

Serbia: Sustainable Development in the Southern Region 2012-2014

Sector: Education

The Evaluation Report

by Dragiša Mijačić



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May/June 201

PREFACE

This report was prepared by the evaluation expert Dragiša Mijačić, proposed by the Institute for Territorial Economic Development (InTER) to perform this assignment based on the contract signed with Caritas Luxemburg.

The evaluator wishes to thank the interlocutors from the NGO Pomoć Deci, NGO Offer, Primary School “Vuk Karadžić”, Secondary School of Agriculture and the Roma Commissioner that were interviewed during the fieldwork. Special thanks to the programme team of Caritas Luxemburg for providing logistic support.

The evaluation was undertaken during May 2013.

Disclaimer: The views and comments expressed in this text are the responsibility of the evaluator and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of Caritas Luxemburg or InTER.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

EQ	Evaluation Question
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons (referring to people that fled from Kosovo)
InTER	Institute for Territorial Economic Development
OFER	Omladinski forum za edukaciju Roma (Youth Forum for Education of Roma)
ToR	Terms of Reference

INTRODUCTION

Programme Description

Due to the fact that Southeast Serbia became an area with significant outflow of international protection seekers, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Luxemburg invited Caritas Luxemburg to design and implement a Strategy of Intervention that will support this target group, predominantly from the Roma community, but other socially disadvantaged groups as well.

Following the findings of the assessment missions carried out by representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Caritas Luxemburg in September and November 2011, as well as analysis of secondary sources in this field, the strategic approach and the sectors of intervention have been defined.

The overall objective of the Strategy is poverty reduction in South Serbia through support to vulnerable groups comprising Roma, IDPs and the local population.

The Programme is structured within four components:

- A housing component for Roma in Roma settlements and IDPs in Collective Centres;
- An education component covering primary, secondary and higher education;
- An income generation component; and
- A sensitization and information component.

In addition, the Programme is also covering the cross-cutting issues such as: Gender Equality, Conflict Prevention and Environmental Sustainability.

The Programme implementation covers Vranje and Bujanovac, yet interventions in neighbourly municipalities are not excluded. The Programme implementation is coordinated from the field office of Caritas Luxemburg, located in Vranje. The Programme will be implemented in the time frame 2012-2014.

Scope and Objectives of the Evaluation

The scope of the evaluation has been defined by the Terms of Reference (ToR),¹ focused on assessment of the following segments:

- The effectiveness of the project in contributing to the Education sector's goals as well as the program's goals;
- The empowerment of local partners;
- The best options in order to expand the project to one or two additional neighbouring municipalities.

ToR determined the following key questions that should be answered within the scope of the evaluation:

- Is the current project effective?
- Is the current project empowering local actors and beneficiaries?
- Which additional measures should be taken to improve it?

¹ Terms of Reference is given in the Annex 3 of the evaluation report.

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- Which potential stakeholders should be involved in the future, which have not been involved yet?
- Which additional neighbouring municipalities should be included in the project's next phase?

ToR also stipulate that the evaluation report shall contain:

- A comprehensive overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the project;
- Options and potentials for the project's next phase (June 2013-December 2014), in order to address weaknesses identified through the evaluation;
- Clear recommendations with regards to potential additional municipalities to be included in the next phase based on objective indicators.

The subject of the evaluation is assessment of the project “Support to Education” that covers preschool, primary, secondary and high education sectors. In particular, the evaluation shall assess:

- The effectiveness of the project in contributing to the Education sector's goals as well as the program's goals;
- The empowerment of local partners;
- The best options in order to expand the project to one or two additional neighbouring municipalities.

Institute for Territorial Economic Development (InTER) has been contracted by Caritas Luxemburg to undertake the evaluation. Dragiša Mijačić, director of InTER and an evaluation expert has been engaged to perform this assignment and prepare the evaluation report.

Methodology

The evaluation methodology followed the logic of the ToR as the primary guide, designing the process that would achieve the expected outputs and the purpose of the evaluation within a limited timeframe. The methodology approach comprised the following phases:

- **Document review:** Within this phase the evaluation objectives were discussed with the Caritas representatives, including definition of timeframe and logistics. Besides, secondary documents (programme documents and project reports) were collected and analysed thoroughly (*See the List of documents reviewed in the Annex 1*).
- **Fieldwork:** During the fieldwork, meetings were organised with the Caritas Luxemburg Team, with representatives of two implementing organizations (*Pomoć Deci* and *OFER*), and with project beneficiaries (*See Annex 2 for the List of interviewed persons*).
- **Analysis and report writing:** the last phase included the analysis of all collected data and writing of the evaluation report. Formulation of conclusions and recommendations was done within the framework of the ToR and based on collected documentation and its review and findings from interviews with all key stakeholders.

The evaluation process went smoothly and without any problems.

KEY FINDINGS

The Education sector is covered with one project that wraps all levels of education, from preschool to higher education. The project is well adjusted to the goals and activities that are specified in the Caritas Luxemburg Strategy for the Southern Serbia² (hereinafter: the Strategy). Implementation of the project is split on two contracts: one that is signed with NGO *OFER* and focuses on education at preschool and primary school level, and another signed with NGO *Pomoć Deci* that focuses on secondary and higher education. Key findings are structured to follow the requirements from the ToR, providing answers on each evaluation question.

EQ1: Is the current project effective?

There is a body of evidence that project implementation is effective in all its operations. First, it should be mentioned that there is a long-standing cooperation between *Pomoć Deci* and *OFER*, since the later has been established as a spin off from *Pomoć Deci*. Therefore those two organisations have a strategic partnership, often act as a single entity.

Besides, two organisations supplement each other with necessary expertise. For instance, within the scope of this intervention *Pomoć Deci* provides services and legal support to *OFER* in regard to validation of education certificates of children that has been obtained abroad. *OFER* is in charge of collecting data in the field while *Pomoć Deci* works with national authorities in solving the cases. This *modus operandi* has been very successful, both efficient and effective.

The intervention financed by Caritas Luxemburg is to a large extent continuation of what *Pomoć Deci* and *OFER* has been working in the project area for a number of years, which is something that presents the second important factor of success. Modification to the original project is reflected in provision of student allowances, while other project activities regarding to school enrolment, free book delivery or extracurricular teaching support remain the same or similar to ones in previous intervention.

The project intervention is closely in line with the mission and strategic goals of the two implementing organisations, which is the third important factor for success. Namely, both organisations are established with the mission of providing support to disadvantaged children, especially ones from the Roma community, and they both see education as an important sector of their work. That is why the project staff is often engaged in activities that go beyond the scope of this intervention.

Those three factors have been positively affected effectiveness and efficiency of the project operations. There is no project activity that has not been implemented with the great success, starting from support to schools in identification of children for enrolling the compulsory education, through support in education at all levels (from preschool to the university) to provision of scholarships for the most disadvantaged group of students. The project team has been working as recognisable agents of change in education. The energy that project team put into implementation of the project was widely recognised as very positive by all actors: school authorities, parents and pupils. Therefore, this project might be treated as a model of a best practices how to work with disadvantaged population groups in a complex multi-ethnic environment.

The project team has demonstrated capacity to adapt to the changes in order to successfully implement the project activities. For instance, due to limited availability of the space in the schools, extracurricular classes for students have been organised in an improvised classroom, which is treated as positive example within the scope of this evaluation.

² Serbia: Sustainable Development in the Southern Region 2012-2014

It should be noted that the project was delayed in the first month of its operation due to the administrative issue of signing the contract. The signing of the contract was foreseen in May 2012 and it was delayed for a month. Having in mind that the school year ends in late May/early June, activities related to preparatory work for school enrolment for 2012/2013 could not be performed. Nevertheless, the project team and the Caritas Luxemburg staff found a solution to mediate all those issues so the project has succeeded to have a quick start with good results.

Although the proposal foreseen to last 12 months, the intervention was extended for one month in order to provide support to target groups (school children) to the end of the school year. This extension was fully justifiable and absolutely necessary for achieving tangible results among the students that are supported through this intervention.

EQ2: Is the current project empowering local actors and beneficiaries?

The project has produced numerous results and operation mechanisms that significantly contribute to quality of education among the disadvantaged group, especially among students from the Roma community. First of all, this project has been a great asset to the school authorities, especially at the primary (mainstream) level. Namely, the project provides a significant support to the schools in identification and enrolment of children to the mainstream (primary) education, which was confirmed through field interviews with the schoolmasters. Support that project provide to preschool education is also very important for all beneficiaries: public authorities, parents and pupils. Providing incentives through free food has been positive and in line with the best practices in working with targeted community groups.

Provision of legal support to validation of education certificates has also been one of the most significant aspects of this intervention. It should be stated that without this support majority of pupils that are subject of this activity would not be able to validate the degree of their education and continue with school.

Delivery of free books have been important both for pupils and for teachers, and significantly contributed to the quality of education. *Pomoć Deci* did a great job in supplying students with the free books, both brand new and used ones. In addition, *Pomoć Deci* printed rear books that could not be purchased on the market and this was very much praised both by teachers and students.

Scholarships that are provided to the most disadvantaged students have also created good results in terms of dropouts. In this regard the best results have been achieved though support to students that live outside Vranje and Bujanovac who commute to the school on a daily basis. The scholarship also provided a significant support in nutrition of beneficiary students, as well as to financial support to their families.

As stated before, one of the best elements of this intervention is the fact that two organisations are active in advocating for better education of the target groups. There are numerous examples where two organisations actively lobby for better socio-economic conditions of students, equal treatment in front of the Law, or for using their legal rights in getting benefits such as affirmative enrolment policy for the Roma community to the Universities in Serbia.

The project also successfully worked with parents on raising awareness on importance of education, especially at the pre-primary and primary education level.

EQ3: Which additional measures should be taken to improve it?

The project is already very good and there only a few corrective mechanisms that can be improved in the future. Those measures are later presented as recommendations as well.

Separate contracts were signed with *OFER* and *Pomoć deci* regardless the fact this is a single project intervention. This fact has created administrative trouble in writing the project reports. Namely, two organisations were obliged to submit separate reports while the Caritas Luxemburg staff then was merging two reports into a single one. Having in fact the nature of strategic cooperation between *OFER* and *Pomoć Deci* and the fact that this has been designed as a single project intervention, there is no need to sign two different contracts. As a solution, it is recommended to sign a single contract with *Pomoć Deci* that should act as a lead applicant, while *OFER* should act as the partner. *Pomoć Deci* should take the leading position due to more advanced institutional capacity for contract management and reporting. In terms of activities two organisations should remain to implement the same type of activities as they are doing now, since the split is designed based on the capacities and competencies of the involved partners.

The project should also include activities on social integration of the target groups (students from disadvantaged families, mainly Roma) to the mainstream population. Although the current project does not focus on these issues, activities on social integration will create important added value to the intervention. In regard to stimulate social integration of the target groups the project might cooperate better with ones implemented within the Sensitisation and Information Sector of the Serbia Programme.

Scholarships provided through the project are not conditioned by merit of the beneficiaries. This system of scholarships is positive since they are not available only for good students (as it is the case with most of the scholarships) yet to the ones with the great financial needs. Nevertheless, the system of scholarship might be also used to improve the performance of the students in terms of grades, not in a form of conditionality yet in terms of awards for their better achievements.

Extracurricular classes that are provided to students to catch up should be organised throughout the year, not only at the end. Students from Roma community have a language issue from the early days of their education, later making them a problem to catch up the rest of the class. As a consequence, on a comparative level, students from this community have lower grades than ones from the mainstream communities (Serbian or Albanian). Therefore, there is a need to provide continuous support to students through extracurricular classes throughout the year. In that regard *Pomoć Deci* and *OFER* might seek a partnership with the Faculty of Teaching, who can get engaged in the project activities by sending their students to hold extracurricular classes, and that to be counted as a part of the compulsory internship.

At the end, it should be noted that *OFER* did not manage to get the promised co-financing amount from the municipality of Bujanovac. In general, both implementing organisations should improve their communication strategy with the local authorities, as well as the visibility of the project results. Caritas Luxemburg local team should also provide support to two organisations to better promote their results within the project area. Creation of a Project Newsletter might be a tool for better promotion of the results and activities.

EQ4: Which potential stakeholders should be involved in the future, which have not been involved yet?

The project already included key stakeholders in the project area, leaving almost no any actor that is not covered by the intervention. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, more intense cooperation with the local (and national) authorities will contribute to better collaboration with the public sector entities (especially preschools and schools, yet with the universities too).

Cooperation with the Coordination Body for Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa should also be intensified, especially in regard to creation of enabling environment for better education of disadvantaged people.

Partnership should be established with the Faculty of Teaching as well, where students of this Faculty might be informed about best practices in education and be engaged in extracurricular teaching that could be accepted as internship.

EQ5: Which additional neighbouring municipalities should be included in the project's next phase?

It is advised to extend the project activities to two more municipalities, Vladičin Han and Surdulica, since those two municipalities have significant concentration of Roma people. However, the possible extension should be carefully planned, potential stakeholders should be carefully chosen and the scope of intervention should be optimal to the capacity of the implementing organisations. The achieved results of the project in the past should be presented to potential stakeholders in the selected two municipalities. Representatives of the current beneficiary schools should be encouraged to get involved in promoting the project extension to the new project area. Project partners should also consider to organise a panel discussion on the issue of quality education for disadvantage groups where they will open a discussion on this important point with the key actors in the field, as well as present the results that they achieved through the project intervention in the school year 2012/2013.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The evaluation confirms the successful implementation of the project intervention in the Education Sector. The project has been performing well in all segments, including effectiveness and efficiency. This project presents a model of the best practice in working with disadvantage community groups in the field of education.

Success of this project can be ascribed to numerous factors, including good cooperation history between two implementing partners and their specialisation in the education sector.

The project has achieved good results among the beneficiary groups. The intervention has accomplished significant results in identifying and enrolment of children into compulsory education, preparation of children to a higher level of education (from pre-school to primary school, from primary school to secondary school and from second school to the university), then in advancing the socio-economic status of students (through provision of scholarships and free books) and by improving the school grades (through provision of extracurricular classes). The project also provided all necessary legal support in validating education certificates obtained abroad. In addition to all of that the project provided day-to-day support to the target groups on various issues that are related to education yet not being part of this project intervention.

The project implementation has no significant shortages. Among a few it could be noticed that project visibility should be improved in the future, as well as cooperation with the local authorities. Cooperation with the Faculty of Teaching and the Coordination Body for Municipalities of Prešovo, Bujanovac and Medveđa might also bring added value to this intervention. On a technical level, it is advised to sign a single contract with *Pomoć Deci* who will act as the lead applicant, where *OFER* would be included as a partner. Besides, the project should find mechanisms to award scholarship beneficiaries for their good marks, as well as to organise extracurricular classes throughout the school year. The latest should be organised in partnership with the Faculty of Teaching, where students of that Faculty could provide teaching to the beneficiary target groups as part of their compulsory internship.

The project area should be extended to two more municipalities, Vladičin Han and Surdulica. However, the extension should be carefully planned, taking into consideration capacity of the implementing partners.

At the end, there is a need to create a synergy between the Education sector and other sectors, especially the Sensitisation and Information Sector.

Recommendations

Although recommendations are provided throughout the evaluation, here they are also systematised in bulletins.

- ☞ The next phase of the project should have elements which supports social integration of target groups (students from disadvantaged communities) with mainstream population;
- ☞ It is recommended that scholarship system create mechanisms for awarding students for their good performance within the school;
- ☞ Extracurricular classes should be provided throughout the year. In this regard it is advisable to establish a cooperation with the Faculty of Teaching, whose students could hold classes as part of their compulsory internship;
- ☞ The project team should put additional efforts in communicating with the local authorities and in promotion of the achieved results. In that regard some of the following mechanisms could be applied:
 - Creating a communication strategy;
 - Publishing the project newsletter;
 - Organisation of regular information meetings with key actors, especially with local authorities and schoolmasters;
 - Organisation of panel discussions on the key issues that are affecting the beneficiary groups;
 - Creating a synergy with the projects implemented within the scope of the Sensitisation and Information Sector.
- ☞ The project area should be extended to municipalities Vladičin Han and Surdulica. This extension should be carefully planned, taking into consideration capacity of the implementing partners. The project partners should seek support from current beneficiaries from Vranje and Bujanovac when promoting the results to the potential stakeholders in Vladičin Han and Surdulica.
- ☞ Caritas Luxemburg should sign one contract, where *Pomoć Deci* will act as a leading applicant and *OFER* to act as a partner. This way of contracting should not change the division of responsibilities that is now in place. However, according to new model of contracting *OFER* should send their reports to *Pomoć Deci* and *Pomoć Deci* should be in charge of making an integrated report to Caritas Luxemburg.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: List of Documents Reviewed

- Serbia: Sustainable Development in the Southern Region 2012 - 2014
- Project Document;
- Annual Project Report (Narrative);
- Monthly Reports.

Annex 2: List of Interviewed People

Predrag Ranić, Head of Mission, Caritas Luxemburg, Vranje;

Gordana Cikotić, Project Assistant, Caritas Luxemburg, Vranje;

Ljiljana Vasić, Director, Pomoć Deci, Belgrade;

Svetlana Glodić, Deputy Director, Pomoć Deci, Belgrade;

Svetlana Antić, Project Assistant, Pomoć Deci, Vranje;

Dobrivoje Đorđević, Math Teacher, and a group of pupils that attend additional classes, Vranje;

Dragan Anđelkovic, Director, Secondary School of Agriculture, Vranje;

Ljiljana Andrić, Senior Advisor, Secondary School of Agriculture, Vranje;

Dušan Stevanović, Director, Primary School “Vuk Karadžić”, Vranje;

Marina Stojanović, Teacher, Primary School “Vuk Karadžić”, Vranje;

Altena Samatović, Secretary of the Office, the Roma Office for the Protection and Realization of Personal and Collective Rights of Roma in the City of Vranje, Vranje;

Naca Kadrijević, Administrator, the Roma Office for the Protection and Realization of Personal and Collective Rights of Roma in the City of Vranje, Vranje;

Kenan Rašitović, Director, OFER, Bujanovac.

Annex 3: Terms of Reference

Introduction

The Fondation Caritas Luxembourg has been implementing development projects in the Balkans for more than ten years.

Caritas Luxembourg is currently implementing a development programme in Serbia, in the sectors of Education, Income Generation Activities and Sensitisation and Information. The overall objective of the programme is the improvement of living conditions of the population in Serbia and the activities are mainly implemented in the municipalities of Vranje and Bujanovac. The programme is being implemented through a participatory approach.

The Foundation Caritas Luxembourg is currently looking for a consultant in order to carry out an external evaluation of the project “Support to education” within the Education sector.

Scope of the evaluation

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The scope of the evaluation concerns the project „support to education“, covering the pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education sectors.

The evaluator shall assess:

- the effectiveness of the project in contributing to the Education sector's goals as well as the program's goals;
- the empowerment of local partners;
- the best options in order to expand the project to one or two additional neighbouring municipalities.

The evaluation report shall contain:

- a comprehensive overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the project;
- options and potentials for the project's next phase (June 2013-December 2014) , in order to address weaknesses identified through the evaluation;
- clear recommendations with regards to potential additional municipalities to be included in the next phase based on objective indicators.

Key questions:

- is the current project effective?
- is the current project empowering local actors and beneficiaries?
- which additional measures should be taken to improve it?
- which potential stakeholders should be involved in the future, which have not been involved yet?
- which additional neighbouring municipalities should be included in the project's next phase? (max.2)

Evaluation method

The evaluator shall:

- -study documents made available by Caritas Luxembourg and by the partner organizations;
- -carry out interviews with partner organizations and beneficiaries;
- -carry out interviews with potential future stakeholders.

Requirements

- University Degree in Social Sciences or Economics
- At least 5 years professional experience in the field of development projects
- Excellent knowledge of English
- Flexibility to travel
- Excellent knowledge of the Balkan context
- Excellent computer skills
- Analytical skills

Working conditions

The evaluation should be carried out in maximum 6 days consisting of minimum 3 days of fieldwork and maximum 3 days for desk study and writing up of the evaluation report;

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Besides the assignment fees, the following costs will be covered: accommodation, travel to and from Vranje from any city in Serbia and local travel. No other costs will be covered;

The evaluation report has to be submitted at the latest two weeks following the assignment dates.

The evaluation has to be carried out between the 7th and 16th of May 2013.

The deadline for applications is the 25th of April at 14h00.

Offers including evaluation costs and terms of payment have to be sent to Predrag Ranic predrag.ranic@caritas-vr.org