

Sweden's support for the return of
refugees in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Sustainable return for more than 50 000 refugees



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Self-help approach

Key to sustainable return

The 1995 peace agreement in Bosnia-Herzegovina states that all refugees and displaced persons have a right to freely return to their home of origin. Sweden, through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), has been a major contributor to the return process. According to a recent independent evaluation the Sida-financed programme has been very successful in achieving sustainable return for more than 50 000 refugees. One of the crucial elements of the programme is the self-help approach.

The Dayton Peace Agreement, signed in December 1995, dealt with the issue of the displaced Bosnians after three years of war. In order to mitigate the effects of the

ethnic cleansing during the war the agreement states that, “all refugee and displaced persons have a right freely to return to their home of origin”. Return was placed high on the international agenda and many countries and organisations moved in to support the displaced Bosnians.

Sweden, through Sida, is one of the major contributors to the return process. The assistance started already during the war, and between 1995 and 2005 approximately 1,5 million Euro has been disbursed to so-called Integrated Area Programmes, which aimed to establish sustainable returns for displaced persons. Sida and its implementing partners have contributed to the reconstruction of almost 15 000 flats and houses, and the return of at least 50 000 people. When the programme ends in December 2007



Back home. For a family in the village of Grapska in Republika Srpska the future looks brighter as they have been helped to rebuild their house.



The assisted self help approach has proved very effective in the Sida-financed programme. It involves the returnees in the reconstruction and strengthens social trust, collective confidence as well as self-esteem.

an additional 2 000 houses will have been reconstructed and another 7 000 people assisted. This means that Sida has financed about 15 percent of all the private dwellings reconstructed after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Swedish Rescue Service Agency (SRSA), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Caritas, PMU Interlife (which took the name Cross Roads International in BiH) and PEP International has been the major implementers of the Integrated Area Programmes. Sida has established long term cooperation

with these organisations based on the scenario where they are the project owners while Sida participates in the planning, choice of region and follow up.

Almost all the houses and flats are built through an assisted self help approach where the recipient provides an input in the form of work or activities carried out by, for example, a working team organised by the municipality. The implementing organisations have purchased

“Never in my life have I built anything, not even a chicken house. And now, I made it, a good part of it, with my own hands, I have built this flat, but that is almost unbelievable!”

One returnee in Sarajevo who was helped by Caritas to renovate his apartment.

The war and its effects

During the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina about 400 000 houses were destroyed and approximately half of the pre-war population of 4.2 million people fled from their homes. More than one million became refugees outside the borders of BiH; most into Croatia and Serbia. Almost one million people were internally displaced persons within BiH borders. Most of these had taken refuge with relatives and friends, or gathered together in empty private houses. Certain of these houses had been abandoned by others; some were summer cottages, barns, stables. About hundred thousand people had collected in schools and other public buildings.



A woman receiving professional help to rebuild her house. There were exceptions to the self-help approach for, among others, widows.



We are back! The message of the minority return to villages like Grapska is that the ethnic cleansing has failed.

Selection of areas

To promote sustainable return the selection of areas for programmes has been important. Sida and its partners have made these choices together based on strategic criteria. These include needs and possibilities for return, where Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), and in particular those who were to return to areas where they constituted a minority, have been prioritised. There has to be a real will to return, expressed by the whole community represented by a village council, and the returning families' willingness to rebuild their own houses and flats. Even when a village fulfilled these criteria and was offered help, Sida generally did not finance the reconstruction of all the houses in the village. In some cases the local village committees have borne total responsibility for the administration of the selection process; in other cases the implementing organisation has defined the selection criteria while the local committees have made the selection of recipients.

“It simply didn’t matter to be here or there, but home is better, and when you choose between two poverties, again, you are better off in your home – at least then you have your land, you at least have something.”

One of the returnees in Selo who was an IDP in a nearby village.

the material locally in BiH and distributed it, supplied a certain amount of technical assistance, and have in some cases financed specialist construction inputs. The principle of help to self-help has been used in order to foster a social process of rebuilding society. It has also been expected that the individual participation guarantees

to some degree a commitment to the process of return. In addition, self help cut costs for the financier with about 40%.

An independent evaluation carried out by Sida’s department for evaluation and internal audit, claims that the assisted self help approach has been very effective. The evaluation states that the involvement of the returnees in the reconstruction strengthened social trust, collective confidence as well as self-esteem. It involved them as actors,

rather than passive recipients of aid. This had important social and symbolic dimensions. In addition, returnees themselves regarded the assisted self-help method as fair for the very reason that it meant that more people could be helped for the same amount of money.

In order to achieve sustainable return the programmes have had an integrated approach, where interventions have been tailor made for each target area. Thus the programmes have included the repair of schools and healthcare facilities, local infrastructure, electricity lines and water distribution networks as well as mine clearing, all depending on local needs in the respective areas and on the assistance given by other actors. Generally, food security components such as seed, fertilisers, hand tools, livestock and sometimes machinery have also been provided to the returnees.

Over the years Sida has both developed the Integrated Area Programmes and supplemented them with interventions aimed at income generation and job creation. These projects have aimed at creating a livelihood for the returnees and others living in the target areas,



Sida developed additional programmes to the IAP in order to support the returnees to generate an income. This man has been able to start bee-keeping thanks to a microcredit.

and have resulted in about 24 000 permanent jobs

The assisted self help method in combination with the careful selection of areas and the integrated approach has been highly successful in achieving sustainable return. Depend-

“They treated us in such a fine manner, as people that we did not at all feel like paupers – and we were paupers – since, in fact, we were receiving help, charity. And we were thinking – even if we would get nothing – that they treated us as human beings.”

One tenant in Sarajevo helped by Caritas.



Muhammed Selić in Maglaj has been able to take a loan to build a stable for his cows. He takes part in the Cow How-project, supported by Sida. Cow How improves cattle-breeding and originates from a twinning-programme between the municipality of Hörby in Sweden and Maglaj.



Several programmes aimed at supporting the returnees were started in connection to the IAP. One project implemented by the Economic Cooperation Network (ECON) aimed at organic farming. In Gorazde ECON programme officers Eldina Muftić and Haris Obarcanin assists a family that just started to grow organic strawberries.

“Coexistence is possible

today. Who says it is not? It is possible.

There is no more ‘we will not live together’.

Besides, we have never lived together. We lived side by side. [...] They do not disturb us and we do not disturb them. They live and we live.

Normally.”

A 70 year old Bosniak
in Selo.

ing on location between
5 and 17 percent of the
houses are not in-
habited but visited
regularly by their
owners. Only a
small number of
houses are aban-
doned or occupied
by others. These are
outstanding figures in
Bosnia and Herzegovina.

An independent evaluation of the
IAPs assessed the programmes im-
pact on re-integration of communi-

ties and possible reconciliation. It
showed that neither the returnees,
nor people who stayed in the areas
during the war, interact much
across ethnic lines. This is true
both in rural areas and in towns.
Since interaction is so rare one
could hardly speak of social reinte-
gration, or of reconciliation. People
are not living together, but rather
side by side. However, it must be
emphasised that the return of the
refugees has enabled possibilities
for future interaction, and perhaps
even reconciliation, at local level.

Projects developed over time

Over the years Sida has both developed the Integrated Area Programmes and supplemented them with interventions aimed at income generation and job creation. Thus LWF in Tuzla has developed a training programme in modern agriculture with additional grants and micro credits for greenhouses, irrigation plants, seed, plants, fertiliser and machines which has provided returnees and many other Bosnians the opportunity to develop commercial agriculture. In addition to this, LWF established contacts between buyers and sellers of agricultural produce. They also administered collective transport of agricultural produce. Sida has also financed the so called Cow How project, aimed at effective small scale stock farming, and projects aimed at organic farming. In the latter case the Economic Cooperation Network (ECON) has been the major implementing partner. In addition, two large micro-credit programmes have been supported: World Vision and their micro-credit organisation EKI plus Cooperative Housing Foundation (CHF).

Halving poverty by 2015 is one of the greatest challenges of our time, requiring cooperation and sustainability. The partner countries are responsible for their own development. Sida provides resources and develops knowledge and expertise, making the world a richer place.



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