

ENHANCING SOCIAL PROTECTION BY BUILDING CAPACITIES OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSOs) IN BIH







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ABOUT THE PROJECT

CARE International is an international non-governmental organization implementing its programmes for fighting poverty and social injustice in more than 90 countries throughout the world. CARE's aim in the Balkans is to ensure recognition and fulfilment of social, economic and political rights of the vulnerable and marginalized groups, thus contributing to sustainable peace in the region.

The project "Enhancing social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina" contributes to strengthening the weak social welfare and social protection, as well as access to rights and social inclusion for the marginalized and most vulnerable groups in the society.

Poor economic performance and high unemployment rate cause shocks in the country's social welfare system which largely affects the socio-economic position of these citizens. The state and non-state service providers are under-capacitated and underfunded. The project that seeks to protect the most vulnerable groups of population, but also to provide benefits for all BiH citizens, is jointly developed and implemented by CARE International in Balkans and CARE Austria, with vast experience in CSO capacity building, and is funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) with funds of the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC).

The goal of the project is to professionalize and to enhance the mandate and role of civil society organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina by building their capacities to provide services to marginalized and vulnerable population groups and by enabling them to actively participate in the design and implementation of relevant policies.

INTRODUCTION

CARE International Balkans has continued the implementation of the project **"Enhancing social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina"** during 2021 thanks to the support of the Austrian Development Agency and the funds of the Austrian Development Co-operation.

The support was aimed at building the capacities of five social enterprises, which were established with the support of civil society organizations in BiH that work with persons with disabilities, Roma men and women, women violence survivors, and women in rural areas.

The NGOs that are partners of this project have through their work with the direct beneficiaries realised that employment is a key component for the independence, and have hence established social enterprises and built their infrastructural, technical capacities and expertise with the support of CARE International and the Austrian Development Agency .

A lot of work has been done in the past years to introduce social enterprises in the BiH legislation, and it was through this project that several roundtable discussions were held with representatives of the authorities and other relevant institutions, pointing out the importance of having such a law adopted and enforced.

As in previous years, assistance was provided for the procurement of necessary machines, depending on the activity in which the enterprise was engaged, construction of necessary facilities, and other infrastructural works, including also significant support to improving services and marketing promotion, as well as visibility of the enterprise as to achieve higher sales by engaging prominent experts from the business and media sector.

The brochure "Enhancing social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina" is an indicator of the exhaustive work of partner organisations on establishing the most functional social enterprises. It should be emphasised that these are social enterprises that are mostly engaged in agriculture and fruit growing, but also in the textile production.

As a result, organic products such as zucchini, peppers, tomatoes, raspberries, strawberries, rose hip have been produced, as well as various types of jams, juices, traditional food catering, protective masks, aprons, bags,



Sumka Bučan, directress of CARE International Balkans

pillows and many other products that secure salaries or daily wages to the most vulnerable in our society.

These five stories in the brochure tell us how much the beneficiaries of these organisations find the employment important and how much this opportunity changes their lives and lives of their families. When you get this kind of specific feedback from direct beneficiaries, then you know that everything you do is worth it, be-

cause it helped empower someone, and was an incentive and motivation for further positive change.

These stories are an indicator of the joint success of partner organisations, CARE International, the Austrian Development Agency, and most of all marginalised people who were given the opportunity to work without being humiliated for their disability, judged for violence suffered or for coming from rural areas, but were rather supported in the pursuit.

AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE “EKO BUDUĆNOST”

SAFE PLACE TO EARN MONEY FOR WOMEN, VIOLENCE SURVIVORS

Women, violence survivors from Modriča, are making their first money, getting to know peace and happiness, recognising their capabilities and becoming economically independent through fruits and vegetables farming at the cooperative “Eko Budućnost”, which has been operating in this municipality since 2014 thanks to the Citizens' Association “Budućnost”.

One of them is **Mirjana V.**, who had suffered many years of psychological abuse, and today she is happy, satisfied and empowered. **“It is an incredible feeling to be here,**

as it feels as my second home. In addition to having the opportunity to earn money, which is nowadays exceptionally difficult, I am happy to meet other women, listen to their life stories, watch them change, becoming more confident, talkative and happier”, said Mirjana, adding that, besides the money, they often get to take fruits and vegetables home.

Directress of the Citizens' Association “Budućnost” **Jelena Mišić** said that the cooperative Eko Budućnost is a safe place where women, violence survivors can earn living wages. **“We offer guaranteed purchase to women who are not working at the plantation, but are engaged either in agriculture or fruits farming. We guarantee that we will purchase and market everything they cannot sell.”**

However, this entire story, as she underlines, would not be complete without the support of CARE and the Austrian Development Agency, which have built the capacity of the cooperative, enabling the beneficiaries to earn daily wages. **“This year we have, thanks to CARE, procured a fruits drying machine, a sorting table, and an industrial**



sink. Since we are well-known plum producing area, we came up with the idea to procure these machines and to start producing and processing plums. We have planted a plum orchard at the end of last year, but no yield can be expected in the next two-three years. We will purchase plums for drying from our existing co-operants, ten of them, but also from other persons who belong to marginalized groups", explained Mišić.

Economic empowerment advisor at the Citizens' Association Budućnost **Ana Cvijanović** hopes that the expansion of the assortment will make room to hire two additional women at the cooperative's farm: "A total of eight women are working at the cooperative's farm this year and they are working in the strawberry plantation, in the greenhouse – cultivating tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and on the new plum orchard and blueberry plantation."

CARE's support has been of a paramount importance for this cooperative.

"We have a draft Law on Social Entrepreneurship, and we will pursue getting the status of a social enterprise, because that is what we are", said Mišić who believes that their products will soon be on the market.

"We have learned a lot with CARE, starting from the business plan development to knowing what should be our focus as to strengthen capacities of the cooperative even more. We are happy and very proud of what we have achieved so far. We are particularly proud of the women working with us, giving us the strength for the everyday battle to keep them at the farm and be support in the process of their economic empowerment", Mišić concluded.

Photo 1. **Jelena Mišić**, directress of the Citizens' Association "Budućnost"

Photo 2. **Mirjana V.**, seasonal worker at the plantation

Photo 3. Fruits drying machine

Photo 4. **Ana Cvijanović**, Economic Empowerment Advisor at the Citizens' Association "Budućnost"



WOMEN'S AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE "KREATIVNA VIZIJA"

**OUR STORY IS JUST UNFOLDING, BUT WE
SEE FUTURE IN IT**

The proof that rural areas could be a place where women could make a living for themselves and their families was found in a small municipality of Rudo, where a Women's Agricultural cooperative "Kreativna vizija" was established at the initiative of the local non-government organisation Centre for Responsible Democracy "LUNA", bringing together women to create conditions for their economic independence.

"We were very happy when CARE International had recognised our initiative to bring prosperity to the women in rural areas, supporting registration of the cooperative through the project "Enhancing social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina", said **Svetlana Vuković**, directress of the Centre for Responsible Democracy "LUNA", an organisation that has been helping citizens of Rudo to exercise their rights and attain better social position over the past 23 years.

The registration of the cooperative was completed last year, and it is located in Štrpci, the village that had first Serb agricultural cooperative in BiH in 1907. Rose hip was planted on the cooperative's land at the recommendation by the agronomist. Its first yield is expected in three years. **"Rose hip at our plantation will be made in three variants: raw rose hip, rose hip tea, and the most interesting for us is the rose hip puree. It is a product from which housewives make jam just by adding sugar"**, said Vuković



Photo 1.



Photo 2.

In addition to rose hip products the plan is to have this cooperative producing four more products: black chokeberry, natural apple juice, and two size raspberries, while plan is to start producing raspberry marmalade and strawberry jam too.

This story is even more significant because women of this municipality get economically empowered thanks to the daily wages they receive for their work. **"We worked for daily wages while we were planting, and it really improved our home budget"**, said **Dužanka Pantović**, who works at the plantation as the production coordinator. The objective of the cooperative is also to be supportive of women who have their own production in terms of purchase of their products that they took to the market before.

"Financial assistance is significant for the women from rural areas", said directress of "Kreativna vizija" **Milica Vuković**:

"Economic empowerment of women is crucial in rural areas, so that in addition to their family obligations they can get financial assistance based on which they would primarily become independent, also bringing certain benefits to their families. We hire unemployed women, and we have several women who have children with developmental difficulties,"

The project "Enhancing social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina" secured the funds to fence the cooperative's land, to install a hut, and irrigation will be put in place very soon. But, as directress Svetlana Vuković said, the biggest success is the cooperative, which they could not establish before as a non-government organisation. **"Our story is just unfolding, but we see future in it"**, she concluded.

Photo 1. **Svetlana Vuković**, directress of the Centre for Responsible Democracy "LUNA"

Photo 2. **Dužanka Pantović**, production coordinator

Photo 3. **Milica Vuković**, directress of "Kreativna vizija" cooperative

Photo 4. Container at the plantation



Photo 3.



Photo 4.

AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE "ŽENA"

WE ARE BUILDING A SERIOUS CHAIN OF SUPPORT TO WOMEN

United under the idea of economic empowerment, women from the rural area of Bratunac municipality have established agricultural cooperative "Žena" where women's labour is recognised, appreciated and awarded.

"When economically stable a woman could manage all other problems. We have seen that economic empowerment is a priority, and that there are women who produce, but cannot market their products. Therefore we have decided to establish a cooperative that will give women the opportunity to work, but also sell their pro-

ducts," says **Nada Marković**, directress of the Women's Association "Maja Kravica" from Kravice near Bratunac.

She points out that the agricultural cooperative "Žena", where women are earning money by working in the raspberry plantation and providing traditional food catering services, has emerged solely thanks to the support of CARE: **"The support at first related to registration of the cooperative, followed by the construction of a facility at the raspberry plantation, purchase of a van, and procurement of production material. I have to commend CARE's working method as it is truly an organisation that listens to the needs"**.

During 2021 this cooperative has through the project **"Enhancing social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina"** equipped the kitchen and paved the path to the cooperative's farm. Significant support to promotion of enterprise's products was also provided.

Thanks to this project **Gordana Marković**, directress of cooperative "Žena", has got a job after many years spent at the unemployment bureau. **"I lost my job in 2004, and**



Photo 1.



Photo 2.

since then I never had a steady job. This is the first time I feel safe, and it is my springboard as I found strength and will again. When you lose your job then you find yourself in a limbo, and when you become a part of this type of a women's project, it is truly a great thing. It is truly a grand thing. It is very difficult to express it with words. It was my salvation, and I hope it will last", said Marković.

The employee of the Association "Maja Kravica", **Vesna Erić**, says that support to women from rural areas is necessary, because these are mostly women from families of poor financial status, and the daily wages are very important to them as well as the guaranteed purchase that the cooperative ensures.

"When you live in a rural area and share the problems of your fellow citizens, seeing that you can help them, then you naturally make additional efforts. It is a chain that creates some nice connections, friendships, it is a serious chain of support", said Vesna.

She added that it is important to mention that by empowering women from the rural areas this cooperative empowers the entire family, which is an exceptionally important component of the cooperative's activity.

"When we see our women happy and content, we realise that our mission was a success. We have many challenges to face, which are primarily financial in nature, but we will do our best to overcome them together, same as we have launched this idea together and have achieved a certain degree of success", concluded Nada.

Photo 1. **Nada Marković**, directress of Association "Maja Kravica"

Photo 2. **Vesna Erić**, employee of the Association "Maja Kravica"

Photo 3. Seasonal workers at the raspberry plantation of cooperative "Žena"

Photo 4. **Gordana Marković**, directress of cooperative "Žena"



Photo 3.



Photo 4.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE “AGRO-PLAN”

WE BELIEVE IN ROMA MEN AND WOMEN

After receiving many rejection letters, Vesida Beganović, a Roma woman, has in her 29th year of life got the first job in the social enterprise “Agro-plan”, whose main activity is the production of organic vegetables and fruits in the most modern type of greenhouse and partially in the open field. This enterprise is located in Bijeljina and has been operating since 2017. It was established by the Citizens’ Association for promotion of Roma education “Otaharin”.

“I am currently living with my parents, and it means a lot to them to have someone bringing some money we can use to cover our expenses. I am very grateful for that,” said Vesida.

She would like to continue her education in the future as she was forced to drop out of school when she was 14. Vesida underlined “I painted houses, helped people with farm-

ing, chopped wood...and it made my wishes to continue my education fade out...but they are still there, and I hope to be persistent in making them come true. This job is an additional support”.

The goal of “Agro-plan” is to support Roma women and men, particularly women, to realise their dreams through work. Besides Vesida, there are two more Roma persons working in the enterprising, receiving monthly salary, and other benefits as social and health insurance.

“Our beneficiaries come from the communities where they did not have anyone to believe in them. We truly believe in them, but we also believe in the fact that we can expect results if they are given an opportunity in an adequate environment and with certain measures,” said director of “Otaharin” Dragan Joković, adding that the enterprise has already achieved its goal as it is currently changing lives and status of Roma men and women, showing them that it is all really possible.

It all took a lot of efforts and work, but he is proud of the fact that employees whose first employment was at “Agro-plan” are recognised today and are working in private companies. “There was a case of a single mother, who worked here



Photo 1.



Photo 2.

first, and now she is working for a private company where she is exceptionally accepted, I am really proud".

CARE and the Austrian Development Agency have recognised the potential of the social enterprise and have been providing continuous assistance for many years now through the project **"Enhancing social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina"**. **"In 2021 we managed to get one more greenhouse of 200 m2 where we planted tomato, and we were additionally supported in procurement of materials necessary for production...We have purchased a duplicator for vegetable processing, and the plan is to produce ajvar and marmalade"**, said **Ivana Krunić** program officer at "Otaharin".

Directress of "Agro-plan" **Ljiljana Joković** pointed out that enterprise's capacities and production were expanded dur-

ing 2021. **"A total of 0,26 hectares of land in greenhouses and 0,65 hectares of open land are planted. There are some new crops, and in addition to salad, spinach, rucola, green onion there is red long peppers, pink tomato, plum tomato, cherry tomato and we also had cucumber and zucchinis this year. There are string beans, bean, beetroot, cabbage, eggplant, zucchinis planted in the field..."**

The purpose of the work done by the "Agro-plan" and "Otaharin" team is the support to Roma women/men in attaining better living conditions. As Dragan said, being able to help someone is a fantastic feeling: **"Particularly when someone recognises and appreciates it. The happiness increases at the moment when we are the ones who have managed to make a change in someone's life, because their success is our success. We are walking together towards necessary social changes for the better status of Roma men and women"**.

Photo 1. **Dragan Joković**, director of the Association "Otaharin"

Photo 2. **Vesida Beganović**, employee of the enterprise "Agro-plan"

Photo 3. **Ivana Krunić**, program officer at the Association "Otaharin"

Photo 4. **Ljiljana Joković**, directress of the enterprise "Agro-plan"



Photo 3.



Photo 4.

PROTECTIVE WORKSHOP “ŽIVOTNA POMOĆ”

WE ARE STRONGER THAN OTHERS SEE US

Through the Protective workshop “Životna pomoć” for the occupation of persons with disabilities in Goražde, whose founder is the Association of persons with cerebral palsy and muscular dystrophy of Bosnian-Podrinje Canton Goražde, persons with disabilities from Goražde are defeating all prejudices about their working engagement by producing articles that all persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina are using.

Realising that the employment of persons with disability is a huge problem, the president of the Association of persons with cerebral palsy and muscular dystrophy **Mirsada Čulov** has with several other members of the Association come up with the idea to launch a workshop where disa-

bility will not be seen as a barrier for work: **“No one wants to offer a job to persons with disabilities due to prejudice. The prevailing opinion is that they cannot work, that they are neither capable nor expedient. We have decided to show that we can”**, said Mirsada.

And they really can. They proved it years ago when they started producing toys and slippers and exporting them to Germany, and sewing protective masks for the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which have been also exported to the U.S. market.

A total of five persons work in the workshop nowadays, of which four are persons with disability. **Naima Pita**, whose son was member of the Association until 2011. when he unfortunately passed away, had decided to stay in the workshop and give her contribution to the society: **“Being given the opportunity to work here means a lot to me, particularly during the first few days after Mirza’s death, who also had muscular dystrophy. Apart from earning our wages here, here we laugh and talk”**, said Pita.

Sales manager **Amela Imamović** says that they have expanded production this year, and in addition to slippers, pillows, bags and masks, they are now sewing surgical



Photo 1.



Photo 2.

caps. **"A doctor said that they cannot easily find these caps, and that they are very expensive. We have started producing them. We are also making cooking hats, and really try to offer more products"**, said Amela, who is working in the Association with the direct support of CARE and the Austrian Development Agency through the project **"Enhancing social protection by building capacities of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina"**.

Continuous support is provided to the protective workshop "Životna pomoć" through this project and it includes procurement of machines, sewing materials, and financial support. **"We were in a very difficult period at the beginning of 2021. We did not have any orders. CARE and ADA helped us at that time to keep our employees. It meant a lot to us"**, said Amela.

However, the situation has changed in the second part of the year. The workshop got an order to make 800 laundry

bags for migration centre in Velika Kladuša, and thanks to the support provided by the CARE, the sales also started on the OLX.ba portal. A total of 100 pairs of slippers were sold since.

Although it is not easy to keep a workshop like this afloat, particularly without support and understanding of the community, Mirsada and her team are not losing faith!

"It is really rewarding when you hire persons with disability, since then they have the possibility to live independently, to earn money and to do with it whatever they want. Simply to be independent. We did not have anything at time I came to this Association as a volunteer. I borrowed tables and chairs from the school so they could sit, and when I come to our workshop today and see that we have machines to work on, friends who appreciate me, I have to say that I am proud of them and of all our results. We showed that we are stronger than many have thought", concluded Mirsada.

Photo 1. **Mirsada Čulov**, president of the Association of persons with cerebral palsy and muscular dystrophy

Photo 2. **Amela Imamović**, sales manager

Photo 3. Sewing machine

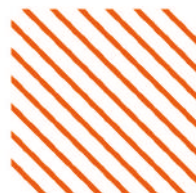
Photo 4. **Naima Pita**, employee of the protective workshop "Životna pomoć"



Photo 3.



Photo 4.



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