



USAID/Kosovo Newsletter

Arberia II (Dragodan), Ismajl Qemajli St. No.1

Pristina, Kosovo

telephone: +381 (038) 243 673

email:kosovoinfo@usaid.gov

Special edition:

Building Diversity

One of the goals within UNMIK's "Standards for Kosovo" is that "all Kosovo inhabitants have the right to remain, have right to property and right to return respected throughout Kosovo." Creating conditions for safe and sustainable returns and reintegration is one of the benchmarks, while an active advocacy by political and community leaders for returns and reintegration is an action called for in the standards document.

USAID supports more than just the goal of returns: Our vision is that Kosovo be transformed into a democratic, self-governing economically sustainable entity in which all citizens have equal opportunities and rights. The new Municipal Infrastructure Support Initiative (MISI) is one program that directly addresses this issue.

"USAID gives high importance to this project as it addresses both municipal development needs in terms of infrastructure improvements but, even more importantly from the standpoint of Kosovo's future, seeks to heal the wounds which separate ethnic communities," says Dale Pfeiffer, USAID Mission Director. But he broadens the issue to address the need for diversity in Kosovo - and what diversity can bring to Kosovo. This edition of USAID/Kosovo Newsletter addresses the concept of diversity - see more:



MUNICIPALITIES WORK ON MAKING COMMUNITIES HOME TO ALL ETHNICITIES

"I think that the greatness of every population does not remain in guarding traditions and history, but in a clear vision for the future, power, energy, and intelligence to overcome difficulties on the road to progress." - Besa Vuthaj, Deputy Program Director at Mercy Corps with the Municipal Infrastructure and Services Initiative.

The returns and reintegration process is supported by the central authorities of the Provisional Institutions of Self Governance (PISG) of Kosovo but local governments play a crucial role in improving living conditions for those who return.

In its effort to assist and strengthen municipalities to take a leading role in improving conditions for return and reintegration, USAID Mission in Kosovo initiated the Municipal Infrastructure and Services Initiative (MISI). MISI is an 18-month program being implemented by Mercy Corps. The program helps local municipal officials improve conditions for returns and help in the reintegration process. MISI will support infrastructure improvements in municipalities in Kosovo that are making significant progress toward establishing conditions conducive to the return and reintegration of minorities.

Content:

Page 1: "Municipalities Work on Making Communities Home to all ethnicities"-Kosovo municipalities work for improving conditions for returns.

Page 2: "Istog/Istok Prepares Road Project to Link Communities and Futures" - How Kosovar communities engage in the returns process by selecting projects for mutual benefit.

Page 3 & 4: "A New Spirit of One Society",- Dale Pfeiffer, USAID Mission Director speech to the representatives of 9 municipalities participating in the USAID's Municipal Infrastructure and Services Initiative.

MISI

continued from page 1

"USAID gives high importance to this project as it addresses both municipal development needs in terms of infrastructure improvements but, even more importantly from the standpoint of Kosovo's future, seeks to heal the wounds which separate ethnic communities," says Dale Pfeiffer, Mission Director, USAID/Kosovo.

Nine municipalities selected through award competition will, at the end of the program, be better able to demonstrate public support for returns, address obstacles to return and reintegration and increase the involvement of receiving communities in returns. Additionally infrastructure funding for 40 projects will have been completed through a participatory process led by the municipalities with involvement from majority and minority communities.

"If anyone had told me when I first arrived that only four years later 18 municipalities would be interested in participating in a program to support returns and reintegration I would have told them they were far too optimistic".

Kristin Griffith, MISI Program Director

"MISI is a program designed to assist municipal leaders to undertake actions that will assist in improving quality of life for all," says Kristin Griffith, Program Director at Mercy Corps for MISI. "MISI is also a program which emphasizes the process, the process which started with each municipality as they took the initiative to apply, in order that they might better their municipality." All municipalities' representatives met for the first time since they were selected at a meeting at USAID/Kosovo on February 24. The meeting allowed the nine groups of municipal officials to exchange ideas on how they are addressing problems relating to returns and reintegration, and hear from Mercy Corps and USAID about the importance of this program.

ISTOG/ISTOK PREPARES ROAD PROJECT TO LINK COMMUNITIES AND FUTURES

Istog/Istok Municipality, like others participating in the Municipal Infrastructure and Support Initiative (MISI), developed a project that not only will link two communities by building a better road, but also will help area children more easily attend school - a concern all participants support. This is one example of a meeting that started the process of rebuilding communities, making them better places for returnees and current residents. The municipality held open community meetings with residents of communities where proposed infrastructure projects had been identified. Municipal officials presented details about the initiative, and explained the process that communities and municipal officials will go through.

Two communities - one ethnic Albanian Kosovars, one ethnic Serbian Kosovars - were separated by an impassable road. On February 2, a community meeting, with 42 participants present, was held in the village of Kernine/Kernina. Municipal officials discussed the proposed project; rehabilitation of the road connecting the ethnic Albanian village of Kernine/Kernina with Osojan/Osojane, the ethnic Serbian village. The poor condition of the road and lack of regular public road servicing these two communities have difficulty accessing transport as most commercial providers refuse to provide service..

Kernine/ Kernina residents readily agreed that rehabilitation of the road was a priority. Enver Rugova, advisor with Department of Economy in Istog/Istok Municipality, tactfully proposed that a multi-ethnic community working group be formed to ensure participation of both villages that would utilize the road. Some community members present at the meeting stated that they would rather not have the project than work together with their ethnic Serbian neighbors. This expression drew a firm response from Qazim Loxha, an official with the Municipal Department for Development, Reconstruction and Planning who said that he himself had lost his father and other relatives during the war. However, he said that people must now look toward the future. "Like it or not, the process of returns has started and will continue because everybody has a right to return to their homes," Loxha said, adding that he believed that, while it's not easy to forget, all have to move on to become a democratic society and part of the progressive world. He explained to meeting participants his belief that all ethnic groups must support projects that benefit all citizens.

Loxha added that the municipality is grateful to the donors who are helping, especially with infrastructure projects as there are still many rebuilding efforts needed. He recommended that the community elect two or three representatives to work together with representatives from the ethnic Serbian village to oversee the road project.

Community members concluded that the project would benefit both communities. Additionally many people expressed their opinion that the road would benefit children, especially girls, in the community who often do not complete more than four years of school because it is a six kilometer walk to the nearest middle school. Residents said the future of their children must be considered, and that they must complete their education in order to move forward.



Kernine/Kernina discussed and voted for projects that would help make communities more welcoming for the returnees.

A NEW SPIRIT OF ONE SOCIETY

On February 24, USAID Mission Director Dale Pfeiffer delivered a speech, "Diversity: a new spirit of one society" to 27 representatives from nine municipalities participating in the Municipal Infrastructure Support Initiative. Pfeiffer opened his speech by telling the audience that they have started to make efforts to make their communities welcoming to returnees, but the rest of Kosovo needs to do more to "heal the wounds which separate ethnic communities." Here are his words.

"During my work in Kosovo, I've visited seven of the nine municipalities selected to benefit from the Municipal Infrastructure and Support Initiative (MISI), but I wanted to meet everyone participating in MISI as the project starts.

USAID gives high importance to this project as it addresses both municipal development needs in terms of infrastructure improvements but, even more importantly from the standpoint of Kosovo's future, seeks to heal the wounds which separate ethnic communities.

I've seen some of your applications: Istog municipality has proposed repair of a road linking a primarily ethnic Serbian Kosovar community with a primarily ethnic Albanian Kosovar community. Kamenice municipality has had success with a recent meeting of community leaders from seven villages, a mix of ethnic Albanian, Serbian and Roma residents, as they discussed a road repair project to link their communities - and this was the first time leaders of all villages have gathered in the same room since the conclusion of the conflict.

Those are just two examples. I want to hear more about your efforts to make Kosovo a whole society. The nine municipalities present today are here because they have started to take steps to make Kosovo a home to all of those who call it home. You, the presidents of your municipal assemblies and your colleagues, have shown yourselves to be true leaders, willing to address the problems of ethnic separation inherited from a past which has been kind to no one, in order to provide your people a better future. Kosovo has a bright future with such leaders. USAID supports this program because we have a vision of our role here, to help Kosovars transform Kosovo into a democratic, self-governing economically sustainable entity, in which all citizens have equal opportunities and rights.



---Laying the grounds for returns---
Meeting with municipal officials in
USAID.

We want our friends in Kosovo to enjoy the same benefits of freedom

and prosperity Americans have.

Today, my message is directed at the people who do not want to see Kosovo as home to anyone except people "just like them". We have this type of person living in the U.S. and in Europe as well, so I am familiar with them. Their bigotry and prejudice must not be allowed to direct your future. Bigotry and prejudice are the tools of those who either through personal ambition or ignorance destroy progress toward a better life for all.

All Kosovars have been victims of indignity and/or violence with roots in ethnic prejudice. Before 1999 it was the Albanian Kosovars. Since then it has been Serbian Kosovars who have suffered. Other minorities such as the Roma, Ashkali, etc., have also suffered. Since all Kosovars know the negative effects of ethnic prejudice on themselves and their families and friends, all Kosovars should understand that life in the future must avoid allowing prejudice to interfere with your creating a modern society where tolerance is the dominant human force and people's differences come to be appreciated rather than disparaged.

---"I think we should use the word 'diversity', not 'multi-ethnic', as the description of the society Kosovo needs to work toward.".....

Multi-ethnicity, returns and reintegration ... these words are all part of the standards set for Kosovo. The international community has given great importance to these standards because the horrors Kosovars experienced in the past were a direct result of efforts by those who sought to divide you from each other based on ethnicity.

Bringing back those who have been forced to flee their homes is one critical step to reversing hatred and repairing the damage. Tearing down the invisible walls which ethnic prejudice has created is necessary to allow all to live together in peace. It is also a test, a test as to whether Kosovars can fit into the modern world and not be allowed to slip back into tyranny and conflict. But to do this means more than having political and community leaders just saying the politically correct words. You must demonstrate that you in fact believe them and work to put them into action. You are being judged. Your friends know it is not easy. Changing the inheritance of a bad history - and that is what Kosovars have had for many years - requires much effort and regrettably much time. The rewards for making this change are all positive and will give Kosovars a better life in every respect.

Let me give you a different word that hasn't been used in the discussions among internationals and Kosovars about this issue: **diversity**. I think we should use the word "diversity", not "multi-ethnic", as the description of the society Kosovo needs to work toward.

Multi-ethnic as a description is limiting: it just means you allow different ethnicities to exist. Different ethnic groups

have lived in Kosovo for centuries, but not as one society. Interaction among ethnic groups has been at best mutual tolerance and at worst physical and mental abuse, in some cases institutionally directed as under the Milosevic regime.

You have the opportunity to create a society which allows people to live together as friends despite differences in ethnicity, religion, language or whatever. This is the essence of a diverse society, a place where differences do not divide but bind because of mutual respect and appreciation.

“Bigotry and prejudice are the tool of those who either through personal ambition or ignorance destroy progress toward a better life for all.”

I know the conflict here was terrible. I saw the results while the smoke was still rising, while people were still in camps and the graves were fresh. The guilty have slunk back into their holes, hopefully ashamed of what they did. Those truly guilty of acts against humanity will be brought to justice or continue to hide, unable to live a normal life. The task now is to allow the innocent to get on with life and to live together in a new spirit of one society

What happened here is not dissimilar to what happened in Germany, when Germans were intimidated by leaders into doing things that good people don't do. Many American families fought and killed Germans, but soon after the war, bonds were reforged. Time heals those wounds. But time also needs the help of a willingness to forgive. All those who have been driven from their homes deserve to return if they want to. That is why the international community has been urging support for returns. That is why this project was conceived to help communities to reabsorb those who fled and want to return...and to forgive. That is why you must work to make them feel welcomed back into your municipalities.

I recently read about one Kosovar Serbian family who returned. They were quoted as saying their old neighborhood was different, almost all their old neighbors were gone. But one Kosovar Albanian family who had known them before the conflict came to their apartment - and welcomed them home. This is an example of how an ordinary citizen took steps to make someone feel at home. It wasn't just the words - it was visiting, stopping by to see an old neighbor. And it wasn't hard to do. I'm sure two families felt better afterward.

It is important to have leaders and ordinary people help in healing these wounds, not just giving lip service to the concept of reconciliation. I heard that one man active in this program and here today, Mr. Qazim Loxha, Istog municipality, expressed readiness to move on, even though he'd lost his father and other relatives during the conflict. He said - and I use his words -- that "everybody has a right to return to their homes", and he went on to say that while it's not easy to forget, all have to move on to become a democratic society and part of the progressive world. That's the kind of courage - and openness, and future thinking that Kosovo needs from all its citizens.

“It may take time here, but you have to work at healing”

It may take time here, but you have to work at healing. You have to stop hating, and start respecting one another ... not in spite of the differences but because of the differences. America is a country that thrives on its diversity - you could say every American is an immigrant, a wonderful mix of different nationalities or ethnicities. We have not solved all the problems of prejudice but we work at it continually. That is our strength - and it can be yours too. It has made us strong and it can make you strong”.

Dale Pfeiffer, Mission Director

Municipal Infrastructure and Services Initiative is implemented by Mercy Corps, an international not-for-profit relief and development organization that has been active in Kosovo since 1993 and has assisted with humanitarian relief in the aftermath of the 1999 conflict. Mercy Corps work in Kosovo focuses in improving basic services such as water and health, promoting economic development through micro-credit programs in agriculture, and supporting the sustainable return of minority groups.

For further information:

Kristin Griffith
MISI Program Director
Tel: + 381 (0) 38 549 704
Cell: + 377 (0) 44 120 009
e-mail: kristin@mercy Corps-kosovo.org

Besa Vuthaj
MISI Deputy Program Director
Tel: + 381 (0) 38 549 704
Cell: + 377 (0) 44 120 035
-- besa@mercy Corps-kosovo.org



municipalities engaged in MISI