



School Gains Access to Running Water

Built in the early 1960s, the Romanian village school of Comanca, Olt, is filled each day with 100 children between seven and 15 years old, learning and acquiring new skills. Until recently, the children also had to bring full bottles of water to school each day so they could wash their hands. Comanca School had no running water, and officials worried that the health department would not let the school open in the fall.

In October 2003, USAID began supporting a local organization to help bring citizens and local authorities together to solve community problems in a more participatory way. Citizen consultative groups were formed in Deveselu, Vlădila, Fărcașele and Stoenești communes. Each group debated community issues and, together with its local government, decided on a priority problem and pooled community and local resources to develop a solution. Although the communities faced many issues, one of the most crucial was to improve the dilapidated infrastructure that has plagued Romania over the past 20 years. In Comanca, the school was the logical place to start.

“It was high time we did something about it,” said Oltița Urătu, the school mistress and physical education teacher. “It was very hard on the children to carry water bottles every day and, even so, not very hygienic.”



Photo: USAID

Students at Comanca School try out the new water system.

USAID assistance provided the pipes, the glass fiber water tank, a pumping system, and a sewage system for the project. Labor was entirely supplied by local citizens, most of them parents of school children, who took turns in digging ditches, carrying the tank and installing it.

Vice Mayor Copilescu of Deveselu Commune, of which Comanca is just one village, said that USAID helped the community “take the first—and critical—step and show us that we can do it and it’s better if we do it together.... Our citizens donated their time and effort, and we solved a long-standing issue in a very short time.”

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Eight other small projects were implemented as a result of USAID support, using a participatory process, improving services and contributing to the increase of local revenues. The courtyard in a Deveselu kindergarten was improved, benefiting 70 students. The rehabilitation of Vlădila’s marketplace will bring an extra \$1,500 in taxes each year to the commune—an 80 percent increase. Fărcașele built a new medical facility to serve the 2,000 residents of Ghimpați village. And the rehabilitated Stoenești school has now been certified by the health department and can open in the fall.

In Comanca, a group of students and their parents, teachers and local authorities gathered July 2 for the inauguration of the school’s water service. After a speech from the mayor of the commune, the ribbon was cut and two children turned on the taps for the first time. From among the group of students attending, a voice was heard whispering, “How cool!”

