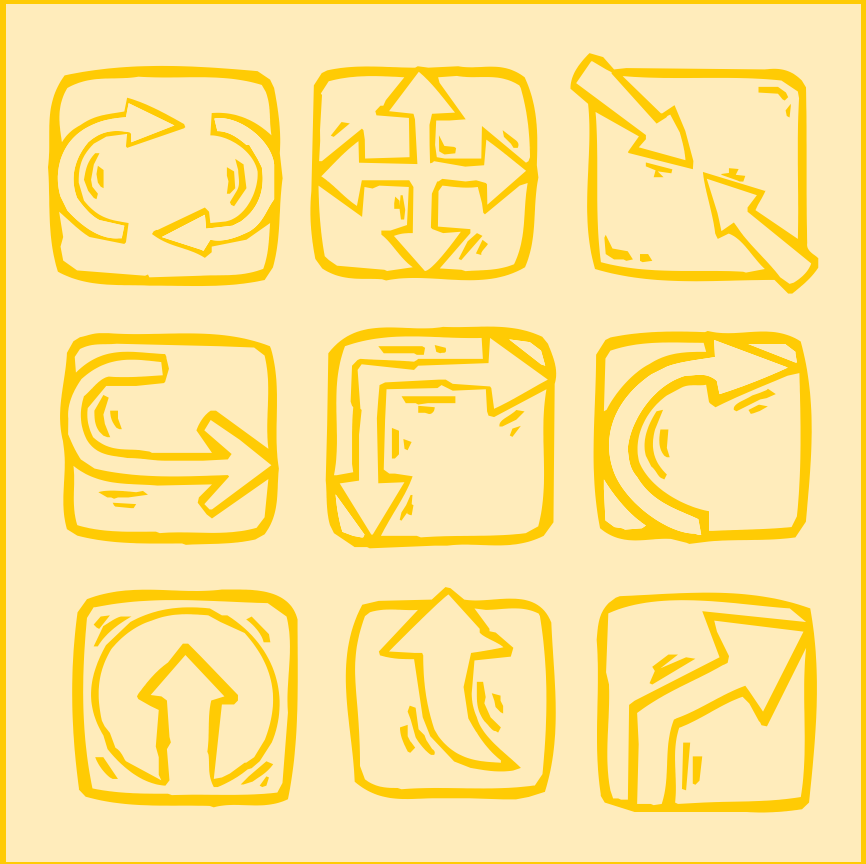

ACTIVATING communities

:: How to Engage Citizens in Local Level Projects ::

AED

Academy for Educational Development

USAID

UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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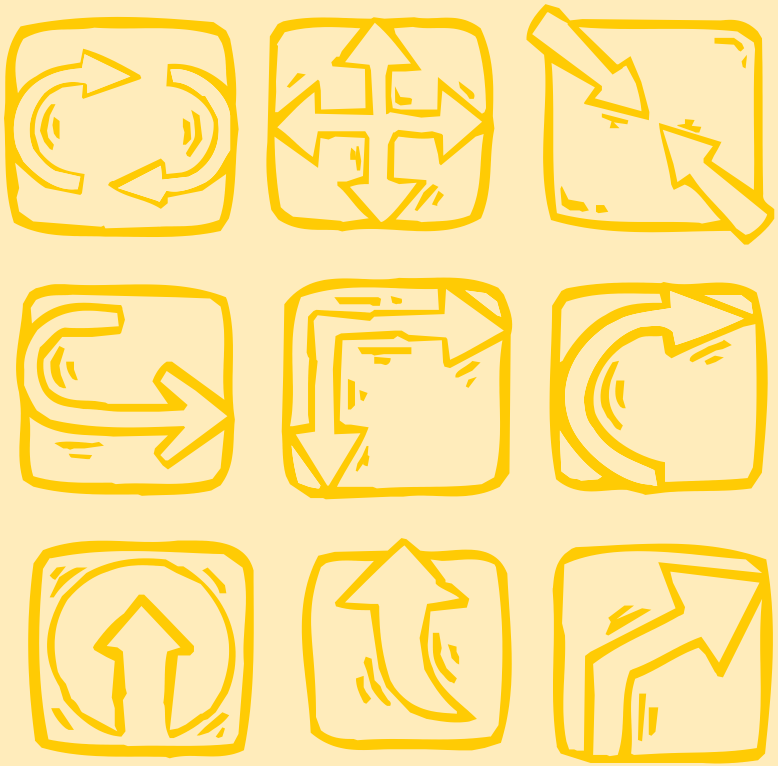


ACTIVATING communities

:: How to Engage Citizens in Local Level Projects ::

"My formula for successful work is to inform the local community about projects at the very beginning and invite citizens to actively participate".

Bajro Bajrić, president of the association "Roma for Roma Croatia"

:: Booklet PURPOSE ::

Citizen participation in community level projects contributes greatly to successful project implementation and long-term sustainability of project achievements. Active participation empowers citizens to solve local community problems and take action to improve the quality of life in their own communities.

The CroNGO Small Grants Program provides financial and technical support to projects that respond to concrete and clearly identified needs of specific communities. Funded projects bring about positive change at the local level through providing support directly to the communities in which they are implemented. All supported projects also have strong potential for continuation after the end of CroNGO funding. Most importantly, projects receiving CroNGO Small Grants include the active participation of local citizens.

Through the Small Grants Program, AED has become familiar with a large number of local NGOs and informal local citizens' initiatives (LCIs) throughout the country. These groups have improved the quality of life in their communities through the active involvement of local people in project activities.

This booklet was created in order to share examples of the success of grassroots organizations in Croatia and to provide practical recommendations on how other organizations can increase the involvement of citizens in community-based projects.

Citizens of Zagreb learning how to walk with guide a dog. Exhibition organized by the Croatian Association for the Training of Guide Dogs and Mobility from Zagreb (Central/North Croatia region)

:: CroNGO Program ::

Volunteers from the Youth Association BUM cleaning and arranging a small city park in Buzet, Istarska County (Istria, Primorje and Lika)

:: What do we MEAN by...? ::

To start off, we would like to offer a few definitions of terms used throughout this booklet, as defined by the CroNGO Small Grants Program.

Local Community :> People living in a particular geographic area, such as a neighborhood, village, town, city or county.

Citizen Participation :> Active non-financial and non-material contributions by citizens to the implementation of organized projects and activities conducted for the common benefit of a community. Citizen participation may take many forms such as the physical work of volunteers (e.g. building a playground, cleaning an illegal dump site, or renovating a community center) or "intellectual" contributions (help in planning and running events or provision of professional services). It is important to note that citizen volunteers are not paid for their work, but help out in order to improve the places where they live.

Volunteer :> Throughout this booklet, the term volunteer is used to refer to citizens from the community who take part in activities that benefit the wider community. These volunteers participate in projects of their own free will. Their participation is not contingent upon the receipt of any material rewards, nor are they paid for their work. Therefore, paid employees, consultants who receive honoraria and individuals performing alternative military service are not considered by CroNGO to be volunteers.

<: **Association for Healthy Life and Healthy Nature TRBUHOVICA** from the area of Prezid, and Čabar (Primorsko-goranska County) with the support of local residents, government, businesses and CroNGO, created a recreational path to promote tourism. Through this joint effort, the community cleaned a spring and created a path that informs visitors of local flora and fauna. Prezid, near the Slovenian border, has around 200 citizens. Local volunteers were organized into working teams based on the time they had available to take part in clean-up activities. Through this flexible approach around 40 local volunteers became actively involved in project activities. After each action the NGO organized community meetings to inform people about improvements that had been made on the path. Involvement of local volunteers in cleaning this path, and the NGO's constant information flow to the community about the path's development, increased the probability that these citizens will stay engaged and continue to maintain the path in the future. In this way the whole community will continue to work together to promote local tourism.

"Nobody is an island, we all have to accept each other, cooperate and help one another."

Ruža Falamić
volunteer of the Association MIGRA *from Donji Miholjac*

"…our opinion is that assisting in the reconstruction work on the future NGO Center in Slatina is one of the ways that we can serve our community."

Josip Šimić Šime and Danijel Cicvarić Cico volunteers that work on construction of the NGO Center in Slatina

:: Why is it IMPORTANT to INVOLVE citizens? ::

Participation of citizens in community actions directly contributes to the success of projects and the long-term sustainability of NGOs and LCIs in many ways, including the following:

:> Citizens who are actively involved in projects have a sense of "ownership" and are more likely to provide future support and take care of the end result of projects.

<: e.g. citizens of Karlovac worked on planting trees and creating green areas around children's playgrounds in cooperation with the association PCAP International; since they had put a lot of effort into beautifying their neighborhoods, local citizens plan to continue to maintain these green areas and protect them for use by children.

:> Citizens can provide skills and knowledge that the NGO/LCI doesn't have.

<: e.g. nurses from a Daruvar health clinic used their free time to provide care for elderly people; nurses, together with volunteers from Association DUGA, visit elderly community members and provide in-home assistance.

:> Involving citizen-volunteers sometimes allows an organization to conduct activities that otherwise they would not have the financial resources to carry out

<: e.g. the construction work that citizens are doing for the future NGO Center in Slatina would have cost the implementing NGO approximately 20,000 kn if they had hired a company.

:> Large groups of citizens working on a project increases the recognition for, and visibility of, NGO/LCI projects within the community and can increase the support they receive from local sources.

<: e.g. in Karlovac 350 citizens assisted in implementing the Campaign "Where to put which trash" organized by association PAN; citizens distributed 6,000 leaflets and participated in PAN lectures and public forums. This significant citizen involvement, and the resulting media coverage, caught the attention of a local waste removal company which agreed to place 65 "green" containers around the city free of charge.

:> Through participating in projects people learn about the needs of their neighbors and are able to further assist them.

<: e.g. Citizens assist the Association of Mentally Disabled Persons from Bjelovar in providing transportation to beneficiaries and organizing exhibitions of their products.
Through serving as volunteers, local people have become more aware of the needs and abilities of the disabled, thus decreasing negative stereotypes while improving integration of the disabled into their communities. ■

Volunteers of DUGA - Daruvar Center for Assistance and Support, Bjelovarsko-bilogorska Coutny taking care of their elderly neighbors (Western Slavonia)

Entertainment activities for citizens of Kozari Bok, Zagreb organized by Association "Friend" (Central and North Croatia)

:: Why do CITIZENS become involved in COMMUNITY projects? ::

Citizens may decide to work on community activities for many reasons, such as:

:> Feeling that what they have done is useful and important for the community.
:> Recognition and respect by their neighbors for their contribution to improving the community.
:> New relationships that they build while working with other community members.
:> Opportunities to gain new experiences and learn new skills.
:> The reward of seeing the long-term results of the projects that they have worked on.

<: **Cultural and Art Society "Posavina"** from Nova Gradiška, Brodsko-posavska County works in a community that had began to lose its cultural heritage during the latest war in Croatia. With CroNGO funds, the NGO implemented a project to revive community traditions and bring back positive feelings among community members. By involving around 200 citizens the NGO reconstructed old folk costumes and instruments to present their heritage both inside and outside of their community. For local citizens, it was very important to preserve their jeopardized cultural heritage and pass folk costumes and traditions on to the younger community members. Through this project, the NGO gathered all community members, who had become divided over recent years, to share their knowledge and memories. Local citizens assisted the project by working with the NGO to set up their premises, provided assistance in the organization of community events, and collected old traditional songs and materials from other local residents. The project introduced community members, particularly youth, to the value of active involvement in community projects. In the future, the NGO plans to continue to organize cultural events in the community and present their achievements in other communities. They will also organize dance courses for youth, with all activities involving older community members who will pass on their knowledge to younger generations.

"It's important to include citizens since the path that we are fixing can be used by everyone, not only by a small group of interested people. This is for the general good of the community, and that's why it's important that everyone gets involved." 1

Smilja Međugorac
volunteer of a Local Citizens' Initiative from Garešnica

"We involve citizens by offering them the possibility that instead of being passive observers, they can become active participants who make decisions related to the problems and needs in their community. So, they can improve and change things by taking the responsibility for solving important problems in the local community."

Ilinka Serdarević, president of the NGO Terra from Rijeka

:: What TYPES of PROJECTS do citizens get INVOLVED in? ::

Citizens tend to get involved when:

- A project is personally important to them and will have a direct impact on their lives or on the life of someone important to them (e.g. parents building a playground that their children can use or someone helping an organization that provides services used by a disabled friend).
- They feel that their contribution will help to change things for the better in their community, making it a nicer place to live (e.g. arranging a recreational path that will serve as a tourist attraction in their community, improving conditions of a community center, cleaning an illegal trash dump, etc).
- The problem being addressed by the project is immediately/currently important to people in their community. A solution to a problem can't wait and the issue being addressed is of crucial importance to people in the affected community (e.g. availability of drinking water through cleaned wells, response to floods, putting out a forest fire, etc.).
- The project results are realistic, visible and have a long-term benefit for the community (e.g. a new park or community center, raised awareness to an issue etc.).

Youth Association HYPER from Koprivnica, Koprivničko-križevačka County received a CroNGO grant to renovate a Youth Center in their city through the assistance of young local volunteers and significant in-kind and financial support from city authorities and the Koprivnica based company "Podravka". The project was designed as a response to the concrete needs of youth from Koprivnica to have a space in which to organize their free-time activities. To solve this problem, the youth group HYPER decided to contact the city authorities to request assistance in finding appropriate space for a youth center. The local government agreed to allow the youth group to use an old army barracks that was in need of restoration. HYPER, happy to have a space, began the renovation process and mobilized over 100 young community volunteers to help in painting and cleaning the premises. After a few months of hard work, the Center was ready to open and HYPER included around 50 city youth in deciding which activities to carry out in the space. The Center quickly became a focal point for youth activity in Koprivnica and already over 2,000 youth and other citizens participate in activities organized in the Center every month.

Local citizens from Odranski Obrež, City of Zagreb learning how to preserve their folklore clothes (Central and North Croatia)

HRVATSKO AKADEMSKO DRUŠTVO LIKOVNIH UMJETNIKA ZADAR
TURISTIČKA ZAJEDNICA ZADARSKE ŽUPANIJE
TURISTIČKA ZAJEDNICA RAŽANAC

ORGANIZIRAJU EKOLOŠKO-UMJETNIČKU AKCIJU

SmećArt 2003.

15. LIPNJA 2003. GODINE - NEDJELJA, U RAŽANCU

PROGRAM:

9 h - OKUPLJANJE SUDIONIKA KOD TURISTIČKOG UREDA

9 - 11 h - ČIŠĆENJE I PRIKUPLJANJE OTPADA

16 h.... ZABAVA I DRUŽENJE UZ DOMJENAK

SUDIONICI AKCIJE ĆE DOBITI PRIGODNE MAJICE

POZIVAMO VAS DA SE PRIDRUŽITE

Akciju podupiru Ministarstvo zaštite okoliša i prostornog uređenja i Turistička zajednica zadarske županije

Financijska potpora AED sredstvima USAID-a

Posters form different NGOs/LCIs inviting citizens to join their activity

:: How can ORGANIZATIONS ATTRACT citizens? ::

NGOs/LCIs need to:

:> Maintain close contact with their communities and keep people informed of what they are doing and planning. (through organizing community meetings or events, distributing flyers, hanging posters in central community meeting points, etc.). Always remember that talking with people (e.g. going door to door, holding community meetings) is much more effective (and requires more effort) than hanging up a poster somewhere.

:> Send out clear messages of why they are conducting certain projects and actions. What are you doing? Why are you doing it? What do you hope to accomplish? (through media presentations through local radio stations, television, local newspapers, brochures, and similar).

:> Be accessible to community members. Let people know when and where you are working and how to get in touch with you. Keep people informed about current actions and past project results. Maintain your visibility so that people can see what you are accomplishing. Involve the community in your needs assessments and project planning phases through questionnaires and community meetings.

:> Provide community members with opportunities to get involved. Ask them to help out.

<: **The Local Citizens' Initiative "Together"** organized an action to create a children's playground in the village of Branjin Vrh in Eastern Slavonia. Branjin Vrh has approximately 1,500 citizens of whom around 200 are children. Until now, the children did not have a place to play. With support from CroNGO, and in cooperation with local non-governmental organizations such as a firemen's club, women's association and the Red Cross, "Together" succeeded in organizing citizens to work together to create a playground. Around 100 local citizens participated in preparations and the actual building of the playground. Citizens found this initiative to be very important because they were able to concretely see the results of their joint work that created something positive in the lives of their children. While they worked together, local citizens spent time discussing how this kind of action was able to bring positive feelings into this war affected community. After the playground was completed, the citizens agreed to begin to meet regularly and plan new joint community actions.

"Citizens can make the greatest impact in their lives by getting involved in the local community. That's why it's important not to be passive."

Damir Konestra, president of the NGO Croatian Reading Room Draga from Draga

"I like to contribute to the local community and this center gives me this great opportunity. Also, I think that this way of assisting others will help me later on in my life. I like to participate in the activities of the Youth Center Domaci since I have lots of different areas of interest."

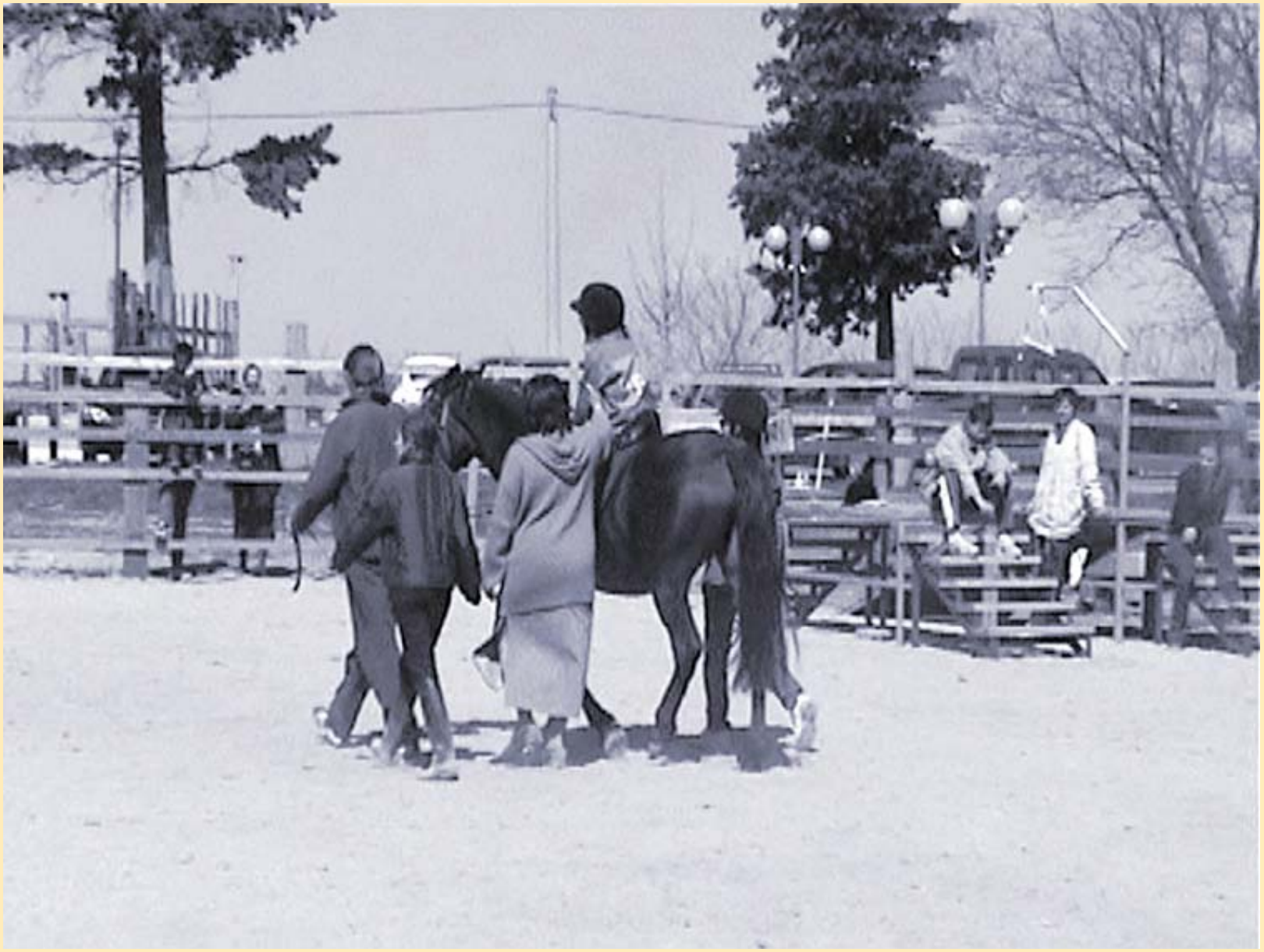
Marija Hrebac
volunteer of the Youth Center Domaći from Karlovac

:: HOW can organizations keep citizens INVOLVED? ::

NGOs/LCIs should:

- Carefully plan your actions so that they run smoothly and have a positive end result for the community so that volunteers feel that the work they have done is useful and necessary.
- Don't put out a call for volunteers unless you have a concrete plan of what they will do. Otherwise you cause frustration, disappointment and miss out on opportunities.
- Involve volunteers in planning your activities. Encourage them to share their ideas for new actions or activities. They know their community needs and how they can assist you in meeting those needs.
- Thank your volunteers for their time and efforts. Volunteers can be publicly recognized for their contributions through the media, certificates, and events.
- Keep previous volunteers informed on the results of the projects that they worked on and your plans for future activities.

:: **Vihor – Association for Therapeutic Horseback Riding** from Zemunik Donji in Zadarska County provides assistance to the physically and mentally disabled. Since its establishment, this NGO has operated with the support of 300 local volunteers who have helped out with riding sessions, constructed a corral and performed a variety of other crucial tasks. Many of these volunteers have a special interest in learning and gaining valuable experience from their participation in Vihor's activities. In fact, a large number of this NGO's volunteers are students at nearby universities who are studying to become special needs teachers or medical professionals. Vihor also is supported by volunteers who have heard about the good work being conducted by this NGO and want to become part of their success story. Vihor reports that many new volunteers become involved after learning about the organization from other volunteers. Vihor's therapeutic horseback riding program requires volunteers in order to function. Without active community participation, Vihor would not have been able to achieve its high level of success. In the words of one of Vihor's members "there is a lot of good will, you just have to get people to become active".



Volunteers of Association VIHOR for Therapeutic Horseback Riding from Zemunik Donji, Zadarska County, assisting a disabled child ride a horse (Dalmatia)

Community members participating in cross-sector cooperation (government, NGOs, business) discussion organized by the NGO SLAP from Osijek (Eastern Slavonia)

:: WHERE can I find more INFORMATION on citizen participation and volunteerism in CROATIA? ::

Contact information:

- **Centar za civilne inicijative (Center for Civil Initiatives) — CCI**, Park Ribnjak 1, Zagreb, tel: (01) 4819 516, fax: (01) 4920 795, e-mail: cci@zg.hinet.hr, www.cci.hr
- **Centar za mir, nenasilje i ljudska prava Osijek (Centre for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights Osijek)**, Županijska 7, Osijek, tel/fax: (031) 206 886 / 206 889, e-mail: cpos@zamir.net, www.centar-za-mir.hr
- **Udruga MI (Association MI),** Sinjska 7, Split, tel: (021) 346 582, fax: (021) 317 350, e-mail: udruga-mi@st.tel.hr, www.udruga-mi.hr
- **ODRAZ.** Lj. Posavskog 2/4, Zagreb, tel: (01) 4655 203, fax: (01) 4655 200, e-mail: odraz@zg.htnet.hr, www.odraz.hr
- **Organizacija za građanske inicijative (The Organization for Civil Initiatives) — OGI**, Kralja Petra Svačića 36, Osijek, tel: (031) 582 292, fax: (031) 582 293, e-mail: ogi@os.hinet.hr
- **RI Centar**, Blaža Polića 2/4, Rijeka, tel: (051) 324 760, e-mail: ri-centar@ri-hinet.hr, www.ri-centar.hr
- **SMART**, Blaža Polića 2/4, Rijeka, tel/fax: (051) 332 750, 320 792, e-mail: smart@smart.hr, www.smart.hr
- **Suncokret — Centar za humanitarni rad (Sunflower — Center for Humanitarian Work)**, Av. Dubrovnik 10, Zagreb, tel/fax: (01) 6551 715, e-mail: suncokret@suncokret.hr, www.suncokret.hr
- **Volonterski Centar Zagreb (Volunteer Centar Zagreb) — VCZ**, Bašćanska 11, Zagreb, tel: (01) 3013 829, fax: (01) 3013 736, e-mail: vc@zamir.net
- **ZOE — Centar za održivi razvoj ruralnih krajeva (Center for Sustainable Development of Rural Communities)**, Domagojeva 14, Zagreb, tel: (01) 4655 202, fax: (01) 4655 200, e-mail: zoe@zoe-centar.hr, www.zoe-centar.hr

"Everyone has wanted to change the world at least once. Nobody can completely transform it, but we can choose one little part that we can work on. For me to be a complete person, I feel the need to contribute, not just to get something in return, but for the common good. I'm happy that this NGO exists, where people with similar ideas, through a common effort, can successfully change a little part of the world for the better."

Renata Jelušić
from RODA, Zagreb

:: RESOURCES ::

- Manual for Community Organizers (Priručnik za organizatore zajednice), Milan Ivanović, Milan Medić, Aleksandra Milosavljevic, OGI — Organization for Citizen Initiatives, Osijek, 2001
- Manual for Work with Volunteers (Priručnik za rad s volonterima), Diana Topčić, Association MI — Split, Volunteer Center — Split, Split, 2001
- Manual for Volunteers (Priručnik za volontere), Diana Topčić i Nives Ivelja, Volunteer Center — Split, Split, 2001
- Guide for Effective Community Work: Development Depends on Your Participation (Putokaz za djelotvoran rad lokalne zajednice: razvitak ovisi upravo o vašem udjelu), Ivana Laginja i Lidija Pavić, ODRAZ — Sustainable Community Development, Zagreb, 2001
- Give Us Back Internet — a small manual about advocacy (Vratite nam Internet, mali priručnik iz zagovaranja), GONG, Zagreb, 2001

All publications available only in Croatian.

Citizens of Radučić village near Knin, Šibensko-kninska County reconstructing a water pump that will be their main source of water (Dalmatia)

:: The CroNGO Small Grants Program ::

The CroNGO Small Grants Program supports non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local citizens initiatives (LCIs). These organizations are themselves part of the communities that they serve, and their projects are supported in part through local contributions. CroNGO provides Small Grants of up to $25,000 for projects that are targeted towards:

- Creating concrete change based on specific community needs,
- Strengthening community leadership,
- Involving citizens in project activities,
- Increasing cooperation with local institutions such as government, media, schools, hospitals, businesses and others.

During the first year of the program implementation approximately 120 local community projects were supported throughout Croatia. This booklet is based on examples of the CroNGO supported projects and their achievements.

:: Bilješke ::

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