



## SUCCESS STORY

# Small Grants Unite Communities

**Grants fund small projects that help improve communities' quality of life**



Photo: USAID/Kristina Stefanova

A local farmer cooperative received a grant to buy tractors and other farm equipment, like this potato harvester, to increase production.

***The Community Self-Help Initiative has provided quality-of-life improvements to communities and has helped to bridge ethnic differences to achieve a common goal.***

Girls in colorful traditional dress sang and danced to traditional music on a sunny October day at the Stobi visitor center, one of Macedonia's largest Roman archeological sites, opened its doors.

The historical attraction is just off a major road, but until recently there were no markings for it — no visitor center, no traffic signs. Then a neighboring community contacted the Community Self Help Initiative, a USAID program that helps communities fund small projects that will better their quality of life through economic development or infrastructure improvements.

Building the Stobi visitor center was only one of more than 300 projects supported through USAID's Community Self-Help Initiative, which included installing public lighting, renovating schools, providing farming equipment for an agricultural cooperative, establishing an education center for Roma children, and providing a fishing association with new breeding technology and help organizing fishing competitions.

When it was started in 2000, the Initiative chose regional representatives to promote the program at schools and municipal centers throughout Macedonia. News traveled fast, and soon representatives were being approached by community members about projects.

In a village not far from the Bulgarian border, farmers requested and received a grant for tractors and other farming equipment. With these new tools, the association has nearly doubled its production of potatoes and other vegetables and is now exporting to Norway.

The biggest challenge for the Initiative was getting individuals and groups within communities to work together — which they did not do under socialism. Now, efforts like the Community Self-Help Initiative are helping Macedonians learn to work together and cooperate with others that have common interests. It has been successful in providing immediate and tangible quality-of-life improvements to communities and has helped to bridge ethnic differences to achieve a common goal.