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**MONTENEGRO**

## SUCCESS STORY

# Local Council Revives Community

### Villagers rejoice as their all-purpose community center is rebuilt



Vidrovan's new community center hosts a gym and plenty of public meeting space.

***Community development councils are helping lead local development projects in Montenegro.***

"This magnificent structure was literally built from the ashes," said Ljubo Vujadinovic, proudly pointing at the new multipurpose community center in Vidrovan. Vujadinovic lives in the picturesque Montenegrin village of Rastovac. His and 12 other villages constitute the area of Vidrovan, an agricultural district. Residents vividly recall when their old community center, where they would gather for meetings, socializing, and recreation, went up in flames 10 years ago.

The center's reconstruction happened thanks to the Vidrovan Community Development Council. As in many communities throughout Serbia and Montenegro, the council serves as a vehicle for uniting neighbors in pursuit of common goals. Rural councils are particularly effective in encouraging communication between distant neighbors and prioritizing redevelopment projects. Organized with the help of USAID, the Vidrovan council has implemented five community projects in three years.

Once the council had identified the rebuilding as a priority and committed to the project, it set about securing funding. USAID provided 69 percent of the \$229,000 project cost. The Vidrovan community, in partnership with the Montenegrin Government's Public Works Directorate, the local municipality, and the council, provided the rest.

Vujadinovic explained that the modern facility will significantly improve the quality of life in his region. "Within the center there are some completely new amenities, including an equipped gym," he said. "A grocery store, as well as a walk-in medical clinic or dentist's office, is expected to be opened soon." The center can host local community meetings, cultural events, and sports activities. It also houses an agricultural pharmacy to meet the needs of Vidrovan's farmers. The center will also create at least seven new jobs. "That is what we needed," said Vujadinovic. "Young educated people will want to stay in Vidrovan now instead of finding their happiness somewhere else."

The only flame that sometimes flickers in the community center nowadays, according to Vujadinovic, comes from the fierce rivalry with the neighboring village that Rastovac's basketball team has defeated.