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Contract Number: 169-C-00-11-00102

Project: Sustainable Local Development Project in Serbia

Contractor: Chemonics Inc.

USAID COR: Mr. Sinisa Cadjo

Issuance Date: December, 2012

Document Title: Quality youth service – step toward sustainable local development

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USAID Sustainable Local Development Project

“Quality youth service – step toward sustainable local development”

Contract no. 01CSOSN01

Final report on the project

**“Quality youth service – step toward sustainable local
development”**

(15th March – 27th December 2012)

Prepared by: National Association of Youth Workers

Novi Sad, 28th December 2012.

The project is evaluated as very successful, all major predicted results have been achieved. The issue of professionalization of municipalities for provision of quality services for young people as important aspect for increasing young people participation in municipal decision making and employability as step toward sustainable local development has been addressed. This was done by using systematic approach working on three levels; 1) direct work with young people, 2) enhancing human resources in municipalities for provision of quality services, 3) Policy level - developing policies and systems that will assure sustainability, including raising awareness of decision makers and relevant stakeholders on importance of the issue. Additionally the project brought strong partnership among relevant international organizations and the government in advocating for this issue that is functioning beyond the project. Even if not originally planned by the project, due to provision of quality capacity building of 16 municipalities, project contributed to improving inter-municipal partnership among 16 municipalities (Youth offices).

If looking more specifically according to the set project results following achievements have been accomplished.

A) Result 1.

Increased professionalism in municipal youth services management through education and competency validation of YO representatives for the Youth work coordinator vocational standard and EU youth policy related context and funding opportunities in thirty municipalities.

Due to unstable political situation caused by the elections during the participant's recruitment process some difficulties occurred. In some of the municipalities encompassed by the project, human resource structure of local self government was in process of transition. Transitional government was in power while new government was still not formed, while in some of the municipalities Youth offices were closed. This caused lack of responsiveness from targeted municipalities, despite implementation of the risk mitigation plan (sending information letters before launching an open call, provided support by the Ministry of youth and sport, headhunting by telephone calls etc). At the end out of 32 targeted municipalities, 17 municipalities were reached through multi-modular training and validation. In total 35 applications were received, while 11 of the applicants withdrawn their applications during the selection process due to mentioned above situation. NAPOR believes that this process would be more smoothly implemented if an open call would be sent by regional USAID offices to local self government as it was originally planned and not only by NAPOR. This was later on confirmed by Youth offices as well. The NAPOR screening commission was formed that assessed candidates competencies whether they satisfied criteria for attending multi-modular training or validation of competencies. At the end of screening process, 21 candidates from 15 municipalities were selected for attending the multi-modular training (Nis- Medijana, Nis- Palilula, Leskovac, Sombor, Doljevac, Prijepolje, Novi Pazar, Presevo, Beocin, Sjenica, Zrenjanin, Temerin, Vranjačka Banja Raska and Uzice), and 3 candidates from 2 municipalities to attend validation (Novi Sad and Kikinda). With all candidates NAPOR signed a scholarship contract (24 contracts in total) obliging candidates to fulfill all obligations for the multi-modular training or validation.

YO coordinators successfully attended 5 modules (community youth work and adolescence, training skills, leadership in community youth work and conflict transformation, project management and EU funding, advocacy and youth participation youth work practice). The modules have been delivered by the 4 accredited NAPOR member organizations. In this way effective use and coordination of human resource expertise at national level have been undertaken. Beside education modules, each YO coordinator has been supervised and mentored

by the accredited supervisor coming from NAPOR member organizations. Through this way individual holistic approach has been provided to each YO coordinator, as one of the best concepts of learning and personal development.

YO coordinators gained competencies to deliver youth services more effectively and efficiently, and with greater transparency and accountability within local self-government. Youth offices play an important role in systematic youth care at local level. Youth offices have a main responsibility in coordination and monitoring of implementation of the local youth action plan including coordination of all relevant stakeholders (youth service providers) and assuring mechanism for young people participation in decision making. Quality services lead to improving cooperation and communication among civic sector, government institutions and local self-government that in effective and systematic way address the long-term local development issues and initiate policy making. There are many issues that are essential for young people, yet what seems to be the crucial one according to the projects implemented by the YO coordinators as their practical placements are employability and young people participation in decision making processes. According to researches that USAID-SLDP refers to “Labor Market and Skills in the Western Balkans”, FREN, November 2012, there is a general finding from practically all surveys that the labor force members lack to a large degree of the so-called ‘soft skills. Employers find that they are unable to obtain workers with the right mix of skills that are needed, and especially lacking in the modern ‘soft’ skills needed to enable increased productivity and competitiveness to overcome the economic downturn. According to *Occupation and skills survey* (2009) these skill needs include flexibility and adaptability, problem solving and decision-making skills; information management; and team working. It is concluded that the education system and curricula should be more responsive to labour market needs and that more attention should be paid to soft skills. It argued that the development of such skills should go beyond the traditional role of the educational system. Youth Work as a part of non formal education greatly contributes to building soft skills among young people – that later on contribute to their employability. Therefore, Youth offices play an important role in these complex process; one of the roles of Youth offices is to coordinate or organize youth work programs aimed at building soft skills in partnership with other service providers that are in line with local youth action plans; the other are information sharing, career guidance etc. Using this project as a reference, especially number of implemented projects (Result 2) it can be seen and concluded how it is important to continue to build capacities of Youth offices as a part of infrastructure at local level that will provide and coordinate service for young people employability.

At the end of the project, through process of validation and multi-modular training, out of 24 YO coordinators coming from 16 municipalities, 17 received certificates for the Youth Work coordinators (2nd level), 3 YO coordinators received certificate for Assistant Youth Work coordinators (1st level), 2 will receive certificates for the Assistant Youth Work coordinator upon submission final paperwork, while 2 YO coordinators will receive only confirmation letter that have been participated in the 4 modules. The issue of variation in the levels of certificates (certificate for the 1st level Assistant Youth Work Coordinator or 2nd level Youth Work Coordinator) has been discussed with USAID – SLDP and it was reached common understanding and decision. This occurred due to the fact that YO coordinators primarily entered in this process with great variation in previous working experiences and with different personal motivation. In some of the municipalities YO coordinators were employed only on the bases of political affiliations. Thus their motivation to professionally work with young people and competencies varied that in some cases had consequences on the level of gained competencies within this educational process. NAPOR is a national association of professionals that introduces standards in order to assure quality practice that lead to achievement of results at local level. Therefore, this issue has been raised with USAID –SLDP, and it has been reached agreement to issue two level certificates to YO coordinators. Unfortunately, even if 16 municipalities participated in this project it cannot be said that all 16 of them have been professionalized in relation to provision of quality youth services. The reason behind is that 6 YO coordinators (from 5 local self-government)

lost their positions within youth offices due to local elections and change of ruling coalition. Thus, 11 local-self governments through this process have been professionalized. This issue has been discussed with Nenad Borovcanin –the state secretary of MoYS, pointing out that positions of youth office coordinators should be depoliticized, and that ToR should include competencies for working with young people. This matter should be further advocated in partnership with Ministry of Youth and Sport towards the Ministry of Regional Development and Local Self-Governments (more under result 4).

Additionally, due to provision of quality capacity building of YO coordinators, this project contributed to improving inter-municipal partnership among municipalities involved in the project (Youth offices). Throughout this process, YO coordinators identified common needs and potential areas of partnerships for inter-municipal cooperation, where some of the actions took place even during the project implementation. The YO coordinators exchange good practices and provide support to each other at the level of youth offices. Such outcome is a great result, since it is based on the true identified need and not constrainedly imposed only by signed MoU – that often stay “dead word on paper”.

B) Result 2

Capacity of 250 young people built for advocacy and participation in local decision making processes in 25-30 municipalities.

Out of 31 projects that have been submitted and approved to be implemented in 16 municipalities, 29 have been successfully completed. Two YO coordinators (Elzana Sinanovic from Novi Pazar and Predrag Jovic from Leskovac) did not manage to successfully complete their projects according to NAPOR standards and curricula, although they started with implementation. The projects mainly covered following topics: active participation of young people in decision making processes of local self-government, issue of youth unemployment and entrepreneurship, youth activism in promotion of tolerance and sustainable ecological development. Throughout these projects 250 young people gained some degree of soft skills that will contribute to their employability and practical skills for advocacy and participation in local decision making in local self-government. As a result, 15 public actions as a part of advocacy for youth issues took place in 15 communities (*Please find attachment: “Short summary on the achieved results of the community projects”*)

Under Result 2. targeted municipalities provided co-funding (in-kind) in total amount of 74.000 RSD (2.480 RSD per a project) for the community projects that are implemented by the YO representatives.

C) Result 3.

Improved cooperation and coordination among key policy makers and CSOs towards the quality improvement of youth services provision at the local level.

Under this result the **Policy brief on youth services at the local level in Serbia** has been conducted.

The Policy brief represent an overview of existing services for youth that are offered at the local level including examples of good practices. The problem which has been explored in this paper is missing capacities among service providers in order to provide quality work. It has been seen that service providers are not coordinated, nor some of the services of some of them (the Office for Youth, civil society organizations) are integrated into a broader system of providing services to local communities. Basic recommendations suggest the need for system coordination to provide integrated services for young people and common strategic actions of all actors of youth policy in the direction of building standards and mechanisms for ensuring quality services for youth at the local, regional and national level.

Data collection was conducted by surveying key stakeholders involved in the planning and implementation of services for young people, such as local and central governments, civil society organizations that provide services for young, professional and personnel engaged in direct work with the beneficiaries. The state institutions during research process did not showed willingness to cooperate with civil society organizations – which is another issue that need to be addressed. There is recommendation that Policy brief should be additionally improved through desk research and interviews with representatives of state institutions in order to ensure wider understanding and more comprehensive data elaboration.

The importance of such a Policy brief is to create conditions where further changes and developments at policy level and in the practice will be evidence based.

The findings of the Policy brief have been presented on the international symposium that was organized in partnership with USAID Sustainable local development project, the Ministry of Youth and Sport, UNICEF-office in Serbia, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and British Council. *The main purpose* of the symposium was to promote cooperation and coordination among key decision makers and civil society organizations towards the development of quality services for young people at local level.

The objectives were:

- ✓ To introduce participants with examples of good practice in Serbia and other European countries about the possible systems of service provision for young people
- ✓ To improve mutual understanding and consensus on the role of local actors of youth policy in relation to the provision of services for young people, particularly regarding the role of local youth offices
- ✓ Encourage the development of integrated local services for young people and quality assurance mechanisms

56 participants as representatives of relevant Ministries, institutions, Local youth offices, CSOs and international organizations took participation at the Symposium, while original plan was 40 participants.

The symposium met the set expectations. Challenges and future steps in the development of services for young people at the local level in Serbia were mapped. One of the most important outcomes of the Symposium was improving cross-sector cooperation and partnerships of relevant stakeholders. This was done by formation of the working team consisted from relevant stakeholders coming from government institutions, civil society organizations, international organizations and representatives from ministries. The working team, in accordance with the conclusions of the Symposium defined the final recommendations and actions. With establishing working team that is

The final products of the working team were focused on:

1. *Proposal for the establishment of the Working Group of the Government of the Republic of Serbia (name, composition, competence ...) to deal with quality assurance of the National Youth Strategy at the local level;*
2. *Recommendations for future initiatives in the development and quality assurance services for youth.*

NAPOR held a meeting with the Ministry of Youth and Sport, where the main conclusions are agreed and future steps defined. The Proposal for the establishment of the Working group of the Government of the Republic of Serbia has been given to the Ministry of Youth and sport that will further present it to decision makers in the MoYS. It has been also agreed that the development of ToR for the quality assurance working group of the Ministry of Youth and sport is postponed until the National council for youth and the Working group of the Government of R. Serbia are formed. This is done in order to harmonize tasks, duties and authority of all three bodies. The ToR will be created by the working team that was formed at international symposium. Another, unexpected outcome of the project that indicate building strong partnerships among relevant stakeholders was formation of the so called “Initial team” that is formed of international organizations, government institutions and civil society organizations. The initial team will

continue to work beyond the project, and the main purpose is to exchange information, good practices and to initiate in the future joint projects/actions in order to assure quality of youth services. With this project, NAPOR has finally made significant changes in relation to issue of quality assurance of youth services. It is important to mention that NAPOR has been advocating for this issue for a past 3 years. The issue of quality assurance is finally on the top of agenda of the Ministry of youth and sport, and with this project it was managed to find a way how the issue of quality assurance of youth services should be regulated through policies as well. This is seen as a very important progress and change, that will continue to develop in the future.

Result 4.

The awareness of 40 municipalities rose for professionalism in the municipal youth services management, as well as its quality assurance and civic participation.

At closing event/graduation ceremony held for students attending multi-modular training course and validation of competencies it was gathered 50 relevant stakeholders (project partners – international organizations, representatives of municipalities, representatives of USAID-SLDP and Ministry of Youth and Sport, YO coordinators, representatives of civil society organizations.

The event was organized in partnership with USAID-SLDP and Ministry of youth and sport. The key speakers were: Snezana Klasnja- Assistant Minister of Youth and Sport, Suzan Fritz - Mission Director of USAID in Serbia, Ivana Jerkov – Youth office coordinator – Temerin, Dzermaludin Paucinac – representative of self-government, Novi Pazar and Vanja Kalaba - President of NAPOR. The main purpose of the event was to raise awareness among representatives of municipalities for the need of professionalism in the municipal youth services management, as well as its quality assurance and civic participation.

The main issues raised were:

- ✓ The need for the support of the future projects of this nature since they contribute to systematic capacity building of YO coordinators in line with “Guidelines for the implementation on National Youth Policy at local level and Youth Offices and Coordinators Competencies” (developed by the Ministry of Youth and Sport and GIZ). This represents one of the crucial steps to assure quality youth services and youth policy development at local level.
- ✓ In line with recent happenings where YO coordinators (that in most of the cases hold needed competencies) lost their positions due to local elections and change of human resources within local self-government, it was raised issue of effective usage of human resources and the need of depoliticizing youth offices. Depoliticization refers on the two aspects: a) ToR for the Youth office coordinators should include competencies for working with young people and policy development and it should be primary condition for hiring personnel. This position should be professional not political; b) Youth offices should not promote political attitudes and values of one political party or symbols of one ethnicity since this directly have an impact on profile of young people that should be reached in community. Youth offices should not be mechanism for recruitment of young people to become members of one specific political party, it should be public service for all young citizen of Serbia no matter of their political, ethnical, sexual or any other background and affiliation.

This event, present the very begging - where this issues have been for the first time publically spoken. NAPOR will in partnership with other relevant stakeholders continue to advocate for the systematic changes that will lead to quality assurance of the youth service provision.

From defined above, it can be concluded that this project was in many aspects pioneering and that initiated crucial processes for sustainable systematic development at policy level and in practice. This project was also in a way pilot - for the first time NAPOR mechanisms for professionalization of municipalities have been tested, where mechanisms are evaluated with

high quality and as very meaningful. It is very important to continue to support this kind of projects which is also recommendation by the Ministry of Youth and sport, since this is the only way how we can build strong and sustainable infrastructure for capacity building of young people at local level and by it enhance their employability and inclusion in decision making processes at municipal level.

Quote from Youth office coordinator Zorka Milosevic, Somobor (participant of NAPOR multi-modular training course)

"I have to admit that it was really not easy, it was very hard – the pace that program dictated was exhausting. Sometimes I questioned my self – Why do I need this and why did I put so many obligations to my agenda? Now, when I look back I can see how many things I learned. Truly – I learned practical things, I discovered that I have some skills (I was surprised by that), and I discovered that some of the competencies I do not have (and again I was surprised).

I want to thank you, for this 6 months fantastic experience. It was wonderful and above all useful. It changed me! Thank you for everything!

BY: _____

Name: Vanja Kalaba

Title: President of the Association

Date: 28.12.2012.