

Lessons Learnt from the Integrated Rural Development Programme (ALKA) and the Albanian Macedonia People's Empowerment Programme (AMPEP)

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Table of Contents

Summary of Major Lessons Learnt	3
1 Background.....	5
2 Terms of Reference and Methodology	5
3 History and Characteristics of the Two Programmes.....	6
3.1 The Integrated Rural Development Programme	6
3.2 The Albania Macedonia People's Empowerment Programme (AMPEP)	9
3.3 Major Differences between the Programmes	11
4 Major Findings and Lessons Learnt	12
4.1 Major Achievements.....	12
4.2 The Relevance of the Programmes.....	14
4.3 The Significance of a Clear Understanding of What is to be Achieved.....	15
4.4 Where to Put the Emphasis – on the Process or the Physical Output of the Process?.....	16
4.5 The Self-reliance Concept	17
4.6 AMPEP, ALKA and Poverty Alleviation	18
4.7 Gender.....	20
4.8 Raising Awareness	22
4.9 Developing Trust	22
4.10 Sustainability	23
4.11 A Word on Replicability	27
5 A Way Ahead?	28
Annex 1 Terms of Reference	30
Annex 2 Summary of Issues Emerging from Local Level Information Collection and Workshops.....	32
Annex 3 List of Villages and Municipalities Covered by Field Activities in this Review	39
Annex 4 Steps in the Field Methodology of the Two Programmes	43



Summary of Major Lessons Learnt

Important dimensions of programme design should be guided by policy. Until recently there was no Government policy to guide the relative balance between the objective to provide *direct benefits* to villagers and the objective to promote *a process* at village and municipality level. Likewise no policy guidance has been given by the Government or by Sida on the issue of poverty focus except a focus on rural municipalities and the inclusion of poverty as one among several criteria for the selection of villages.

If poverty alleviation had been an explicit objective, the programmes could have done more by including very small villages, which tend to be the really poor ones. The programmes might also have attempted to address differences in levels of wellbeing within a village.

However, a positive bias in favour of the poorest in a community is difficult to achieve with a community based, collective approach. Collective decision making e.g. on priority problems will be dominated by the more influential and better-off. Furthermore, public goods and services, which are the normal outcome in community development approaches, are of less importance than household concerns about money and food.

A donor should refrain from micro-management in programmes that they support. Different views of Sida staffs delivered to a programme management can be highly disruptive.

Clear and concrete objectives defining what a programme is attempting to achieve is critically important. Formulation of objectives is not a choice of wording or an editing matter.

Sida has played an important role in making the programmes address gender concerns.

The participation of women in the different activities of the programmes (prioritisation of needs, decision making, planning and implementation of activities, training, etc.) has not come spontaneously. The quota requirements imposed and closely monitored by the programmes in all activities proved efficient in ensuring women's participation.

Surveys undertaken by the programmes indicated a positive attitudinal change among men to participation of women.

However, changing gender relations is a long-term and uphill struggle. The decline in women's participation over time observed in the programmes should not be seen as a failure.

An evolving decentralisation reform is not easy to understand. In particular municipality representatives consider that the programmes have played a very important role in raising awareness and understanding of the nature of the reform, the roles and responsibilities of Local Government bodies, the role of the Village Councils, the constraints these bodies face as well as the rights of citizens.

Trust among stakeholders is a crucial determinant to success. The programmes played a role in overcoming mistrust by villagers on municipalities. Transparency in all dealings is a key means to reduce the risk for mistrust. Apart from promoting an attitude, transparency can be enhanced by setting down relevant information in writing and by sharing the information with all whose trust matters. Open village meetings, direct face-to face contacts and the use of billboards were mechanisms used to reduce mistrust.

It is important to address the issue of maintenance of an investment already at the planning stage in order to define who is responsible and to devise mechanisms for funding.

Sustainability of institutions that have been involved in programme activities is a (necessary but not sufficient) precondition for the sustainability of these activities. The choice of the village council as the village level institution to work with was a strategically important choice.

The ability of village councils to perform activities of the nature promoted by the programmes is constrained by their loss of legal status, which prevents them from holding bank accounts. The option to use of a sub-account in the municipalities is not viable; the villagers should have full control over funds they mobilise themselves. It is their money.

The sustainability of *the process and the approach* that has been promoted by the programmes will critically depend upon the ability and interest in municipalities to perform the tasks performed by the programme staffs.

Two factors have been important for the level of sustainability of the process. Firstly, the level of external dependence on funding, i.e. the grants given by the programmes to the villages. A large grant is more difficult to substitute with local resources. Some village needs can be addressed in steps by a series of discrete project. In such cases the size of the grant is less of a concern. Secondly, the degree of exposure to the approach and the programme methodology makes a difference. Repeating the process in several or many villages in a municipality increases exposure. On-the-job training over and extended period of time where municipality staffs gradually take over and perform the tasks of the programme staffs has proven effective in securing sustainability of the process and the approach.

Where the process has been sustained, a tendency to simplify the methodology and to find short-cuts have been observed.

The mode of operation promoted by the programmes is relevant for most tasks and roles of a municipality, not only for infrastructure investments. The government should decide whether the principles and the role allocation between municipalities, village councils and citizens promoted by the programmes is a *desirable mode of operation* and a desirable way to implement the intentions in the decentralisation reform.

Any replication and dissemination of approach and methodology should be preceded by 1) an inventory of other experiences in other programmes in Macedonia and elsewhere than in ALKA and AMPEP, 2) and synthesis of best practice into *one* approach and methodology and 3) the approach and methodology should be fine tuned to reflect

- time and resource constraint under which municipality staffs operate;
- time and resource demands if the approach and methodology is to be applied in interaction with *all* villages in a municipality and also to be used in urban areas;
- a realistic assumption on the “exposure” that inexperienced municipality staffs can be given (through training, support material such as handbooks, study visits, etc)
- ZELS (The Association of Municipalities) is the logical body to take on the tasks suggested above.

1 Background

Within the long-term development cooperation programme between Sweden and Macedonia, Sida has supported rural development through two programmes, the Integrated Rural Development Programme (ALKA) and the Albania Macedonia People's Empowerment Programme (AMPEP) with some 25 million SEK¹.

The support is coming to an end. AMPEP was terminated in March (2008). The support to ALKA is limited to one more year plus three month (ending March 2009) with a reduced amount. In consultation with the two programmes Sida concluded that it would be valuable to undertake a structured participatory review to assess and reach a deeper understanding of achievements, the process of learning and the evolvement of approaches and methods in the two programmes. Such a review was expected to be instructive and useful for a wide audience in Macedonia and beyond.

An international and a local consultant were commissioned to plan and undertake such a review. This is the report of that review.

2 Terms of Reference and Methodology

In the attached ToR (annex 1) the purpose of the review is stated to be

- to provide a basis and an opportunity for the stakeholders in the concerned programmes to jointly reflect and learn from their implementation, and
- to identify key achievements, approaches, weaknesses and strengths as well as other factors contributing to success or failures of use for wider application and learning in Macedonia or internationally.

The strong emphasis on learning and direct involvement of key stakeholders in analysis and reflection suggested a methodology that was slightly different from that normally characterising a conventional evaluation.

The key element in the methodology that was applied is *reflection*. A tentative identification of key issues and dimensions of the formulation and implementation of the programmes was made. Subsequently opportunities were provided where reflection could take place.

Hence, *structured conversations* were held in 18 *villages* in each programme with 2–5 participants at each occasion. The villages were chosen to represent different stages in the evolution of the programmes. Efforts were made to meet with members of the Village Council, members of the village project implementation committees and “ordinary” villagers including women. *Structured conversations* were also held with the *municipalities* under which the villages fell.

In addition three *local level workshops* with participants from 9 villages and 6 municipalities were held in each programme. These villages and municipalities were different from the villages and municipalities in which structured interviews were held. In total some 150 individuals from 10 municipalities and 45 villages took part in these local level events. These were not merely arranged to provide input to analysis and reflection at aggregate level. They were also intended as learning events for all those taking part.

¹ The IRDP is better known under the name of the implementing organisations CAD, ACTED/IRDU and ALKA.

The views, arguments and conclusions from these local level learning events were summarised and provided as an input to *four central level workshops*. The briefs are appended in annex 2. Separate workshops were held with staff and municipality representatives from the two programmes. These workshops were facilitated to reflect on the specific experiences in each programme. These workshops were followed by a session where staffs from the two programmes were brought together with the intention to exchange experiences and learn from one another.

Finally a central level workshop was held to bring out the main lessons learnt in the preceding process and to discuss a number of outstanding issues. In addition staff from the two programmes, the Ministry of Self Government, Ministry of Agriculture, ZELS, Sida – Sarajevo and Sida – Macedonia participated in this workshop. A list of workshops held and the participants is given in annex 3.

3 History and Characteristics of the Two Programmes

3.1 The Integrated Rural Development Programme (nowadays and henceforth in this report referred to as ALKA)

The present programme grew out of the activities of a British NGO, Children's Aid Direct (CAD), which initiated its activities in Macedonia in 1998. Under CAD a rural development team was formed to implement small water infrastructure projects financed by UNICEF. In 2001 a team (IRDU) was formed still under CAD to work on water supply and health education issues at village level. IRDU was presented to Sida along with a concept labelled 'enabling participatory approaches' for mobilisation of people and resources for implementation of different community projects. Sida began to support the activities of IRDU in 2001. When CAD terminated their activities in Macedonia in 2002, the IRDU team and its activities were taken over by a French NGO, ACTED, and IRDU received continued funding from Sida. One of the programme objectives of IRDU was to transform IRDU to a local NGO. In 2004 the Association for Sustainable Development and Cooperation (ALKA) was established by the IRDU staff. ALKA has since implemented the programme with Sida support. The Sida support under the different programme owners was as follows.

	CAD (2001–2)	ACTED (2002–4)	ALKA (2004–7)	Total
Sida support (€)	317,000	912,000	932,000	2,161,000

Source: ALKA

The municipalities in which ALKA has been active are scattered over the country. However, there was an agreement mediated by Sida that ALKA was not to be implemented in the same municipalities as AMPEP.

Throughout its lifetime the programme has focused on needs at village level. Municipalities and villages have been selected on a set of criteria that directed the programme to poorer if not the poorest villages in rural municipalities. It has mobilised communities through participatory approaches and engaged municipalities in support of the evolving decentralisation process. Over the years the programme concept has been slightly modified and fine tuned as a result of lessons learnt and changes in the external environment.

The objectives of the programme have changed slightly over the years. The programme objectives under the ACTED period (2002–04) was to

- to support civil society and local government in understanding,
- meet the needs of rural communities,
- establish IRDU as a viable independent body (NGO, Foundation or Association).

The second objective reflected both the general aspirations of the IRDU staff and the specific ambition to ensure sustainability of programme activities.

The programme objectives during the ALKA period (2004– 2008) are to

- Build the capacity of communities and municipalities;
- Promote good governance, and
- Implement 35 village level infrastructure projects.

The programme concept builds on a number of principles.

- Focus on rural communities;
- Criteria based selection of municipalities and villages;
- Transparency;
- Awareness raising;
- Wide participation in a village (including elderly, youth, marginalised groups, women) in decision making, contribution to activity implementation and training;
- Training and learning-by-doing for capacity building;
- Provision of a significant grant for implementation of village projects;
- Competition between villages for access to funding from the programme;
- External control over funds;
- Involvement of the municipalities in the process;
- Gradually increasing the role of the villages;
- Using an expanded village council (an Initiative Board) as the institutional framework at village level;

A number of techniques and methods have been used to translate such principles in to operational activities. These include

- Village surveys to verify adequacy of selection of villages;
- Introductory meetings with representatives from all villages in a selected municipality;
- Introduction of billboards in the villages;
- Requirements on wide attendance in village level meetings for selection of priority activities and provision of information;
- The use of focal groups consisting of members representing different groups in a society for project planning;
- Demands of women's participation as members of the Initiative Boards;

- Demands on municipality representation at important village level meetings;
- The signing of tripartite agreements between the programme, a village and a municipality on village level projects;
- Project cycle management training;
- The use of forms for project applications and for the preparation of full fledged project proposals;
- Preparation of village development plans using SWOT analysis;
- Training and provision of information on the decentralisation process;
- The division of the programme into three components in order to provide villages that earlier (in component A) had their grant applications rejected to re-apply and to transfer wider programme implementation responsibility to municipalities and villages.

The last point requires some elaboration. In component (A) all villages that were selected on a set of criteria in a (selected) municipality were invited to fill in a questionnaire and deliver it to ALKA. Out of 82 eligible villages 75 returned the questionnaire. Representatives from these villages were offered project cycle management training in which 65 villages participated. Subsequently these villages were invited to submit project idea proposals. The selection of what priority need the idea would address had to follow a prescribed process to ensure wide participation and to put together a project idea description based on a format developed by the programme. 58 villages submitted project idea proposals and 18 of these were accepted for funding by ALKA. The grant in component (A) amounted to maximum € 30,000.

A component (B) was designed in which all villages that had implemented projects under the CAD and ACTED periods were invited to apply for a new project for ALKA funding. Out of 42 eligible communities 24 choose to apply for a grant that was maximised to € 15,000. Nine projects were approved. These communities were given some training and facilitation that they had not received under the previous programmes.

A third component (C) was introduced under ALKA offering a smaller grant of maximum €10,000. New eligible villages in 9 municipalities and the villages in these municipalities that had applied under component (A) but had had their proposals rejected were invited to apply. 18 villages applied and 6 were approved.

Three features of the programme stand out in these figures. Firstly, as one can expect there are a number of drop-outs in the process; villages that choose not to respond. Secondly, not all villages filling an application were funded; the villages competed for funds. Thirdly, options with smaller grants were introduced.

An important evolution of the programme concept was that the responsibility to prepare project proposals with supporting documents were fully shifted to the municipality and the villages in component (B) and (C).

A summary of the steps and activities in the different components is given in annex 3.

3.2 The Albania Macedonia People's Empowerment Programme (AMPEP)

It is possible to distinguish between two phases of AMPEP. The first phase lasted from 2001 to mid-2004 and the second phase covered the period thereafter up to the termination of the programme in March 2008.²

The first phase

The origin of AMPEP is an initiative taken by Sida in 2000. Two consultants were recruited to assess the possibilities to identify potential areas for support within the broad area of democratisation and local government development in Albania and Macedonia.

The consultant mission was not intended and did not serve the purpose of programme formulation. The mission explored the local government reform programmes under way in the two countries. It also discussed conceptual issues related to decentralisation in political and administrative structures. In doing so the mission pointed to a wide range of issues that a programme could address. However, there was no attempt to suggest which the programme-to-be should focus on. This was left to a dialogue between the key stakeholders, the Government, Sida and the programme management.

In 2001 Sida signed a contract with a Swedish NGO, Naturresursforum, as the implementing agency. Sida also recruited a long-term consultant to assist the programme management. Activities were initiated in Albania (Korca region) and in south-western Macedonia bordering Albania. In broad terms these activities centred on awareness raising of communities of their own capacity to solve common problems, promotion of institutions for self-reliant development and implementation of small community level projects.

At that time the programme was characterised by a search for a programme concept by applying a learning-by-doing approach. A rather far-reaching interpretation of the concept self-reliance by strongly de-emphasising the role of external funds in village activities provided a general framework within which a programme concept was understood to be formed. In its field level activities the programme was re-active rather than pro-active. The process at village level was slow.

Yet another characteristic of AMPEP in the first phase was explicit ambitions to promote cross border exchange of experiences and ideas between municipalities in Albania and Macedonia where the programme was active. This took the primarily the form of meetings of mayors.

During the period 2001–03 the programme objectives were revised three times. Such frequent revisions offering very different objective sets signalled difficulties to define the purpose and the role of the programme. All three sets of objectives were vague and reflected an ambition level that hardly was attainable. The vagueness of objectives can be exemplified with the formulations in the project document for 2003–2004. In this document the long-term goal of the programme was to *'create the spirit of development among villagers'* and the immediate objective was to *'strengthen and stimulate the democratic and decentralisation processes'*. Hardly surprising these objectives failed to provide clear guidance on the selection of activities.

In early 2003 Naturresursforum withdrew as programme implementing agency leaving the programme in an organisational limbo. This was resolved by the formation of an international NGO, PEP International, with the consultant that Sida recruited in 2001 to the programme as the founder. PEP International has been the implementing agency since then until the closure of the programme.

² There was some overlap between the two when AMEP completed activities started with the methodology used in the first phase parallel to the introduction of a revised methodology, which is referred to as the second phase.

The second phase

In 2003 there was growing frustration and dissatisfaction with the programme both among the programme staffs and the management as well as within Sida. Whereas the programme had developed facilitation methods and modes of interaction with communities, it was not clear where the programme was heading, what it was trying to achieve and what it really did accomplish.

The programme asked Sida for an external review and for assistance. Sida recruited a 'quality assurance group'. Their review (in early 2004) was followed by two facilitated workshops in which the staffs worked on the recommendations made by the review team. The outcome was a significantly revised programme design, which had to take into account that Sida indicated that funding would cease in two years. The redesign involved, among other:

- The formulation of concrete, realistic and measurable objectives;
- Adding objectives related to the capacity of villagers to make claims on the municipalities and the transfer of the role and tasks of AMPEP to selected municipalities;
- Re-balancing the focus from primarily *the process* to the process as well as the *output of the process* (thereby recognising that 'money matters');
- Relaxing the principles of self-reliance and learning-by-doing and accepting the usefulness and justification of external resources both at village and programme level;
- Modification of the field methodology by drastically reducing the number of visits to a village, having a specific purpose with each visit, link the visits to steps in the process, shorten the time span for the process, introducing SWOT analysis and project cycle management;
- Significantly increasing the involvement of municipalities in the process at village level;
- Encouraging 7 municipalities to select a member of staff for on the job training with AMPEP staff as a means to promote sustainability of the programme concept;
- Establishing linkages with the Ministry of Local Self Government and with ZELS.

These modifications required a reallocation of staff functions, staff training and the introduction of a revised M&E system.

Throughout its entire programme period AMPEP applied several of the principles on which ALKA operated. These principles had been developed and chosen independently in the two programmes. As ALKA AMPEP also

- Focused on rural communities;
- Used criteria based selection of municipalities and villages;
- Gave importance to transparency;
- Put emphasis on awareness raising;
- Ensured wide participation in a village (including elderly, youth, marginalised groups, women) in decision making, contribution to activity implementation and training;
- Provided training and learning-by-doing for capacity building;
- Used an expanded village council (an Initiative Board) as the institutional framework at village level;

The list above of dimensions in which the programme concept was revised in 2004 indeed implies that AMPEP modified some of the principles on which it had previously operated.

There are important lessons to be learnt from the AMPEP experience leading to the revised design and these lessons will be discussed in section IV.

The following table provides information on the size of Sida support to AMPEP.

Sida support in '000 € (Source PEP)

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006–7	Total
Macedonia	265	274	552	489	675	859*	3,115
Albania	176	184	368	326**	–	–	1,054
	441	458	920	815			4,169***

* Includes an amount for programme wind up in 2008

** The Albanian component of the programme was terminated in 2004.

*** Whereof 33 thousand unspent.

Given the acknowledged difficulties that the programme encountered in the first 2–3 years to find a clear orientation and a concept, and given the rather passive and re-active mode of operation in the villages, the programme was arguably highly cost-inefficient in this period.

As in the case of ALKA it is difficult to determine how many that have benefited from the AMPEP programme given the nature of the activities.

3.3 Major Differences between the Programmes

In this section a comparison is made between ALKA and AMPEP, as the latter programme has emerged in phase II.

However, it is important to note that there are striking similarities between the second phase of AMPEP and ALKA. As already discussed most of the principles underlying the design of ALKA as well as the techniques and methods elaborated above also characterised AMPEP in phase II. There are differences, however, as can be seen from the following comparison.

ALKA	AMPEP
Stronger emphasis on direct benefits to villagers (drinking water, improved roads, etc)	Stronger emphasis on the process
Fairly large grants to villages (max 10,000–30,000 €)	Relatively small grants (max 5,000 €)
Control of external funds (the grant) and tendering by the programme	Control and responsibility for tendering by the village Initiative Boards*)
Competition between villages for access to grant funds	No competition
Preparation of village development plans	Preparation of (annual) activity plans
Involvement of municipality staffs	An expanded involvement of municipality staffs in performing tasks of AMPEP staff through on-the-job training
Preparation of handbook of the ALKA methodology by ALKA staffs	Preparation of handbook by trained municipality staffs
Country-wide presence	Regional concentration
65 villages and 28 municipalities in-volved	255 villages and 20 municipalities involved

*) Delegation of the responsibility for tendering in the AMPEP programme was possible as Sida rules permitted it. The same Sida rules prevented delegation either to village initiative boards or to municipalities in ALKA.

The most significant differences in terms of principles between the two programmes are the difference in balance of emphasis on the two dimensions of both programmes, direct benefits to villagers and the

process as well as in the consequential difference in the size of the grants. These differences will be elaborated upon in section IV.3 and IV.10.

Another difference of a principled nature is that the villages in ALKA had to compete for a grant. The fact that they were approached and engaged in the process through project cycle management training and the preparation of a project idea proposal was far from a guarantee of funding. In fact the competition was strong; only around one third of the applying villages were eventually funded. The implications of such competition will be further discussed in section (IV.6).³ In AMPEP on the other hand villages that accepted and followed the process facilitated by AMPEP could count on a grant.

There is also a notable difference in terms of the number villages and municipalities covered. These differences will be discussed in section (IV.3) and (IV.10).

One would perhaps have expected a difference in terms of the type of projects that were implemented at village level. However, in both programmes investments in water systems and roads dominate and account for around 70% in both ALKA and AMPEP. This clearly suggests what villagers feel are the most pressing problems, which they choose to address even if the funds available were relatively modest, as was the case in AMPEP. The remaining 30% is divided on a somewhat higher number of different activities in AMPEP.

4 Major Findings and Lessons Learnt

4.1 Major Achievements

Both AMPEP and ALKA have made significant achievements during their six years of operation. This is the more commendable as there was rather limited experience in Macedonia from the type of programmes and activities that AMPEP and ALKA represent. As in most cases when programmes are successful, the explanation is generally to be found in the calibre and commitment of the staff. AMPEP and ALKA are no exceptions. The staffs have been the most valuable resource in both programmes and they have reasons to feel proud of what they have achieved.

ALKA

ALKA has benefited rural 65 rural communities and in 28 municipalities (out of a total of 123 municipalities before the municipality boundary reform in 2005) by addressing high priority problems. These figures are distributed on the three different project implementing agencies as follows.

	IRDU/CAD (2001–2002)	ACTED (2002–2004)	ALKA (2004–2007)	Total
Villages	2	30	23	65
Municipalities	9	10	9	29

Source: ALKA

As a number of villages implemented more than one project the total number of projects implemented was 89.

A considerably larger number of villages (110) have been involved in the training activities up to the submission of a project proposal for ALKA funding.

³ See also Annex 3, section 2 in summary of issues emerging from local level information collection and workshops on ALKA

Some 40% of all projects have been related to water problems and 30% to problems with poor road infrastructure. Problems in these areas are invariably put high on any agenda for development in most rural Macedonia. On these priority concerns ALKA has been able to respond with significant levels of investment. The average total project cost in component (A) in 2006 was € 38,800 with a 62% grant element, in component (B) € 32,000 with a grant element of 42% and in component (C) € 25,000 with a grant element of 41%.⁴

ALKA has resulted in significant village level resource mobilisation. During 2006 villagers contributed around 180,000 € in cash or in kind to village level projects. This means that some 640,000 € programme funds leveraged 180,000 € worth of village resources.⁵ Put differently one euro grant money leveraged 0, 28 euro at village level.

It is difficult to give a meaningful figure of the number of programme beneficiaries. For instance, how are the number of beneficiaries of a sports ground or an improved road to be estimated? If the population in the villages that have been involved in the programme since 2001 is taken as 'the beneficiaries' they number around 110,000. This is indeed an inflated figure of true beneficiaries but suggests the magnitude of people who one way or the other has been close to the programme.

Some 750 persons have been active on the Initiative Boards promoted by the programme. 211 of these were women. In addition 1–5 members from the community council received project cycle management training. This is a significant number of villagers who have received training and hands on experience of planning and implementing fairly big projects. The board members in 63 out of the 89 villages have also gained experience in the process of preparing a village development plan.

Due to the programme villagers have come to experience a partly different and more effective communication with the municipalities. The concept of joint efforts and shared responsibility has been fostered.

Villagers have been exposed to and trained in methods and techniques for planning, implementation and maintenance of infrastructural investments and preparation of village development plans, which were new to most of them. This training and these experiences would seem to be beneficial to the extent they are applied in new activities. The systems for maintenance of investment that seem to function well, so far, clearly seem to be beneficial. Whether the training in project cycle management and the experience of planning and implementing a project will prove to be beneficial is a more open question. The observations in 18 of the 89 villages covered by the programme during the village level interviews in this review suggest hardly any new activities. The implied conclusion is that the training and experiences in Project Cycle Management may not have been particularly beneficial, at least so far. During the preparation of this report ALKA has provided information that suggests that new activities have been initiated in 8 out of some 30 villages. It is not clear how these figures tally.

ALKA has made a contribution to deepen democracy by insisting on wide participation at village level in the processes of setting priorities and implementing activities.

ALKA has documented its approach and methodology in a comprehensive and well composed handbook.

AMPEP

AMPEP has facilitated the implementation of one project per village in 255 villages in 20 municipalities. These projects have primarily addressed problems with drinking water and poor roads. The projects have been much smaller than the projects in ALKA. In 2006 the average total cost per project was €

⁴ ALKA fourth progress report January–June 2006, annex 1

⁵ ALKA fourth progress report January–June 2006, annex 1

5,000 with a 75% grant element. The total grant fund in 2006 was 84,000 €. This investment leveraged village resources in cash and in kind worth € 51,000. This means that one euro grant money leveraged 0,61 euro at village level. This is a commendable achievement.

As in the case of ALKA it is difficult to estimate how many that has benefited from the AMPEP programme activities. AMPEP indicates that some 65,000 villagers were directly involved and that the population in the villages covered is around 350,000. Since it is not clear how 'directly involved' has been defined over the years it is hard to draw any conclusion about what the figure represents.

AMPEP has provided villagers training on a wide range of topics related to village level planning, organisation and project cycle management. In all villages involved in phase II, AMPEP staffs facilitated the use of SWOT analysis. Training has furthermore been provided on different aspects of decentralisation and the role and responsibilities of municipalities and village councils. An interesting element in the training package is the training that villagers have been offered on how to approach municipalities and how to make claims.

A particularly significant achievement is that the process, which AMPEP has promoted, is sustained in many villages. Eight of the twelve villages involved in the field events of this review reported to have formulated and implemented or were in the process of implementing new projects in cooperation with the municipalities, after the termination of AMPEP support.

A related achievement is the training and experience that AMPEP has given to 11 representatives from 6 municipalities in the application of the AMPEP methodology making them able to write a comprehensive handbook on that methodology.

4.2 The Relevance of the Programmes

Decentralisation and local government reforms are presently undertaken in a large number of countries at different stages of development. A common feature of these reforms is often a strong focus on building the institutional framework and the capacity at the level to which political and administrative power is decentralised. Concerted efforts in this regard make sense, as the success of a decentralisation reform to a large extent depends upon the capacity and the capability of such local institutions to dispense their duties.

However, in this process there is a risk that the very essence of decentralisation and creation of local government bodies is lost sight of. Decentralisation is intended to deepen democracy and expand the means of citizens to influence the decisions taken by local government bodies and the services provided by the administrative structure at local level. The critical relationship between local government bodies and the citizens tends to be given less attention and often far less attention.

The decentralisation process in Macedonia is no exception in this regard. Significant efforts have been made to develop the capacity and the capability of local government institutions and to define the relationship between the central, national, level and the local government level. Far less attention has been paid to the relationship between the local government bodies, the Municipal Council and the Mayor and his/her structure and the citizens.

In view of these arguments it is a foregone conclusion that AMPEP and ALKA have been highly relevant. The limited experience of working at this level in Macedonia and elsewhere makes the lessons to be learnt from the two programmes all the more interesting and valuable.

4.3 The Significance of a Clear Understanding of What is to be Achieved

This would appear to be a self-evident statement that should need no further elaboration. However, it is surprisingly common that programmes and projects fail to make clear *why* they do what they do.

This means that they have not fully clarified what problem they are trying to solve or what opportunity they are trying to capture. Likewise it is common that projects and programmes have not made clear *what* they attempt to achieve.

The objectives of a programme *should* reflect these two fundamental dimensions. Surprisingly often objectives in programme documents are both vague and high flying. This is not a matter of choosing words or editing. Such formulations reflect the failure to clearly define the purpose of a programme and the result that should be achieved as well as an overestimation of what a programme realistically can accomplish. If you do not clearly know what you are trying to achieve, it becomes difficult to choose activities. The basis for the choice is not there.

The experience of AMPEP is a good illustration of this argument. In phase I (2001–2004) the programme formulated three different sets of objectives. The fact that three rather different sets of objectives replaced one another as well as the content of these objectives indicates that the programme at that time only had a vague idea where it was heading.

The following objectives from 2002 and 2003 respectively illustrate the problem:

AMPEP approach becomes a recognised model for rural development and regional cooperation adoptable for countries in similar situation.

and

On the basis of market driven economy to strengthen and stimulate the democratic and decentralization process through maximized usage of local recourses.

The AMPEP staff and management have acknowledged that it was simply not clear to them where the programme ought to go, what it should attempt to achieve. The reasons for this situation offer other *important lessons*.

One reason was that *the staff, including the management staff, had limited or no prior experience of* the type of programmes and methodologies that were to be developed. They were also unaware of the wealth of information and experiences around the world of relevance for the strategy and programme they ostensibly were asked to develop and implement. The mode of operation became learning-by-doing, which in some considerable degree meant to reinvent the wheel. This was inefficient and time consuming.

Another significant reason for the difficulties to develop a firm and convincing programme concept was the *extensive involvement of Sida staff*, particularly during the first two years. During a period of one year no less than 12 Sida staffs from the Sida offices in Tirana and Skopje as well as from Stockholm involved themselves in the programme, often at a remarkable level of detail.⁶ A particular problem of such micro management was that Sida representatives often expressed different opinions giving diverse and contradicting instructions. In May (2001) Sida made it clear that the focus of the programme should be “people’s empowerment”. Later the same year Sida argued that the priorities of the programme were to be “mobilisation and cross-border activities”. At the same meeting with Sida in July (2001) AMPEP was given instructions on the programme concept implying, among other

- That most of the money and time in AMPEP should be spent on visiting citizens in the area, listening to their problems, helping them to vocalise, prioritise and act to find solutions to their

⁶ For instance Sida staff was involved approving grants to villages.

problems. Money and time should not be spent showing them what to do, giving them what they want or presenting ready-made solutions;

- There should be no direct monetary support;
- AMPEP should not use external consultants;
- Capacity building in municipalities was not to be part of the programme.

These views apparently guided AMPEP in choosing approach and mode of operation over the next two years, a mode of operation which created disappointment and frustration both within AMPEP and Sida. In fairness to the AMPEP staffs, who have accepted their inadequate experience at that time, it must be noted that the Sida staff giving such instructions hardly were fully experienced on the substance either. This does not mean that Sida as an organisation does not have such knowledge. On the contrary Sida has a wide and solid experience of relevance for both AMPEP and ALKA. The fact that this knowledge was not made available is a reflection of internal organisational structures and working procedures, where the department managing the support to Macedonia is not yet fully integrated with the rest of Sida.

AMPEP felt that the instruction not to use external consultants was a particularly harmful restriction as the programme staff had limited relevant experience and strongly felt the need for external inputs.

This does not mean that AMPEP was at a total loss in this period and that the activities that were undertaken were purely at random. The idea of local resource mobilisation through a participatory approach still provided a framework for the effort. Furthermore, the management and staffs of AMPEP were good learners with institutionalised internal mechanisms for reflection, assessment and adjustment. Yet, this was not enough and it was increasingly felt leading to a situation of frustration and loss of moral among the stakeholders.

The revision of the design of the programme in 2004 changed all this. The revision was triggered by a review by external consultants commissioned by Sida. Concrete, measurable and realistic objectives were formulated, which clearly indicated what the programme attempted to achieve in the remaining two years. Stating the ambition to engage the municipalities further, as recognition of their crucial role for sustainability, guided AMPEP to choose activities to that end. One activity was the involvement of selected municipality staffs in the application of the programme approach and methodology over an extended period of time. Another activity was to engage with ZELS (The Association of Municipalities). In combination with revisions of the field work methodology these changes resulted in a well structured and internally logical programme concept, which the staffs successfully implemented.

4.4 Where to Put the Emphasis – on the Process or the Physical Output of the Process?

In both programmes there were physical outputs (an improved road, a sports ground, a drinking water system, etc) and there was a process for planning and implementation of activities. However, different emphasis was given to the two dimensions in the programmes. ALKA tended to give more emphasis to the output than AMPEP. Among other this is reflected in the significantly larger grants given to villages by ALKA. AMPEP on the other hand provided more training of relevance for the continued relationship between the villages and the municipalities. Hence, villagers were trained in making claims on municipalities. Furthermore, selected municipality staffs were engaged in on-the-job training in the application of the AMPEP approach and methodology.

The differences can also be expressed as a difference in terms of which objectives that were prioritised. Clearly ALKA provided more direct benefits to villagers (e.g. in terms of access to drinking water) than

did AMPEP due to its much larger investments. This means that ALKA gave stronger (implied) emphasis to the objective to provide direct material benefits. AMPEP on the other hand gave stronger emphasis to the objective related to a sustainable process. It should be stressed that none of the programmes only strived for one of the two dimensions; the matter is the relative importance given to them.

So where should the emphasis be? While this is a relevant question it should not be asked at programme level. The question has to be directed to the government at policy level. At the time the programmes were designed there was no policy guidance on the relative importance of the two dimensions – process and physical output. Hence, it cannot be concluded that one programme focus was more appropriate or “better” than the other. At the concluding central level workshop, which was part of this review, the representative from the Ministry of Local Self Government indicated that presently there is a policy preference for programmes under that ministry in favour of the process rather than the physical outputs.

The lesson from these observations is that certain, often important, aspects of the design of a programme should be guided by policies. These aspects should not be decided upon by those designing a programme. From this follows the need to determine what policies that are relevant to consider. However, in the absence of policies for guidance on a specific dimension there is nothing “wrong” in choosing a particular design as long as it falls within the broader government policy framework. Both ALKA and AMPEP clearly did so.

Another related lesson is the importance for a programme management (or an NGO) to monitor the evolving policy framework and to adjust if and when required. There seems to be a case for ALKA to reflect on this matter.

4.5 The Self-reliance Concept

Whereas the AMPEP never used the concept self-reliance in the discussion of the programme concept, it centred on the issue of self-reliance or rather how to define self-reliance in the context of the programme. One line of argument suggested that villagers could not sit back and expect that the central and local government would sort out and solve all their problems. The capacity and the resources to do so are simply not there. Furthermore, it was argued that there are human and material resources in the villages that could be mobilised in their own interest and to their own benefit. It was further argued that genuine self-reliant processes of change will emerge when this is recognised by villagers. Such processes cannot be forced but should emerge as a result of facilitated awareness raising. Neither carrots nor sticks should be used.

These and similar arguments were made to justify the low and passive profile of AMPEP in the first three years. The operational implications included no mentioning of a grant until rather late in the process. When villagers asked what (money) they could expect from the programme, the answer was “why money?” and efforts were made to direct their focus on their own resources. Furthermore staffs made numerous unannounced visits with no specific agenda but to strike a conversation about the situation in villages with whoever was around. No or limited demands were placed on the villages. Learning-by-doing was applied as a guiding principle. For instance, villagers were given grant application forms with little or no training/instruction on how to fill them in. More importantly the programme relied almost entirely on itself to develop the programme design, methods, techniques and skills to be applied by its staffs. The limited prior experience indeed made such self-reliance a challenge.⁷

Despite these limitations unreserved credit should be given to the staffs and the management for their

⁷ As noted in section (IV.5) The Sida imposed restriction on the use of external consultants constrained the evolution of the programme when the programme had realised that they had exhausted their own capacity to make improvements.

ability to learn-by-doing and to translate that learning into working methods of good standard. However, on some of the important underlying principles, assumptions and dimensions of the programme this learning was not sufficient.

One such dimension was the importance of having a clear understanding of what the programme was supposed achieve as discussed in section (3).

Another important aspect related to the factors that were likely to affect villagers' willingness and enthusiasm in participating in the programme activities. In this regard the programme underestimated the significance for the villagers to know from the outset that external funds could be accessed, even if these funds were limited. Furthermore, it seems as if the programme underestimated the importance of *tangible* and *early* results. A process that drags on with no concrete benefits as a result tends to be seen as a talk shop for which people may not have time.

At the bottom of these concerns seems to be a possible misconception of the life situation of the villagers and their priorities.⁸

Most villagers in Macedonia have found their wellbeing drop after the break-up of Yugoslavia and as a result of the war. Loosing what you have had is hard. People's difficulties and struggle to make ends meet are serious and on the mind of everyone. In such a situation what really matters is the wellbeing of those in close circles, the nucleus family, the close relatives such as ageing mothers and fathers. The mind-set becomes more individualistic. "What is in it for me?" becomes a more pertinent question in all undertakings.

From this follows that activities that are for the common good, even if some benefits reach the individual or the household, that demand time, labour and money, tend to be given lower priority. The willingness to take risks is reduced and the patience for results will run out faster. Furthermore, an activity that does not provide benefits related to a serious problem or a basic need at the individual or household level may not be given high priority. For instance, garbage collection may not be felt as particularly important, if there is no money in the household to meet expenses for food, health care and clothes.

One lesson learned from phase I of AMPEP is that such considerations matter more than was recognised.

4.6 AMPEP, ALKA and Poverty Alleviation

The issue of how and to what extent AMPEP and ALKA have contributed to poverty alleviation can be discussed from at least four angles. Firstly, the question can be asked whether the programmes *should* have had such a focus. This is a value based policy issue, which should have been addressed primarily by the Government but also by Sida at the time the programmes were designed. There is no evidence that neither the Government nor Sida provided any policy direction in this regard beyond the indication that the programmes should focus at rural and poorer municipalities. The terms of reference for the reviews of the two programmes that Sida commissioned in 2004 make no mention of any task for the consultants related to the issue of poverty. Hence it is hardly surprising that the different programme documents do not discuss the distributive implications of their activities other than in terms of *inclusiveness* meaning that all in a village should benefit. However, ALKA did address poverty concerns in so far as they included level of poverty, unemployment and remoteness in their set of criteria for selection.⁹

These observations suggest that it would be unfair to demand specific results in terms of poverty alleviation in the programmes at this stage.

⁸ The arguments that follow are not based on any research in the Macedonian context. However, they are based on world-wide observations, which seem to have general validity.

⁹ In the set of criteria for selection of villages in AMPEP no criterion refers to any dimension of poverty. (See End Report 2006, section 6).

A second angle from which the issue of poverty alleviation may be discussed refers to the question whether programmes such as ALKA and AMPEP *could* have done more, if addressing this issue had been an objective. The answer to that question is probably yes. Small and remote villages, presumably with poorer inhabitants, were excluded as a consequence of the criteria for selection of villages. Such villages could have been included. The programmes would have had to significantly reduce the demand for local contribution and probably also the scale of activities. Furthermore, ALKA would have to give up the idea that villages should compete for grants. Really poor villages would hardly be able to compete for funds.¹⁰ AMPEP's emphasis of the process is unlikely to have been appropriate in such situations. The delivery of benefits is likely to be more important for marginalised and poor people and more feasible for the programme to achieve than attempts to empower them. The implied argument is that more could be done to address poverty in the selection of villages.

A third angle is whether the programmes could have done more to address the issue of poverty within a village. Both programmes made explicit and reasonably successful efforts to ensure that all sections of a village (young, elderly, disabled, ethnic minorities, women) participated in the process (setting priorities, training, implementation of activities, sharing benefits, etc). The principle was inclusiveness. Could anything more have been asked for?¹¹

An approach, which focuses on a village and the problems and the needs of a village, has limitations in terms of its capacity to deal with intra-village disparities of wellbeing; that is to say that such an approach has inbuilt difficulties to favour the poor over others. The reason is partly the involvement of "all" in the process of setting priorities etc and partly the nature of the activities, which provide public goods (e.g. improved roads or a sports ground) and public services (e.g. drinking water or garbage collection) as opposed to individual goods and services.

Collective decision making and participation as promoted in the two programmes has the apparent weakness that the participants do not involve themselves on equal terms. Social and economic status is not the same for all. Self-confidence varies and so does education level and experiences of "the world" outside the village. Gender invariably makes a difference. Inevitably those with plus scores on such and other characteristics, and also have the privilege of being men, tend to unduly influence and dominate. It will be their interests and preferences rather than the preferences of those with minus scores that will be reflected in how needs are prioritised and how activities are planned and implemented. This is in no way a critique of the efforts to involve all that have been made by the two programmes.

Drawing upon worldwide experience the argument and *the lesson* is rather that if the ambition is to favour the poor over others, it is difficult to rely on collective decision making.

The other inherent limitation of a community approach in addressing differences in poverty in a community is the nature of activities resulting from this approach. The key reason is that the benefits of public goods and services (e.g. garbage collection or and improved road) generally is of lesser value to the very poor than benefits which address their individual or household income poverty. The poorer you are the more important do individual needs rather than collective needs become. This problem is *often exacerbated by the bias against the poor and marginalised in the collective decision making process.*

The lesson of this argument is that it is often difficult to address the issue of intra-community differences in terms of wellbeing through a community approach beyond ensuring inclusiveness. As already noted the two programmes have been reasonably successful in this latter regard.

¹⁰ In all likelihood the competitive element has favoured more resourceful among the 89 villages and communities that have been approached by the programmer.

¹¹ Related to this matter an argument was made in the central level workshops that the income disparities in a village in rural areas generally are limited. However, the argument is based on casual observations rather than household surveys leaving this factual issue unsettled.

The two programmes were explicitly formulated within the context of the decentralisation reform with the view to support this process. In both programmes important ambitions were to link municipality delivery of public goods and services to the needs at community level and to define a role for local resource mobilisation and influence in such deliveries. Logically and as a direct consequence the programmes focused at collective rather than individual needs. Satisfying such needs is a contribution to poverty alleviation.

However, for the purpose of reflection it may be of interest to consider, if such a focus is the most relevant in addressing poverty. This is not to question what the programmes have done and should in no way cast any shadow on their achievements. The option that will be discussed was not relevant for the programme for two reasons. Firstly, the policy context in which they were formulated was the decentralisation reform as discussed above. Secondly, poverty alleviation was not the prime focus of any of the programmes. However, assume that we were asked to formulate a programme where poverty alleviation was the single most important objective. What then?

Poverty has several dimensions such as low income, poor health and education and limited influence. Low income is generally particularly harmful as income poverty not only limits consumption but also limits access to healthcare and education and gives the poor a low status in society. Empirical evidence suggests that people who are poor in a number of dimensions give priority to address income poverty, if they have the choice. Then the question is, if the provision of public goods and services such as improved drinking water, an asphalt road rather than a gravel road, a cultural centre, a sports field is the most effective way to address income poverty. This is not to say that a sport field or a cultural centre is not 'useful', 'fun' or 'good'. However, they will hardly improve income poverty and when you have problems to properly feed and dress your children and yourself, sport fields and cultural centres are hardly of high priority. Income is.

It is true that a road investment can have impact on income by reducing transport costs, improving access to labour and commodity markets. However, unless the investment opens up a new area the impact will often be modest, particularly when the investment is for an improvement.

The activities that have the highest impact on income generally address the immediate constraints that individuals meet in raising their income. Availability of employment opportunities is an obvious constraint. Other constraints may be limited skills, no access to credit, insecure tenure on agriculture land, poor access to markets for farm products, weak labour unions, etc, etc. Obviously the constraints will vary and so will the opportunities to improve incomes. A programme design for improving income will have to be based on a thorough participatory analysis of the conditions that people face.

Such an analysis will not rule out that certain activities of a public goods and service nature will be called for. However, in most instances the analysis is likely to show that other activities are more important or that activities in the field of public goods and service delivery have to be complemented with other activities addressing individual rather than collective needs in order to have an impact on income poverty.

Finally it should be noted that the possibilities to target those who are really poor in a community will be far greater when the individual or the household is in focus rather than whole community.

4.7 Gender

From the various programme documents (plans, progress reports) it seems that initially gender was not a major concern in either of the two programmes. However, in the AMPEP documents from 2004 and onwards gender is an increasingly prominent issue. Staff training was arranged in 2004 and continued in 2005. Gender disaggregated statistics were given in the reports and gender issues were discussed under a separate section. A 25% representation by women was demanded in open village

meetings, in SWOT analysis and on the Initiative Boards. In 2005 23% of the participants in open village meetings were women and 28% of those involved in SWOT analysis were women. Village surveys in January and December 2006 found that respondent's perception of women's involvement in decision making processes had increased from 20% to 60%.

Gender concerns seem to have come to the forefront somewhat later in ALKA. Staff training was provided in 2005 to two members of staff. Disaggregated statistics on gender is given in the annual report for 2005 on participation in the focal groups (only) that ALKA formed for planning purposes. There is no text discussing gender. This is also the case in the annual report for 2006.

However, this poor coverage in reporting does not give justice to the efforts in ALKA on gender issues. ALKA required that women were represented in the management body (the Initiative Board, see further section 10) at village level. From the handbook on the ALKA methodology it appears that ALKA demanded that 25% of the positions in a Board be filled by women. The actual percentage achieved was 28. On average there were 3 women and 7 men on an Initiative Board. Women were also represented as a requirement in the focal groups that ALKA formed for planning purposes.¹²

From the interviews and workshops at village level a number of observations related to gender should be mentioned. A comment often heard was that the men had found it useful to have women involved in the process. They added perspectives and views that were relevant and useful. The point was also made that initially their involvement was formal only (to meet the programme requirements). However, further on in the process their involvement became increasingly real and more active.

The field level conversations also revealed that men are less ready to see a role for women in decision making bodies such as the Village Council or in Initiative Boards.

It was also reported that women's participation tends to decline over time.

What lessons can be learnt from this experience?

For Sida a lesson seems to be that *it can make a significant difference if Sida as a funding agency pursues its policy stand on gender issues*. It is unlikely that gender would have emerged as an important element in the programme unless Sida had given emphasis to the issue. The effects were significant and influenced the working methodology of the programmes. At village level women's participation became a reality and a new experience to thousands of men and women.

At programme level there are also lessons to be learnt. One significant lesson is that *women's participation hardly comes spontaneously* or that general encouragement would be sufficient. In strongly male dominated societies something more direct and forceful is needed. This was realised by the programmes when access to the programme services and resources was made conditional upon women's participation. Quota demands in crucial stages of the process turned out to be an effective instrument.

Another lesson is that *even positive experiences of mixed gender participation during a process over a year or so, will not change basic gender relations*. In the absence of an institutionalised order relations will slide back to the pre-project status.

If the government is concerned about gender equity this experience should be of interest for the Ministry of Local Self Government. If so, there might be a case for considering quota prescriptions by law on gender in Village Councils, and perhaps Municipal Councils.

¹² However, somewhat surprising gender is not mentioned when participants in focal groups are discussed in the handbook that ALKA has developed on the ALKA methodology.

4.8 Raising Awareness

Municipality representatives in particular are of the view that the awareness of what decentralisation means, what the role and the responsibilities of a municipality are and what the rights and responsibilities of the citizens has been a critically important impact of the programmes.

The decentralisation reform is complex. Furthermore it is a process over time where roles, authority, responsibilities and resources for the local government bodies change. As a result there is considerable uncertainty not least among ordinary citizens what the decentralisation reform really means. Furthermore, limited or no direct interaction with the municipalities and limited information about their constraints has been a fertile ground for mistrust and disappointment.

Municipality representatives consider the information on the decentralisation process provided by the programmes to have been effective in raising the level of understanding of the process.

Raised awareness is not reported to have been important only among citizens. The exposure of municipality representatives to the situation in the villages, which the programme methodology has prompted, has meant raised awareness at municipality level as well.

The government has made efforts to inform about the decentralisation process. The experience in the programmes seems to suggest that considerably more is needed. A plausible conclusion also seems to be that direct interaction and information dissemination by local government representative is likely to be more effective. Furthermore, it has the added value of developing the relationship between the municipality and its constituents.

4.9 Developing Trust

In an activity involving a number of stakeholders, programme success in considerable degree depends upon the successful development of a number of trustful relationships. A particular responsibility always rests on the staffs of the intervening agency, in this case the staffs of AMPEP and ALKA.

The two programmes have been highly successful in shouldering this responsibility in the view of both villagers and municipality representatives. In the field level interviews and workshops participants unanimously expressed the highest appreciation of the relationship that the programme staffs developed with them. They pointed out a number of factors of particular importance, including

- “They always fulfilled what they promised;
- They were fast, efficient, punctual and timely
- They were responsive to the needs of the population”

These comments point to the nature of trust. Trust is not something given to someone. Trust is something *earned*.¹³

Mention was also made of the fact that the programmes approached all in the village through open village meetings hence developing trust that the “project” was not only for some.

A number of other measures and approaches ostensibly contributed to the formation of trustful relationships. Transparency on all matters pursued by both programmes is one. Professionalism is another.

Transparency was given strong emphasis by both programmes and specific efforts were made to ensure a high level of transparency. Techniques, methods, agreements, selections criteria (of villages, among tender bids, etc) were recorded in writing and shared. Both programmes introduced the use of a

¹³ As one participant in the concluding central level workshop pointed out.

billboard in each village on which all relevant information was displayed. Given the small size of the grants in the AMPEP programme Sida's requirement for competitive bidding through a formal process did not apply. The same rules prevented ALKA to take a similar step by give the tendering responsibility to the municipalities as they wanted. AMPEP gave the responsibility for tendering to the villages. Rules for the village level tendering process were laid down by the programme to ensure competitiveness in the process as well as full transparency. AMPEP reports hardly any case where irregularities were suspected.

Both programmes made use of a tripartite agreement between a village, the municipality concerned and the programme in which the details of a village level activity were stated as well as the roles and the responsibilities of all concerned. The programmes used clear and open criteria for the selection of villages, the approval of applications for grants and provided feed back with explanatory information to those villages that had their applications rejected (in the case of ALKA).¹⁴

The programmes came with a clear methodology and introduced techniques (such as SWOT analysis) and methods/procedures (such as preparation of project proposals, activity plans and village development plans) that were seen as helpful and indicated that the staffs were knowledgeable and professionals.

Previous less good experience that several villages and municipalities seem to have had with external agencies also helped. Many such interventions have been notably top-down and of a rush-in rush-out nature with little meaningful involvement neither at municipality nor village level.

The programmes have undoubtedly helped to improve the relationship between selected municipalities and villagers. Still, villagers express reservations. For instance, in the local level interviews and workshops with villagers the idea to transfer the control of external funds and the tendering responsibility to the municipalities was seen with scepticism. Villagers preferred the current practice whereby the tendering on external funds is done by the programmes rather than the municipalities. The reason given is the risk for irregularities, if the municipalities handle the funds and the process.

So *what are the lessons* in summary? They seem to be the following:

- Trust among stakeholders is of paramount importance for success;
- Trust has to be earned;
- A number of measures can be introduced in a programme to reduce the risk for mistrust. A particularly important measure is to ensure transparency in all dealings. Such dealings should be written down and shared with all whose trust or distrust matters.
- The municipalities in Macedonia (and indeed in many other countries) need to do more to earn the trust of their constituents.

4.10 Sustainability

In the context of the two programmes it seems useful to distinguish between sustainability of 1) direct benefits to villagers, 2) of institutions and 3) of the process. Direct benefits to villagers refer to the benefits flowing from an investment or an activity (e.g. drinking water, better access as a result of an improved road, a sports ground to play soccer or garbage being collected and disposed of). Sustainability of institutions refers to the continued existence of institutions created or used to perform project tasks. The process refers to the different steps in the field methodology and the mode of operation characterising the programmes.

¹⁴ Such information was given in writing. However, villagers in such villages complained in the interviews that they had been let down and that the programme staff never came back to them. This suggests the importance of direct face-to-face contacts.

Sustainability of benefits to villagers

It is too early to draw final conclusions on the sustainability of direct benefits from improved roads, water delivery systems, etc. However, in all villages visited in connection with this review the facilities were all functioning and maintained. Different solutions regarding maintenance were reported. In some instances the municipality had taken the responsibility. In other cases the village council maintained the facilities and in still other cases the responsibility was shared between the municipality and the village council.

As maintenance of investments generally is a problematic aspect, credit should be given to the programmes for having addressed this issue with vigour and indeed the villages and the municipalities for the arrangements they have made.

Sustainability of institutions

The sustainability of institutions is generally a precondition for the sustainability of benefits as well as the sustainability of process. Some organisational unit must take on the responsibility for maintenance of, for instance, a water scheme. Likewise, some organisation needs to manage and implement the steps in a community based development effort such as the ones promoted in AMPEP and ALKA. Hence, the crucial importance of sustainability of institutions.¹⁵

Both programmes choose to work with and through the village councils and with the municipalities.¹⁶ Both bodies are part of the local government structure by law. For programmes that claim to work in support of the local government reform process this choice was logical and correct. The village councils were expanded into what was called initiative boards for two reasons. Firstly, this provided an opportunity to involve villagers with a particular competence or interest. Secondly, an expansion was necessary in order to ensure a better gender balance. The initiative board concept is well established since long in Macedonia and such boards are established for specific purposes. They are generally perceived as ad hoc and temporary in nature.

Field level information confirms this perception. It was reported that initiative boards generally were dissolved once the projects implemented under the programmes were completed. However, the role and the function of the board was then taken over by the village council (in the cases where the process was sustained, see below). This clearly points to the importance of working with institutions that are *permanent* in nature. Ad hoc institutions such as the initiative boards, informal committees and interest groups are generally far less sustainable.

The field level contacts strongly emphasised the constraints imposed on the village councils to perform a development role as envisaged in the two programmes without being able to hold and operate a bank account. Stripping the councils of their status as legal entities in the present legal framework for Local Government is a most unfortunate *centralisation move*. The option to have a bank account in the municipality over which the council does not have full control is considered highly unsatisfactory by villagers. The idea that villagers, who collect money on their own initiative, should not have the full control over that money is understandably hard to accept.

Projects and programmes often find existing institutions that are permanent in nature to be ineffective cooperating partners. They may be weak, corrupted, politicised, undemocratic, elite oriented or autocratic and generally a blend of these characteristic. In such a situation there seems to be good reasons to find an alternative, or as it often turns out, to create an alternative. In the short run and to achieve immediate project objectives this is likely to prove to be effective. However, there is overwhelm-

¹⁵ The fact that an institution is sustainable does certainly not mean that investments are maintained or that a development process is sustained. It may be a necessary but it is not a sufficient precondition.

¹⁶ In some villages where no Village Councils had been elected AMPEP encouraged elections to be held and also succeeded in a number of cases.

ing evidence that such ad hoc institutional solutions run great risks of failing in the long run. When project support and funds come to an end, such institutions have an alarmingly high mortality rate.

The lesson is the importance of considering sustainability of institutions and the considerably higher probability that institutions, which by their nature or proven record are permanent in nature, are sustainable. If sustainability of the institutions is important for the sustainability of benefits and/or a development process, it is preferable to work with such institutions, even if they have notable shortcomings.

Sustainability of the process

Both programmes had the ambition that the development process and the methodology they developed would be sustained where it was introduced. This is to say that programmes activities would continue after the termination of their support. Furthermore, both programmes have had the ambition that their methodology would be *replicable* and eventually become the mode of operation in all municipalities and villages.

A crucial aspect of sustainability of the process is that the municipalities succeed in taking over the role that has been played by the staffs in the two programmes. Hence there are reasons to pay particular attention to factors that influence this transition.

It is yet too early to draw any firm conclusions on either the *sustainability* of the development process and the methodology (in the municipalities and the villages where the programmes have operated) or the *replicability* of their processes and approaches. The experience so far gives some hints, however. Beyond that one can reason about the factors that are likely to matter.

The programmes themselves have only casual information on whether their processes and approaches have survived their withdrawal. There are observations on this matter in the 45 villages and 10 municipalities covered by the field interviews and local workshops as part of this review.

However, also this information has to be taken as indicative as no efforts were made to record and report the findings statistically.

In the villages under ALKA that were visited the process had come to a halt. Whereas some project proposals had been prepared, none had been implemented. The reason given was unavailability of funding in the absence of ALKA grants.¹⁷

A continuation with new activities or projects was reported in 8 out of 12 villages from phase II of AMPEP villages that were visited and interviewed. In other words, in these eight villages the process had been sustained so far. Then it should be noted that only 1–2 years have passed since AMPEP terminated their presence and support. Whether this short-term sustainability of the process will turn into long-term sustainability remains to be seen. Yet, the fact that short-term sustainability has been achieved in 2/3 of the villages (visited) is significant and interesting. While further information collection and analysis would be required to explain this result, a number of plausible reasons can be suggested.

Firstly, as discussed in section (IV.4), AMPEP placed a stronger emphasis on the process than on the physical outputs of the process (improved roads, garbage collected, etc). This emphasis is reflected in the methodology in general and the content of the training and information sessions in particular.

Secondly, the grant given to the villages was modest. This means that the dependence on external funding to sustain the process was correspondingly modest. Hence it has been easier to replace the grant with village level funding and funding from the municipalities. The fact that the process had

¹⁷ During the preparation of this report ALKA provided information that suggests that eight out of some 30 villages have implemented projects after ALKA withdrawal.

centred on smaller village projects that people found both useful and feasible may have conditioned them to “think small” rather than large.

Thirdly, AMPEP tended to remain in the same municipalities longer than ALKA. On average AMPEP worked in some 12 villages per municipality and ALKA in 2¹⁸.

Fourthly, and seemingly of decisive significance, AMPEP choose to engage two appointed municipality staff members from six municipalities for on-the-job training along side AMPEP staff over a period of one year. It is noteworthy that of the eight villages that reported continued activities, six were located in municipalities that had allocated staffs for on-the-job training with AMPEP. These staffs not only observed the tasks undertaken by AMPEP staffs. They were also gradually taking over the tasks such as facilitating SWOT analysis, holding open village meetings, preparing MoUs etc.

Three of the twelve municipality representatives that had received on-the-job training on the methodology participated in one of the central level workshops. They reported that they are fully conversant with the methodology. They can and do apply it and they consider themselves capable of training others. It should also be noted that the handbook on the AMPEP methodology has been prepared not by AMPEP staffs but by six of the municipality staffs who took part in the on-the-job training. The comprehensiveness and quality of the handbook bear witness to their command in the methodology. Their apparent commitment and appreciation of the potential of the methodology in all likelihood is important for the sustainability of the approach in the municipalities where they work.¹⁹

Fifthly, the methodology itself is designed in such a way that the one who manages it (AMPEP or municipalities) will earn trust from the villagers. They are visited, listened to, given the power to decide on their priorities and they are assisted. And trust between the key stakeholders is important for sustainability. The methodology also promotes internal trust in a village by involving a broad representation of the villagers and by introducing means and mechanisms for transparency.

An explanation to what seems to be a lesser degree of sustainability of the process in ALKA villages is equally interesting for learning purposes. One explanatory factor would seem to be the stronger emphasis that ALKA gave to the objective related to direct benefits to villagers and the choice of activities to this end.²⁰ Other factors can be suggested at least as reasonable hypotheses.

The relatively large grants implied a higher degree of external dependence and consequently difficulties to replace external funding with village level funding and/or municipality funding.

This in combination with the focus on relatively large investments might have conditioned villagers to “think large”. Having implemented a project with the ALKA methodology in the order of 40–50,000 euro or more (including local contribution) could have made it difficult to re-think and see the usefulness of the approach on activities in the order of a few thousand euros. Some problems can be addressed in steps over several years, however. This may reduce the effects of dependence upon external funding.

As AMPEP, ALKA also engaged municipality staffs in different steps in the process. Their presence was primarily to represent the municipality rather than to get on-the-job training in the methodology with the view to take over tasks performed by AMPEP staffs (e.g. facilitating SWOT analysis, facilitating the development of village development plans). In component B and C of the programme the responsibility for preparation of project proposals was shifted to the villages and the municipalities. The tasks involved covered only part of the ALKA approach and methodology.

¹⁸ This is a purely arithmetical calculation. In reality the number of villages per municipality varied for AMPEP.

¹⁹ There is indeed the risk that they are given other duties in the municipality or that they leave for other employment and with them the knowledge and the commitment.

²⁰ It should be reiterated that ALKA has been convincingly successful in achieving sustainability of benefits.

Still another factor that is likely to influence sustainability of the process is the perceived usefulness and complexity of the techniques and methods as well as the objectives with different steps in the process. The observations during the field work in this review point in some diverging directions.

Villagers generally reported that the methodology in the two programmes is useful and possible to apply. Respondents that had been involved in the ALKA programme found the formulation of a village development plan useful. Respondents in both programmes indicated that SWOT analysis is a useful tool to arrive at priorities. Villagers also appreciated that a wide section of the villages was mobilised and that the views of all could be heard.

The municipalities in the two programmes that were visited likewise expressed very positive views on the methodology and claimed that they had adopted it. This, however, appeared to be an overstatement at further probing. There was no indication in the ALKA municipalities that any of them applied the methodology. In AMPEP one strong municipality (Resen) seems to apply the methodology more or less fully, also in new villages. However, there are also indications that municipalities simplify steps and take short-cuts. For instance, it was reported from one municipality claiming to use the methodology that they asked the village council to come forward with proposals on priority needs without the steps that ensured that many villagers, including women, were involved in setting priorities. Likewise, it was reported that the project proposal format was simplified.

So, *what lessons can we draw* on the matter of sustainability of the process from these observations?

Since the experiences have not been sufficiently researched, there are reasons to be cautious in drawing far-reaching conclusions. With this reservation in mind, it may still be possible to point out what seems to be lessons learnt.

Firstly, *extensive and repeated exposure and on-the-job training* in the methodology of staffs from the municipalities *seems to be crucial* in explaining the higher degree of sustainability of the process in AMEP.

Secondly, *the higher dependence on external inputs, particularly funds, the more difficult it is to transfer the role of the external agent* – here the AMPEP and ALKA organisations – to local institutions – here the municipalities and hence a reduced potential for sustainability.

Thirdly, *a methodology that is seen as too complicated and/or too time consuming will either be rejected or simplified as the individual user seems fit*. Critical strategic elements or principles may easily get lost such as gender balance, wide participation in decision making at village level. The methodology has to be adjusted to the capacity and capability constraints that will play out fully in the absence of programme staff.

4.11 A Word on Replicability

Both programmes have had the ambition that their methodology may be replicated on a large scale in many or even all municipalities. This makes the last point on the methodology even more important. In all likelihood such replication means that municipality staffs and villagers with no prior exposure should be able to apply the methodology with the help of written material (e.g. handbooks), with a presentation as AMPEP has made to a gathering of Mayors in their region and one would think with some training. This places even stronger demands on the methodology to be feasible and acceptable in such new situations.

A worldwide observation is that manuals and handbooks tend to be good pieces of work by qualified persons who do their best to thoroughly think through all dimensions and options of the matter they are writing on. With few exceptions the result is something that goes beyond what is practical and feasible for users that are hard pressed for time and less specialised. The challenge is to be simple enough to be relevant for the users without losing the crucial dimensions or elements of (here) a methodology.

We are concerned with an approach that presents the methodology and its elements as optional for the users to pick and choose and modify at his or her discretion. This is the way the two handbooks prepared by the programmes are suggested to be used. *The key reason is that these methodologies imply a new and different outlook on principles. They attempt to fundamentally change a top-down and largely autocratic mode of operation of municipalities to a mode that shifts power to villages, and from a selected few in the villages to many. The methodologies also are designed to make the municipalities responsive to needs articulated from below.* Such a change is a matter of changing values and attitudes. Such changes hardly come about by just stating what principles that should be adhered to. Instruments such as steps in a methodology have to be made compulsory in a transition of attitudes.

This being the case and given that the methodology is *not* to facilitate or increase the efficiency of the way things are run at present, the methodology should hardly be a wide menu from which to pick and choose and to modify at ones pleasure. The challenge is to develop something that is *simple enough* to meet time and other constraints on the part of the users, retains *elements of particular importance on principles as compulsory* and still provides for the flexibility that always will be needed.

5 A Way Ahead?

The two programmes have fundamental principles in common. They imply a shift of power to the village level and they attempt to democratise the decision making process at that level. They attempt to make the municipalities listening and responsive service providers. They promote the concept of joint efforts and shared responsibilities between villages and municipalities.

So far the principles have been applied to certain types of activities. In ALKA these activities have been limited to infrastructure investments. The types of activities were somewhat broader in AMPEP but still with limitations.

However, the principles underlying the two programmes are of general *validity as a mode of operation for a municipality in virtually all its activities*. The legal framework for Local Self Government in Macedonia clearly supports this understanding of the role of Local Self Government bodies and the relationship between such bodies and their constituents.

Therefore should the experiences of ALKA and AMPEP be of paramount interest as a matter of policy at the highest level of Government. There seems to be two critical policy issues that need to be resolved by the Government namely

- 1 Do the principles on which the two programme approaches and the methodologies rest reflect a correct understanding of the relationship between the Municipalities and their constituents that is intended by the legal framework on Local Self Government?
- 2 If so, should these principles be the basis for the mode of operation of municipalities in all dimensions of their relationship with their constituents?

If the Government as a matter of policy answers yes to these two questions, the implications would be far-reaching. Not only would the methodologies developed in the two programmes, and possibly also in other programmes, have to be reviewed to assess their relevance as an overarching framework for Local Government development. It would also be necessary to assess the relevance of the steps in the methodology to different issues and subject matters, which a Local Government body deals with. Furthermore, the methodologies would have to be reviewed in terms of their resource demands (times

and skills), if they were to be applied widely in scope and in the relationship not only between a municipality and a few villages but to all villages and to urban settlements in a municipality as well.

A policy stand should precede any attempt to disseminate an approach and a methodology. The reasons are strong. Firstly, a policy stand implying a yes (or a no) to the questions above would decisively give legitimacy to an implementation effort and could provide dissemination measures otherwise not at hand such as legal instruments and government directives. Secondly, it would give what is to be implemented the status its relevance deserves. Thirdly, it would give direction to the implementing body or bodies when developing the operational implications.

There seems to be consensus that ZELS (The Association of Municipalities) is the logical body to take on the process of developing the operational implications of a policy related to questions as the ones raised above. This task would seem to have two dimensions. Firstly, ZELS would have to focus on approaches and methodologies. This would mean to assess the approaches and methodologies in the two programmes reviewed here together with possible other experiences in other programmes in relation to the policy stand. It would also mean to test the acceptability and operational feasibility of applying the methodologies in municipalities with different capacities. In all likelihood this suggests the need for certain revisions, perhaps for the preparation of different levels of sophistication, possibly different steps for different types of issues with the view to develop something that could be disseminated to all municipalities.

The second task for ZELS would be dissemination and follow up. The experience in the two programmes may give some guidance for this important and demanding task. A range of means, including training, back-stopping and coaching will have to be considered.

It must be recognised that these tasks are not a one-shot effort but demand a continuous concerted effort over a long period of time.

At present ZELS is totally inadequately resourced to fulfil the strategic role that has been outlined above. In a more narrow perspective the value of the two programmes for the future hinges almost altogether on the capacity of ZELS to carry it further. A distribution of two handbooks is unlikely to make much of a difference at the level where it matters.

Annex 1 Terms of Reference

Planning and Implementation of a learning process on the experiences and achievements of rural development in Macedonia through AMPEP and ALKA

1. Background

Within the long-term development cooperation programme between Sweden and Macedonia, Sida has supported rural development through the two organisations ALKA and AMPEP (Albania-Macedonia Peoples Empowerment Programme) since 2001. Altogether, the two programmes have been working in 52 of the totally 84 municipalities in the country, spending in total some, more than 24 million SEK. In addition, support through the Regional Environment Centre – REC – has been provided for development and elaboration of Local Environmental Action Plans in a number of municipalities during the period. A note on the two organizations and the projects/programmes is given in annex 1.

All three programmes have involved a high degree of “learning by doing”, developing and testing innovative and process oriented approaches to decentralised, local level development with a high degree of people’s participation.

The Swedish support to ALKA and PEP is coming to an end. AMPEP has already wound up its activities in Albania, and the organisation as such will be disbanded from spring 2008. ALKA has transformed itself into a national NGO, and intends to continue as an actor within the area of decentralised local development. The REC/LEAP programme continues in a second programme phase.

It is of great importance to undertake a structured, joint and participatory review in order to assess and reach a deeper understanding of achievements, the process of learning and evolvement of approaches and methods in the programmes of value both for the agencies involved, other practitioners, scholars and policy-makers in Macedonia as well as internationally.

2. Purpose and Scope of the assignment

The overall purposes of the learning event are:

- to provide a basis and an opportunity for the stakeholders in the concerned programmes to jointly reflect on and learn from the implementation
- to identify key achievements, approaches, weaknesses and strengths as well as other factors contributing to success or failures which could be of use for wider application and learning in Macedonia or internationally

The *overall assignment* is to design, plan and provide overall guidance and coordination of a participatory assessment, learning and documentation process. This shall focus on the experiences, learning and achievements from the programmes of AMPEP and ALKA, in close collaboration with the organisations and key beneficiaries concerned.

The assignment includes the preparation of a detailed plan for the whole process, preparations for and implementation of the process in Macedonia as well as analysis and report writing presenting findings and conclusions.

3. Specific Tasks

The assignment comprises four steps:

Step 1

- Preparation of a detailed conceptual note and plan for the study and learning process and the expected outputs, in close collaboration with ALKA and AMPEP – to be approved in final form by Sida.

Step 2

- Collection of basic information on the history of the two programmes.
- Assessment of achievements and sustainability of activities and concepts at municipality and village level.

Step 3

- Organisation, preparation, implementation and facilitation of one or several work-shops with all key actors

Step 4

- Interpretation, analysis, assessment and synthesising of available data, information and the conclusions from the Work-shop(s) in the form of a report for national and international use. The main report shall not exceed 25 pages.

Key issues to be illuminated in the study and learning process include

- History, outline, project design of the two main programmes (ALKA-PEP)
- Major results and achievements – both physical investments and immaterial
- Relevance and effectiveness of interventions and investments incl. poverty, gender and ethnic dimensions
- The projects and their role within the context of decentralization
- Methods and forms for interaction and participation of local actors and beneficiaries
- Methods and techniques for planning and implementation
- Organisational and management aspects
- Sustainability aspects (institutional, physical, financial) and exit strategies
- Cost-efficiency aspect
- Monitoring and results based management
- Systems for learning, capacity building
- Major shifts in approaches and methods
- Experiences of special relevance and use for future policy, method development and programmes for rural development
- What should be done differently if starting up again?

Part of the assignment is to determine how and in which steps such aspects will be reviewed.

- Experience of rural development in the Balkans.
- Previous experiences from Macedonia and the programmes and organisations in question are considerable merits.

Annex 2 Summary of Issues Emerging from Local Level Information Collection and Workshops on

ALKA

1. Entry approach

- Clear criteria on which villages are eligible for the project. Some municipalities set their own priorities for capital investments in villages in which ALKA would work.
- In the beginning there were common reservations (disbelief), but the village meeting at which all citizens took part strengthened trust. The idea of designing a village profile is considered to be useful by the villagers.

Reflections:

What have you learned (effective and ineffective means) about how to develop trust in the project by villagers and municipality staff, including the mayor?

2. Situation in villages where the project application had been rejected

Apart from the expected unpleasant feeling of dissatisfaction resulting from having their project proposals rejected, the villagers reported that the dissatisfaction also stemmed from the fact that they were not given an explanation why their proposals were rejected. They feel betrayed because they had participated in all the phases. The blame was primarily put on:

- The mayors (because of the dishonest games they played),
- In some villages that had their applications approved lobby groups were formed in addition to the initiative board (collected more money as the village contribution to the project),
- Their own failure to organise themselves and to agree (e.g. villagers could not agree where to start the construction of a road, so according to them, it was the key reason for being “dumped”).

Almost all consider that they have acquired skills to prepare applications for funding but they also think that they were not given the chance to apply elsewhere. The villages that had their proposals rejected were not contacted by ALKA afterwards.

Reflections:

Pros and cons for spending project resources and involving villagers and villages (in meetings, training sessions, prioritisation and planning of activities, preparation of project proposal) that are not foreseen to get funding?

3. Experiences in villages that had their proposals accepted

3.1 The relevance and usefulness of methods and techniques used by ALKA

The methods and techniques used are assessed positively both by villagers and municipality officials.

The following are listed as especially positive characteristics of the ALKA methodology:

- How to determine priorities
- Development plans (the whole methodology)
- Getting a high percentage of the villagers involved
- All villagers needs were heard

Villagers especially stressed the usefulness of the formation of new institutions (the initiative board, coordinating mechanisms, etc). Villagers reported that they have learned a lot and gained experience, which they already use when preparing new projects.

There were statements suggesting that the members of the initiative board are qualified enough to prepare applications with the remark that they lack knowledge about project cycle management, which they would like to receive training on.

Reflections:

Do you think it is realistic to expect that civil servants from municipalities can apply ALKA methods and techniques to facilitate similar activities in villages?

3.2 The usefulness of having a village development plan

The villagers see the development plan as a way to make progress, a path of activities that leads to a better life in the village. The plans are also a tool to let the municipalities know what the needs of each individual village are.

Reflections:

What are your feelings about the competence of village bodies to prepare development plans of the kind prepared in the project without external help? What conclusions do you draw, if they do not have the competence?

3.3 The relevance and usefulness of trainings

The trainings for preparation of development plans and the trainings on the relationships with the municipality are assessed to be beneficial but again not sufficient. Furthermore several people from each village should be chosen and given training in project management.

Reflections:

Did you expect villages and municipalities to report additional/other benefits?

The relevance and usefulness of focal groups, the stage at which they were used (project formulation, not identification/prioritisation)

Focal groups are accepted as a useful form of expressing specific interests and contributions to the development plans. It was concluded that it would have been difficult to get their full participation, if they had been formed at the stage when the priorities were set. Once a project has started it is easier to motivate people to participate in focal groups.

Reflections:

What are the pros and cons for establishing and involving focal groups at different stages of the process?

3.5 Sustainability at village level

In relation to sustaining what has already been implemented, there are different experiences. In some cases maintenance is the responsibility of the village boards themselves (e.g. every household pays for water supply and the money is used for repairs). In some cases it is the village board together with the municipalities (maintenance and clearing of roads in winter), and there are also cases when the municipality takes care of everything. There are several villages where the problems with the water supply system are not solved, cases when the municipality tends to take over the system and maintain it while the villagers do not want to hand over this responsibility although they are not capable of maintaining the system themselves.

Almost in all villages there are plans for new projects but only a few of the villages have implemented new projects. It seems as if the process has come to a halt.

Unlike the maintenance of physical facilities the sustainability of institutions and women's participation decline as time passes. It is especially noted in municipalities, which have mayors belonging to different political parties than parties dominating at village level.

Sustainability of women's participation differs between villages. The level of participation is particularly low in villages where Albanian inhabitants dominate. Women were involved in the village meetings and in focal groups but there is not readiness to include women in permanent bodies (village boards, initiative boards).

Reflections:

What seem to be the most important factors that determine the degree of sustainability of the process (planning and implementation of activities, maintenance of investments) at village level?

How to sustain gender balance throughout the process and beyond?

3.6 The relationships Village – ALKA – Municipalities

The relationship with ALKA is seen with respect in all villages and municipalities without exception. The following was stressed:

- The cooperation was trustful
- There were several meetings
- The staffs were fast, efficient, punctual and timely
- They always fulfilled what they had promised
- They had short and efficient procedures
- They were responsive to the needs of the population

The relationship between villages and municipalities vary – from full satisfaction to extreme dissatisfaction.

The ones that are satisfied are those receiving technical support in the process of project preparation and where the municipality participate with funds. On the other hand, in the villages, which voted for a party other than that to which the mayor belongs, the cooperation is weak. In some instances there were even obstructions in the implementation of projects as well as – “stealing” of ideas and projects.

Reflections:

What are the pros and the cons to the idea presented in some villages to establish permanent initiative boards as a way to resist political influence by municipalities?

3.7 Transfer of responsibilities for component B and C from ALKA to municipalities

Even though the initial concept proposed by ALKA was that the municipalities would manage the tendering and bidding process, in practice, ALKA decided on the Sida funding and undertook the tendering. The village representatives consider this to be better as irregularities in the municipalities could be avoided. Some of the village representatives suggested that village representatives should be included in the tendering committee even without right to vote but as providers of information.

The arrangement with a three party control (ALKA, municipalities and villages) of project implementation activities is considered to be good practice by the villagers.

All municipalities visited declared that they have accepted the ALKA concept but only one municipality has attempted to apply the concept in practice.

Reflections:

When there is no external project, there will be only two parties – the village and the municipality. The villages distrust the municipalities. How could this problem have been addressed by the project?

What conclusions do you draw from the fact that only one municipality has attempted to apply the ALKA concept in practice?

3.8 Adaptation of the ALKA methodology

Villagers think that the ALKA methodology could be used but it is important to take the following into consideration:

- To involve more experienced and literate people from the villages
- To train a project team in the villages in project management

Reflections:

Do you think that the methodology you apply is applicable to other than infrastructure investments?
Would there be a need for some modifications?

3.9 Authority and responsibilities of the village council

All villages emphasise that the municipalities should authorise the villages to maintain facilities.

Reflections:

Could the project have done something more or something differently to address this problem?

AMPEP

Phase I (from 2001 to 2005)

1. Entry approach

At the beginning the aim of the AMPEP project was not clearly understood by the villagers. The participation of young people is considered essential and useful. The participation of women was only formal at the beginning. Their active role in determining priorities as well as in the process of implementation of projects resulted in increased awareness of the importance and usefulness of their involvement.

The villagers appreciated the honesty with which AMPEP approached them (unlike other projects in which they had experienced racketeering or corruption).

Reflections:

What was the experience of the approach to build trust and to activate villagers in the first phase?
Pros and cons.

What specific measures seem to be effective in reducing the risk for corruption?

2. The relationships Village – AMPEP – Municipalities

AMPEP is seen to have served as a bridge in fostering or initiating cooperation between villages and municipalities.

Villages received support from municipalities mainly on technical matters when preparing project proposals, and sometimes with financial participation.

Reflections:

What happens when AMPEP is not there to play this role?

Could the project have done something more or differently to avoid dependence on AMPEP in this role?

3. Facilitation of village activities

The facilitation performed by AMPEP was considered useful in the following three respects:

- In the process of mobilisation (gradually from individual contacts, groups contacts to organising village meetings).
- Institutional development at village level (village board elections where such elections had not been held and activation of passive boards).
- Particularly important is facilitation of the process to set priorities enabling all groups in the village to express their interest and their arguments; young people, women, different ethnic groups.

Reflections:

Is it realistic to expect that civil servants from the municipalities can and will continue to perform this facilitation role?

4. Assessing the IDF (Initiative Development Fund)

Villagers found the format of the fund and the support to apply for grants useful.

About half of the villages visited applied for a second time but only one of these villages was granted funding. The reason for rejection was said to be that the applications had come too soon after the first application.

The IDF was considered important to justify the effort to set priorities and to make project activities possible.

Reflections:

How important do you think the IDF was to attract people to the project and to make the implementation of activities with sufficient benefit potential possible?

5. Sustainability

All the implemented projects in the villages that were visited are well maintained. The maintenance is being carried out in different manners; by the villages, by the municipalities, etc.

In those municipalities where a mayor has been elected (in the last election), who belongs to a different party than the members of the initiative board, there has been a slow down in the operations of the board. In some villages the new municipality authority has used its influence to make changes in membership of the village board. As a consequence these boards stopped their activities.

Villagers suggested that initiative boards with a competent leader should be formed as a temporary solution.

Several villages have prepared proposals for new project but few have been implemented for the lack of funding.

Reflections:

Is there some way to reduce the risk of political influence in the functioning of the village level institutions?

6. Benefits of involvement to the municipalities

The main benefit to the municipalities in this phase is reported to be the fact that they became more informed about the needs in the villages, which could be taken into consideration when preparing municipal plans and budgets.

Reflections:

Did you expect the municipalities report other benefits?

7. Adoption and application of the AMPEP concept

The villagers accept the AMPEP working methodology but again they are dependent on help in the preparing technical documentation as well as information regarding funding opportunities.

Reflections:

So how important is the funding issue?

Phase II (from 2005 to 2007)

1. Entry approach

The informal relation that was established during the first visit by AMPEP staff was important and effective.

AMPEP staff referred to successful projects in phase I and this served as a motivational factor.

Villagers emphasised the importance of the fact that everyone in the village was given the opportunity to say what he/she thought and that everyone could be involved in the implementation of the projects.

Reflections:

The entry approach in this phase was quite different from the first phase. What were the main gains from changing the approach?

2. Relevance and usefulness of SWOT analysis, trainings and the preparation of a village development plan

All villagers agree that the SWOT analysis is very useful when determining priorities and they have all drafted an annual activity plan.

SWOT analysis is seldom used as a tool for preparation of a village development plan.

Only a few villages have prepared development plans. Those which have done so consider it useful. Most of the villages report that they could use SWOT analyses themselves to prepare development plans.

Reflections:

Are you confident that the villagers can use the version of SWOT that you have presented to them on their own?

3. Sustainability

Most of the villages and the municipalities consider that the main benefit of the programme is the raised awareness of the potential of self-help organisations and the capability to prepare project proposals for application of funding.

Not all villages have proceeded with the formation of the institutional framework at village level (initiative board, project management team).

The relations with the municipality are better in the cases where no major changes took place as a result of the recent elections (the same mayor and staff responsible for village level cooperation).

The quality of leadership conditions the success with the process and the mobilisation of villagers.

Most villages that have received support from AMPEP have continued to implement new project primarily funded by the municipalities and own contribution.

Women's participation was significant in the SWOT analyses as well as in training activities but not in the village level institutions.

Reflections:

How do we explain that villages continue to plan and implement projects after the termination of AMPEP support in phase II and not in phase I?

What is the likelihood that the municipalities are willing and capable to apply the AMPEP methodology in their practical work?

4. Institutionalisation at village level

In most villages the initiative boards and the project implementation teams are dissolved with the finalisation of the project supported by AMPEP and activities are then continued by the village board.

There are positive experiences of broadening the involvement of other institutions such as NGOs and church boards in the process of mobilisation of villagers for new projects.

A serious obstacle for the functioning of local institutions is the legal regulation that a village board cannot hold their own bank accounts. So often they only have a sub-account in the municipal administration or a member of theirs holds a private account. Neither of these solutions is satisfactory and sustainable.

Reflections:

What conclusion do you draw from the observation that initiative boards and management teams often seem to be dissolved upon the termination of AMPEP support and the functions are taken over by the village board?

5. Relationship with municipalities

In many villages the opinion was expressed that the municipality officers who apply the AMPEP methodology were looked upon as political party representatives rather than as professional civil servants. This is negatively affecting villagers' trust in them and their willingness to participate.

The reason for this perception can in part be found in the (political) role these officers often played during the recent election campaign.

Reflections:

Can anything be done about this or is it something one has to live with?

6. Cooperation between neighbouring villages

There are initiatives to implement joint projects (roads, water supply systems, cattle water places etc) by neighbouring villages but it was reported such cooperation should and can be expanded.

Reflections:

What are the factors that seem to increase the likelihood of cooperation between neighbouring villages?

7. Relationship with AMPEP and benefits to the municipalities

The cooperation with AMPEP is given the highest marks by the villagers. It was reported to have been frank, professional, timely, always respecting what had been agreed etc.

Reflections

Congratulations!

8. Claims on the municipalities made by villagers

In the municipalities involved in this phase of the programme the number of requests and claims made by individuals and village boards has increased. As one new mayor noted "someone must have taught these people how to make requests".

Reflections:

Should the project have put more emphasis on this aspect?

Annex 3 List of Villages and Municipalities Covered by Field Activities in this Review

(Below 'V' stands for village and 'M' for municipality)

1) List of villages visited for interviews

AMPEP phase 1 villages and municipalities:

V. Brezovo, M. Sopotnica
V. Dolenci, M. Sopotnica
V. Zapolazni, M. Dolneni
V. Vrance, M. Dolneni
V. Carev Dvor, M. Resen
V. Rajca, M. Resen
V. Drmeni, M. Resen

AMPEP phase 2 villages and municipalities:

V. Sveta, M. Demir Hisar
V. Pribilci, M. Demir Hisar
V. Kuratica, M. Ohrid
V. G. Lakocherej, M. Ohrid
V. Zubino, M. Oslomej
V. Trebino, M. M. Brod
V. Vogjani, M. Krivogastani
V. G. Koljari, M. Prilep
V. Selce, M. Prilep
V. Ribarci, M. Novaci
V. Sazdevo, M. Krusevo
V. Ivanjevci, M. Mogila
M. of Novaci

ALKA villages and municipalities:

V. Capari, M. Bitola
V. Medzitlija, M. Bitola
V. Papradnik, M. Mavrovo Rostusha
V. Novaci, M. Novaci
V. Crkivno, M. Veles
V. Milino, M. Veles
V. Chiflik, Cheshinovo Obleshevo
V. Pesirovo, M. Sv. Nikole
V. Dobrevo, M. Probistip
V. Dreveno, M. Probistip
V. Varoviste, M. Kriva Palanka

V. Psaca, M. Rankovce
V. Nikuljane, M. S. Nagorichane
V. Dragomance, M. S. Nagorichane
V. Strezovce, M. Rankovce
V. Sv. Petka, M. Sopiste
V. Rakotinci, M. Sopiste
V. Pagarusha, M. Studenicana

2) List of village/municipality level workshops with names of participating villages and municipalities, dates and names of where they took place

(A) Local Level workshop on AMPEP experience – phase 1, Bitola, 27.02.2008

Slobodan Mojsoski, v. Dolneni
Marjan Krsteski, mayor of M. Dolneni
Sevganija Ibrahim, v. Crniliste
Kzim Aslani, v. Krani Aravati
Dobre Krsteski, v. Sopotnica
Ace Delovski, Mayor of M. Sopotnica

(B) Local Level workshop on AMPEP experience – phase 1 Bitola, 26.02.2008

Oliver Markovski, v. Beranci
Lidija Markovska, v. Beranci
Dragan Acevski, v. Beranci
Zoran Trencevski, v. Vardino
Zivko Tasevski, v. Kuratica
Ruse Sekulovski, v. Kuratica
Giran Mickovski, v. Kuratica
Vlado Jovkovski, M. Ohrid
Slave Petreski, M. Mogila
Slavko Veleviski, mayor of M. Mogila

(C) Local Level workshop on ALKA experience, Veles, 29.02.2008.

Ljupco Dimitrov, M. Lozovo
Slagjan Tasdkov, M. Lozovo
Jovanka Daneva, M. Probistip
Ance Marinkov, v. Ziginci
Dimce Arsov, v. Ziginci
Miki Ampov, v. Ziginci
KOstadin Manev, v. Vojsanci
Jovica Petkovski, v. Vojsanci
Blagoj Tanevski, v. Vojsanci
Sasko Ristovski, M. Veles
Trajko Pavlovski, v. Vetunica
Laste Aleksovski, v. Vetunica
Vojo Jovanovski, v. Vetunica

3) List of participants in the central level workshops.

March 12, 2008 ALKA workshop

Denica Naumova, ALKA staff
Daniela Andreska, ALKA staff
Gjorgji Velkovski, ALKA staff
Snezana Kapsarova, ALKA staff
Nikola Jovanovski, ALKA staff
Sime Dimovski, ALKA staff
Zarko Dzipunov, ALKA staff
Vasko Hadzievski, Sida Skopje
Nuri Shanin, mayor of M. Zupa
Emilija Jovanovska, advisor M. Bitola
Emilija Dimitrovska, junior associate M. Bitola
Tatjana Petkovska, Head of the department for LED

March 13, 2008 AMPEP workshop

Liljana Tanevska, AMPEP staff
Snezana Urdarevik, AMPEP staff
Vilijam Hristovski, AMPEP staff
Marko Spasevski, AMPEP staff
Audunn Olafson, AMPEP staff
Stojan Trajkovski, senior associate M. Novaci
Slave Gjurginovski, senior associate M. Makedonski Brod
Milos Vojneski, Mayor of M. Makedonski Brod
Sanije Sadiku, Mayor of M. Oslomej
Selaudin Sadiku, associate M. Oslomej
Velli Kasami, associate M. Oslomej
Vasko Hadzievski, Sida Skopje

March 13, 2008 ALKA AMPEP shared experience

Denica Naumova, ALKA staff
Daniela Andreska, ALKA staff
Gjorgji Velkovski, ALKA staff
Snezana Kapsarova, ALKA staff
Nikola Jovanovski, ALKA staff
Sime Dimovski, ALKA staff
Zarko Dzipunov, ALKA staff
Liljana Tanevska, AMPEP staff
Snezana Urdarevik, AMPEP staff
Audunn Olafson, AMPEP staff
Skam Hristovski, AMPEP staff
Vasko Hadzievski, Sida

March 14, 2008 Summing up experiences – final workshop

Denica Naumova, ALKA staff

Daniela Andreska, ALKA staff

Gjorgji Velkovski, ALKA staff

Snezana Kapsarova, ALKA staff

Nikola Jovanovski, ALKA staff

Sime Dimovski, ALKA staff

Zarko Dzipunov, ALKA staff

Liljana Tanevska, AMPEP staff

Snezana Urdarevik, AMPEP staff

Marko Spasevski, AMPEP staff

Audunn Olafson, AMPEP staff

Elena Petkanovska, Ministry of Self Government

Valentina Gjosevska, Ministry of Agriculture

Katica Panzoska, Ministry of Agriculture

Vilijam Hristovski, ZELS

Daniel Asslund, Sida Skopje

Anders Hedlund, Sida, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Jan Haiusallo, PEP Bosnia and Herzegovina

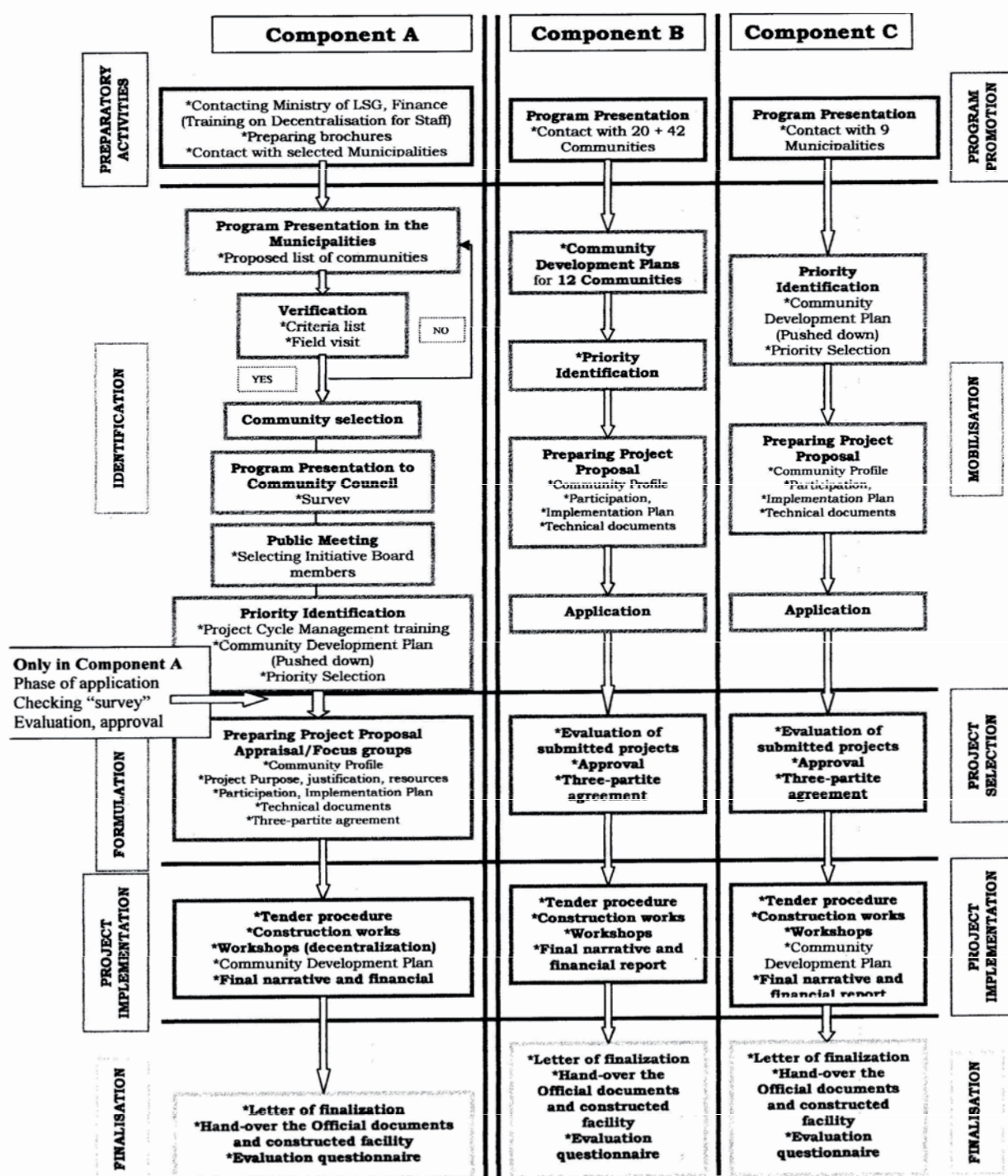
Biljana Dzartova Petrovska, Sida Skopje

Vasko Hadzievski, Sida Skopje

Annex 4 Steps in the Field Methodology of the Two Programmes

AMPEP

Step	Activity
1	Introductory meeting with Mayor explaining project concept, objectives, soliciting interest, verbal agreement to cooperate, if interest.
2	Criteria based selection of villages.
3	Signing of MoU with municipality; establishing contact point and counterpart
4	Introductory meeting with village councils explaining programme, role of stakeholders, conditions and demands for local contributions on villages that participate.
5	Open village meeting to present the programme. Since 2006 a MoU with village was signed in conjunction with this meeting
6	Training of village council members; village organisation, gender, environmental issues.
7	20 villagers making SWOT analysis to prioritise needs. Village council members only observers taking notes. Village council to prepare simple action plan for project idea based on the result of analysis.
8	AMPEP staff assess project idea
9	Project cycle management training of 2–3 villagers intertwined with preparation of project proposal. Village council members trained in Local Government legislation and role and responsibility of village councils plus office routines. In 2005 a MoU was signed with the village prior to step 10.
10	Signing tripartite agreement between AMPEP, the village and municipality concerned.
11	Assessment and approval of project proposal by AMPEP
12	Tendering and project implementation (by the village)
13	Preparation of project completion report by village



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