intention and practicalities for the project. This was very encouraging particularly as most mayors have claimed that the people in their villages were not interested in participating in open discussions about their villages.

5.2.3 Project Cycle Management training

The Project Cycle Management training was applied in 4 steps, which were believed to have practical purpose, not only for the village's workgroups but also for individuals who might consider other more economically oriented projects. In 73 villages, members from the existing MZ bodies were part of the workgroups. The PCM training was applied in a simplified version supposed to provide the basic idea for project planning and implementation rather than the sophisticated detailed programmes organised for number of weeks. The training included:

- 1st step; organisational principles and formalities for establishing organisations, conducting meetings and maintaining formal communication and references.
- 2nd step; SWOT analyses and project idea selection.
- 3rd step; project planning and resource allocations.
- 4th step; project financing and finance management and reporting.

For each of the steps up to 10 people attended and expressed their satisfaction for the simple and understandable program.

Photo: Field officer Dženana Baždarević in the village Jurišići, Posušje municipality, performing SWOT analysis



5.2.4 Knowledge through practical examples

Following the training period the workgroups in every village started working on the project which they had identified through the SWOT workshops. This exercise took to the test the knowledge the workgroups had acquired during the training. In simple terms this proved to be very successful, although PERA staff participated in 2-3 additional meetings in the villages where simple advisory and consultation service was provided, all villages completed a detail work plan, clear financing plan, and all permission and verification from the municipal authorities.

5.2.5 Measurement and reporting

During this step of the training some examples from different banks and funding organisation were presented. It explained how different reporting and evaluation were applied by different actors. All the workgroups, by the end of their projects implementation, produced very comprehensive reports on their projects; this signifies a good understanding of the PCM and provides a good reference to the success of the training.

5.3 Measurement and reporting

As previously explained, a project of this nature requires a sophisticated measurement system to prove that intend influence has been achieved. Of course this could have been conducted in several different ways but by looking into the measurement applied by a number of other

organisations, none of their systems seems to provide the insight which the PERA project wanted to display through the reporting.

A baseline study structured mainly as an opinion poll was carried out prior to any direct field activities. The baseline study targeted around 1.600 persons at a random selection from three control groups; villages directly targeted by PERA, neighbourhood villages supposed to be effected by the local government involved and external villages totally out of PERA influence. The basic findings from the Baseline study suggested a very low level of communication both internal in villages and between villages and their local governments. These findings were presented to the 20 targeted Local Governments and were the basis for joint agreement to improve the communication.

The follow-up studies in 2010 and 2011 targeted a bit extended sample but maintained the same area focus and included the same questions as previously applied. In 2010 interviews were held with 1.837 persons and in 2011 with 1.835 persons. In preparation for the final study in 2011, the University of Sarajevo was offered a chance to include a number of its students in conducting the study. 16 students from the Faculty of Political Sciences, Faculty of Economics and Faculty of Public Administration participated both in the direct study in villages as well as processing the data from it. Students were very happy for this opportunity and claimed to have gained valuable experience on how to apply study methods through a multidisciplinary approach and also to have gained a better understand on the situation in rural parts of BiH. All finding from the PERA studies are now stored in a SPSS program which provides a good facilitation to study and analyze these findings.

During November further studies were made on the correlation between the increased social capital in villages and environmental awareness and actions. 16 villages were visited and the workgroups interviewed and participated in discussions about environmental issues, problems and possible solutions.

In general the study analyses indicate that a lot has been done to strengthen local capacity and to increase the social capital in the PERA villages. It show that the project managed to engage the local population according to principles of democracy, transparency, and to mobilize their local resources. Positive changes are though only registered in the active villages as all the villages outside PERA who were used for comparison showed stagnation or very low improvements. This might indicate that other methods applied in these villages had not been as productive as those PERA applied.

In addition to these longitude studies, interviews were conducted with MZ representative, contact people in municipalities and village's workgroups. These interviews helped, in addition to the formal studies, the project to stay on track and provide documented measure on people's attitude and the sociological effects of the project.

All reports from PERA had references to these studies.

6 Analysis

This chapter will elaborate on critics and discussion on the strategy and implementation of the project. Remarks by PEP are mostly based on intensive discussions among the management and staff, with reference to meeting minutes and notes, and as such are the main inputs for analysing the outcome of the project. Unfortunately during the three years of implementation, no direct and constructive discussions were established between organisations active in this field. For those reasons, many of the analysis set forward in this chapter are only related to the Mid Term evaluation on PERA conducted by Mr. Lars Erik Birgegard, who was recruited by Sida to perform the evaluation, and his report produced in October 2010.

6.1 Implementation

In general the implementation of the project was performed without any difficulties other than those related to large area coverage. The strategy for a stepwise approach was at the beginning found as time consuming and tiresome for many of the villages but as time went by more and more appreciated it and by the end found as the most productive. During the end discussions in villages many villages claimed that PERA had introduced standards for communication which other organization should follow and adopt. This is also verified in the mid-term evaluation:

“The strategy and approach at village level is similar to that of major local NGOs with longer experience and time for adjustment than PEP. This approach is well designed and without question the most successful part of the project”⁸.

So the main conclusion is that the implementation of PERA was a very successful exercise and in general terms produced better results than most other organization so far.

6.2 Direct results

During the initial stage and project document preparation few predictions were made on what might be expected as effects from the intended project. The following gives an insight into these expectations as stated in the original Project Proposal and what has been recorded as success in relation to that:

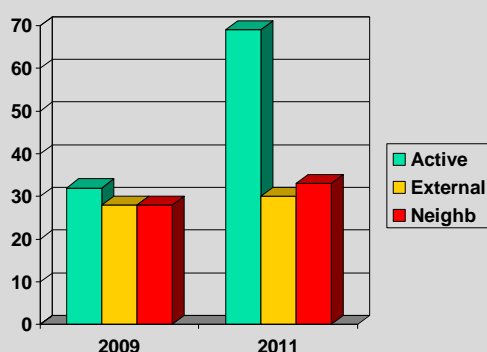
- *Joint activities will enhance the social capital in rural communities and lead to increased improvements in general attitude and responsiveness.* Survey results show that positive attitude has increased from around 20% to between 60 and 70% of those interviewed. More importantly both citizens and Local Government representatives admit that the flow of information between the municipal offices and villages has improved from almost nothing to a well established practice, it has also been admitted by some mayors that there is an increased capacity of the citizens to criticize their mayor and demand improvements.
- *Identification and prioritisation of problems through simplified SWOT leads to new ideas and solutions well beyond project of public service nature.* In a number of villages cooperation has been established between PERA and non PERA villages in an attempt to work towards more economically oriented activities such as village's tourism and fishing for example.
- *Improved infrastructure and public service increases the awareness for the surroundings, it effects general improvements at homes and in nature.* This is probably the most interesting effects from the project and the actions taken in the villages strongly support it. More and more villages are organizing village cleaning as stated in the environmental interviews in November, it is clear that actions of environmental concern are a priority. Villages have also become aware that they can do any project they set their mind to, although there can be a problem with funding. They also know and have started sending request for funding further than only to their municipality. People also claim they had no idea that they had a say in matters like; whether people throw garbage on the side of the road or not or if people are polluting rivers etc. Since the PERA project people are aware of what their rights are and with everyone in the village involved a wider perspective on problems and possibilities is obvious
- *The gender mainstreaming and un-discriminated inclusion of all citizens in project implementation affects the tolerance and acceptance of minorities and differences.*

⁸ Remark by Lars Erik Birgegård was also made in a similar way on the previous AMPEP project in Macedonia

- *Project cycle management and capacity building for making claims has proved to very useful for individual planning for commercial activities or new entrepreneurship.*
- *The direct engagement and trainings in budget planning and procurements for villages project is used on personal investments and farming activities.* For the above 3 paragraphs no real studies have been made as that would have included a new set of questionnaires in addition to the regular one. On the other hand some general interviews and discussions in villages have clearly suggested very good success on all of those issues, particularly as individuals claim they have applied the project planning on their personal ideas which has helped them prepare requests for funding or credits for their projects.

Comparing the longitude studies from the beginning of PERA remarkable results are documented on every aspect of the project. This particularly applies on issues of self organization and direct participation of citizens in the decision making at village level and is best observed by comparing the active villages to the neighboring and external villages. The following few graph show how the active villages have improved while the others have remained almost the same during these three years.

Graph 1; Important part of the project was to build up the capacity of ordinary people to organize themselves and participate in discussion about the preferences and needs of their village. The following question was part of the survey; ***Does your village have regular meetings?*** Referring to the following graph the conclusion is:



The active villages shown in the first column and marked with green color have shown a remarkable increase in their internal organization.

Through the baseline study in 2009 all three groups had similar answers to the question while in 2011 the active villages showed 100% increase in their internal organization.

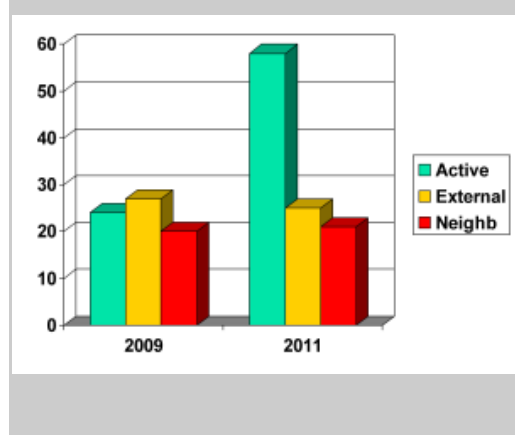
The neighboring villages (red) and villages outside the project (yellow) on the other hand showed almost stagnation or only slight increase in their internal organization.

Neighboring villages and villages completely out of PERA project have show stagnation which indicates that external efforts or intervention by the state or local governments has not produced any visible results in terms of village's organization

An important issue was also to establish if meetings initiated in the villages had indeed lead to increase in the participation of citizens in identifying project or problems to be solved.

It was very important to measure this as the official intention of the Bosnian government, according to their strategy, was to support the Local Governments to increase the participation of citizens in public affairs.

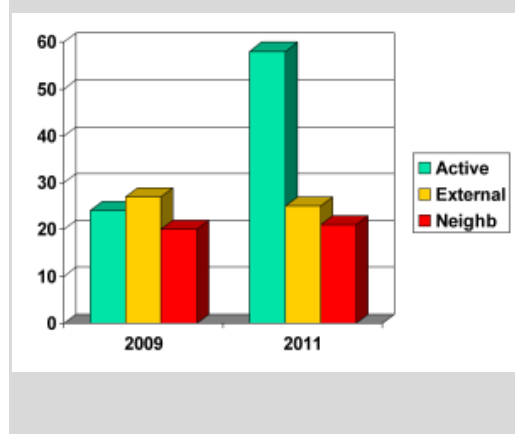
Graph 2; With the same explanation as above on the colors and the columns in this graph, the following is observed when the question; *have you personally been involved in prioritizing issues?*



This graph shows a clear increase in the participation of citizens in prioritizing issues for improvement in their villages. It also shows like in the first graph that no development is recorded in the villages used for comparison. Furthermore in the end discussion with people in PERA villages a great satisfaction was express for the fact that people had learned to appreciate the importance of self organization and internal communication in their villages. Another interesting observation is that many villages outside PERA have recently asked if they could be included in the project as they had learned about the success from the PERA villages. This is very interesting as it clearly demonstrates that external interventions during this period from 2009 to 2011 has not had any direct impact on increasing the participation of citizens in the decision making progresses..

The un-discriminate inclusion of all citizens was at the core of the PERA project although the measurement system only measured the inclusion of women in villages meetings.

Graph 3; the project wanted to establish if the participation of women had increased during the project and posed the question; **do women actively participate in villages meetings?**



It was expected that a significant improvement would be registered as PERA insisted on a minimum attendance of women in all project meetings. This decision led to around 300% increase in the involvement of women between 2009 and 2011 and has been regarded by most of the villages as one of the main achievements of the project. This clearly signifies that traditional behavior can be tackled and necessary improvements made. During the end of project discussions in the villages some villages had actually appointed woman as the president of their village workgroup or council.

There are number of other graphs and comparison that verify that the project was indeed very successful in initiating discussions and communication between municipalities and villages. On every aspect of the project, democratic inclusion, transparency and participation has increased between 2009 and 2011 in the PERA villages while very little changes are noted in other villages.

6.3 Staff selection and capacity

During the mid term evaluation of the project the evaluator made the following comment on the staff selection:

“In addition costs could have been reduced if experience in community development and the different methods and techniques generally practiced in such approaches had been a requirement in the recruitment of staff”. He then continued: “Given that many community development projects have been implemented over the years in the country, it is reasonable to suggest that such experience is available on the labor market”.

This observation is understandable but does not take into consideration that PEP definitely considered the option of recruiting such “experienced” staff and advertised that prior experience could be an asset for the post but not precondition. From the around 170 applicants that applied for job within the PERA project only a handful could demonstrate some experience from working on capacity building projects at villages level but were lacking other skills and motivation. Thus PEP is of the opinion that the mixed team of highly skilled and devoted staff has been the biggest asset for the project. This also corresponds to the previous experience from the AMPEP project in Macedonia, which were on several occasions appraised for the capacity of the staff. This was also recognised by the mid term evaluator on PERA who stated in the same report:

“At the outset it should be said with no reservation that PERA is implemented by a highly committed, hard working and able set of staffs. They share a clear understanding of what the objectives of the project are and the significance of the process. There is a demonstrated consciousness of the significance of how to relate to villagers with the liability of being well educated and “city people”. The field visits confirmed the success of the staffs.

The staffs represent the three main ethnic groups in the country but work in MCs irrespective of their ethnic background. Field staffs are rotated to achieve a relation of an institutional rather than personal nature and also on purpose to avoid that a staff member works in MCs dominated by his or her ethnic belonging.

Staff training has been extensive thereby continuously enhancing skills.

Staff meetings are held for exchange of experiences and pursuance of a continuous discussion on project design, implementation modalities and working methods. This signifies a learning organization for which PERA should be complimented”.

It further states:

“PERA is implemented by highly committed and hardworking staffs. It is highly appreciated by key stake holders including villagers and Mayors and municipality staffs directly involved in the project. The project was also given positive comments by other concerned actors consulted in this review such as Association of Cities and Municipalities (ACMs) for the Federation and the Civil Society Promotion Centre”.

Considering these remarks PEP can only conclude that the selection of staff and the constant capacity building applied by PEP was the main contributor to the successful implementation of the project. On several other occasions PEP has been praised for the high quality and commitment of the staff.

6.4 Cost effectiveness

During the initial preparation for the PERA project the cost effectiveness was thoroughly discussed and the final planning adjusted to these discussions. However the issue of cost effectiveness was raised both internally by PEP as well as by the evaluator during the Mid Term Evaluation. There were three main concerns by the evaluator; the cost related to

complete area coverage of whole Bosnia & Herzegovina, the large study target and the decision to send field workers in pairs on field visits.

A detailed reply was given to these remarks and shared with the donor Sida by late 2010, the main remarks as follows: The area coverage was decided in full consultation with the donor Sida and is considered by PEP, for sustainable reasons, to be one of the best decisions made for the project. Regional coverage would never have yielded any results close to the meeting in September 2011⁹. The second comment on the large study target might look reasonable but with 100 villages actively engaged in PERA over the whole country and the necessity to have a reasonable insight per village and to have a control sample from outside these 100 villages the sum adds up to the large sample¹⁰. The third comment on the decision to send pair on every field visit was considered several times by the PEP team and always found the most proper one and the cost related to sending single persons would not have reduced cost as accommodation and vehicle cost would have increased.

Internally the cost effectiveness discussions have also been evolving around three main issues; the cost for the whole project and how that could have been reduced, the cost per each project in villages and how much joint financing it yielded and most importantly the cost in relation to the sustainability indicators.

- a) The total cost for the project after exchange losses of around 124.000 € and return of unused funds of around 182.000 € is about 2.125.000 € invested in a project that started September 2008 and lasted including closing and reporting until end of April 2012. Deducting the actual cost of starting up and closing the project the actual cost can be stated as just over 2.0M €. Undisputedly the cost for staff and staff related issues is the biggest part of the project, almost 50%. This can be criticized as quite high cost but when considering that 11 local staff and 1 international were directly involved as regularly employed staff covering more than 1.100 meetings and interviewing around 5.300 people in 288 villages all over Bosnia & Herzegovina as well as a number of meetings in and around Sarajevo the cost was considered as reasonable as possible, in relationship to the huge reconstruction projects in the country the cost of PERA divided per village is similar to one badly damaged house being reconstructed per village.
- b) The direct cost for 94 project financed by the project was around 455.000 € and yielded almost 100.000 € from citizens, 130.000 € from the Local Governments and over 70.000 € in returned VAT. This means that the project yielded in total more than 11% additional financing from the partners. This is quite remarkable as the preconditioned joint financing by the villages only predicted around 70.000 € or 3% additional yield. There is also reasonable expectation that the Local Governments will increase their financial support to villages as most have made provision in 2012 budget for direct support to villages.
- c) The question remains if the potential sustainability of the project can be secured or not. This is highly depending on external factors and most importantly if any real attempt will be made to build on the success so far. But again referring to the Villages Gathering in September where representative from the civil society from around 90 villages and 18 Municipalities met to discuss their learning from the PRTA project and how that could be used in the future indicates a strong interest to maintain and use the lessons from this project.

6.5 Studies and measurements

The development of the measurement system for PERA was basically done internally by the staff. It took into consideration the experience from Macedonia and the results which could be

⁹ See chapter 7.1

¹⁰ See chapter 6.5

seen from there. PERA staff is fully aware that this system could have been made in a different format, the questionnaires could have been differently designed and the application could have been different. However, the study was introduced to a number of students from the University of Sarajevo and; to both students and professors at the University of Iceland. The study and the study methods were found very impressive and have been used by the students for further analyzes and even as a base for Master Studies on Environment and Resource Management. The only critic on the study was received from the Mid Term evaluation on PERA suggesting that a smaller sample could have reduced cost:

“It seems that the project could have been designed and implemented in a considerably more cost-effective way¹¹ by reconsidering the decision to send field workers in pairs to all meetings at village and MC level and by reducing the size of the sample in the base line and follow up surveys”.

It is possible that a different decision had been less costly but the study was applied in all the 100 villages selected for cooperation in order to have a good overview on the process there. It was also found important to study a number of neighboring villages to see if some spill over effects could be seen. And finally the decision to have completely external villages in the control group to see if other projects or governmental decision or any other interventions might have contributed to the outcome is found as the most interesting aspect of the study. The number of villages, in total 208, and the number of interview per village, 7-11 reflects the intention to have a comprehensive study that would give a good insight into the real progress of the project both in terms of general overview as well as broken down by municipalities and villages.

6.6 Selection of municipalities

The main intention of the project was to have an impact on the whole territory of the country. Thus the decision was made to include municipalities and villages as much as possible all over the country. This intention was introduced to and accepted by Sida before the implementation started. Comparing to the impact of other projects covering only smaller region, PERA staff and the partners are of the opinion that this approach was very successful. The September seminar in Sarajevo in 2011 was the first gathering of villages from all over the country and as such marked a major milestone in improving the communication between citizens and local governments across the entity lines. Thus the comment from the evaluator is contested here and regarded as an unrealistic and only shows a lack of understanding of the complex situation in Bosnia & Herzegovina

“Furthermore, the decision to select MCs to be included in the project from all parts of the country was an expensive decision. Even while following Sida’s requirement of project activities both in the Federation and in the Republika Srpska a cluster approach could have reduced costs”.

In general the cost and benefit remarks by the evaluator are understandable but given the agreed strategy and the outcome of the project it is difficult to say if a different strategy would have proved to produce any results close to what PERA did.

6.7 Cooperation with partners

A project like PERA is highly depending on the cooperation between the partners directly participating in the project. This would include the donor Sida, those municipalities that signed cooperation MoU with PEP International and the participating villages. Apart from these direct partners, PERA project established communication or cooperation with a number

¹¹ Lars Erik Birgegard Mid term evaluation on PERA 2010, page 12

of other organizations but most important was the cooperation with the Associations of Municipalities and Cities in both entities.

6.7.1 Other NGOs

At the beginning of the project, PEP established contacts with the GAP project supported by USAID, Sida and EKN, which became a member in the Panel Group that met by-annually to discuss the development of the PERA project. During the Mid term evaluation of PERA the evaluator verified the efforts of PERA to establish communication with other organization working on similar projects, his statement as follows:

“These would include the GAP project supported by USAID, Sida and EKN, the ILDP project funded by UNDP and the Swiss Development Agency, Local Youth Strategies funded GTZ, Rights-Based Municipality Development Program funded by UNDP and Local Government Reform funded by OSCE.

This is well and good but perhaps not sufficient. At closer look it turns out that several significantly larger (and more influential) players presently and in the past have been active in ‘influencing MC decision making’ to achieve more participatory (democratic) and professional planning and decision making in MC. In other words, with at least broadly speaking the same ambitions and approach as PERA and interestingly with the view to get their particular approach accepted as the one to be replicated as the unified approach in all MCs nationwide. It should be added that these other actors also seem to work in isolation with limited or no coordination with others”.

PEP tends to agree with the evaluator that coordination attempts by these different NGOs working in this field did not materialise in any direct cooperation or actions. It is a valid concern if it can be expected that NGOs, often competing for funds, are willing to establish any real coordination without being orchestrated directly by the donors.

Looking into the objectives of two, supposed to be, the most experienced and influential, organisations working in the same field as PERA certain similarities are noted. Their objectives are rather general and encompass number of issues that are compatible with the objectives of PERA as shown in the following overview:

UNDP

“Encourage NGOs/CSOs to specialize/professionalize their activities – to adopt a longer-term planning perspective, to become more responsive to local needs and less dependent on current donor priorities.

“Contribute to the democratic stabilization, conciliation, and further development of Bosnia and Herzegovina through support to select municipalities in establishing improved local authority/civil society relations and facilitating financing mechanisms for improved service delivery.”

Premised on the larger objective, the purpose of the project will focus on institutionalizing the principles of relationship between local authorities and civil society organizations and raising awareness on the significance of such principles, strengthening the capacity of different stakeholders to better engage in this relationship and, establishing a transparent and consistent municipal funding mechanism to support implementation of priority projects and ensure service delivery activities by civil society organizations, thus directly addressing the UNDAF goal of “*strengthened accountability and responsiveness of Government to pro-active citizens,*” and specifically addressing the CPAP outcome “*Strengthened Capacity of municipalities and CSOs to manage and participate in long-term sustainable socio-economic development within a framework of human rights and rule of law.*” Gender sensitivity and

promoting multi-ethnic interventions will be given special consideration in each objective and all activities”.

OSCE

“Assisting municipalities to establish mechanisms to actively engage with local communities

The activities in this area start with general improvement of the municipal regulatory framework and basic set-up conditions for MZs. They also relate to the development of clear and transparent criteria and procedures governing municipal funding for MZ projects. The Mission-led initiatives focus on improving municipal management of MZ affairs through the establishment of appropriate mechanisms, structures and positions within the municipal administration. This helps to establish communication channels and consultation practices between the municipality and MZs and thus greater transparency and accountability.

Establishing networks of local communities

The activities in this area concentrate on the establishment of ad hoc or issue-based networks and other communication channels between different MZs and between MZs and relevant partner NGOs. These networks, if effectively utilized, not only serve as an important means of information exchange and priority identification, but also pave the way for long-term co-operation and partnership. Networks of MZ Coordinators as peer-to-peer forums are also of particular significance.

Strengthening MZ and municipal partnerships to resolve community concerns

The Mission advocates greater co-operation between MZs and municipalities so that issues of community concern are properly resolved through targeted projects. Improved regulatory framework, increased capacity, and strengthened networks of local community leaders are key to finding effective solutions to community problems through joint action.

Where OSCE works

*Bihac, Brcko, Cazin, Donji Zabar, Glamoc, Gradacac, Hadzici, **Jablanica¹²**, Jajce, Kiseljak, Kostajnica, **Maglaj**, Modrica, Mostar, Novi Grad, **Prozor-Rama**, Rogatica, Srebrenica, **Vlasenica**, and Zavidovici”.*

An interesting observation during the implementation of PERA is that although these two organizations had been actively working in some of the municipalities engaged in PERA, and with similar objectives, none of the municipal officials made any references to their experience working with them.

Direct cooperation was established during 2011 with the CPCD project. It was interesting to see how they have organized their implementation via a consortium of regionally based local NGOs, in Dobož, Prijedor, Travnik and Livno. PEP staff visited all their regional offices to obtain information on their objectives and intention and how that could be shared with PERA villages. It was apparent during these visits that these 4 NGOs work very independently with no common objective or coordinated approach. As PEP could not provide any financing for them, their interest for cooperation disappeared. However the available information about their existence and possible potentials were shared with PERA villages and some contacts established. Since then some villages have reported to PEP staff a positive experience, particularly in Livno, while others have expressed a serious concerns about the standards and implementation of the CPCD project. Some villages went so far as to state that the low standards and compromises applied could destroy the momentum and trust that had been crated through PERA.

¹² The green highlight indicates municipalities also involved in PERA

6.7.2 Partner villages

As earlier explained the project targeted 100 villages for cooperation and introduced the concept idea of PERA and invited these villages to establish direct cooperation with the project. During the weeks that followed some of the villages encountered internal problems and lack of interest to establish active communication within their village and finally 4 villages gave up on the process and were thus not involved in any further activities. The remaining 96 continued their cooperation with PERA and took part in the capacity building phase with total commitment. The fact that only 93 villages completed the final phase of the project by initiating and implementing project based on their ideas and practical trainings does not indicate that the remaining few had not increased their capacities to do so. The reasons for those 3 that did not complete any project are more of technical nature and conflicting ideas between their villages and the local governments.



PERA villages Gathering in Sarajevo September 2011.

Plenary session

The main success of the project is in the cooperation with the villages engaged. The focus on internal organization of each village was received and appreciated as a completely new approach by those villages. Many claim that PERA is the first project that treats the villages as direct partners rather than just beneficiaries as most organizations have done before. It is also believed that the internal organization of all villages is a precondition for any active cooperation of villages in the future. This was clearly demonstrated in the Villages Gathering in Sarajevo in September 2011 where active PERA villages from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina met to discuss the outcome of the project and lessons learned. During this conference 3 motions were constructed and sent to the relevant governmental institutions and organizations:

- **To institutions at higher levels:** *“The meeting concludes that no new legislation nor amendments to existing laws concerning civil organization should be passed without prior consulting a representative groups of the people at local levels”.*
- **To Local Governments, partners of PERA project:** *“The meeting concludes that an active network of villages would be an appropriate vehicle to influence decision making at higher levels. The PERA village network that is already in place might be just one such vehicle. Thus, it is of great importance that the PERA partner*

municipalities provide support to these villages in establishing a network through which they will continue to communicate”.

- **To villages and village organizations:** *“The meeting concludes that an active and engaged civil society is the base for improvements at village’s level. It is imperative that people do not wait for others to come and help, but act now and create changes themselves”.*

These motions demonstrate a good knowledge of the role and potentials of civil organizations and how these villages can contribute to better governance. The real outcome of the PERA project is now pending on how this foundation can be further explored and utilized and how the experience of these villages can be used to further strengthen the civil organizations in the country. This conference, in September 2011, proved that there is an interest and capacity among civil organizations to establish a forum across the entity line(s) that can review and comment on draft legislations and potentially issue motions for improved legislation affecting the civil organizations in the country.

6.7.3 Partner municipalities

The initial stage of implementing the project was the selection of municipalities for partnership. The selection plan was based on studying public statistics and information on development level and size of the target municipalities as well as information from each of the municipalities. Following these studies the first visits were made to 20 municipalities to introduce the project and to verify if the public information used in the selection criteria were correct. During these visits the unreliability of the public statistics became obvious. In Trnovo, Dobretici, Berkovici and Bosansko Grahovo the potential villages did simply not exist. In some cases where public figures indicated villages of 200-300 people, only a couple of old persons were found. **It is a very serious issue if municipalities do not keep updated figures on the population in their villages or if they do not share them with potential partner for projects.** This remark, by no means, points only to these 4 municipalities mentioned here but for all the municipalities visited by PERA. This particular issue of wrong statistics delayed the final selection of 20 municipalities for weeks as all potential villages had to be visited to verify the “accurate” population before the final selection was made.

Following these complications the final selection of 20 municipalities was completed and the cooperation agreement for the project was completed with direct engagement of all the municipalities. During this phase which basically addressed the mayors or the highest administration level, all the municipalities openly stated that they would **“do everything we can to help PEP implementing the project”**. This is maybe a core issue for consideration as it clearly shows that the municipal authorities looked at themselves as beneficiaries rather than direct partners in the project, at least in the beginning.

After signing the MoU for cooperation every municipality assigned 2-3 persons supposed to have an active role in either development departments or departments for communicating with their citizens, those assigned should then actively engage with PEP in the implementation of activities in the villages. The selection of these persons in many ways indicated the interest and commitments of the municipalities to make the most out of the project. PERA staff has categorized the appointed contact persons as follows; a) Observers, only supposed to collect information on the implementation and discussions in the villages and report back to the mayors. b) Explorers, which only engaged in discussions about further financial support and inclusion of more villages into the project. c) Contributors; that actively participated in the process provided information from the municipalities and had authorities to make commitments on behalf of the municipalities. This last group was far the biggest and it is only fair to say that in the municipalities of; Tomislavgrad, Drvar, Lopare and Posusje for examples, their experience is very useful for further dissemination of project results and potentials.

In many of the municipalities the understanding and appreciation for improved communication with citizens is very well established. The information gained from villages about their preferences is now being incorporated into their budget planning and resource allocation and some municipalities have already taken concrete steps to introduce the PERA processes to other villages. There are also signs that municipalities are sharing their experience with other non PERA municipalities for example in Tomislavgrad that has shared with Livno the lessons and examples from PERA as well as some of the villages from Tomislavgrad have taken up contact with neighboring villages from Livno.

6.7.4 Donor and Association of Municipalities

The cooperation between PEP and the donor Sida is based on years of mutual trust and respect. As earlier explained, the original establishment of PEP International was encouraged and even initiated at the management level in Stockholm. To secure the flow of information between PEP and Sida during the PERA project, some procedures were established in addition to regular progress reports; Sida directly participated in the by annual Panel Group discussions initiated by PEP and regular monthly updates were provided to the Program Officer at Sida. In addition to this few consultation meetings were held on particular issues if needed.

Like Sida, the Municipal Association from both entities took active part in the Panel Group meetings. In addition to that PEP participated in meetings and seminars organized by the associations and contributed to discussions and directives aimed at improving the civil engagement in public affairs.

These two actors, Sida and the Municipal Associations are key contributors to the development of Local Governments and civil societies in the country. They either directly support or participate in a number of projects in this field or have contacts or information on all the projects that are applied. Therefore it is concluded that both Sida and the Associations could have played a more active role in the coordination of efforts and engaged the organizations in more constructive discussions about directions and potential solutions for the future. It is however clear that the organizational structure of both associations is weak, maybe not as internal organization but in terms of the commitments and willingness of the municipalities to actively support the structure. This is clearly demonstrated through the very weak financial capacity of the associations and their dependency on external financing.

7 Further suggestions

The following chapter outlines the main suggestions and recommendation for continued efforts to strengthen the role of civil society as seen by PEP International.

7.1 On strengthening civil engagement

At the beginning of the PERA project and during the initial introduction and delivery of training for the villages the lack of confidence and trust among the inhabitants and towards governmental institutions and NGOs was very apparent. This is very much in line with observation made by other actors in the field and to some extent could be contributed to previous (top down) humanitarian and reconstruction efforts applied for almost two decades¹³. PEP is of the opinion that this apathy and distrust can be tackled systematically and in many ways might be a key issue for the constructive democratic development of the country. The outcome of the Villages Gathering in Sarajevo in September 2011 clearly demonstrated the potential of this kind of systematic approach.

¹³ Both Municipalities and villages agreed that very little effort had been made to include them in any decisions related to previous projects but only to participate as decided and instructed by the implementing agency.

This however requires a rather complicate and time consuming approach with some clear set of principles to follow:

- **To address a “critical mass” of people disbursed in a very broad geographical way**, PERA would never have succeeded establishing the common feeling of trust and belonging to the same level as felt at the Villages Gathering in September 2011 with a single regional or limited area coverage. If the intention is to initiate the civil society on general terms to influence the policy makings, the civil society has to have a solid and broad base for their involvement similar to that established by PERA. To gain recognition on a scale that counts as representative for the civil society a narrow sample is not likely to succeed but might add to further separation and distrust.
- **To apply high standards in terms of staff knowledge, behaviour and approach and to have clear references to laws and regulations guarding civil engagement¹⁴**. For most of the villages the high standards of PERA have led to increased interest and engagement of the citizens. It has further added to the willingness to take responsibility and to share their ideas and potentials with others. PEP approach to the project is now referred to as benchmark for others by most of the villages involved. There should be no “discount” in terms of applying a project without clear demand on the engagement of the project staff, their knowledge and shared vision.
- **To allow for necessary timeframe and adjustments of strategies**. This is very important as most projects are very limited in time, one year or few months in many cases. The experience from PERA shows that the villages were only ready to engage in discussions on further strategies by the end of the three year project. This is very interesting observation as the critics at the beginning of PERA was mainly related to the “lengthy” approach; *“Don’t complicate things, just give us the money and we will solve everything”* was later regarded by most of the villages as their lack of understanding on how important the time factor is.
- **To give responsibilities to the villages to actively engage in discussions and decisions on how to continue and strengthen their role**. The spirit felt at the Villages Gathering gave a strong indication to the desire to be included and listened to. It is important not to loose this momentum although already half a year has passed since this meeting.

7.2 On institutionalisation

The Local Governments are of course the main actors in maintaining a strong and engaged civil society. However, throughout the last 10-15 years, the main effort by the municipalities visited by PEP has obviously been focusing on delivering information to the local communities rather than engaging them in discussions and decisions. To some extent this might be the results of a pressure from higher authorities and bigger international organisations to improve transparency but not entirely from the intent to improve engagement of the civil society. The Local Governments representing each municipality are the lowest level of governing in the country and should remain as such.

¹⁴ For example; villages did not know that the existing legal framework allowed for citizens to organise and construct their ideas and to deliver to their local authorities as many NGOs and local authorities had previously presented that changes of laws and municipal statutes would have to take place to make it possible for individual villages to organise.

PERA project has been guided by the vision and the strategy of the donor Sida; implemented by the PEP BiH staff using experience from the previous project; and in partnership with the AMCs in both entities

*Photo:
Stakeholders of PERA project:
The donor Sida, AMC FBiH,
Pep International Macedonia and BiH. At
the PERA villages Gathering in
Sarajevo, September 2011*



There are number of references to projects aiming at strengthening the institutions at municipal level. PEP is of the opinion that these efforts have to great extend been compromised as the focus has been on the institutions but not on those supposed to carry these institutions.

- ***Citizen's organisations as institutions.***

The findings and discussion both within PEP and with project partners on the field suggest that the unclear role of MZ might be a reason for the poor communication with citizens. **PEP is suggesting that the focus in the future should be more on the individual village organisations, as association of citizens, and the existing structure of the Local Governments as the lowest level of governing.** There have been motions, both within municipal councils and Municipal Associations, suggesting a re defined laws for MZ as institutions. These motions are suggesting clearer mandate, election processes, defined competences and finances. **PEP would strongly advise against any further attempts to institutionalising the MZ setup, particularly if that intervention would further establish the MZ as yet another administrative layer¹⁵.** There are clear differences of opinions among the municipalities as how to solve this issue. To some extend this is mainly an issue of terminology as in some municipalities the MZ is referred to as a network base for a number of villages while in many other municipalities MZ are referred to as individual village organisation. **In terms of civil engagement and participation in the decision making, the existing laws guiding the rights of citizens to form association is sufficient enough to support the base for active civil organisation in villages. On the other hand the municipality laws are also clear in terms of the right of municipalities to extend their services with villages by any means they decide on,** this would include establishing sub-offices or service centres in particular areas within their municipality as they find most productive, define their functions and provide finances for their operations. This might be the best solution for municipalities that would like to maintain or strengthen the institutions of the clustered MZ, to do so clearly within the municipal setup.

¹⁵ The arguments for institutionalisation at the villages level is mostly focused on the possibilities of villages to collect and manage funds and participate in joint financing with the municipality. Although highly questionable in terms of potential discrimination, (hidden taxation, favouring villages that can collect funds etc.?) these joint financing can be handled in a very sufficient way via informal villages organisation as proved through the PERA project.

- ***Municipal association as institutions***

There is no question that an active and well functioning association of municipalities is the correct base for discussions and debates on general issues between Local Governments and Central Governments and institutions. As elaborated before the organizational structure of both municipal associations is weak, maybe not as internal organization but in terms of the commitments and willingness of the municipalities to actively support the structure. Quite many municipalities have not paid their membership fee to the association for years and claim that there is no point in doing so. This is confirmed by the management of both associations and clearly demonstrated through the very weak financial capacity of the associations and their dependency on external financing. Considering the efforts placed by most of the municipalities to organize joint financing and fund raising at the village's level there is a clear contradiction in their lack of interest to sufficiently support their own associations financially. **Future attempts to support the association as strong institutions should place due respect to the importance of establishing the responsibility for maintaining the association on those forming it, namely the municipalities.** If the associations are supposed to act like institutions, it has to be clear who formed the institution and why. **Thus it is imperative that any attempts to support the association should include actions towards raising the awareness of the municipalities parallel or simultaneously with other efforts.**

7.3 On further projects

One of the controversies facing those presently working on strengthening the democratic process in Bosnia & Herzegovina is the tendency to dwell in the past and apply centralised methods that have references in the previous systems of former Yugoslavia¹⁶. In almost every institution and organisation working on these issues are key persons that would love nothing more than to have the old system back. They don't really believe in the potentials of the civil society and participation and debates but would like to have clear directives and instructions from someone above, i.e. "follow the manual". This atmosphere was very obvious when PERA team first entered the villages as the people there claimed to be eager to work if someone would tell them what to do. Only after three years of engagement did PEP start to receive positive feedback from villages that claimed to have gained confidence in themselves and their community and to have established productive communication with their local authorities. There is no hesitation to claim that the outcome of the PERA project can provide a sustainable platform for further democratic development at the local level. If the intention is to continue along these lines the following is recommended by PEP International.

- **For civil societies**

Put the main focus on the general associations of citizens on a village to village base rather than taking the shortcuts of working with interest based groups. These interest based groups, which are mostly commercially oriented for example; farmers, fisherman, tourism etc. can find their platform within the villages groups or within a network of their own and should at the end of the day cover their cost themselves.

Once active villages associations are in place the cooperation or networking of these villages should be encouraged and supported, first within each municipality and later on a broader scale. **The main objective should be to have a forum where civil organisation can meet** to discuss issues of important for strengthening the rural communities and to review draft for new laws or other matters of importance for them.

¹⁶ There is a valid question if the international community has contributed to maintaining this syndrome by applying very top down approach for almost two decades on humanitarian and reconstruction projects.

- **For Municipal Cooperation**

Similar to the village's organisations, make an effort to establish regional cooperation of Municipalities that should have as one of their main objectives to strengthen their Municipal Association. As mentioned before, the base for the Municipal Associations is very weak as previous efforts by international organisations have mainly been on strengthening them as institutions and less on the role of the Municipalities in building their association. Voluntary cooperation between Municipalities hardly exists and there are no regional networks of Municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A strong regional network of Municipalities with direct link to the Municipal Association would increase the pressure on those Municipalities that are less keen to maintain and support the Association. Without any efforts at the Municipal and regional level the potential sustainability of the Associations is greatly compromised and might pose a real threat to their survival.

7.4 Final words

On coordination of activities

The coordination of efforts is an underexplored opportunity in the development work in Bosnia and Herzegovina. PEP does not see it as possible for implementation agencies to undertake nor initiate such coordination on any reasonable scale nor can it be expected that the Governing Institutions of BiH can in the nearest future initiate such coordination. Therefore that effort will have to be organised and lead by the Donor agencies which might result in fewer and bigger projects but more coordinated efforts.

On PEP lessons learned

It is a good practice to sit down at the end of a project to try to map what could have been done differently knowing what is known when a project is finished. In PEP case there are few issues that could have been done in a different and more productive way.

- Involving the University of Sarajevo in a more formal way in the study part of the project from the beginning.
- To have a clearer engagement of the Municipal Associations in terms of sharing and training staff that would have a future role in the associations.
- To involve the Municipal staff more in the preparation and direct engagement in the Panel Group meetings. That could have lead to a more strategy and vision oriented discussions and less on the direct implementation issues.
- To insist on the “green light” for potential extension of PERA too early was the biggest mistake made by PEP. To do so before the real results of the project became visible only led to confusion and consequently the flat refusal to really consider that option.

On general feeling

PEP International is both proud and satisfied with the outcome of the PERA project. The project has proved that a systematic engagement of the civil society on a large scale can be achieved and that a broad forum for their involvement can be established. At times there are references that PERA is just one more project doing the same as many other project working with civil societies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. PEP does not agree with that as there is no clear reference found for any other project achieving anything similar to PERA.

The general feeling is that the Villages Gathering in Sarajevo September 2011 marked a major milestone in the inclusion and engagement of citizens in the decision and policy making processes. Citizens gathering as performed during that meeting, not as top down initiated institution but as a discussion forum for citizens, can be an effective tool to engage citizens and their authorities in discussions about almost every matter of importance for the citizens of Bosnia & Herzegovina. This has been tested in countries like Sweden and most of

the Baltic States with very good results. This PEP believes is the right approach rather than having international organisation drafting and proposing policy changes to the governments.

The PEP team wants to acknowledge the efforts and commitment made by the 20 Municipalities and 100 villages that were involved in the project.

Done in Sarajevo April 2012

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PEP International