

Better Living Conditions in Bosnia and Herzegovina Through Improved Urban Services

Jasmina Hadzic, Communications Assistant in the Bosnia and Herzegovina World Bank Office, offers this story.

When Miroslav Loncar opens his garden tap to hose his plants, water gushes out every time. It still amazes him. For years, even though his house was connected to the water mains, water dribbled from the tap an hour or two a day and then stopped. Now a pipeline brings water to his community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and he has water at the turn of a handle.

"Before we had water, there was no orchard, no vegetables, not even a tree here. Once we had reliable water I planted all of this. And now my whole family, my children and grandchildren, enjoy being here all year round."

Miroslav isn't the only happy gardener. Almost 300,000 people in Bosnia and Herzegovina have water around the clock, thanks to a project supported by the World Bank that has helped to upgrade public service delivery in 20 municipalities by replacing pipes and training public utility staff.

In 2004, only 45 percent of those connected to the public water supply had 24-hour service. The water and wastewater network was in dismal condition, leaking up to 60 percent in some cities. Half of the pipes needed replacing in the water network, and more in some places.

Local governments in Bosnia and Herzegovina are responsible for the delivery of key public services. And 85 percent of the population lives in about 60 municipalities of more than 20,000 inhabitants. As a consequence of the conflict and subsequent lack of funds, maintenance of urban infrastructure was neglected, resulting in a sharp drop in service and reliability.

The project which aimed at improving public service delivery recognized that the institutions delivering them needed to be financially sustainable and that it was important to invest in different areas and diverse municipalities. It also recognized the need for long term urban planning. Thanks to the project, six municipalities developed urban management plans guiding public investments in

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Miroslav Loncar

key local services to better meet citizens' demands.

Rehabilitation of water and sanitation infrastructure where service was very poor was a priority, but other infrastructure projects were supported—especially if municipalities with long term urban plans identified them as priorities. Smaller and poorer municipalities got added institutional support and favorable terms as part of their loan. Larger and better-funded municipalities and public utilities received bigger investments as long as they worked to improve efficiency and financial sustainability.

Besides better water delivery, communal housing was in high demand, especially because of the high numbers of internally displaced people. But the public housing stock was seriously damaged. Priority investments in communal housing provided shelter for 65 internally displaced families. Initial results from a social audit suggest that people are regaining trust in the local authorities. On average, the share of people in project regions who trust their local government has increased, for example, in the Municipality of Srebrenica from 13.5 percent in 2004 to 28.8 percent in 2010. Overall, investments and technical assistance financed under the Project have had a positive impact on living conditions of beneficiaries in the targeted areas.