



COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

USAID Dedicates School Project in Mitrovica

Mitrovica mayor Bajram Rexhepi joined USAID Mission Director Michael Farbman in celebrating the renovation of the Bedri Gjina school in Mitrovica. Bedri Gjina is one of the largest schools in Mitrovica, with almost 700 Albanian, Bosniak, and Roma/Ashkali/Egyptian (RAE) students.

"We at USAID support projects that facilitate a change, projects that have some impact in the society, and I believe that one of the best places to invest is education. Education is the foundation of strengthening a society and we all think alike when we speak about education and its importance," said Farbman at the dedication.



Students of Bedri Gjina school in Mitrovica - Performing traditional dance at the dedication of the school rehabilitation project

The \$50,000 project included application of a new façade, refurbishment of bathrooms, installation of a water and sewage system, and replacement of gutters. The school interior was rehabilitated by USAID in 2002. The project was a part of the Community Enhancement and Development Project, implemented in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Property Tax Grant Brings More Positive Outcomes

Municipalities that implement collection of property taxes received a partial or full allocation of

the Incentive Grant for the year 2007.

A Property Tax Incentive Grant is designed to address the problem of low-levels of own-source revenue, and is distributed according to the progress of municipalities toward achieving targets that were set using 2004 revenue as a baseline. Municipalities that collect at least as much as they did in 2004, but less than their revenue target, qualify for a partial allocation. Municipalities that achieve their revenue target qualify for their full allocation. Municipalities that exceed their targets receive a portion of the funds not distributed to municipalities that fail to achieve their revenue target.

The Property Tax Incentive Grant focused the attention of local politicians on raising property tax revenue. Mayors and assemblymen began talking to citizens about property taxation and its importance to the community. This led to further discussions with citizens on how the money should be spent. Municipal leaders were able to present their citizens with a menu of public improvements and projects that could be implemented if citizens paid their property tax.

The effort municipalities made to collect property tax increased sharply. While the total amount rose through property tax is still small in aggregate terms (8.5 million euros for 2007), the Property Tax Incentive Grant has established a system of positive incentives for municipalities to raise property tax revenue and has set them on a path towards continued revenue growth.

MEDIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Role of Women and Minorities in Media

Women and ethnic minorities have more opportunities to shape news reporting in Kosovo, concludes a recent survey conducted by USAID's Kosovo Media Assistance Project (KMAP).

Based on responses from 46 journalists, representing 28 Albanian- and Serbian-language media outlets, female journalists in Kosovo are regarded as being committed to quality, and supportive of other women in the field. As a result, women are more prominent in journalism and reporting than before.

The report also shows that the media is gradually incorporating more viewpoints of ethnic minorities in news reporting.

This is particularly true with radio broadcasters, which are facilitating more non-Albanian language programming, hiring multi-lingual journalists, and encouraging cooperation among journalists of different ethnic backgrounds.

Continued progress in building an inclusive and representative media are important as Kosovo builds a multi-ethnic state. KMAP is being implemented by IREX.

SPECIAL INITIATIVES

"Water: There is if You Save It"

"Water: There is if you save it" is the slogan of a public education campaign that kicked off on a March 21st conference commemorating World Water Day. The one-month campaign will educate the public about the need to preserve water, and provide tips and advice on water conservation.

Kosovo faced a major drought last summer and, given low snow fall over the winter, faces another dry season this year. The government is working on a plan to preserve water by restricting usage and imposing large fees for water abusers, however these actions will only be effective if the public acts responsibly in preserving water.

"We never know the worth of water till the well is dry," said Michael Farbman USAID/Director, quoting Thomas Fuller, an 18th century doctor. "Let's not wait until the well is dry before we begin valuing the precious resource of water in Kosovo." Dr. Farbman joined Mahir Yagcilar, Minister of Environment and Spatial Planning and Idriz Vehapi, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development in speaking at the event. Water preservation is becoming a global challenge, as many parts of the world face shortages of potable water. For this reason, the United Nations has declared 2005-2015 as the "Decade of Water".

The "Water: There is if you save it" campaign is developed and supported by USAID in partnership with Inlt and Koperativa, Kosovo-based public relations companies.

Visiting Congressman Sees USAID in Action in Kosovo

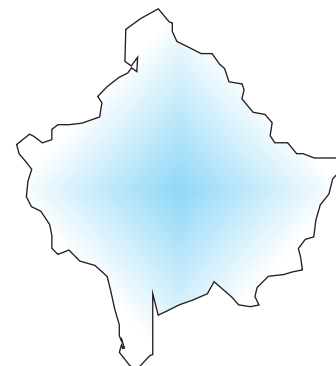
Representative Earl Pomeroy, North Dakota, a member of the House Ways and Means Committee as well as the Agriculture Committee, met with civil society representatives and economic leaders, toured a dairy plant and government laboratory and met with Hope Fellows during a March 18-21 visit to Kosovo.

Minister of Finance and Economy Ahmet Shala thanked Pomeroy for American support, and explained that the "big challenge is unemployment, which can be solved with two different approaches, with economic restructuring and private sector engagement."



At Bylmeti, Pomeroy was treated to yogurt and white cheese after touring the plant with owner Ymer Berisha. Pomeroy told the dairy's owner and staff that he'd been served Bylmeti's yogurt at breakfast that morning, and appreciated the great taste.

Pomeroy saw how business and government are working to improve the competitiveness of dairy products during visits to Bylmeti Dairy in Fushe Kosovo/Kosovo Polje municipality and the Kosovo Veterinary and Food Agency Lab. At Bylmeti, Pomeroy learned how improvements in product quality had led to increased consumer confidence and demand.



U.S. Agency for International Development
Arbëria (Dragodan), Ismail Qemali st., nr. 1
Phone: ++ 381 38 243 673
Fax: ++ 381 38 249 493

For more information visit www.usaid.gov/missions/kosovo and www.pristina.usmission.gov or contact us at kosovousaidinfo@usaid.gov