

Ethnic Integration and Conflict Resolution 2000–2007

Program for Cooperation between
Ethnic and Religious Groups in
Bulgaria

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Abbreviations

CA	Cooperative Agreement
CC	Conciliation Commission
EICR	Ethnic Integration and Conflict Resolution
GDA	Global Development Aliance
GOB	Government of Bulgaria
LI	Leadership Institute
MC	Mediation Center
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PBF	Partners Bulgaria Foundation
SO	Strategic Objective
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

The assets from this investment are a core group of people with increased self-esteem, knowledge, and a new model of relations, creating widely supported local civil society structures and practices that will continue to work for positive change in improving the quality of life in isolated communities.

Throughout the last decade, the position of ethnic minorities within the Bulgarian society and the ethnic integration has compelled attention, at all levels of the public space, as one of the most topical issues. The rural regions in the country, inhabited mostly by multi-ethnic populations have experienced sharp economic and social problems, including high unemployment, delays in social services, closed factories and schools, and rising social tension. In the current situation the political actors and the administration are kept hostage to at least two powerful and contradictory forces: the pressure on the part of the international community, mostly EU, to launch ethnic minorities targeted policies, especially with focus on Roma; and the internal pressure to cut down the welfare programmes, from which the ethnic minorities are seen to be the privileged beneficiaries.

The administration tries to cope with this situation by producing two different interfaces: one with the outside environment, which is dominated by production of increasingly sophisticated documentation, and one with the internal environment, which is dominated by imitative activities and self-reinforcing institutional inefficiency, which comes to edge of unacknowledged sabotage of the policy.

Partner Bulgaria Foundation with support and assistance from USAID designed and implemented a comprehensive program to build sustainable structures to promote inter-ethnic and inter-sectoral cooperation in multi-ethnic locations, facilitate ethnic conciliation, and increase the effectiveness of minority groups and those working with them to improve practical and ideological conditions within multi-ethnic communities.

The approach applied by the Ethnic Integration and Conflict Resolution Program among the diverse locations consists of three core tasks – cooperative/participatory planning, conciliation commissions and mediation, and a leadership training program. The Program definitely has an innovative character with respect to Bulgaria. While there are various projects and programs conducting training on local economic development, partnership promotion and implementation of small projects, in other programs there have not been any grants provided for the development of mediation and leadership. During the whole implementation period, beneficiaries received technical assistance so as to better absorb the training topics, prepare project proposals to apply for grants, and implement funded projects.

The overall approach, though systematic, was fragmented in search of models and structures to sustain the effort. The Program evolved to include follow-up work and consolidation towards a community development model with a special focus on inclusiveness and diversity. In other words, the Program became more dynamic to focus on activating civil society and building cross sector partnerships in ethnically diverse communities.

The main legacy of the Program at the community level is its enduring message about the importance of working in diverse communities, recognizing integration as equal participation, and understanding that respecting the rights and values of all ethnic groups depends on all sectors and their ability to interact in making their community a better place.

Introduction

In 2000, Partners Bulgaria Foundation (PBF) initiated an Ethnic Integration and Conflict Resolution (EICR) Program, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), to assist Roma to improve their economic, social and educational opportunities and ethnic relations in three pilot towns – Lom, Vidin and Kyustendil.

The activity had three core tasks: Community Planning, Training and Community Outreach – with each task having sub-tasks. The program aimed at facilitating ethnic conciliation and increasing the effectiveness of minority groups in improving the conditions in multi-ethnic communities. Each of the three tasks was accomplished with a core group of participants, including other stakeholders as appropriate, to build a critical mass of capacities and knowledge in each community to effect change in the targeted communities. The structures and capacities created (e.g. Conciliation Commission, cooperative planning facilitation skills, collaborative projects developed through the cooperative planning processes) continue to thrive after the end of the grant.

PBF small grants spurred the creation of more than three-hundred jobs in agriculture, farming, construction and other sectors in the three communities. With EICR Program assistance more than 2,100 students engaged in projects to reduce school drop-out rates. More than seventy young Roma were trained under the Leadership Institute program and are currently engaged in projects integrating Roma into society. PBF assisted the Government of Bulgaria in drafting a *Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma People by Creating Equal Opportunities for Access to the Labour Market and Decreasing their Reliance on the Social Assistance System*.

In 2003, PBF expanded the Program to include four additional communities with mixed Roma and Turkish populations - Asenovgrad, Dupnitsa, Samokov and Targovishte.

As outlined in the USAID/Bulgaria Graduation Strategy, the Mission emphasized the integration of minorities into mainstream society. However, the Mission's work so far has mainly focused on work with Roma communities, and has only included two communities with mixed Roma and Muslim populations. Therefore, USAID proposed to initiate a Global Development Alliance in regions with predominantly Turkish/Muslim populations. This led to improved access to secular education and minimization of radical fundamentalist influences in Bulgaria, improvement of the economic and social situation for Turkish/Muslim communities, and reduction in the propensity for ethnic conflict.

In October 2004, USAID/Washington's Global Development Alliance approved and funded PBF's proposal to expand the EICR activity to six additional communities with predominantly Muslim populations – Aytos, Devin, Isperih, Kardjali, Momchilgrad and Razgrad. This entailed modification of the existing Cooperative Agreement, including an increase to 50% for PBF's matching contribution.

The EICR activity directly contributed to USAID's Strategic Objective 2.3 - Local Governance More Effective and Accountable - and this SO's Intermediate Results. The activity supported the ability of local Muslim communities to strengthen their communities by increasing citizen participation in community decision-making and by increasing the level of community-generated resources used to address local problems.

This report outlines the activities conducted during the life of Cooperative Agreement and presents a comprehensive discussion about the program approach utilized, its impact and legacy.

Through examples and analyses, this report informs, illustrates, and provides the reader a basis to form an opinion about the implementation of the Partners Bulgaria's cooperative approach, accomplishments and opportunities for replication within the rubric of multi-ethnic community development.

Background

The Context

The fall of Communism in the Balkans precipitated a region-wide shift towards ethnic tensions and some pathological forms of ethno-nationalism and separatism. Bulgaria is a multi-ethnic country with a long history of coexistence of different ethnic groups – Roma, Turkish, Pomaks, Armenians, Jews, Greeks, etc. However, not all groups have integrated equally into Bulgarian society. When Bulgaria began its democratic transformation, the ethnic conflict inherited from the Communist past posed a serious threat to political stability and consolidation, if not to state cohesiveness itself. The ethnic issue has resisted democratic crafting as much as any other problem on the transition agenda.

Ethnic minorities suffered from poverty, unemployment, low educational levels, discrimination, and isolation from the rest of Bulgarian society. Bulgaria's economic crisis during the transition to a market economy only exacerbated such problems.

“Unemployment is definitely higher in the villages. It is not normal that there are villages ... where only 10 people work, for example. In the winter everything stops, the school, the healthcare center, and the mayor's office only work. Now in May movement begins, in Sofia, Plovdiv, here and there. This does not solve the problem, on the contrary it deepens it.”
(female, Devin)

The rural regions inhabited mostly by multi-ethnic populations have experienced sharp economic and social problems, including high unemployment, delays in social services, closed factories and schools, and rising social tension.

Ethnic intolerance can be destructive and dangerous because it can lead to high conflict potential. The deterioration of human capital in the country and the poverty caused by high unemployment, declining health, decreased school enrolment, and an increase in the number of groups living on low fixed incomes (pensions, social allowances, etc.) creates disappointment, lack of control, and lack of participation or sense of safety and protection.

“The harshest is the material status of the Roma. Very often they determine themselves as Turks or as Bulgarians. The reasons for their situation is their low education, that they do not feel like working, look for the easy way out, live day in day out. The other two groups - the Bulgarians and Turks, are relatively equal. Nevertheless, the Turks are a little more entrepreneurial and that's why their situation is better”.
(Representative of the Social Assistance Directorate in Razgrad)

Minorities, ethnic integration and equal opportunities have always been challenging and unpopular issues, with much politicized interpretation. Increased nationalistic debate among political elites, media reporting, and growing support to extreme or more moderate nationalistic political platforms in the past years has raised questions about the vulnerability of democratic values in Bulgarian society.

PBF/USAID Response

The EICR Program emphasizes ethnic integration, an issue of paramount political and economic importance for Bulgaria. Moreover, the Program focused on relatively unpopular activities - those not on the agenda of the local authorities for a variety of reasons.

On April 11, 2003, Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov said that poverty and unemployment that plague his country's minorities threaten the ethnic peace. Parvanov said that high unemployment a sharp decline in minority children who go to school, and lack of housing for young families were the main social problems in minority populated regions. He cited statistics according to which a total of 28,000 children --mainly from minorities-- stop going to school every year because their families can't meet the costs.

"The big danger is ... that at a certain stage the smallest spark of tension may ethnicize those social and economic problems," Parvanov said.

- Bulgarian News Network.

PBF with support and assistance from USAID designed and implemented a comprehensive program to build sustainable structures to promote inter-ethnic and inter-sectoral cooperation in multi-ethnic locations, facilitate ethnic conciliation, and increase the effectiveness of minority groups and those working with them to improve practical and ideological conditions within multi-ethnic communities.

Partners Bulgaria's Cooperative Approach

The approach applied by the EICR Program among the diverse locations consists of three core tasks – cooperative planning, conciliation commissions and mediation, and a leadership training program. These were implemented in a very similar way in each of the communities, with some modifications to respond to local differences and the development of the Program itself during its different phases.

Startup and Needs Assessment

Entry into each community started with promotion of the Program, meeting with local stakeholders and creating a local PBF office (office space, equipment and local coordinator) to provide coordination and logistics, and to organize work in the community. Selection of the local coordinator was conducted as a participatory process – announced locally and decided in consultation with local stakeholders. From 2004, the Program strategy was to, whenever possible, ensure local coordination using existing local organizations.¹ The needs assessment process included in-depth interviews and focus groups with key local stakeholders: community leaders, local government and institutions and civic groups working in the broad areas of education, social service provision and business. It served to identify key stakeholders and their interest in participating in different parts of the Program. In the later stages of the Program, the needs assessment was combined with an Index of Ethnic Integration – a community poll conducted by an independent sociological agency.

Community Cooperative Planning

¹ In Ayatos, Isperih, Devin, the EICR is hosted by the business centers established in the framework of the JOBS Program of the UNDP, and in the case of Momchilgrad – it is assigned to the Chitalishte (local community center).

The objective of this task was to create sustainable community space, where different social, economic and ethnic groups could build positive relations and propose and implement concrete cooperative initiatives to benefit the whole community. This task consisted of two main sub-tasks:

Training in Cooperative Planning in three key areas of community issues – social services, local economic development and access to education.² The training opportunity was announced widely through the local media and through local institutions, and participants were selected based on the findings of the initial needs assessment. The interactive training consisted of three modules: 1) participatory community planning; 2) inclusive community development models; and 3) project cycle management. The first module was standard for all participants. The second module of inclusive community development had both general and issue-specific parts related to its application in the three developmental areas – social services, local economic development and education. In this module, training is combined with introducing and sharing practices of other projects supported in other communities by the EICR itself or of other programs that work in the relevant area. The third module included a supplemental business plan development training for participants working in the area of local economic development.

Grants to support local initiatives that emerged based on the cooperative planning training processes. A closed call for proposals was announced within the three cooperative planning groups that participated in the cooperative planning training. Provision of grants was made based on clear procedures adapted in each of the stages of the Program. Criteria for selection were based on priorities identified in the planning processes, as well as the objectives of the Program – all initiatives had to be interethnic and partnership-focused. Applicants were required to submit a partnership declaration with concrete contributions from local government or other stakeholders. In the first two Program phases, applicants submitted a full proposal. Later, in 2005, a pre-selection stage was introduced in which applicants submitted project ideas, and then the best candidates were invited to submit a full proposal. During all three phases of the Program, grant application assessment was done by an expert committee consisting of a number of independent experts from other donor or international programs (and business consulting in the area of economic development). In addition, the PBF team provided ongoing technical assistance and monitoring of the projects during their implementation.

A total of 200 projects were developed and implemented by community stakeholders across 13 municipalities. The number of supported initiatives per municipality ranged from 10 to 23. The projects were 10 to 12 months in duration, and all were developed as a partnership between at least one NGO and another relevant institution. Each was approved based on signed partnership agreements, with a concrete contribution from all parties.

Setting up Conciliation Commissions

The objective of the Conciliation Commissions (CCs) was to assist in the creation of neutral, community-based institutions (panel of citizens representing the ethnic diversity in the community) that would serve as the focal point for efforts to promote conciliation and resolve or prevent ethnically-motivated conflicts. The idea was to stimulate citizen participation in addressing common problems (including those related to ethnic issues); gather information on

² The ‘social issues’ area was added in 2002-2003 based on identified needs in the first years of the program in Lom and Vidin, and remained part of the model in later applications.

minority-majority relations and potential conflict; organize hearings on issues of concern to the minority community; mediate disputes and conflicts related to ethnic minorities; and facilitate dialogues between the ethnic groups.

The conciliation component started with wide publicity to introduce locally the CC concept and activity. This included publications and announcements in the media, meetings with various stakeholders and official presentations to local decision makers, civil society and community leaders. Nomination and selection of potential participants resulted from local consultative processes. Once commission members were selected, they participated in a training program consisting of three courses in conflict resolution-based problem solving methods. PBF assisted the established commissions with additional training and advice in publicity and case resolution.

Since the end of 2004, in addition to starting CCs in new locations, PBF also developed a strategy for institutionalizing the existing commissions. The CCs were renamed mediation centers, which was much less controversial in the public space. PBF was very successful in advocating for the adoption of the Mediation Law (1994), based on which mediation is recognized as a service for alternative dispute resolution. Gradually, some mediation centers were institutionalized as part of local government, established by PBF and registered as local Partners associations. In other locations, the mediation centers function as a group of certified local mediators, based on the regulations of the 1994 law. To further these efforts, in 2005, PBF introduced technical assistance and grants to support local Partners associations, mediation centers and the core group of the Leadership Institute in promoting community problem solving mediation and conducting civic forums.

The Leadership Institute

The objective of the Leadership Institute was to equip a core group of minority representatives with leadership, management and networking skills for effective community organizing, enabling them to advocate for the interests of their communities and to cooperate with the majority community in solving problems of common interest. It was envisaged as a two-year capacity building program for about 25 minority leaders, consisting of nine intensive training sessions. A selected group of seven or eight talented participants continued as trainers to assist other training in their community or act as co-trainers in nearby communities. As the training program expanded to more ethnically diverse communities, it was renamed – from the Roma Institute, to the Minority Institute, and finally the Leadership Institute. Starting in 2004, additional English language training was included.

Over the years there were changes to the strategy related to sustaining and institutionalizing the Leadership Institutes. If in the beginning they were seen as one of the sustainable community structures, later they were an integral part of the overall Program and became a support network to the local Partners associations. In addition, a variety of initiatives supported exchanges and bringing participants of the Leadership Institute together on the regional or national level.

Two more training and interaction activities accompanied the above model:

Embracing Diversity: The objective was to further stimulate tolerance and multiculturalism through an additional series of 10 training sessions for a variety of community stakeholders (institutions, business, civic groups and NGOs) on a variety of themes related to

understanding the benefits of diversity and overcoming ethnic bias and prejudice. Trainers identified in the Leadership Institute served as co-trainers for these sessions.

Organizational development and capacity building: This included a series of ten sessions to build the capacities of organizations and institutions working with or serving the minority communities - governments, NGOs and businesses.

The Program definitely has an innovative character with respect to Bulgaria. While there are various projects and programs conducting training on local economic development, partnership promotion and implementation of small projects (though none pursue so many goals at once), in other programs there have not been any grants provided for the development of mediation and leadership.

In addition, during the whole implementation period, beneficiaries received technical assistance so as to better absorb the training topics, prepare project proposals to apply for grants, and execute funded projects. Project implementation was monitored on a regular basis, and implementing groups received hands-on additional assistance as needed.

The overall approach, though systematic, was fragmented in search of models and structures to sustain the effort. Initially, the Leadership Institute and the Conciliation Commissions were expected to be the final institutional products and the legacy of the Program. The Program later evolved to include follow-up work and consolidation towards a community development model with a special focus on inclusiveness and diversity. In other words, the Program became more dynamic to focus on activating civil society and building cross sector partnerships in ethnically diverse communities.

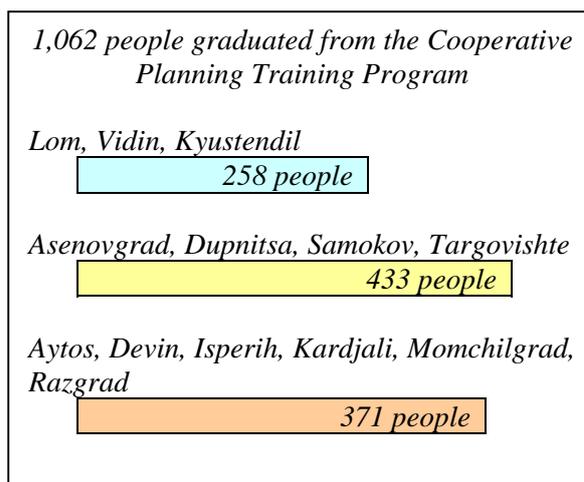
Local Community Development

Addressing issues of local economic development, educational advancement and social service improvement

In each of the target locations, PBF facilitated three, one-year cooperative planning processes on issues of economic development, educational advancement and social support for minorities. This taught the participants to organize and facilitate participatory processes and enabled them to apply these skills in their communities.

Within the organized trainings, meetings and discussions, participants learned more about situational analysis, problem identification, setting up priorities and objectives, and finding solutions.

All participants in the training on cooperative planning established joint teams involving other representatives of their community, and developed partnership proposals for micro-projects in the areas of educational advancement, social service improvement, and local economic development.



Participation in the process of development and implementation of projects created opportunities for active team interaction and helped participants gain new self-confidence by finding alternative models and through the efforts of multi-disciplinary teams. Two hundred micro-projects were implemented to address issues of importance to local multi-ethnic communities.

In Asenovgrad, a micro-project to establish a computer lab in the Roma neighborhood was financed. As a result, five households in the neighborhood purchased personal computers and have Internet access.

In Lom, Kyustendil, Asenovgrad, Kardjali, Momchilgrad, Devin, Isperih and Razgrad, the micro-projects aimed at a quality change in lifestyle by raising career qualifications, obtaining a profession and providing a work place - thereby creating an opportunity to transition from social aid to employment.

Some of the supported projects were implemented in isolated villages. In this way, the activity of the rural population increased and they became more active in civil participation, thus opening people's eyes to contemporary models of life.

Help Comes Just in Time for Small Business

Small business owner creates job opportunities for community

Tucked away on a side street near the central square of Momchilgrad town, the Egeya-Yumer Salim apparel factory is a bright room where 12 employees work on multicolored sports apparel and crisp white and green hospital uniforms. The company supplies uniforms to hospitals throughout Bulgaria, and recently won a new contract to supply uniforms to a Greek company. But a few years ago, says owner Yumer Salim, he and his wife almost had to close their business because they couldn't afford to buy a heavy-duty running stitch sewing machine and other equipment needed to sew stripes, belts and other features onto clothes. Orders had to be sent to another factory for completion, which sometimes delayed production.

In 2006, Yumer was awarded a PBF grant of approximately \$5,000, which enabled him to buy the new equipment the company needed to fulfill orders on time and satisfy clients. Now he focuses on expanding his company's work for the Greek customer, and hopes to increase staff to 20 employees within the year. "USAID saved my business," says Yumer.



The company's employees reflect the ethnic diversity of Momchilgrad, a small town nestled in Bulgaria's Rhodope Mountain range in an area whose population is primarily ethnic Turkish and Bulgarian. The grant from PBF enabled the company to hire six additional workers from the local community, an important achievement given the area's relatively high unemployment.

Responding to the Needs of the Disabled

"Our most important achievement is that using alternative methods of support we facilitated the integration of disabled people from different ethnic groups in society." Shenai Bekir, Regional Coordinator of the Union of the Disabled in Kardjali.

The energetic commitment of Shenai Bekir, a regional coordinator of the Union of Disabled in Bulgaria, breathed new life into an information and advisory center for disabled people in the southern town of Kardjali. The center, aptly named "From Us, For Us," inhabits a modest office space provided for free by the city of Kardjali. A renovation transformed the center's dreary appearance and now it is cheerfully decorated with colorful children's drawings.

Disabled people of different ethnic origins from Kardjali and neighboring villages have a cozy place to meet and socialize. Social consultants and volunteers extend a friendly helping hand. More than 50 percent of the funding for the one-year project was provided by PBF/USAID under the Interethnic Interaction Program.

Four consultants of Roma, Turkish and Bulgarian ethnicity assist visitors with filling out applications and forms for social and health services and provide free legal advice on a bi-weekly basis. They also offer trainings on career development such as how to write a CV, how to find a job, and presentation skills. Special interest groups were formed to address specific problems shared by some disabled people, like disabled mothers. Volunteers from grades 9-11 of a Kardjali school organized a course on computer literacy for the disabled at the club. Approximately 900 of the region's 1,000 disabled people have used the club's services at least once during the past year, says Bekir.

The Center's efforts to find employment for disabled people have reaped success. Wheelchair-bound Dimitar Petkov works as the project accountant. The consultants assisted a young woman missing fingers on both hands to find a job in a second-hand shop, and helped a 25-year old disabled musician start work at the Turkish community center in Kardjali.

The Day Center and the Union of the Disabled-Kardzhali also engage in advocacy activities. As the result of a joint project with the Kardjali Municipality, 42 street crossings in downtown Kardjali were reconstructed to be wheelchair-accessible.

Improving relationships and cooperation between ethnic groups and local institutions

The EICR Program also targeted implementation of priority areas related to social inclusion – education, employment, healthcare and provision of a better lifestyle in the towns and villages. The results of the Program provide positive examples that may be replicated. On the whole, the Program helped all ethnic groups to realize that integration is possible – that it is possible to get out of the vicious cycle of poverty and functional segregation.

The majority of the participants in the Program adopted the ideas and practices of cooperation and partnership. Successful partner relationships with municipal authorities have provided a catalyst to change the prior attitude where government and institutions were not accessible – this is a prerequisite for renewed self-confidence with the micro projects teams.

In most of the municipalities where the program was implemented, the municipal authorities recognized the established mediation centers as an institution for maintaining interethnic dialogue, and provided municipal premises for the centers on a long-term basis.

The municipal authorities in Aytos and Kardjali effectively supported the micro-projects for educational advancement and social service improvement by contributing up to 10% of the budgets of supported organizations.

Our Successes

Photography Project Keeps Communal Memory Alive

At the request of the Kardjali Mayor, Hasan Azis, the exhibition of photos from the Roma community was put on temporary display at the Kardjali City Hall.

Societal prejudice persists regarding Bulgaria's Roma minority, and many non-Roma Bulgarians are unaware of Roma traditions and customs. A recent project in the town of Kardzhali in southern Bulgaria sought to bring the Roma community out of its isolation. The project preserves a visual chronicle of the colorful lifestyle and customs of the Roma who live in Kardjali's Borovets district and identify themselves as Turkish and Muslim. Partners Bulgaria Foundation/USAID Interethnic Interaction Program, funded the initiative.

A local company, Spektar M&L, organized photography classes for 18 people, mostly from Borovets district. For ten months the young participants learned about the history of photography, techniques of taking pictures, composition and lighting, and had practical training in shooting film and video. They went out into their community and captured simple and celebratory moments in the lives of local residents, such as

children playing, women making traditional foods, and young brides preparing for their weddings.

Many of the pictures were published in the Kardjali newspaper 'Spectrum'. The best photos became an official exhibition at the community center in Borovets. The Kardjali city website provided information about the exhibit and stimulated widespread interest, including from the mayor of the 76,000-person city, Hasan Azis. On his insistence, the exhibition was put on temporary display at the Kardjali City Hall in July 2006, where it attracted positive feedback from visitors.

Spektar M&L owner Mladen Savov hired two of the best-performing participants in the course to work full time for his company. Mesut Ahmed was trained to be a cameraman and has already received requests to film Roma weddings. Mustafa Sevim, who previously considered photography only a hobby, gained the professional skills to work for the local newspaper as a photo reporter.

In order to become sustainable, the project intends to open a small photo lab in Borovets neighborhood to serve the needs of local inhabitants for quality photo printing, photos for official documents, weddings and other events. Mesut and Mustafa will staff the shop. Furthermore, the hugely successful photo exhibit may travel to Sofia.

Increasing the level of community generated resources to address local needs

More and more representatives of local authorities (municipal administration, magistrates, etc.) started to recognize the importance of civil/non-governmental organizations as partners in solving the issues of local development. To a great extent this is due to the EICR Program, which is partly due to the fact that in some of the municipalities civil society had been very poorly developed before the intervention of PBF.

The micro-projects were supported with small grants amounting to BGL 2,445,000. This amount multiplied through the generation of matching local resources amounting to BGL 2,890,000 which were contributed to micro-projects. The table below presents the distribution of resources in terms of the number and locations of sub-grants, and contributions to subgrant budgets.

Municipality	Total sub-grants			
	Number of sub-grants	Total budget (in BGL)	PBF contribution (in BGL)	Applicant contribution (in BGL)
Lom, Vidin, Kyustendil	59	2,003,014	1,004,635	998,379
Asenovgrad, Dupnitsa, Samokov, Targovishte	67	1,388,021	723,327	664,694
Aytos, Devin, Ispernih, Kardjali, Momchilgrad, Razgrad	74	1,944,682	716,763	1,227,919
Total	200	5,335,717	2,444,725	2,890,992

Educational Advancement

Seventy-two projects were in the area of educational advancement. They comprised a variety of initiatives for development of teaching materials, work with children in school or out of school, preparatory classes for pre-school children and various cultural activities – clubs, theater performances, music and dances; work with parents and teachers, etc. They were implemented by partnerships of kindergartens, schools, *chiltalishte* (local cultural centers), Roma and other NGOs, relevant school authorities and local education administrations.

Municipality	Educational advancement sub-grants			
	Number of sub-grants	Total budget (in BGL)	PBF contribution (in BGL)	Applicant contribution (in BGL)
Lom, Vidin, Kyustendil	21	403,054	312,380	90,674
Asenovgrad, Dupnitsa, Samokov, Targovishte	23	331,415	249,780	81,635
Aytos, Devin, Ispernih, Kardjali, Momchilgrad, Razgrad	28	378,613	256,920	121,693
Total	72	1,113,082	819,080	294,002

Social Services Improvement

Sixty projects in the area of social services were developed by partnerships of local social services office, local union of people with disabilities, issue-based NGOs, community groups and leaders, etc. They worked in various areas to improve service provision – establishing social support centers, providing better access to service for people with disabilities, working to integrate children with disabilities, and improving access to health care, especially in Roma communities, through the provision of Roma healthcare mediators.

Municipality	Social services sub-grants			
	Number of sub-grants	Total budget (in BGL)	PBF contribution (in BGL)	Applicant contribution (in BGL)
Lom, Vidin, Kyustendil	16	445,206	293,116	152,090
Asenovgrad, Dupnitsa, Samokov, Targovishte	20	330,167	225,747	104,420
Aytos, Devin, Isperih, Kardjali, Momchilgrad, Razgrad	24	367,250	236,832	130,418
Total	60	1,142,623	755,695	386,928

Local Economic Development

Sixty-eight projects were in the area of economic and business development. They included various business initiatives of individual or larger companies from different localities to start up or expand their business in various areas – agriculture, processing or production, crafts, retail, service, trade, etc. In most cases, grants were requested for equipment or renovation of premises, and in some cases, for organizing training and capacity building. In each case, the condition for the grant was the development of new jobs for people from minority communities.

Municipality	Economic development sub-grants			
	Number of sub-grants	Total budget (in BGL)	PBF contribution (in BGL)	Applicant contribution (in BGL)
Lom, Vidin, Kyustendil	22	1,154,754	399,139	755,615
Asenovgrad, Dupnitsa, Samokov, Targovishte	24	726,439	247,800	478,639
Aytos, Devin, Isperih, Kardjali, Momchilgrad, Razgrad	22	1,198,819	223,011	975,808
Total	68	3,080,012	869,950	2,210,062

Learning About Differences, and Celebrating Them

Children from the small Bulgarian town of Momchilgrad who participate in the “Beyond Difference” project are shy but proud when they say they know more about other religions than their fellow students or even their parents.



Conceived by project leader Miglena Petrova from the local NGO Faith and Love Association, “Beyond Difference” gathers an ethnically diverse group of students from Momchilgrad’s Bulgarian, Turkish and Roma populations, and helps students to value the diversity of their community and broader society. The students learn about the history and traditions of the area’s dominant Christian and Muslim religions, as well as other religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism.

The program includes opportunities for site visits to historic places in the Rhodope Mountain region. Some students say their favorite part of the project is learning about how children of different religions celebrate their religious festivals and having the opportunity to try new foods and sing new songs. Their parents are also involved in the project and benefit from the specialized instruction their children are receiving.

Girls from a Muslim high school in a neighboring village work as volunteers with the project. For the girls, this provides a unique opportunity to interact with non-Muslim children. For some of the children in the project, the Muslim girls’ participation provided their first exposure to young women practicing a more conservative form of Islam and wearing traditional headscarves.



Mediation for Peaceful Conflict Resolution

Applying a consensus approach

Mediation as an alternative to court for resolution of individual cases, though important, did not prove to be the main instrument for preventing tension and ethnic conflicts. What worked well was mediation for community problem solving – mediating by a civic structure or coalition to communicate varying interests, convene stakeholders, facilitate agreement, and suggest solutions. This was mostly part of the function of effective community organizing and local advocacy, stimulating identification of solutions in a cooperative way. Such community mediation is of critical importance for improving relations in interethnic communities.

More than 300 people from different professions and ethnic groups received training in mediation and alternative conflict resolution. A number of them have been certified as mediators by the Ministry of Justice, based on the existing legal provisions of the Mediation Law. These groups functioned as formal or informal mediation centers or services as part of the registered Partners Associations in nine towns and in some of the local organizations that hosted the Program. A brief profile of these mediation and community organizations is provided in Annex 1.

The level of activity in mediation and the number and type of cases varied across mediation centers. A total of 431 individual cases were resolved in the medication centers and through services of the Partners' associations in the seven municipalities from the first and second phase. Most of the individual cases resolved were family disputes (between 70% and 90% depending on the municipality). Other types of resolved disputes related to employer/employee issues, property issues, neighbor disputes, and a few business or financial issues. Most of the cases were requested by individuals from the Roma minority.

“Usually neighbors are unable to agree on how to replace a common fence”, reports Ms. Veska Milanova from Mediation Center in Kyustendil. “They disagree over issues such as cost and which contractor to use. In a number of cases their dispute lasted for so long that the existing fence collapsed. In another case, neighbors had a dispute about how to remove tree roots affecting both properties. The situation was causing property damage and creating the risk of physical injury. Through mediation, the parties are able to reach an agreement on certain basic rules to allow them to continue to occupy their property in relative peace”.

Our Successes

Mediation Keeps Lights on in Roma Neighborhood

Gizdova Mahala is not only the largest Roma area in the Bulgarian city of Dupnitsa, it is also the poorest. Perched on a steep hill with stunning views of the nearby Rila Mountains, its streets are unpaved and dogs, horses and turkeys reside in the front yards of low brick houses. Local leader Georgi Georgiev, 24, worries about the future for the neighborhood's young people. Almost 2,000 people live in the community, 90 percent of whom receive government social assistance.

Nonpayment of electricity bills by residents in the neighborhood was a growing problem with no apparent solution. The electric utility was frustrated by its inability to collect back payments and control illegal usage. Roma residents were frustrated by a payment system that made it difficult for them to pay back debts and current bills. Total electricity debts in the neighborhood exceeded \$120,000.



An active participant in the EICR, Mr. Georgiev identified the electricity issue as a potential source of conflict. Tensions ran so high that the electricity company brought police when they came to cut off the power of delinquent clients. Bulgarian neighbors were also growing increasingly resentful of non-paying Roma.

In October 2005, Mr. Georgiev and Nikolina Nikolova of the PBF Mediation Center in Dupnitsa decided to organize a roundtable with all interested parties. This included neighborhood representatives, the mayor's office, and electric utility representatives.

Mladen Krastev, head of the local office of the electrical supply company, says he was "absolutely skeptical" that an agreement would be reached. Georgiev also says he expected officials to reject his suggestions. All parties were surprised when a solution emerged: individual payment plans for more than 100 households that allowed small payments to be credited towards past debt as well as current bills.

"It was difficult in the beginning. People paid irregularly", Krastev says. "Then the mediation center organized a meeting in the neighborhood. In the last three or four months, there has been a significant increase in people making regular payments." He estimates that 5 percent of the original debt has been collected under the agreements, which allow debtor household to pay amounts as small as \$5-\$10 a month over periods up to 10 years. Some residents have paid even more than was required under the agreement, and some households who didn't sign an agreement have begun to pay as a result of positive peer pressure from neighbors.

Dupnitsa Mayor Parvan Dangov remarks, "Mediation is a good practice. We've had good results with Partners Bulgaria Foundation: They recognized a problem and showed how it can be resolved. We want to continue our cooperation."

Establishing Partners for Tolerance network

The CCs were institutionalized as NGOs first in Lom, Vidin and Kyustendil in 2004; followed at the end of 2005 by Asenovgrad, Dupnitsa, Samokov and Targovishte; and at the end of 2006 by Kardjali and Razgrad. The CCs now operate as Mediation Centers (MCs). Their main activities focused on promoting alternative methods of conflict resolution, as well as supporting joint initiatives with local authorities, including the court, police, municipal authorities, social services, schools and other

stakeholders. To ensure sustainability and independence of the established MCs, PBF provided technical support, monitoring and supervision on a sub-grant agreement basis.

As of September 2007, the rich experience gained by the local associations created under the Program was united in a national network through a virtual partnership “Partners for Tolerance”. In this way, existing forms of cooperation between these associations were formalized, which will enable a better exchange of good practices in the future. At the same time, such a network will become an equal partner of the NGO networks created during previous years throughout the country (BARDA, the National Business Development Network, the National Rural Areas Network, etc.) - not only when seeking solutions to local problems but also when applying for funding under European projects. The Partners for Tolerance Network offers new and specific services for Bulgaria - such as mediation – and shares these through joint efforts within the networks’.

Our Successes

Mediation Center in Lom bestowed a prize for “Most Tolerant Person”



The Mediation Center in Lom was established in 2001 and succeeds the Conciliation Commission created in Lom. In June 2004, the Mediation Center became an independent organization with a mission to promote a culture of peaceful conflict resolution and tolerance and to support the civil society.

The Center in Lom works in close collaboration with the Municipality. The office of the Center is situated in municipality premises. Good relationships are maintained with the Social Services Directorate, Local Labor Office and Local Court. The Mediation Center participates in public discussions and meetings on controversial local problems and often facilitates the negotiation process between interested parties.

Town Mayor Ms. Penka Penkova is the first woman to hold this position in Lom. Strongly devoted to addressing social issues of the municipality and fostering tolerance and dialogue in a multi-ethnic community, Ms. Penkova has attracted more than USD five million over the last two years to fund social and infrastructure projects. Her commitment and successes earned her the award for “Most Tolerant Person.”

Capacity Building for Multi-Ethnic Communities

Increasing local leadership potential

Originally launched as the Roma Leadership Institute and aimed at developing Roma leadership capacity, the renamed Minority Leadership Institute was transformed into an informal training initiative for building management, leadership, and networking skills of Roma, Turkish/Muslim, and Bulgarian leaders. Through a leadership training program for representatives of ethnic groups, Partners Bulgaria's trainers provided a series of workshops in effective communication, mediation, consensus building, project management, fundraising, networking, and other outreach techniques.

A total of 365 participants have graduated from the Leadership Institute training initiative in all 13 municipalities. Out of the 365, 149 passed the exam to become trainers. Some have participated as co-trainers and/or facilitators for trainings, community meetings and events in their own communities or in other Program locations. The graduates varied in each municipality by age, level of experience, gender, level of education and future aspirations. Some were from the municipal center, others from the surrounding rural areas. Most were from local minority communities.

LI Training Program

- Training I: Models of Effective Leadership
- Training II: Effective Communication and Negotiation
- Training III: Facilitation and Effective Meetings
- Training IV: Teambuilding and Networking
- Training V: Management and Organizational Skills
- Training VI: Project Cycle Management
- Training VII: Deliberation
- Training VIII: NGO Management
- Training IX: Lobbying and Public Relations
- Training X: Training-of-Trainers Program



An Award Certificate Ceremony for the trainees of the Leadership Institute was held on March 23, 2006, at the Atrium of the U.S. Embassy in Sofia. Ambassador Beyrle and USAID Mission Director, Michael Fritz, addressed the participants and expressed appreciation for the trainees' commitment to participate in an Interethnic training program strengthening intercultural understanding and cooperation.

Participation in the leadership training program helped generate a change in attitudes concerning opportunities for personal development and self-expression and understanding of personal responsibility for the process of change within the community. The new vision of the nature of conflicts and the opportunity to resolve these through efforts within the local community altered prior traditional perceptions and inspired a search for alternative forms of change management.

Over the years there were changes to the strategy related to sustaining and institutionalizing the Leadership Institutes. If in the beginning they were seen as one of the sustainable community structures, later they were an integral part of the overall Program and became a support network to the local Partners' associations. In addition, a variety of initiatives supported exchanges and bringing together participants in the Leadership Institute on the regional or national level.

Increasing citizen participation in multi-ethnic community decision-making

Since 2005, there has been a gradual increase in the community mediation function of the local Partners' associations. This was stimulated by the Program team aiming to reinforce the image of local partners as conveners of important local debates and their growing role in local policy dialogue and implementation. The idea comes from the survey Index of Ethnic Integration introduced by PBF as a tool in monitoring the social cohesion in multi-ethnic municipalities.

The Index of Ethnic Integration measures the level of equality between various ethnic groups in seven main fields of public life: local self-government, the labor market, education, healthcare, social services, quality of life, and relations with others. (see Scheme of the Index of Ethnic Integration structure, page 27)

In 2005, in municipalities where predominantly Bulgarians and Roma reside, the survey validated that deeply entrenched differences exist between ethnic groups, polarity in their way of thinking, different perceptions about community problems, and overall a different way of life. The survey demonstrated that there are ethnic conflicts, a low degree of readiness to communicate in a tolerant way and to have closer relations with other ethnic groups, and a failure to accept ethnic 'otherness'.

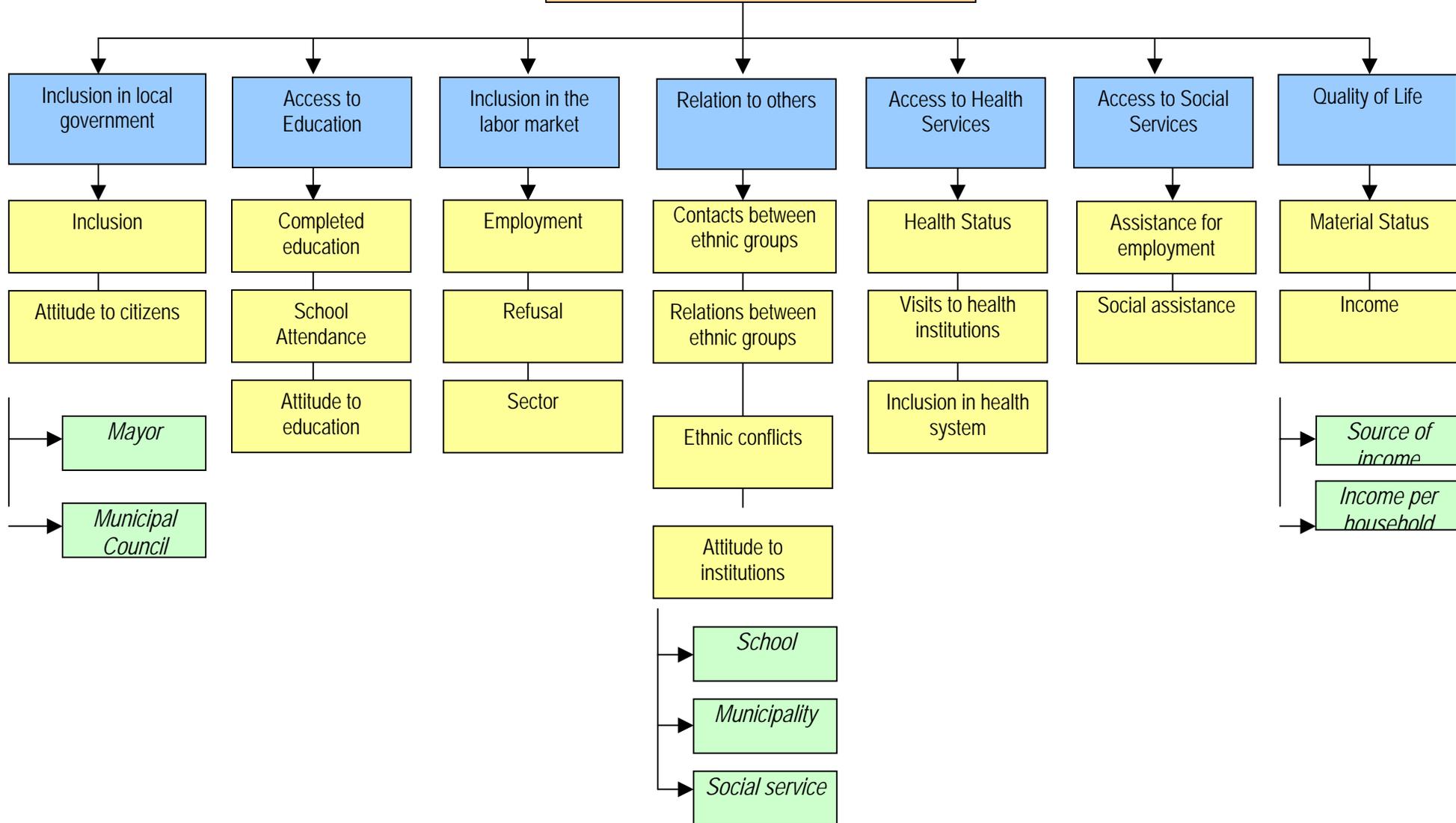
On the basis of the results obtained from the studies conducted so far (2005-2007), Index of Ethnic Integration has been calculated for the municipalities of Asenovgrad, Aytos, Devin, Dupnitsa, Ispirih, Kardjali, Momchilgrad, Razgrad, Samokov, and Targovishte. The summarized conclusions and results are provided in Anex 2.

Despite the specificities of each of the examined municipalities, the data allow to reach the following more general conclusions:

- In the municipalities in which Bulgarians and Turks live, the representatives of the two groups show a relatively high tolerance to each other. The Roma ethnic group, however, is more rejected and stigmatized by both Bulgarians and Turks.

- The data about the two municipalities where mainly Bulgarian and Roma population coexist are worth considering. The relations between the communities there are completely the opposite. While in Dupnitsa lack of tolerance towards the Turkish ethnic group and greater tolerance between Bulgarians and Roma people can be observed, the situation in Samokov is completely different as far as the opinions of the Bulgarian are concerned, they reveal flatly their negative attitude to the Roma people as well as attitudes for their isolation.
- Labor market discrimination can be observed again mainly in relation to the Roma people in the municipalities, where such people live. The unemployment rate among them is the highest respectively, while their financial and economic status is the lowest. Roma people most of all take advantage of social services, provided in the municipalities.
- Opinions continue to be voiced in some municipalities in favor of segregated education of children from the minorities. The biggest number of segregation proponents is observed in Kardjali, where 16% of the Bulgarians hold the opinion that children from the minorities have to study in separate schools. A greater number of proponents of this opinion are recorded in Dupnitsa and Samokov. 32% of the Bulgarians in the first municipality and 38% of the Bulgarians and 15% of the Roma people in the second municipality hold this opinion.
- The municipalities with compact Roma population are characterized with the greatest number of school-age children who have dropped out of the education system. Although in some of them, such as Samokov, for instance, over 80% of the Roma support the idea that education should remain compulsory for the children until 16 years of age, this right and obligation of the Roma children is not complied with in many cases. Targovishte turns out to be the municipality with the greatest number of school-age children who do not attend school classes; there are such children in almost one-fifth (19%) of the Roma families. The data about the number of dropped-out children in the other three in the region of the country are as follows: 16% in Dupnitsa, 10% in Samokov, and 11% in Asenovgrad.

Ethnic Integration Index



The Leadership Institutes (LI) and the MCs are two separate lines of the EICR Program with common goals - namely to create conditions for inter-ethnic dialogue and tolerance by developing local social capital. Established as formal and informal local structures, the LI and MC provided a model for civic participation in solving local public issues. The initiation of an open citizen forum supported the efforts of the local communities in seeking a better life.

After an assessment of needs stemming from the outcome of the Index of Ethnic Integration - 2005, five one-day workshops were held for interested parties. The workshops took the form of roundtable discussions with the purpose of identifying and prioritizing problems. Ideas were developed and an agreement reached for their solution. The projects were demonstrational and presented a replicable and sustainable model for an active policy towards inter-ethnic dialogue. Projects were implemented in partnership, with MCs as the leading organizations and the LIs and municipalities were obligatory partners.

Our Successes

Illuminating Ethnic Harmony



Bulgaria is often cited for the relative harmony among the country's different ethnic and religious groups, even during the difficult post-communism transition period. Communication among different groups in the country however is not perfect. Groups may proclaim tolerance and acceptance on a rhetorical level, but in everyday life relations are not necessarily close. This prompted a network of organizations and individuals in the eastern Bulgarian city of Targovishte to implement a project called "Svetlina" ("Light"). The project provided the 20th-Century St. Ivan Rilski Church

and the 18th-Century Saat Mosque with external lighting, thus illuminating the spiritual centers of Targovishte so as to enhance their ritual functions.

Partners-Targovishte Association and its mediation center initiated the project. The Municipality of Targovishte, the church board, the mosque board, and local NGOs joined efforts to develop a proposal and secure funding. The budget totaled \$4,500 and the applicants contributed \$1,400 thanks to the participation of the municipality.



The project made the city center more attractive and the joint work of all the parties demonstrated tolerance and improved relations between the Christian and Muslim communities. This prompted local religious leaders to invoke references to light as a metaphor of hope and inner peace illuminating people's paths on their quest for truth.

“On the day of its 70th anniversary, St. Ivan Rilski Church radiated light”, said clergyman Slavcho Prodanov. “It shone like a beacon for those lost in the sea of despair to the cherished shore of calmness and harmony.”

“The mosque shines magnificently with a light that illuminates our souls,” added Imam-Hatip Oktay Hashim. “When I saw it, I knew that even the greatest skeptics had perceived the benefits of the Svetlina Project. Its very title is a precise expression of our state of mind. I am proud to serve in a temple where the artistic and architectural lighting contributes to an improved environment. This is the way to preserve the religious temples of cultural and historical value.”

The two boards continue to maintain the architectural lighting systems and the Municipality of Targovishte covers the expenses for electricity.

Legacy

The EICR Program answered pressing local needs and has achieved its goals as planned, using both tested but also innovative practices for the integration of minority groups. The Program leaves behind an enduring legacy in thoroughly-trained local representatives of different ethnic and religious groups; in established Mediation Centers and the new associations; in improved cooperation between civic organizations and local authorities; in increased local capacity and awareness, self-confidence and civic activity; and in the beginnings of a new culture in which social integration and amicable conflict resolution are seen as valuable assets in helping municipalities independently solve urgent local problems.

What will stay?

The main legacy of the Program at the community level is its enduring message about the importance of working in diverse communities, recognizing integration as equal participation, and understanding that respecting the rights and values of all ethnic groups depends on all sectors and their ability to interact in making their community a better place.

The asset from this investment is a core group of people with increased self-esteem, knowledge, and a new model of relations, creating widely supported local civil society structures and practices that will continue to work for positive change in improving the quality of life in isolated communities.

Creation of solid local capacity and strengthening of civil society

The Program leaves behind enhanced sustainable local capacity and infrastructures, including the following:

- Institutional instruments: Partners' associations were created in each of nine municipalities, with independently equipped offices and teams in each municipality.
- Small projects: The Program supported - funding over 2,444,000 BGL - small projects implemented by 68 firms, 60 social service organizations, and 72 educational institutions. The fact that many project activities continue after PBF funding was finished contributed to the overall sustainability of the Program itself. (For example, project activities/training materials were included/used in the Schools Optional Classes, music integration, subsequent extra funding of social services by the municipal/state budgets, etc.)
- Training: 1,062 people were trained in cooperative planning and about 300 people learned mediation. The human resource factor is the most important condition for the sustainability of the Program. The continuation of partnerships and provision of funding for future activities largely depend on the skills and personal motivation of the local participants themselves.

Creation and maintenance of stable local partnerships

Partnership agreements signed by Partners' associations and municipal authorities, the Police, the Social Care Departments/Directorates and other institutions create an important ongoing basis for cooperation. Due to some objective and some subjective factors, in each of the Program municipalities priority partnerships are different – either between non-governmental organizations themselves or with municipal authorities, or Social Care Directorates and Labor Office Directorates. What is notable, the partnerships at the local level cover a broad area – between representatives of local government authorities; educational, culture and social

institutions; NGOs; businesses; as well as formal and informal leaders of various ethnic communities.

Assistance in resolving specific municipal and community issues, and creation of models/good practices for seeking solutions to pressing local problems

The Program covered a wide array of community issues, creating a broad scope of models for replication. These included such things as increased employment and jobs, protected housing, mediation for conflict resolution (such as with the electricity payment arrangements in the Roma quarters), better quality of milk collection (in accordance with EU requirements), new methods for training caregivers and educating socially vulnerable children and persons with disabilities, and many other issues.

Development of civil society among all ethnic groups

All ethnic groups were – in many cases for the first time – involved at all levels of community life. Program activities and outputs included a variety of elements, such as forums for discussing youth activities, an Ethics Code covering the work of the NGO sector, commissions for working with Roma, support and training of a new generation of leaders from Turkish and Roma groups, mediation for resolving family problems, jobs created for ethnic minority workers in predominantly minority communities, etc.

Replicability of the Partners Bulgaria's Cooperative Approach

The Program contributed to the development of civil society in rural multi-ethnic regions. Due to PBF's work, the civic conscience of key local stakeholders has been enhanced and they are active in civic roles and positions and able to initiate programs and projects useful for their community. Several mechanisms and models of civic participation in decision-making related to local economic and social development have been established. Such models enable citizens and representatives of different ethnicities to develop their opinions and offer initiatives. In parallel with the process of building interaction between local NGOs, another process has also begun – that of creating trust not only among NGOs but also between NGOs and state/municipal institutions. The Program also contributed to the creation of long-term social capital - the partnership between local authorities, civil society and the private sector has led to joint efforts in seeking sustainable solutions to problems.

Remaining Challenges

The last decade was a time of wide-ranging donor support to *stimulate and support change at the local level with a focus on minorities and ethnic diversity*. Many have tested various approaches to empowering minorities and embracing diversity, or influencing one or more aspects of community development and local self-governance in ethnically diverse communities. However, most of the lessons about what works remain fragmented at the local and central levels, without a central body of knowledge guiding or demonstrating inclusive community development. With EU accession most previous donors have ended their funding. Thus, 2007 starts a new phase for civil society and local development with a different type of support to local initiatives. With very limited local philanthropy and few private donors, especially for minority issues, most of the funding will be within the framework of the European structural funds. This requires capacity development linked with cross-sector partnerships and regional and local development, requiring consultative processes with various stakeholders as projects are developed, funded, and implemented.

Annex 1. Mediation and Community Organization Profiles

<p align="center">Partners Lom Association 1, Georgi Manafski Street, floor 3 town of Lom Phone: 0971/60-280 E-mail: lom@partnersbg.org</p> <p align="center">Chairperson: Mrs. Katya Ivanova</p>	
<i>Organizational profile: members, partnerships</i>	Established in 2004; 8 members; 2 project-based staff; 3 partnership agreements with local institutions; 2 partnership projects with other NGOs; Participates in the NGO association of Lom.
<i>Mediation: cases and community issues solved</i>	60 cases - 90% family disputes, 10 % individual cases - employment, agriculture, financial.
<i>Other initiatives (civic forums, local planning, community projects)</i>	Licensed for social service provision; 6 civic forums to discuss local issues, local municipal plan for development 2013; Last 2 years - invited by the municipality to facilitate discussion of municipal budget.
<i>Plans for the future and sustainability</i>	Priority programs for mediation; 10 year office – provided by the municipality for free.
<p align="center">Partners Vidin Association 13, Tsar Aleksandar II Street, floor 3 town of Vidin Phone: 094/601218 E-mail: vidin@partnersbg.org</p> <p align="center">Chairperson: Mrs. Silviya Stavreva</p>	
<i>Organizational profile: members, partnerships</i>	Established in 2004; 19 members (5% Roma), 1 staff; Participates in the Regional Council on Minorities and Demographic issues.
<i>Mediation: cases and community issues solved</i>	112 cases - 70 % family; 30% property disputes - average level of request for mediation from Roma minority.
<i>Other initiatives (civic forums, local planning, community projects)</i>	Participation in developing local municipal strategy until 2013; Two joint projects with other NGOs.
<i>Plans for the future and sustainability</i>	3 financed projects; Support from municipality is informal; Challenge will be financing.

<p align="center">Partners Kyustendil Association 13, Targovska Street, floor 2 town of Kyustendil Phone: 078/550-321 E-mail: kyustendil@partnersbg.org</p> <p align="center">Chairperson: Ms. Veska Milanova</p>	
<i>Organizational profile: members, partnerships</i>	Established in 2004; 11 members, 80% Bulgarians, 4 project-based staff; Two partnership agreements with local government and social assistance directorate, and one with local NGO association.
<i>Mediation: cases and community issues solved</i>	202 cases - 90% family disputes - average rate of request for mediation from minority representatives. Interethnic community problem solving – one round table to discuss the infrastructure problems of Roma neighborhood.
<i>Other initiatives (civic forums, local planning, community projects)</i>	Licensed for social service provision; Civic forums – 5 discussions and one round table for accessibility of public buildings for people with disabilities; Joint projects with other NGOs.
<i>Plans for the future and sustainability</i>	Office provided by local government for low rent; 6 financed projects, four of which continue; Strategy for sustainability - creating interest clubs (folk dances, eco-club, active NGO club). Challenges: approaching European programs.

<p align="center">Partners Asenovgrad Association 38, Tsar Ivan Asen II Blvd town of Asenovgrad Phone: 0331/64-301 E-mail: asenovgrad@partnersbg.org</p> <p align="center">Chairperson: Mrs. Silviya Hubenova</p>	
<i>Organizational profile: members, partnerships</i>	Established in 2005; 7 members - 4 Bulgarians, 3 Turks, 1 Roma; Participates in the Regional Council on Minorities and demographic issues.
<i>Mediation: cases and community issues solved</i>	22 cases - 8 property disputes, 4 neighbors arguments, 3 family disputes, 3 citizens-institutions, 3 employment, 1 business - average request from minority representatives.
<i>Other initiatives (civic forums, local planning, community projects)</i>	1 civic forum; One of initiators to develop local strategy for youth policy, and strategy for inclusion of Roma in the local economic development.
<i>Plans for the future and sustainability</i>	Office provided by the municipality; Works on a project for developing regional agricultural center with 5 branches - providing information, technical assistance and training for entrepreneurship, professional development of minorities, social service to the elderly.

Partners Dupnitsa Association 1, Svoboda Square , floor 3 town of Dupnitsa Phone: 0701/52-127 E-mail: dupnitsa@partnersbg.org Chairperson: Mrs. Nikolina Nikolova	
<i>Organizational profile: members, partnerships</i>	Established in 2005; 12 members, including 3 Roma; 2 staff, 12 people on project basis; 4 partnership agreement signed with local institutions; 4 partnership projects with other NGOs within the platform of human rights.
<i>Mediation: cases and community issues solved</i>	21 cases – mostly family, institutional, some property and a few neighbor arguments; Interethnic community problem solving: 126 agreements with Electricity Company (based on single memorandum achieved community mediation to solve unpaid electric bills in Roma neighborhood; 100% of requests for mediation come from Roma minority.
<i>Other initiatives (civic forums, local planning, community projects)</i>	1 civic forum; Advocacy campaign and analyses for cooperation of institutions and NGOs on issue of children at risk; Initiated and coordinates local NGO club of 25 NGO members; Signed cooperation agreement between the NGO club and the municipality.
<i>Plans for the future and sustainability</i>	Priority strategies: work with children at risk, advocacy, provision of social service, and mediation.

Partners Samokov Association 22, Macedonia Street town of Samokov Phone: 0722/60-281 E-mail: samokov@partnersbg.org Chairperson: Mrs. Milka Koshtrova	
<i>Organizational profile: members, partnerships</i>	Established in 2005; 7 members (15% Roma), 3 board members, 6 people on project basis; Participates in national network.
<i>Mediation: cases and community issues solved</i>	14 cases - 72% family disputes, the rest – employment, neighbor disputes; 95% requested by citizens from minority.
<i>Other initiatives (civic forums, local planning, community projects)</i>	Civic forum for development of strategy for work with Roma; Developed strategy for intercultural cooperation in the area of education.
<i>Plans for the future and sustainability</i>	Four financed projects; Municipality provided office, support and partnership for projects.

Partners Targovishte Association
Stoyan Mavrodiev Square, room 25
town of Targovishte
Phone: 0601/63-256
E-mail: targovishte@partnersbg.org

Chairperson: Mrs. Lyubomira Nikolova

<i>Organizational profile: members, partnerships</i>	Established in 2005; 12 members - 42% Bulgarians, 50% Turks, 8 % Roma; 2 staff, 7 people on project basis; Two partnership agreements with the municipality and the Local Police, joint projects with the club of NGOs Turgvishte and with "Partners –Razgrad;" Participates in the network of NGOs in Northeast Planning region.
<i>Mediation: cases and community issues solved</i>	14 cases, 71% family disputes.
<i>Other initiatives (civic forums, local planning, community projects)</i>	Two members took part in development of regulation of cooperation between municipalities and NGOs; Participates in international project.
<i>Plans for the future and sustainability</i>	Promotion of mediation; Development of projects for community development on district level; 3 financed projects; Provided office by the municipality; Challenges - fundraising, promotion and development of new services; attracting business as a client and partner.

<p>Partners Kardjali Association 1, Miniorska Street, room 341 town of Kardjali Phone: 0361/65-916 E-mail: kardjali@partnersbg.org</p> <p>Chairperson: Mrs. Romyana Dimova</p>	
<i>Organizational profile: members, partnerships</i>	Established in 2006; 7 members - 3 Turks and 4 Bulgarians; 10 people on project basis; 5 agreements with local institutions, 2 with school and youth complex, 2 with local companies.
<i>Mediation: cases and community issues solved</i>	No mediation yet; One priority is to promote mediation service and approach.
<i>Other initiatives (civic forums, local planning, community projects)</i>	One civic forum.
<i>Plans for the future and sustainability</i>	Office space from municipality; 1 financed project; Priority strategies - to develop youth center for advocacy and lobbying, develop campaigns for fundraising, and work in networks and partnership initiatives with other NGOs.

<p>Partners Razgrad Association 10, Nikola Vaptsarov Street town of Razgrad Phone: 084/660-236 E-mail: razgrad@partnersbg.org</p> <p>Chairperson: Mrs. Esin Chete</p>	
<i>Organizational profile: members, partnerships</i>	Established in 2006; 11 members - 60% Bulgarians, 20% Turks, 20% Roma; Four partnership agreements with local institutions; Works in cooperation with association Janet; Participates in Northeast planning region NGO network.
<i>Mediation: cases and community issues solved</i>	2 cases in process - one dispute with an institution and one property dispute.
<i>Other initiatives (civic forums, local planning, community projects)</i>	Joint project with “Partners-Turgovishte”.
<i>Plans for the future and sustainability</i>	Promotion of mediation; Development of projects for community development on district level; Challenges - fundraising, promotion and development of new services; attracting business as a client and partner.

Annex 2. Index of Ethnic Integration

Summarized conclusions and results

The summarized Index of Ethnic Integration records a growth in 4 of the examined municipalities: Devin, Kardjali, Momchilgrad, and Dupnitsa. In contrast, a decrease in the general index can be established in the other six municipalities: Razgrad, Ispirih, Aytos, Asenovgrad, Targovishte, and Samokov. The greatest decline is recorded in Aytos and Asenovgrad.

A more careful analysis of the sub-indexes explains the reasons for the rise or the decrease in the data for the general index. In the first group of municipalities in which the value of the aggregate index rises, an increase in the values of several sub-indices can be recorded. In this way the data of the self-perception of the ethnic groups living in Devin and Momchilgrad and their consideration by the local self-government is very high, while the differences between the groups in this respect are not high. Other positive changes can be noticed in the standard of living of the population in Devin, Kardjali, and Momchilgrad. This indicator reveals the process of equalization of the financial and economic status of the groups which live in these municipalities and the lack of drastic differences in their conditions of life. This sub-index is connected to a great extent with the integration of the citizens in these municipalities in the labor market. It also records a growth and currently it indicates its highest values from March 2005 until 2007. The citizens of Kardjali Municipality have most equal rights at the labor market in the context of all examined municipalities. A slower rate of increase in the sub-index for access to health care service can be noticed in these three municipalities.

In the other municipalities in which a decline in the value of the Index of Ethnic Integration can be noticed, opposite changes are recorded towards growth and decrease in the values of the constituent sub-indices. It has to be mentioned, for instance, that despite the decrease by 0.02 points of Razgrad Municipality index, which is within the range of the statistical error, the index continues to maintain a very high value of 0.81 that ranks the municipality third after Devin and Momchilgrad in terms of ethnic integration. One of the main characteristics of this municipality is the high share of both Christians and Muslims who believe that the local government protects and pays attention to their voice. The other positive change in Razgrad is due to the population's attitude to education. "Access to education" sub-index records an increase of 0.07 points in comparison to September 2005 and it has reached the value of 0.77, which is the highest among all municipalities in this research.

"Access to education" sub-index in general records growth only in two municipalities, where representatives of the three ethnic groups in the country, Bulgarians, Turks, and Roma, have been examined – Asenovgrad and Targovishte. There is similar situation in the other regions with declining general indices; the values of some of the sub-indices record a growth, while the others indicate a decrease. In the case of Ispirih access to social services has a particular impact on the decrease of the Index of Ethnic Integration and currently its value is only 0.29.

The differences established, however, are to the benefit of the Muslims, who take advantage largely from social benefits, including labor markets services in the municipality. The sub-index measuring the participation of the population in local self-governance counterweights to some extent the low value of "access to social services" sub-index.

Aytos is the other municipality in which the respondents were selected according to their religion. This is the municipality with the greatest decrease in the Index of Ethnic Integration of 0.11 points. This is due to the considerable decrease by 0.37 in the value of the sub-index on participation in the local self-government as well as to the decrease of other indicators such as "Access to education", "Access to social services", "Labor market integration", and "Standard of living". The inequality of the two ethnic groups in the community is at the expense of the Muslims among whom fewer people with higher education are registered, fewer currently employed people and more people receiving social benefits.

The four municipalities where the main selection criterion was ethnic belonging are also of particular interest. Dupnitsa is the only municipality among them with an increased ethnic integration index, where a positive change is registered in comparison to the previous study related to "Participation in local self-government", "Attitude to the others", and "Access to social services". It has to be mentioned the great number of Roma citizens who perceive themselves as participating or having influence on the work of the local government. The share of Roma who believe that their opinion is considered and respected by the authorities at the municipal council and district level is much greater than the one of the Bulgarians in the municipality.

Among the other three municipalities of Asenovgrad, Targovishte, and Samokov, lower values of "Participation in local self-government" sub-index are recorded. It is particularly low for Asenovgrad because not one of the interviewed Roma citizens feels in any way respected by the local self-government authorities at the Municipality. In this sense, the Turks have the greatest conviction of representation by the local authorities. The situation in Targovishte Municipality is similar in relation to the same index; once again, the biggest share of Turks point out that the authorities take into account the citizens' opinion. The share of the representatives of the other two groups who hold the same opinion is considerably smaller. Due to the presence of Roma population in these municipalities, the differences among the ethnic groups in terms of some parameters remain very big. This is related to the access to social services and the standard of living. The high number of Roma who receive social benefits and their lower financial and economic status respectively result in lower values of these sub-indices. On the other hand, the higher values of the sub-index of standard of living in the municipalities with Bulgarian, Turkish, and Roma population are due to the closer status of the Bulgarians and the Turks. In contrast, the differences between the Bulgarians and the Roma are much greater and this is reflected on the lower values of this sub-index.

One of the most interesting sub-indices is "The attitude to the other". In some municipalities, it maintains values much closer to the ones in the previous study (Momchilgrad, Devin, and Aytos) and it reveals that the relations between the ethnic and religious groups in these parts of the country have undergone no significant changes. Momchilgrad is a municipality characterized by the greatest possible acceptance and peaceful existence of the ethnic groups that live there and as at the moment, it shows the highest value of this sub-index – 0.86.

Among all the six municipalities, examined under the religion criterion, the lowest degree of tolerance to the others can be noticed among the interviewed people from Aytos Municipality, where this index stands at 0.72. Among the other group of municipalities, the values of "Attitude to the others" are also low. The only exception is Targovishte, where the greatest tolerance between the ethnic groups can be noticed in comparison to the other multiethnic communities. The situation in Samokov raises great concern. Although this index records a growth of 0.10 points in comparison to September 2005, it remains very low. The negative

attitude of the Bulgarians in the municipality to the Roma community is the main reason for the low values of this sub-index.

The data in tables below present comparative assessments of the population living in the six municipalities, calculated on the basis of “religious belonging” criterion and the values of "Attitude to the others" sub-index at a national level, re-calculated according to the same criterion. National data reveal low degree of declared tolerance between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria. The value of this sub-index for the country in general stands at 0.65. This index is higher in all the municipalities where the respondents were selected according to their religion than the data on the country. This reveals that the co-existence of the two religious groups and the direct contacts between them in the municipalities with compact population has created a spirit of greater acceptance, understanding, and willingness to co-existence between Christians and Muslims. At the same time the national data re-calculated for the Bulgarians, the Turks, and the Roma reveal that the ethnic tolerance index for the country in general is 0.74. This value is relatively high. Only the value of the same index for Targovishte is higher than the one calculated for the country. It has to be taken into account that the opinions from the national survey are more likely a matter of principle because some of the respondents interviewed in the omnibus study do not live in populated areas with compact ethnic population due to which it can be assumed that the tolerance declared by them is overrated.

INDEX OF ETHNIC INTEGRATION FOR THE MUNICIPALITIES AND THE COUNTRY AVERAGE

INDEX OF ETHNIC INTEGRATION	Razgrad			Isperih			Aytos			Devin			Kardjali			Momchilgrad			Country average
	Mar 2005	Sep 2005	Mar 2007	Mar 2005	Sep 2005	Mar 2007	Mar 2005	Sep 2005	Mar 2007	Mar 2005	Sep 2005	Mar 2007	Mar 2005	Sep 2005	Mar 2007	Mar 2005	Sep 2005	Mar 2007	
	0.77	0.83	0.81	0.75	0.74	0.69	0.75	0.76	0.65	0.71	0.65	0.82	0.71	0.69	0.76	0.73	0.69	0.80	
Participation in local self-governance	0,85	0,94	0,95	0,71	0,43	0,83	0,60	0,70	0,33	0,56	0,22	0,91	0,68	0,40	0,63	0,63	0,47	0,95	
Access to education	0,69	0,70	0,77	0,69	0,79	0,55	0,68	0,76	0,60	0,68	0,67	0,63	0,59	0,70	0,63	0,63	0,73	0,69	
Labor market integration	0,80	0,85	0,82	0,94	0,89	0,89	0,92	0,84	0,79	0,86	0,90	0,94	0,79	0,85	0,89	0,77	0,78	0,82	
Attitude to other	0,89	0,88	0,83	0,80	0,72	0,80	0,77	0,73	0,72	0,78	0,80	0,79	0,89	0,80	0,75	0,88	0,86	0,86	0.65
Access to health care services	0,82	0,81	0,82	0,76	0,81	0,82	0,76	0,70	0,83	0,85	0,80	0,92	0,88	0,86	0,89	0,78	0,79	0,87	
Access to social services	0,75	0,82	0,71	0,65	0,78	0,29	0,80	0,75	0,51	0,66	0,47	0,67	0,55	0,52	0,65	0,65	0,52	0,55	
Standard of living	0,63	0,78	0,77	0,71	0,76	0,68	0,73	0,82	0,77	0,60	0,67	0,89	0,60	0,72	0,88	0,78	0,70	0,84	

INDEX OF ETHNIC INTEGRATION FOR THE MUNICIPALITIES AND THE COUNTRY AVERAGE

INDEX OF ETHNIC INTEGRATION	Asenovgrad		Targovishte		Dupnitsa		Samokov		Country average
	Sep 2005	Mar 2007	Sep 2005	Mar 2007	Sep 2005	Mar 2007	Sep 2005	Mar 2007	
	0.58	0.49	0.60	0.55	0.47	0.53	0.47	0.44	
Participation in local self-governance	0,66	0,07	0,64	0,21	0,48	0,70	0,63	0,58	
Access to education	0,52	0,59	0,54	0,73	0,55	0,51	0,54	0,46	
Labor market integration	0,76	0,85	0,73	0,70	0,61	0,57	0,49	0,64	
Attitude to other	0,77	0,71	0,74	0,77	0,48	0,56	0,28	0,38	0.74
Access to health care services	0,69	0,55	0,69	0,72	0,70	0,65	0,79	0,78	
Access to social services	0,23	0,10	0,38	0,20	0,26	0,45	0,38	0,16	
Standard of living	0,43	0,55	0,50	0,49	0,24	0,28	0,23	0,10	