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EXTERNAL FINAL EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

“Inclusive Economic Growth and Employment Generation in Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina – Birač Region”



This project is supported by European Union IPA/2013/24, and co-financed by the Austrian Development Cooperation and CARE Austria. It is implemented by CARE International, in partnership with Women's Association 'Maja' Kravica, the Regional Advisory Service (RAS) and the Municipality of Vlasenica.

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Background to the project

The main goal of this project is to enhance inclusive economic growth and employment generation in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina, more specifically in the Birač Region, and to improve the competitiveness of agricultural small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and producers through the establishment of sustainable support mechanisms and provision of technical support in four target municipalities – Bratunac, Srebrenica, Milići and Vlasenica. The project goal is achieved through: **A)** Investing resources into the improvement of the business environment for (mainly export-oriented) agricultural SMEs and producers and strengthening capacities of the co-applicants by delivering comprehensive capacity assessment and technical expertise. **B)** Strengthening the capacities of agricultural SMEs and producers (mainly cooperative members) operating in the project's target area through a tailor-made training program implemented by the co-applicant Regional Advisory Service and through a project grants scheme for a total of 16 beneficiaries – SMEs/agricultural cooperatives/cooperatives' members. **C)** Increasing the inclusion of women in agricultural entrepreneurship by promoting women and social entrepreneurship as a sustainable business practice by supporting the development and work of the women's cooperative Maja Kravica.

The four municipalities involved cover a total area of 1546 square kilometres (Bratunac, 293; Milići, 279; Srebrenica, 526; Vlasenica, 448) and 61,482 citizens (Bratunac, 21619; Milići, 12272; Srebrenica, 15242; Vlasenica, 12349) as of 2013. As reported in the Baseline Report prepared for this project (Independent Office for Development, 2014), at the time, most interviewed citizens (75%) believed that they possessed sufficient knowledge and skills to start a successful business in agriculture, with 56% of these intending to realize their entrepreneurial potential for the agricultural sector within the following six months. 26% of the respondents professed a fear of failure, which is significantly lower than the Bosnia & Herzegovina national average, which stands at 38.4% (Independent Office for Development, 2014 p.4). However, more than half of interviewees (53%) are engaged in agriculture only because they have no other opportunities. Therefore, as the baseline report correctly stressed, a need for a comprehensive project that would increase motivation of people and help them evaluate their business potentials is present. The need for such support is even more evident considering the fact that over 80% of respondents in the region plan to expand their production, while many express a desire to reach out to new markets for their produce. Most entrepreneurs (75%) use local or regional advisory services during the process of manufacturing and selling the products, but only 63% of them are satisfied with this kind of assistance. Therefore a need for support toward institutions like RAS is evidenced. A need to work with municipalities themselves, identifying their needs, stages of development upon which different strategies lie, and the identification of their capacities is evident, in part due to the absence of many key strategic documents and plans. There is no official system for monitoring the needs of agricultural producers within the region, and the project correctly addresses this through support to Regional Advisory Service (RAS). Infrastructure for the agricultural development of the region is considered to be partially developed, and the project addresses its further development through grants and training.

Introduction

The primary purpose of this final project evaluation is to, through a participatory process, provide a better understanding of the implementation and results of the "Inclusive Economic Growth and Employment Generation in Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina – Birač Region" project in relation to the Logical Framework (see Annex 4) created prior to project implementation. More specifically, the following has been assessed:

- i) Whether the business environment for agricultural SMEs and producers has been improved in target municipalities through the implementation of project activities.
- ii) If, and to what extent, food production SMEs and agricultural cooperatives has been strengthened by CARE and RAS through realised project activities.
- iii) If, and to what extent, women and social entrepreneurship has been promoted, through project activities, at regional level as a sustainable business model.

Issues Affecting Project Implementation

The following issue has been taken into consideration prior to assessment of the project results and implemented activities:

The earlier phases of project implementation were delayed due to floods which occurred throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina in May 2014, and devastated much of the country, including the Birač region. As a result of this delay, some activities planned within the project were postponed, while other activities were adjusted to better respond to the urgent needs of the population. While the delays had knock-on effects for grant beneficiaries who were reliant on seasonal planting and harvesting periods, all planned activities were successfully completed by the conclusion of the project.

Methodology

The methodology employed for this evaluation was based on the premise that evaluation is an intrinsically political and socially constructed activity. With this in mind, this evaluation was used as a way to collect objective evidence, but also to empower project participants and balance stakeholder interests (Taylor and Balloch, 2005) including the target groups in selected municipalities. In addition, this was a **participant-oriented evaluation** with importance given to people involved in the programme as implementers, beneficiaries, authorities and other involved stakeholders, their views, concerns and assessment of the programme itself. In order to fulfil the goals proposed, the evaluation contained both formative and summative elements.

The *formative* evaluation strategies allowed us to assess the quality of the implementation of the programme and data collection strategies used, including **assessment of the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of project activities**.¹ With summative evaluations, the insights beyond the immediate outcome have been offered, such as the impacts the employed methodologies have upon the targeted beneficiaries.

The goals of the final evaluation were achieved using a variety of evaluation tools, including (but not exclusively limited to) the following: **desk analysis of project documentation and reports, analysis of results taken from semi-structured interviews with project leaders and partners, and orientation workshop/meetings with project team and project associates**. In using this methodology, it has been taken into consideration that the participants come from local communities faced by different contexts and issues.

1. Desk analysis

During the first phase of the final evaluation, desk analysis was conducted, whereby project documentation was examined, along with all relevant reports. CARE International obtained and provided all documentation required for desk analysis. The information obtained via analysis of documentation was used, in combination with questionnaires formulated for the mid-term evaluation, to formulate beneficiary questionnaires and questions for interviews to be undertaken as the next phase of evaluation.

2. Orientation workshop and interviews

From November 2nd to 3rd 2016, a series of orientation workshops, round tables and stakeholder interviews was organised over a two-day field visit with project associates, beneficiaries and municipal representatives, for the purpose of: 1) gathering information and impressions from the stakeholder groups on implemented project activities and achieved results against the baseline and project evaluation

¹ Efficiency presents a level of performance that describes a process that uses the lowest amount of inputs to create the greatest amount of outputs. In this evaluation the term has been used to document if the project resources have been used to achieve planned project results and if results were achieved above the expectations. The effectiveness is the degree to which objectives are achieved and the extent to which targeted problems are solved. In contrast to efficiency, effectiveness is determined without reference to costs and, whereas efficiency means "doing the thing right," effectiveness means "doing the right thing."

criteria; and 2) gathering additional information on specific topics in order to supplement information gathered from documents during desk research in the initial phase of the evaluation. The evaluation team opted to undertake a two-day field visit, consisting of meetings with members, round tables and stakeholder interviews, as opposed to the one-day workshop proposed in the ToR, largely due to the impracticality of gathering project members from throughout the four municipalities in a single place. This change in schedule was agreed with the Project Manager in advance during a previous orientation workshop held in Sarajevo on October 19th, 2016.

3. External evaluation report through focus groups and semi-structured interviews

A series of four round table discussions in the form of focus groups were conducted with key stakeholders during the two-day field visit. These were supplemented with interviews held with selected focus groups participants immediately following the focus groups. In total, four focus groups were conducted (three in Bratunac and one in Vlasenica) with project implementers, beneficiaries, participants in the work placement programme and representatives of municipal council offices for agriculture and business, which are elaborated upon in the field visit report below.

It was determined that semi-structured interviews would complement the proposed focus groups discussions, as such semi-structured qualitative interviews are suitable for exploring – in some depth – people’s experiences, values, attitudes (Byrne, 2006) regarding past events, motivations and reasoning around concepts (Drever, 2003). During the focus groups discussions, participants were encouraged to bring in additional issues and occurrences they considered relevant. Based on the opinions proffered during the focus group discussions, individual stakeholders were selected for supplementary semi-structured interviews, lasting from 10 to 20 minutes each. Individual interviews were guided using both previously prepared open-ended questions and notes made by a member of the evaluation team during focus group discussions. In order to develop an atmosphere of mutual respect and learning instead of assessment, the efforts was made to conduct discussions and interviews in a professional but friendly and relaxed manner. Interviews were conducted with project staff from CARE, Women's Association “Maja” Kravica, the Regional Advisory Service (RAS) in both Bratunac and the newly-established satellite office in Vlasenica, two project interns, two beneficiaries and municipal representatives of Bratunac, Srebrenica and Vlasenica. A full list of participants, and dates and locations of discussions is attached to this report as Annex 1.

4. Beneficiary questionnaires

Questionnaires designed by the evaluation team prior to the field visit were used to obtain opinions of grant beneficiaries assisted by the project as to its success and how it has affected them. A series of questions were drawn up across two questionnaires to be completed by project beneficiaries; the first by SMEs and cooperatives, and the second by women producers. The questionnaire was heavily based on the one created during the Midterm Evaluation in Autumn 2015, and the results of the two can be combined to allow a greater analytical insight into the project’s progress over its second half by direct comparison with the first. The Final Evaluation questionnaire was delivered by Maja and RAS to their beneficiaries following round tables and interviews conducted during the field visit, with a deadline of 18th November set for these to be returned to the evaluation team. A total of 55 questionnaires were completed by project grant recipients (15 individual producers, 3 SMEs, 7 cooperatives and 30 women producers), the results of which were analysed and are presented throughout this report.

5. Case studies

In order to present an example of best practice, the evaluation team conducted two case study analyses with two project beneficiaries. In order to decrease the incidence of errors due to selection bias, the Care representative put forward a number of beneficiaries that had achieved positive results, and the evaluation team selected two of these, from different municipalities, with whom they conducted in-depth interviews during the second day of the field visit.

Orientation workshop report and conclusions

An field visit was undertaken on location by the evaluation team on 2nd and 3rd November 2016. This involved meetings with project team members across two locations, and a series of round table discussions with a number of project partners and beneficiaries from all municipalities involved in the project. A small number of individual interviews were used to supplement information and insights obtained during round table discussions. These were guided using previously prepared open-ended questions and notes taken during the round tables, while the participants were encouraged to bring in additional issues they consider relevant. In order to develop atmosphere of mutual respect and learning instead of assessment, the efforts have been made to conduct interviews in professional, but friendly and relaxed manner. A Field Visit Diary can be found attached to this report as Annex 6, and a list of interviewees is found in Annex 1. Prior to embarking on the field visit, the evaluation team leader compiled a series of questions to be broached during round table discussions, based primarily on the First Interim Narrative Report and Midterm Evaluation Report previously forwarded by the representative of CARE International, and also upon other documentation received prior to the visit, including email correspondence.

Day 1 – 2nd November 2016

The evaluation team departed Sarajevo at 06:15, with a short stop in Vlasenica undertaken for the purpose of orientation in preparation for meetings the following day (3rd November). The team then proceeded to the newly-purchased premises of the Regional Advisory Service (RAS), in Bratunac municipality, where they met with RAS and CARE representatives to discuss issues directly pertinent to RAS's implementation of project activities and their opinions on project results pertinent to RAS and its members, in line with Expected Result 2 of the project's Logical Framework. Comments from this discussion were recorded, and are included throughout this evaluation report, as are comments from follow-up interviews with two RAS employees.

Following this, the evaluation team travelled to Kravica, also in Bratunac municipality, to undertake a focus group discussion with two representatives of MAJA Kravica, along with one project intern who, upon completion of their internship, had been retained by MAJA as a specialist agricultural adviser for their clients. This round table discussion largely focused on the implementation of activities related to Expected Result 3 of the project's logical framework, and also the implementation of recommendations proposed in the Midterm Evaluation Report compiled by the evaluation team. All of the evaluation team's questions were answered during the focus group, and there was no need for individual interviews to enhance the information obtained.

Day 2 – 3rd November 2016

The evaluation team returned to Bratunac to meet with representatives of Bratunac and Srebrenica municipal authorities. This round table was held in the premises of RAS, and also present were one representative of RAS and one representative of CARE International. This meeting focused on aspects of Expected Result 1 of the project Logical Framework, in particular relating to the agricultural fairs held in Bratunac, and also the overall results of the mentoring program, and the long-term impacts of the increased number of registered agricultural smallholders upon municipal budgetary resources.

The fourth focus group discussion held within the scope of the two-day field visit was held at RAS's satellite office in Vlasenica. Prior to the round table, the evaluation team were shown around the premises, donated by Vlasenica to RAS as an outcome of the close collaboration between the two arising from the project. This focus group discussion involved a representative of Vlasenica municipality, two project beneficiaries (from Milići and Vlasenica municipalities), two employees of the satellite office (one being a former intern employed through the project), and the representative of CARE International. An intern supported by Caritas in a work placement with RAS Vlasenica was also present at the meeting. A wide range of topics were discussed, primarily relating to Expected Results 1 and 2 of the Logical

Framework. Follow-up interviews were held with the two beneficiaries and the municipal representative, who answered more specific questions related to the implementation of their grants (both cooling plants, but one for a registered SME and the other for an independent producer), and Vlasenica’s future plans as a result of the project, respectively. The interviews with the two grant beneficiaries have been developed into case studies, which are presented in Annex 9 attached to this evaluation.

Findings and Conclusions from the Field Visit

The evaluation team received answers to all queries raised during the field visit, either through round table discussions or semi-structured interviews. Where quantitative figures were mentioned, these were given in concrete form through subsequent email correspondence. Explanations had previously been given for all deviations from the initial project outline, many of which were related to the floods of May 2014, which devastated much of this area of the country, and had knock-on effects for later stages of the project, due to the time-specificity of certain activities, namely the purchase of agricultural equipment and infrastructure for grant beneficiaries, which is largely a season-specific task. All season-reliant activities that missed their window for implementation in the project’s first half were successfully undertaken in the second half, and the extension period given to the project allowed these to bear initial positive results. The evaluation team is satisfied with the implementation of the project, noting that adaptations had been made to the original outline in relation to the project timetable, and other minor aspects. Where the evaluation team believed it necessary, these are detailed in the findings presented below.

Final evaluation findings

Evaluation of Overall and Specific Objectives

In accordance with the Logical Framework created for the project, the project has been evaluated in relation to a number of overall and specific objectives. The evaluation of these interventions, objectives and their indicators are presented below.

Intervention logic - Inclusive Economic Growth and Employment Generation in Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina – Birac Region

Objectively verifiable indicators of achievement:

Income levels in Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina increased

According to statistics published by the Republika Srpska Institute of Statistics,² income levels in Eastern Bosnia have increased through the duration of the project. Taking 2013 as the baseline year (prior to project implementation), wages have increased in both Net (Bratunac 4.51%; Milići 6.56%; Srebrenica 6.40%; Vlasenica 9.15%) and Gross (Bratunac 1.88%; Milići 0.80%; Srebrenica 3.55%; Vlasenica 5.58%) terms to the last date of measurement (31st December 2015).

The table below shows average net and gross wages (in BAM) for the 4 municipalities involved in the project for the 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 calendar years.

Table 1: *Income levels in Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina 2012-2015*

		Year			
		2012	2013	2014	2015
Bratunac	Net	703	709	723	741
	Gross	1160	1168	1159	1190
Milići	Net	756	732	755	780
	Gross	1311	1244	1210	1254

² Statistical Yearbook of Republika Srpska 2016: Chapter 31 – Review by municipalities and cities

Srebrenica	Net	767	781	813	831
	Gross	1273	1297	1317	1343
Vlasenica	Net	771	754	810	823
	Gross	1279	1255	1311	1325

Source: Republika Srpska Institute of Statistics

Number of small and middle sized enterprises (SMEs) in Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina grows

According to data obtained from APIF (*Agencija za posredničke, informatičke i finansijske usluge* – the Agency for Intermediary, Informational and Financial Services) all of the four municipalities involved in the project witnessed significant increases in the number of smallholdings registered, with this ranging from 52% (Bratunac) to 87% (Milići). Table 2 gives the number of smallholdings registered in each of the municipalities for the 2014 (at the time of project initiation), 2015, and 2016 (project completion) fiscal years, as well as the percentage increase from 2014 to 2016.

Table 2: Increase in number of small and middle sized enterprises (SMEs) in Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina

Municipality	Fiscal Year			% increase 2014-16
	2014	2015	2016	
Bratunac	726	900	1100	51.52
Milići	157	216	294	87.26
Srebrenica	358	502	653	82.40
Vlasenica	160	186	257	60.63

Source: *Agencija za posredničke, informatičke i finansijske usluge*, November 2016-12-06

Besides smallholders, a number of persons have registered their activities as commercial smallholdings. This is a separate category, where persons registered are expected to pay levies (this is currently set at 126 BAM per month) as health insurance and pension contributions. All persons registered as commercial smallholders are no longer registered with the local Bureau for Employment. Not all municipalities have this category of smallholding business fully established to date. As of 2016, 17 persons are registered as commercial smallholders in Bratunac, 5 in Milići, 9 in Srebrenica, and 1 in Vlasenica (up from 0 in 2014).

Specific Objectives

Intervention logic - To improve competitiveness of food production SMEs and agricultural cooperatives through establishment of sustainable support mechanisms and provision of technical support in 4 target municipalities

Objectively verifiable indicators of achievement:

SO Indicator 1: Number of food production SMEs and agricultural cooperatives that increased their production and sales by 10% over baseline

By the time of the evaluation procedure, monitoring data was collected for 9 of the 10 SMEs and agricultural cooperatives involved in the project. These had a combined annual turnover of €72,000 prior to the onset of the project. This had grown to €106,800 by the time of the evaluation – an increase of 48.33%, which greatly surpasses the 10% increase expected from the project. Five of the SMEs and agricultural cooperative beneficiaries of the project experienced turnover increases of 100% or greater.

It must also be noted here that the average increase in turnover for all project beneficiaries (SMEs, cooperatives, independent producers and independent women producers) for whom complete monitoring data was received was 37.57%. This is a considerable achievement for the project.

SO Indicator 2: At least half of target SMEs and cooperatives created at least one new job opportunity by the end of the project

Six SMEs, cooperatives and independent producers reported a growth in full-time employees, and eight reported a growth in part-time employees, with a total of eleven SMEs, cooperatives and independent producers increasing employment overall. In total, this increase accounted for 11 full-time employees (6 male and 5 female) and 32 part-time employees (14 male and 18 female). According to round table discussions, the majority of these part-time positions are primarily seasonal in nature. Of the 10 businesses registered as SMEs and agricultural cooperatives at the start of the project, 6 increased their number of employees, five of these with full-time positions being created. Therefore, it can be concluded that this indicator was exceeded.

SO Indicator 3: Number of new women led and social enterprises operational by the end of the project as a result of the intervention

Although the project successfully influenced the development of women business in the region, a number of women that started or expanded their business (25 in total) as independent producers are still yet to register them. As explained by beneficiaries and MAJA Office representatives, most women would like to formally register their business, but they are currently awaiting the publication of a new Book of Rules for the registration of individual producers. This should be published and adopted at municipality level in the concerned municipalities by the beginning of 2017.

Expected Result 1: Business environment for agricultural SMEs and producers improved in target municipalities

For a matrix of indicators and their relevant activities, as analysed by the evaluation team, please see Annex 5.

Indicator 1. # of joint initiatives of municipalities and economic development institutions created as a result of the project interventions

There have been at least eight joint initiatives³ between municipalities and economic development institutions created as a result of project interventions, as elucidated below under Activity 1.4. These initiatives include support to trade fairs from both the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations and Ministry of Agriculture of Republika Srpska, donation of office space to RAS by Vlasenica municipality, donation of 2 hectares of land by Vlasenica municipality for the development of a communal orchard, to which CARE and UNDP have invested 50,000BAM in greenhouses and other equipment, donation of land by Vlasenica to eight families, for which CARE invested in an irrigation system, cooperation between MAJA and Bratunac municipality in aiding the women's cooperative Zena by paving the road to improve access to their production facilities, in which JICA and UNDP have made over 100,000 BAM infrastructural investment, and a joint cooperation between RAS and the Agricultural Institute of Republika Srpska, based in Banja Luka, involving analysis of soil samples and the causes of damages to plants.

There has also been also improved cooperation between municipalities themselves. Such improvements have been particularly visible in the second half of project implementation. These are highlighted in the Activity narratives below.

The ten exchange forums and round tables organised in direct cooperation with each municipality throughout the project have also helped foster stronger relationships which will in the future lead to the launching of more initiatives.

One major outcome of the round tables has been the commitment of the Mayoral Advisor in Srebrenica municipality to co-financing the joint development of a slaughterhouse to service the Birač region with a local company, BEOMES. The investment will amount to €1,200,000. A conclusion of a further round table was that an ultrasound facility for livestock needs to be created. It has been suggested that two veterinary stations in Vlasenica bid to participate in municipal co-financing for this service.

³ The precise number is difficult to define, as several joint initiatives have involved multiple stakeholders, each working together on certain aspects of an initiative. The number of eight determined here is an absolute minimum, and the number could be interpreted to be considerably higher.

Indicator 2. Relevant strategic documents and measures developed and adopted in the target municipalities as a result of the project

It was explained by representatives of all three municipalities interviewed, RAS, and CARE International that, like at the point of the mid-term evaluation, municipalities are at various levels of strategy development, adoption and implementation. A number of strategic documents and measures have been adopted in targeted municipalities. However, the situation in each municipality varies, and is incredibly specific. **The Final Mentoring Report prepared within the scope of the project summarizes the results of an initiative to bring target municipalities up to the level where they can acquire Business Friendly Environment Certification (BFC).** A summary of the findings of the Mentoring Report, saying how complete municipalities' work is in regard to the twelve different BFC criteria, and how complete it would be if the recommendations presented within the Report were undertaken can be found in Annex 3 of this Evaluation Report. During the round table discussions, the municipal chiefs of economic development from Vlasenica, Bratunac and Srebrenica confirmed that they will try to implement the recommendations presented in the Mentoring Report, that include development of various policies and formation of a number of municipal bodies.

The generation of several key documents in the project's early phases can be seen as invaluable both to the project and to the participating municipalities. Foremost among these can be considered '**Assessing the Business Environment of the Birač Region**', a report undertaken by the Independent Office for Development based in Gradačac, and the report '**Needs assessment for food production SMEs including socially oriented food production SMEs in Birač target municipalities Bratunac, Srebrenica, Milići and Vlasenica**', created by the independent consultants Damir Miljević and Slavko Simić. It must also be noted that Srebrenica and Vlasenica have active local development strategies, while Bratunac has drafted one ready for adoption by municipal authorities.

Indicator 3. A minimum of 4 export oriented partnerships created as the result of the project involvement

Due to the specific situation of agricultural exports originating from Bosnia & Herzegovina, this indicator has not been directly met, as no project beneficiary has signed a contract to directly export products from the country.

One of the primary reasons for this is the fact that foreign companies do not see it as economically feasible to export the quantities of products produced by the involved beneficiaries. One solution to this is the formation and strengthening of agricultural clusters (discussed below in Section: "Impact 2: Food production SMEs and agricultural cooperatives strengthened by CARE and RAS") to strengthen collective bargaining and supply powers of producers within the Birač region. **However, direct partnerships have been established with larger companies within the country that have contracts to export.** In a looser sense, these partnerships are 'export oriented', and therefore this indicator can be claimed to have been achieved. A total of five export-oriented partnerships have been established as a direct result of the project. Exporters with which direct cooperation has been established include ZZ *Srebrenica* which exports to Serbia, *BOS Agrofood*, which exports to Sweden, OPZ Srebrenica and Agros DS from Bratunac. OPZ Žena exported 10 tons of raspberries in 2015 and 2016 through OPZ Srebrenica, TR Agros Skelani, from Srebrenica also exported 250 tons of raspberries through a broker, and individual producers in Milići, Srebrenica and Vlasenica were also able to export raspberries through a number of other intermediary companies in Bosnia & Herzegovina.

Indicator 4. At least 2 trade fairs implemented with the support of the project

Due to the devastating effects of the floods in May 2014 at the start of the project, the first trade fair to be supported by the project – Bratunac's Raspberry Fair ('Dani Maline') was cancelled. However, to show solidarity with the municipality, the first round table was symbolically held when Dani Maline should have been held. The activities of Vlasenica municipality are especially noteworthy. Largely due to the activities of this project, the municipality decided to host their own annual agricultural fair, inaugurated in October 2015. **In the course of the project, a total of 4 trade fairs were implemented with the support of the project.**

Activity 1.1 Assess business environment, existing services and need for technical support at target municipalities

The business environment, existing services and need for technical support within target municipalities were all assessed during the initial stages of the project. Two key documents created are 'Assessing the Business Environment of the Birač Region' and 'Needs assessment for food production SMEs including socially oriented food production SMEs in Birač target municipalities Bratunac, Srebrenica, Milići and Vlasenica'. The 'Assessing the Business Environment of the Birač Region' study provides detailed analyses of all stakeholders and municipalities. Round tables and exchange forums were organised to strengthen communication and cooperation between municipalities and communities. A full list of the round tables and themes discussed is attached to this report as Annex 2.

The first round table was symbolically held when Dani Maline should have been held. The priorities of this meeting, however, were somewhat shifted toward focusing on post-flood recovery for small and medium agricultural enterprises in the affected municipalities, a commendable shift, in line with the social responsibilities of this project. This was also an effective reallocation of already-committed resources, and avoided the wasting of both effort and money. After the mid-term evaluation, these round tables became more thematically focused, and were often connected to other events, to increase the possibility of attendance, as it had been noted that often, in spite of keenness to participate, attendants had had to cancel due to other obligations. Interview participants mentioned that one of the direct benefits of round tables had been to facilitate direct access to municipal directors of economic affairs, something which was generally unattainable through normal routes.

Activity 1.2 Design and implement mentoring program for target municipalities to improve public policies and service delivery

In order to help municipalities develop the capacities to provide adequate services to small and medium-sized enterprises, the project supported development of a mentoring program, in order to allow municipalities to adhere to the Business Friendly Environment Certification (BFC) adopted by the Republika Srpska Entity. The results of this mentoring program are documented in the Mentoring Report. A summary of the findings of the Mentoring Report can be found in Annex 3 of this Evaluation Report.

The representatives of Srebrenica and Bratunac expressed a high level of satisfaction with the Mentoring Program, and representatives for all three municipalities interviewed confirmed that they will try to implement the recommendations contained within the Mentoring Report. It must be noted, however, that assessment for Milići in regard to the Mentoring Report was undertaken entirely via desk-based research, and therefore the assessment cannot be claimed to be complete or entirely accurate. The reason for this was the fact that, for much of the three-year duration of the project, the Head of Economic and Social Affairs of Milići municipality was on long-term sick leave, and was represented by his assistant, who has no influence over the municipality's policy or development.

It must also be noted here that there was initially a delay in implementing the mentoring program, largely due to low levels of interest in the initial stages of the project from municipal representatives, both due to the prioritization of engagement in post-flood recovery activities and the fact that a number of similar mentoring activities were being planned by other donors. Regardless, the activity was completed to the standard expected (with the exception of Milići municipality) and within the timeframe allocated by the project.

Activity 1.3 Support relationship building of target municipalities with local/international development institutions, banks and employment institutions

At the time of the field visit, a total of eleven round tables had been held, with a final round table scheduled to be held before the end of 2016. The first round table was tailored toward emergency flood relief issues, while subsequent round tables were held in Bratunac in June 2014, Srebrenica in March 2015, and Vlasenica in June 2015, specifically tailored toward supporting relationship building between target municipalities and development institutions, banks and employment institutions.

The round tables allowed all involved stakeholders to see who is doing what, and which donors support different activities, in order to make processes in regard to the support of agricultural SMEs more efficient. Stakeholders from both CARE International and RAS made it clear during interviews that they were satisfied that there has been no duplication of activities or aims, meaning that this project provides a valid and unique contribution, and target municipalities have been made aware of other donors and

actors who can help build on this project's outcomes, a fact reiterated by representatives of the three municipalities. It must be noted that the majority of round tables have been held in Vlasenica and Bratunac (see Annex 2 for a full list).

Representatives of both Bratunac and Srebrenica municipalities expressed their intent to continue hosting forums and round tables post-project, as these are good ways for them to understand the needs of smallholders and agricultural SMEs, and such events became a platform where municipality officials presented their policies to potential producers and where producers could discuss their business ideas.

Representatives of both CARE and RAS highlighted the fact that although banks participated in earlier round tables, they were unable to provide information or advice other than the services that they were able to offer in terms of money lending and banking for small businesses.

Activity 1.4 Foster sales oriented partnerships between higher level government institutions and local food production SMEs

As a result of stakeholder meetings organised within the project, a joint initiative agreed between Bratunac municipality and the Ministry for Agriculture of Republika Srpska for the production of berry fruit seedlings was initiated, with financial support from UNDP. This involved the purchase of 5 hectares of land suitable for growing berry-producing plants by the municipality for cooperative growers to begin production. Contracts have been signed with local producers for seedling material supply. Likewise, in order to stimulate berry production in Vlasenica municipality, a joint initiative with the Ministry for Agriculture of Republika Srpska to install de-chlorination facilities in two villages was launched. The municipality has also, like Bratunac, initiated a cooperative growers' project, whereby the municipality has set aside land for berry production free of rent, with investors found to provide seedlings and other equipment. People without their own land are prioritised in this project.

Vlasenica's Agricultural Festival, launched largely due to the efforts of this project, is now included in the entity-level budget of Republika Srpska, receiving 10,000 BAM for the 2016 edition. Although at the time of the mid-term evaluation, Milići municipality was initiating the process of investigating the potential for opening an agricultural produce market within the municipality, as a direct result of meetings between stakeholders involved in the project, this idea was abandoned due to a lack of interest on a political level.

There is also an initiative for the establishment of a trans-municipal slaughterhouse, with each municipality involved within the Birač region investing 100,000 BAM, with the remainder being invested by local company BEOMES D.O.O.

A three-year agreement on cooperation between RAS and the Agricultural Institute of Republika Srpska, based in Banja Luka, was entered into in September 2015, involving analysis of the causes of damage to plants. Through this, the Institute will analyse soils, in order to ascertain primary reasons for plant damage and low yields of berries. This will be of long-term direct benefit to beneficiaries of the project, as well as other local SMEs, who may be challenged by identical problems of soil or water contamination, or the presence of pathogens.

Activity 1.5 Support the organisation of at least two trade fairs

As mentioned above in the evaluation of Indicator 4, four trade fairs were held with the support of this project; two in Bratunac which were aimed specifically toward raspberry production and sales, and two general agro-commerce fairs in Vlasenica. The evaluation team notes that cooperation in this regard has been particularly beneficial for Bratunac and Vlasenica municipalities, although producers from Srebrenica and Milići have also benefitted from the hosting of these fairs. The first trade fair held with the support of the project, namely Bratunac's Dani Maline 2015, was held on 26th and 27th June 2015. Vlasenica's first agricultural fair was held on 12th October 2015. Both of these fairs were held again in 2016. This was made possible due to the project being granted with extension (in order to counteract the effects of the May 2014 floods on the early stages of project implementation).

RAS took the opportunity of the fairs to hold information sessions on current agricultural communities faced by the region, in particular bluetongue, of which the first cases were recorded in the country after a long absence in November 2014.⁴

Activity 1.6 Implement Young Professional Program – Training and Job Placement of young graduates at target municipalities and RSA

On 27 October 2014, CARE organized a public call for young graduates, receiving a total of 24 applications from all four municipalities, out of which 13 were selected for the project training program. All partners (RAS, MAJA, Care) participated in selection of candidates. The young professional program was fully implemented, with four candidates selected through a fair and open process, judging applicants on knowledge of both general and region-specific agriculture, English language and computing, through tests developed by CEDES and CARE International. No candidate was selected from Milići municipality, due to the unsuitability of the applicants which passed the initial vetting process. Three of the four interns selected completed their job placements, with one finding permanent employment during the course of (and partially as a result of) their placement, with a further intern receiving an extended placement to work as an agricultural consultant with Maja, and one more being employed within RAS's satellite office in Vlasenica since its opening.

All interns participated in trainings organised through project activities, and gained a full understanding of the activities of RAS, the economic development of the municipalities involved, and many other aspects of the agricultural sector and its potential for economic growth and employment generation in the Birač region. It can be concluded that the Young Professionals Program was implemented successfully and achieved greater than expected results.

Relevance of activities for achieving planned result

Taking into the consideration the overall development of agriculture production in the Birač region, the project was properly focused on the improvement of the agricultural business environment in the target municipalities. A number of assessment reports of needs of beneficiaries, together with assessments of export-oriented business were properly used to increase the relevance of activities in the project.

The selection of stakeholders proved to be relevant. In the final year of project implementation, municipalities increased their response to local communities' needs through organised meetings and therefore the project indirectly contributes to social cohesion and trust building in the selected communities. RAS has been recognised as an expert body, with its capacities having been strongly increased as a direct result of the project, not least through the support it has received from Vlasenica municipality (see sections Activity 2.1 Strengthen capacities of RAS) while MAJA is building its capacities as a CSO representative for economic empowerment of women. Finally, the selection of target groups was wide enough yet specific enough to prove its relevance in the process of achieving project goals.

Effectiveness of activities for achieving planned result

Meetings and round tables organised with municipalities and stakeholders can be considered even more effective in the project's final year, when compared to their effectiveness in the project's first half. They resulted in the development of specific joint initiatives. Moreover, round tables are to be considered particularly effective, as they have provided an opportunity for all interested parties and stakeholders to discuss their separate activities, reduce duplication and increase cooperation. However, as confirmed through focus groups discussions, the participation of banks in these round tables was not considered particularly useful, since the banks were not very helpful in providing expert support or advice to beneficiaries, and primarily wanted to use the round tables as an opportunity to promote their own self-interests.

The effectiveness of initiatives oriented toward export partnerships was satisfactory, in a roundabout way. Through the involvement of 'middlemen', indirect partnerships have been supported and resulted in export activities. However, according to the results of the questionnaire, the project contributed to networking between project beneficiaries and other producers, and to increasing connections with

⁴ <http://www.vet.gov.ba/?q=en/node/1610>

exporters. Therefore, activities oriented toward building export partnerships cannot be seen to have been fully ineffective.

Both fairs organised in Bratunac were very effective for beneficiaries, according to respondents to the questionnaires created by the evaluation team. It has been noted that 50% of beneficiaries (individual producers, SMEs and Cooperatives) only visited the 2015 fair 'Dani Maline' in Bratunac, while a minority were there to present their products (22%). However, all of them assessed the trade fair as very relevant to the potential expansion and improvement of their business activities. For the 2016 edition, of the 50 respondents in total (30 women producers, 15 individual producers, 1 SME and 4 cooperatives), 90% reported visiting the fair, with 24% presenting their products, a slight increase on the previous year.

The final evaluation questionnaire only collected data on the 2016 Vlasenica agricultural fair, and not the 2015 edition, due to the 2015 questionnaire being submitted to respondents prior to the fair being held. For this, all 55 respondents (30 women producers, 15 individual producers, 3 SMEs and 7 cooperatives) answered the question, with 46 (84%) claiming to have visited the fair, and 26 (47%) having presented. The higher number presenting at this fair than at Bratunac is to be expected, due to the more generic agricultural content of the fair, and comparatively better funding from external sources.

While the number of women who submitted business plans was highly positive and proved the effectiveness of activities in this term, no social enterprises were included, which can be seen to have somewhat decreased the overall effectiveness of the planned result. In order to improve effectiveness and fulfilment of the planned result, it is important to take this into consideration. Maja secured travel subsidies for all trainees which ensured that those in the most remote places and those affected most severely by economic hardship could attend trainings. This proves the effectiveness of the project activity.

Efficiency of activities for achieving planned result

The selection of the training for the beneficiary category of woman individual producers proved to be relevant in the target municipalities. The project partners correctly followed the Needs Assessment Analysis recommendations and used them for the planning of activities for individual beneficiaries, including trainings and grant selection. Trainings were relevant and useful according to responses from beneficiaries. All Maja respondents (30 of them) stated that grants were very useful, while training related to business plan writing was also assessed as highly beneficial in the first half of the project.

Sustainability

All women respondents (30) and the overwhelming majority of individual producers, SMEs, and cooperatives (21, with 1 SME and 2 cooperatives not answering, and 1 individual producer stating that it had not contributed) that participated in the survey confirmed that project contributed to and was highly beneficial to the sustainability of their business (see Annex 8).

The sustainability of the planned fairs has been proven, since, as explained, by the end of the project, four trade fairs were held, instead of two, with increased recognition and external funding secured for these, with sustainability ensured through municipal-level commitment, and furthermore a 'brand' being developed through the media campaign (see below, Section Activity 3.3). These organised fairs can be considered an efficient intervention, as stakeholders (individual producers, SMEs and cooperatives) assessed fairs as very relevant for their business.

Expected Result 2: Food production SMEs and agricultural cooperatives strengthened by CARE and RAS

For a matrix of indicators and their relevant activities, as analysed by the evaluation team, please see Annex 5.

Indicator 1. Regional Advisory Service RAS serves an increased number of clients, and has diversified its service portfolio

The implementation of this project allowed RAS to introduce a membership fee of 30 BAM per year for individuals, and 200 BAM per year for SMEs. As a result of the project, **RAS became better recognised amongst members of the region's agricultural community**, and was therefore able to offer its services for a certain fee, which, according to interviews with RAS employees and CARE representatives, consumers believed to provide value for money. The increase in membership of RAS shows that their members positively assessed their services. This not only boosted the organization's income, but also allows them to keep a more accurate track of their membership and to provide additional services to subscribing members. As a result of the project, **RAS has expanded its overall membership in three key sectors**; raspberry production (247 members compared to 200 at the midpoint of the project), strawberry production (170 members) and milk production (150 members), with 567 individual members and 7 SME members in total in these sectors as of November 2016. Services introduced by RAS as a result of the project's implementation have included the provision of theoretical and practical lectures, one-on-one field visits to clients, and an SMS service providing members with information on and warnings of severe weather events. Furthermore, RAS has enabled its clients to realise the payment of government subsidies by assisting them in submitting the correct documentation to receive these payments, and provided assistance in VAT registration and accounting. **A field team was established as a direct result of this project, consisting of three persons.** This team aims to make 150 field visits per month to agricultural producers throughout the four municipalities involved in the project in order to provide advice and troubleshooting in regard to production methods. However, as explained by representatives of RAS, there are over 1000 individual producers in these 4 municipalities and would need more experts to organise visits to all of them (the maximum number per one expert-advisor is 150 producers over the course of a month). Throughout the peak season in 2016, this team (split into two since the establishment of RAS's satellite office in Vlasenica) managed an average of 72 field visits per month.

Participation in the project has furthered cooperation between RAS and Vlasenica municipality to such an extent that in 7.9.2016. **RAS opened a satellite office in the town, with the 125m² commercial premises being provided rent-free by Vlasenica municipality.** The hiring of the four interns to assist in project implementation has also helped improve bonds between RAS and the municipal authorities in the involved municipalities of Vlasenica, Srebrenica and Bratunac. This was evidenced in the interviews with RAS, the interns themselves and the representatives of these municipalities. The Needs Assessment Report conducted by CEDES in spring 2015 showed a clear capacity and dedication of RAS for maintaining their consultative role in the agricultural development of the Birač region. It can be concluded from both discussions and RAS's membership numbers that Regional Advisory Service serves an increased number of clients, and has diversified its service portfolio. During the course of the project, uptake of RAS membership has been high among individual producer, SME and cooperative beneficiaries.

Indicator 2. At least 40 food production SMEs and agricultural cooperatives and their members developed business plans and implement them, partly with financial support of the project (grants)

Under the training program for individual beneficiaries, food production SMEs and agricultural cooperatives, 88 food production SMEs and agricultural cooperatives and their members participated in project trainings in business plan development, with 84 representatives and members of food production SMEs and agricultural cooperatives eventually developing and submitting business plans, with 26 SMEs and cooperatives eventually receiving grants, along with 30 women producers, to give a total of 56 grant beneficiaries. This was explained during the interview with official from CARE International, who stated that they did not foresee that not all participants in the business plan development trainings would eventually submit business plans. This facet will be addressed in future projects. However, it can be concluded that the foreseen number has been reached and that success is higher than expected. Details on the awarding of grants are explained below in Activity 2.6.

Indicator 3. At least 4 food production SMEs and cooperatives supported by the project signed sales and export contracts

Two export contracts were signed throughout the duration of the project, with OPZ Srebrenica and Agros DS, Bratunac. OPZ Srebrenica has exported 10 tons of raspberries for the women's cooperative OPZ Zena in both 2015 and 2016. One of the major barriers to export previously has been a lack of transport and refrigeration infrastructure. The project has assisted two firms (Agros-DS from Bratunac, and Beomes

d.o.o., also from Bratunac) to purchase refrigeration and delivery equipment, which will hugely boost the export potential of the area in the long run. A number of other individual producers have indirectly exported their produce through wholesalers. These include the following:

- SME “TR Agros Skelani”, Srebrenica - 250 tons of raspberries
- Individual Producer “Mile Perić”, 20 tons of raspberries through Smrčak d.o.o, Zvornik
- Individual Producer “Slađana Pavlović”, Milići, raspberries through Rankić d.o.o
- Individual Producer “Snežana Stupar”, Vlasenica, raspberries through Hip-Ex d.o.o, Novo Goražde

Furthermore, 24 of the 26 SME and cooperative grant beneficiaries have signed sales contracts for local markets. It can also be concluded that the project’s activities will undoubtedly contribute to further export-oriented sales contracts in the long term.

Indicator 4. Facilitate formation of agricultural SME clusters

The selection of target groups for project support was completed based on the Needs Assessment Report. Therefore, the possibility for the formation of SME agricultural clusters was improved. Facilitation of this through the project was relatively straightforward, in a large part thanks to the improved capacities of RAS and improved networking of SMEs and cooperatives. **A total of 3 informal (unregistered) clusters of producers have been established: in the first year of the project implementation for berry fruit producers, milk producers and – more recently – for potato growers (predominantly with the intention of making processed potato goods, such as French fries).** Other clusters are to be introduced to RAS’s portfolio, namely beekeepers and other vegetable growers. It could be concluded that, during the final year, the project positively influenced formation of clusters and it would be expected to have some more formal organisation of clusters in the following period. The berry producers’ cluster has had some success in coordinating cooperation between berry growers and owners of cold storage facilities. However, it was noted during interviews that local-level political problems have hindered the potential of this cluster to some degree.

Activity 2.1 Strengthen capacities of RAS

A needs assessment was conducted by an external consultant, and used as a basis for the capacity building program for RAS, conducted through spring 2015. This training was implemented via three programmes:

- Project development and implementation,
- Project cycle management and
- Business enabling environment/Agriculture cooperative operation.

Through implementing a highly affordable membership fee, RAS has been able to better track its membership numbers, and provide an increased range of services. It has an increased presence in the municipalities of the Birač region, particularly Vlasenica, where a satellite office has been established, opening in 7.9.2016. The expert team assembled by RAS for the purpose of berry growing consultancy was highly effective, conducting several hundred field visits to growers, and proving to be an invaluable resource for SME producers in the area. This replaced the initial idea of employing a single consultant to work in the offices of Maja, although later in the project one of the interns employed through the project began to work in this role. Although this has somewhat reduced Maja’s capacities for growth as an organisation into a resource centre for social entrepreneurship (see Activity 3.1), it is believed by the evaluation team to be greatly more beneficial to SME producers than the initial concept. It can be concluded that strengthening of RAS capacities included increased membership, improves services and introduced membership fee.

Activity 2.2 Conduct needs assessment for technical support to food production SMEs and agricultural producers

It is noted that this activity has been fully carried out, with the document ‘Needs assessment for food production SMEs including socially oriented food production SMEs in Birač target municipalities Bratunac,

Srebrenica, Milići and Vlasenica created by the independent consultants Damir Miljević and Slavko Simić. It was noted by representatives of both RAS and CARE (as well as within the Interim Narrative Report) that this was completed following an unsuccessful performance by another set of consultants.

As noted by Miljević & Simić (p.5) prior to project implementation, of the four municipalities involved in this project, Milići and Vlasenica had developed Strategic Development Plans, while Srebrenica and Bratunac had not, and Bratunac and Vlasenica had drawn up development plans specifically focusing on agriculture, while Srebrenica and Milići had not. It can be concluded that the needs assessment was properly conducted, and, although some technical problems were evident at the beginning of the consultant selection process, the evaluation team is satisfied that the project implementers undertook due diligence of the initial bidding process to the best of their ability.

Activity 2.3 Select target groups for project support (food production SMEs, agricultural producers)

Target groups for the receipt of support through this project were identified through the conclusions of the needs assessment report, and were therefore postponed until this stage of the project was completed. Calls for training specifically targeting the pre-identified groups were published in the municipalities in which the project is being implemented.

Public calls were announced simultaneously for all three identified beneficiary categories from 27 October to 7 November 2014. Although the evaluation team noted that this was a relatively short announcement period, the backlog introduced to the project due to the flooding experienced by the Birač region in its initial months, in combination with the forthcoming holiday period necessitated this. In total, 155 Individual Producers and 16 SMEs submitted applications before the call's closure, suggesting that it was open or a sufficiently long period to fulfil the project's aims.

Upon closure of the call, based on the low number of received applications from SMEs and cooperatives, believed to be a result of the brevity of calls resulting from the reasons outlined above, it was decided to form a joint training group consisting of SMEs and cooperatives from all four target municipalities in Srebrenica, with a total of 14 participants (4 from Srebrenica, 7 from Bratunac, 1 from Milići, and 2 from Vlasenica). A second training group was composed of individual producers from Srebrenica (14 applied and 12 selected for the training) and Bratunac (51 applied and 22 selected for the training), totalling 34 trainees.

On 15 December 2014, the project opened a public call for trainings of individual producers and women social entrepreneurs from the municipalities of Vlasenica and Milići. In order to secure enough applications and avoid the holiday period, the application process lasted until 15 January and the training began at the end of January. A key aim here was to finish the grant awarding procedures before the spring planting season. Upon closure of this second call, it was decided to hold trainings within the individual municipalities for 20 individuals (of 32 applicants) in Milići, and 20 (of 56 applicants) in Vlasenica.

Although the evaluation team expressed a certain degree of concern at the shortness of calls for applicants, the interviewees from both CARE and RAS stated that the number of applicants for each target group was satisfactory, given the numbers in each category operating within the municipalities involved. The evaluation team also recognised both the holiday season (an extended period throughout January for much of the region's population) and the urgency of the impending planting season as factors influencing the shortness of calls. Furthermore, the use of local media to advertise calls was believed to be a successful means of promotion, although prior research into the types of media typically accessed by agricultural producers within the region would have been desirable.

Activity 2.4 Design and implement training program for 80 food production SMEs and agricultural cooperatives

The consultants responsible for creating the Needs Assessment Report were also engaged to design and deliver the entire training programme. Four days of training were held together for SME food producers and cooperatives, simultaneous to those for individual producers from Bratunac and Srebrenica on 19, 26 and 27 November, and 11 December 2014. The four training days for individual producers from Milići and

Vlasenica were held simultaneously on 29 January, and 4, 5 and 18 February 2015. Alongside the training, participants were required to fill out two questionnaires and an evaluation form. The first Questionnaire (completed prior to the training program) was designed to check the participants' knowledge about business plans prior to the workshops. The second Questionnaire checked participants' knowledge about business plan after completion of the workshops. The Evaluation form was used to gather information on participants' satisfaction with and knowledge gained within the workshop.

The overall aim of the training program was to obtain a total of 200 completed business plans from all three groups of beneficiaries. Eventually, 197 business plans were completed: 113 from women participants, 71 from individual producers & SMEs (Bratunac 16, Srebrenica 8, Milići 25, Vlasenica 22), and 13 from cooperatives (Bratunac 7, Srebrenica 4, Milići 1, Vlasenica 1). This total of 84 completed business plans from SMEs and cooperatives exceeded the target of 80 set within this activity. It was explained by CARE International's representative that 88 SMEs and cooperatives were invited to (and attended) the trainings, a number also above the target for this activity.

Activity 2.5 Select beneficiaries – recipients of project grants and in-kind contributions

After the delivery of business plans by the stated deadline (18 December 2014 for Bratunac and Srebrenica municipalities and SMEs and cooperatives, and 26 February 2015 for Milići and Vlasenica municipalities), business plans were assessed and ranked, with site visits being carried out to further assess the accuracy of data provided by potential beneficiaries in February and March 2015 for the two groups of applicants respectively. Following on-site visits, further appraisal of the submitted business plans was made, and the CARE Selection Committee consisting of all members from all four municipalities,⁵ made the final decision on grant beneficiaries on 2 March 2015 and 16 April 2016, with a number of reserve beneficiaries also being selected, in case of failure to provide adequate paperwork on the part of beneficiaries, or in the case of extra funds for assistance being found. Totals for the two calls were as follows:

- Bratunac: First year: 9 women, 2 Individual producers(1 is led by women) and 5 SME and Cooperatives (1 of which is run by a woman); Second year: 1 SME (managed by a woman)
- Srebrenica: First year: 4 women, 4 individual producers, 3 Cooperatives
- Milići: First year: 6 women, 2 individual producers, 1 SME; Second year: 2 women, 1 individual producer (also a woman), 1 SME
- Vlasenica: First year: 8 women, 4 individual producers; Second year: 1 women, 3 individual producers, (1 is a women)

The evaluation team were also told that support in drafting the business plans was provided by project implementers to those who had attended the training, and that this was a great additional asset to those applicants with minimal entrepreneurial experience. Due to the urgency of the forthcoming planting season, it was imperative that deadlines for each of the selection processes were strictly adhered to. The evaluation team believes that this overall process was performed correctly, and maximised the efficiency of the selection process. The addition of a reserve list of candidates should be highlighted as a plus point, as when additional resources have been found elsewhere to provide grants, the process of application and selection did not have to be repeated. An additional 10 business plans were supported from the reserve lists.

Activity 2.6 Provide grants and in-kind contributions to 16 beneficiaries – for production improvement and physical infrastructure

Grants and in-kind contributions were initially intended to be awarded to 8 individual producers and 8 SMEs & cooperatives. However, with additional funding found, this figure eventually rose to 16 individual producers and 10 SMEs and cooperatives. Due to the seasonality of agriculture, and the initial delay in the project due to the flooding in May 2014, delays in relation to the signing of contracts and awarding of grants were to be expected. However, all contracts were eventually signed by the end of January 2016.

⁵ CARE formed a committee consisting of CARE's Project Manager, Director of RAS, MAJA director, one official from each municipality, and one observer.

Activity 2.7 Facilitate formation of agricultural SME clusters

Representatives stated that while this activity was originally planned for implementation throughout the duration of the project, during the early stages of project implementation it was realised that it would be better to facilitate formation of clusters on the basis of the SMEs' needs assessment, as assessed through reports and round tables. Due to this adaptation of the initial plan, the potential for the formation of more effective and efficient SME agricultural clusters was improved. By culmination of the project, clusters had been established for berry fruit producers, milk producers, potato growers and beekeepers.

Relevance of activities for achieving planned result

The activities undertaken in order to achieve this Expected Result can be considered highly relevant. It is notable that stakeholder trainings delivered were in accordance with RAS employees' identified needs. Moreover, needs assessment documents were used as a guide in planning the trainings and education for beneficiaries. Trainings were relevant and useful according to survey responses from beneficiaries (see Annex 8). All grant recipients who responded to the Evaluation Team's survey in 2015 and in 2016 stated that the grants they received were very useful, while business plan writing was unanimously assessed as highly beneficial.

Effectiveness of activities for achieving planned result

It is evident that the increase in RAS's scope, capacity and number of members was effective and successful. Introduction of the membership fee can be considered as a key feature in the improvement of their performance (and quantifiability of their performance) in all municipalities. According to the responses of the survey conducted by the evaluation team amongst grant beneficiaries, beneficiaries (individual producers, SMEs and Cooperatives) were either members of RAS before and continued their membership (which implies that they opted to pay the introduced membership fee), or became members during project implementation (see Annex 8).

Moreover, the creation of a mobile team proved to be an effective way of providing RAS services to the local producers. The opening of the satellite office in Vlasenica will allow a more efficient utilization of teams and specialists in the future, reducing travel times and increasing the efficiency of coordination of field visits.

At the same time, the project activities oriented toward export of produce, while they set the groundwork for the later stages of the project, did not bear much direct fruition during this project phase. One of the reasons for this is the insufficient number of opportunities for local producers in terms of direct export activities and another has been the lack of uptake from local businesses of wares offered directly through clusters. However, having said this, there is now an infrastructure in place for long term collective bargaining when aiming toward achieving export-oriented sales. Furthermore, beneficiaries' success in signing sales contracts on the local market (with 24 of the 26 SME and cooperative beneficiaries signing such contracts during the course of the project) can be said to have been a strongly successful aspect of this component.

Efficiency of activities for achieving planned result

RAS's membership fee was introduced in the early stages of the project and has formed a basis for measuring the efficiency and stability of the increased capacities and services of RAS. It is evident that RAS's (paid) membership increase throughout the project shows its efficiency in this regard, as does the introduction of a higher-category membership for SMEs in 2016, which has thus far shown a healthy degree of uptake.

Moreover, the number of food production SMEs and agricultural cooperatives and their members that developed business plans and implemented them confirms the efficiency of the activities.

Considering that grants and in-kind contributions were initially intended to be awarded to a total of 8 individual producers and 8 SMEs and cooperatives and that this number was eventually increased to 26, the efficiency of activities in regard to the selection of grant beneficiaries is proven.

Sustainability

The membership system has helped in achieving sustainability of the perception of RAS as an important expert oriented organisation in all municipalities of the region. It is very positive that RAS has developed a platform for mobile communication (via which they inform their members about urgent measures for the protection of plants in relation to forecast weather conditions), and their growth (through the aid of Vlasenica municipality) through the opening of a satellite office is both strategically sustainable and an asset to the communities they serve. RAS's purchase of their own premises in Bratunac has also aided their long-term sustainability, and the location of these offices allows for further expansion of capacities in the future.

According to the survey conducted amongst grant beneficiaries (see Annex 8), all 25 respondents who are members of RAS confirmed that networking through RAS was either very beneficial (88%) or partly beneficial (12%). Therefore, further development of their services also contributes to the sustainability of the project results.

Expected Result 3: Women and social entrepreneurship promoted at regional level as a sustainable business model

For a matrix of indicators and their relevant activities, as analysed by the evaluation team, please see Annex 5.

Indicator 1. NGO MAJA turned into a resource centre for the promotion of women and social entrepreneurship

It is demonstrated by the project's progress that Maja, has continued to evolve into a resource centre for the promotion of women entrepreneurship, in large thanks to the dedication of the NGO's staff. This is particularly visible in the second part of the project where the MAJA membership database was introduced. While no formal membership structure of the organisation exists, prior to the project Maja Kravica, according to interviewees, regularly served approximately 60-65 women, although nowadays, in a large part thanks to the awareness-raising of the organisation through its participation in and promotion by the project and its activities, it serves approximately double this number, with 123 women participating in its activities, encompassing a total of 491 household members.

However, in spite of this growth in size and capacity, the intention of providing a weekly consultancy through cooperation with RAS, as recommended in the consultancy report of Ms Nerka Jugo, although initially enacted, ceased after several months. Although at the point of the mid-term evaluation the representatives of Maja had expressed a certain degree of disappointment with this, it was believed by both RAS and CARE that it was far more efficient for consultants to be deployed to the field as a team to undertake site visits to provide their expertise than to have an individual consultant available in Maja's offices one day per week for surgery sessions. This field team (described in Expected Result 2, Indicator 1) has indeed been of greater benefit to the grant beneficiaries and similar project participants. In the final year of the project, one of the former interns on the Young Professionals Program implemented as part of the project, has taken on the role of an in-house consultant within Maja. Not only has this fulfilled the intended function, but the former intern has, through the Young Professionals Program, learned many things that are undoubtedly invaluable to the role. She is supported in this role by another 5 women who are individual producers with experience in different sectors. They give advice to other women producers in the sectors of growing vegetables in polycarbonate (plastic) greenhouses, berry production, goat rearing, dairy and beekeeping.

The consultancy provided by CEDES was considered highly useful, allowing Maja to identify issues within its management, streamline its needs and align them with those of the community, and to help it with its awareness of grant application writing, with CEDES being attentive to Maja's needs. Two series of funds

were applied for during the consultancy period; to create a resource centre and a women's entrepreneurial bank.

Additionally, MAJA played a critical role in the employment of 30 women in the seedling nursery recently opened within the municipality. The advice and education the women obtained during with the assistance of Maja throughout the course of this project were decisive factors in their employment.

Indicator 2. Initiatives taken by municipalities in support of women/social enterprises, as a result of the project

Indicator 2 was highly influenced by changes in the political climate within municipalities. While the Interim Narrative Report claimed that the Mayor of Bratunac municipality initiated a procedure to grant NGO Maja Kravica with the building of the pre-war cooperative Kravicanka for use by a women's cooperative as a chicken farm and refrigeration plant, recent developments have slowed down this process. Maja representatives attributed this to changes in the local political climate within the municipality. It was also pointed out by all representatives that many activities undertaken in order to support women/social enterprises were undertaken in combination with those of Activities 1.2, 1.5 & 2.2, such as the hosting of training, forums, trade fairs and similar activities, which were aimed at betterment of the economic potential and situation across the board. Largely as a result of Maja Kravica's involvement in the project and subsequent increased visibility, Bratunac municipality has initiated a Committee on Gender Budgeting. Members of MAJA have had very active role in this municipal body.

Furthermore, the forums held in each municipality have allowed women and social entrepreneurs greater direct access to municipal authorities, in order to allow their needs and views to be heard. It was noted by the CARE representative that these forums have prioritised issues with agricultural trade in small villages and settlements, and, due to the networking element that they offer as a secondary effect, have taken on some elements of a 'micro trade fair'.

Indicator 3. At least 60 women led and social enterprises developed business plans, and implement them, partly with financial support of the project (grants)

As a result of the public calls for trainings of women social entrepreneurs, 186 applications were received. From these, 126 women were invited to the initial four-day training sessions, held in Bratunac, Milići and Vlasenica. After completing the project trainings in all 4 target municipalities, 113 business plans were submitted by women (Bratunac 39, Srebrenica 12, Milići 30, Vlasenica 32). Resources were found to provide grants to 30 of the women entrepreneurs who submitted business plans. All beneficiaries completed all necessary paperwork and received their grants. Due to the seasonality of agriculture, and the initial delay in the project due to the flooding in May 2014, some delays were experienced in the first half of the project, but all grant sub-projects were successfully implemented by the conclusion of the project. A further four women who had initially formulated and submitted business plans as a result of the training given as a part of this project successfully found grants elsewhere in order for them to implement the necessary activities to expand their capacities.

It can be concluded that number of women who submitted the business plan was considerably above the expected number. This proves a need for these calls and a need to invest in increasing capacities of women – individual producers. From meetings with municipal representatives, the evaluation team was satisfied that municipalities are aware of this need, particularly in rural communities, and to this end visible efforts have been made by both Vlasenica and Bratunac municipalities.

Indicator 4. At least 4 social entrepreneurs signed sales and export contracts

25 sales contracts were signed by women producers during the course of the project, of varying sizes and quantities, and one export contract was also signed by women's cooperative OPZ Zena. It must also be noted here that the social entrepreneurship component of beneficiary activities supported through the project was unclear, and it may be beneficial if future forums and trainings organized throughout the Birač region include lectures and case studies that fully explain the concept of social entrepreneurship to involved stakeholders.

Activity 3.1 Facilitate NGO MAJA to become a resource centre for women and social entrepreneurship

Maja benefited from the project participation as it expand its capacities and develop along its aim of becoming a resource centre for women within the local community. Training given to Maja's staff following on from the initial consultancy period at the start of the project was carried out through the capacity building needs assessment and three days of training held on 4, 7 & 8 April 2014 in the premises of Maja. This has greatly improved Maja's ability for self-appraisal in terms of the resources and expertise it can provide to the community.

The shared internship placement between Maja and RAS was of strong benefit to Maja in improving its connections to agriculture-oriented services and experts in the region, and through this the organisation has been able to source expertise that its clients needed during the project. The appointment of a former project intern as an agricultural consultant within Maja's premises will ensure the sustainability of this. The fact that Maja's cooperative 'Zena' has successfully started exploitation of their raspberry seedling nursery within the duration of the project, and that the project's advice and financial support led to a more sustainable mode of production (through reconstruction of the farm premises and support in getting the access to the nursery repaved by the municipality) is also highly encouraging in this regard. Through the project and its promotion, MAJA has also become a more recognized resource centre in both Entities of Bosnia & Herzegovina, and has formed or strengthened connections and communication with various institutions across all governmental and administrative levels, all of which has undeniably contributed to increasing their recognition as a resource centre for women's entrepreneurship. However, it was noted during the mid-term evaluation that Maja's priority in selecting interns was their knowledge of English language and computer literacy, as opposed to agricultural education background. Unfortunately, Maja still lacks capacity in this regard.

Activity 3.2 Conduct needs assessment for technical support to socially oriented food production SMEs

This activity was merged with Activity 2.2, and assessment was carried out concurrently as stated in the Interim Narrative Report. The amendment of Maja's statutes was performed without any issues arising. The evaluation team noted during the mid-term assessment, however, that little evidence of the social orientation of women's grants could be seen, and nothing was presented in the final evaluation to confirm otherwise.

Activity 3.3 Design and implement campaigns promoting women and social entrepreneurship addressing potential entrepreneurs, cooperatives and municipalities

Colosseum, a PR agency from the nearby city of Tuzla, was contracted to provide the promotional campaign for the project. A key aspect of this was the filming of four short films giving narratives of the lives of women beneficiaries impacted upon by the project. These have been screened around the country, maximising the project's exposure on a national level, and have also been uploaded to YouTube. Colosseum also organized promotional material and branding for the Vlasenica and Bratunac trade fairs, a lasting legacy of the project.

However, the contract with Colosseum was prematurely terminated, and the final payment tranche withheld. According to the representative of CARE International, although the Agency successfully delivered branding and multimedia products and strategies, they were unable to create a brochure summarizing the project's aims and achievements. InfoHouse, a Sarajevo-based media consultancy firm with a wide range of experience in working with the NGO sector and donors, oversaw delivery of this product, and the media campaign was concluded successfully.

On a local level, promotion was undertaken by 'Priatelji Srebrenice' (Friends of Srebrenica), a civil society organisation based in Srebrenica with whom one of the interns selected to work on the project had strong links, and Maja, who arranged promotion of the project on a number of local radio stations. According to the results of a survey of beneficiaries undertaken on behalf of the evaluation team during the mid-term evaluation, 66% of respondents considered the promotional work of "Priatelji Srebrenice" highly beneficial, with an additional 28% of women and 27% of individual producers, SMEs and cooperatives considering it partly beneficial.

Activity 3.4 Select target groups for project support (women and social entrepreneurs)

This activity was postponed due to the delay of the delivery of the needs assessment report (as with Activity 2.7), deemed necessary as a basis for target group identification. The selection process for women and social entrepreneurs was undertaken together with the other categories of beneficiaries, as described under Activity 2.3. Out of 186 received applications, the Selection Committee selected 126 candidates for the training program. Representatives from Maja explained that selection was based upon the completion and submission of an application form by applicants, and, where necessary, follow-up telephone interviews. It is positive that a slightly greater number than the 120 intended candidates were chosen (126 in total), as the representative of CARE elucidated in a focus group.

Activity 3.5 NGO Maja provides trainings for 120 women and social entrepreneurs

NGO Maja successfully provided training to 126 women and social entrepreneur applicants through four training programs. The provision of travel to all trainees by the project ensured that those in the most remote places and those affected most severely by economic hardship could attend. The inclusion of the Gender Centre of Republika Srpska in the final day of training at each location allowed the women trainees increased access to and awareness of resources that may be of a high level of relevance to them.

Activity 3.6 Support at least 24 women and social enterprises with project grants to facilitate implementation of their business plans

In total, 32 women and social entrepreneurs had received grants for the implementation of their business plans, with a further four finding funds elsewhere to realize their business plans. The fact that not only were more grants awarded, but also additional beneficiaries were able to find funding from alternative sources, attests to the diligence involved in the distribution of funds.

ACTIVITY 3.7 Organization of exchange forums for women and social entrepreneurs

Project facilitators in each of the municipalities involved in the project organised exchange forums. These have proved to be an invaluable aspect of the project for bringing together stakeholders from the municipal authorities and agricultural producers. Although 10 forums were initially planned, by the time of the final evaluation, 11 had been held, with a 12th scheduled prior to the end of the calendar year. A summary of the dates, locations and issues discussed at the exchange forums can be found in Annex 2.

Relevance of activities for achieving planned result

Based on the responses from women beneficiaries it can be concluded that the selection of the training topics for the women individual producers category of beneficiaries proved to be relevant throughout the target municipalities. The project partners correctly followed the Needs Assessment Analyses recommendations and used them to plan activities for individual beneficiaries, including trainings and grant selection. Trainings were relevant and useful, according to responses from beneficiaries. All 30 respondents to the evaluation team's survey of women grant beneficiaries (see Annex 8) stated that the grants have been very useful, while business plan writing was likewise assessed as highly beneficial.

Effectiveness of activities for achieving planned result

Based on beneficiary evaluation results **it is evidenced that Maja's capacities have increased**. Maja has continued to evolve into a resource centre for the promotion of women and social entrepreneurship. At the same time, the effectiveness of conducted activities was temporarily reduced in order to increase the efficiency of those activities. More precisely, although an initial intention of the project was to provide a weekly consultancy within Maja's premises, through consultation with RAS this ceased after several months with a mobile RAS consultation team being introduced as an alternative. The in-house consultancy has now been reinstated, due to the employment of a former project intern, as well as the formation of an expert team of individual women producers specializing in a variety of agricultural areas. According to responses from beneficiaries, the visits from mobile teams were considered valuable and beneficial. Therefore, the temporary alteration of this activity could be justified.

The evaluation team is satisfied that **both Bratunac and Vlasenica municipalities have improved efforts toward the supporting of initiatives aimed toward women/social enterprises**. The continued scheduling of forums (that women claimed to be very beneficial) or regular meetings with consultants could help determine what would be the most effective use of municipalities' resources in relation to individual

women productions. With an as yet unclear situation in regard to the political administration of Srebrenica following the 2016 local elections in Bosnia & Herzegovina, it is not possible to say how this town will develop strategically in relation to women/social enterprises. No representative of Milići municipality was present during the field visit to provide answers in this regard, but it would seem that little interest has been paid by municipal authorities to this component of the project throughout its implementation. Therefore, it can be concluded for certain that **two out of four municipalities have improved efforts toward supporting women's enterprises.**

While the number of women who submitted business plans was highly positive and proved the effectiveness of activities in this term, **no social enterprises were included as beneficiaries**, which decreased the overall effectiveness of the planned result. To this end, it would be beneficial for project participants, and in particular Maja, to seek external guidance in establishing ongoing parameters for an understanding of social entrepreneurship in communities with whom they cooperate for the purposes of future projects.

Maja secured travel subsidies for all trainees involved in the project, which ensured that those in the most remote location and those affected most severely by economic hardship could attend training sessions and forums. This proves effectiveness of the project activity.

Efficiency of activities for achieving planned result

The call for grants and organised training in the drafting of business plans was very efficient since the number of women who submitted business plans surpassed expectations. This proves a localized need for such calls and a need to invest in increasing the capacities of women – individual producers. At the same time, the number of trained women was 126 while according to the plan this number was 120. This proves efficiency of the activity and also highlights the fact that there was a need for such training amongst women within the target municipalities. Similarly, while the project plan was to support 24 women with grants and/or in-kind contributions, a total of 32 women were directly supported through grants provided by the project, with a further 4 being supported through funding obtained externally.

Sustainability

All women respondents (30) who completed the questionnaires designed for the evaluation process (see Annex 8) confirmed that the project contributed to and was very beneficial for the sustainability of their business. The implemented activities increased MAJA's organisational sustainability. As officials in MAJA explained, as a result of their capacity building, they have improved the quality and range of services that they provide to their members, and also doubled the number of women they serve, with the knock-on effect of serving almost 500 household members. The range of services provided now includes advisory services in Maja's office once a week, with close cooperation with RAS, and direct input into municipal budgeting and strategy.

Recommendations

from the Mid-Term Evaluation

The mid-term evaluation put forward a series of twelve recommendations for the project and its stakeholders to implement during the final year of the project. Here, it must be noted that the mid-term evaluation was not initially planned within the scope of project implementation, but, after an internal review of the results of the first half of the project, it was determined that one would be organized internally, in order to better formalize and utilize the experiences gained within the first project period to allow better direction and planning of the activities to be undertaken in the project's second half. These recommendations were thus a result of self-reflection of the project team, and their own critical review of project activities. It must be further noted that some of the recommendations drawn up by the mid-term evaluation team fell outside of the planned scope of the project's activities. Below is presented a summary of these recommendations and whether they were adhered to by project implementers.

Recommendation 1: Municipalities are to address policy priorities listed in the Needs Assessment document as core issues at round tables and meetings between municipality officials and other stakeholders, merging, where relevant, initiatives between municipalities.

- **The recommendation was taken on board and the intended result achieved.**

Recommendation 2: Place greater focus on communication between women and municipality officials in order to strengthen support municipalities provide to women/social enterprises in their communities.

- **The recommendation was fully taken up by Bratunac and Vlasenica municipalities while less so by Srebrenica and Milići municipalities.**

Recommendation 3: More focus should be put toward facilitating the formalisation of cooperation between food production SMEs and cooperatives in export activities, through greater promotion and inclusion of clusters.

- **The raspberry production cluster in the region was directly strengthened by the project, and sales have increased as a direct result of this, including the (indirect) export of raspberries produced by project beneficiaries.**

Recommendation 4: Better utilize RAS's expertise in selecting and including enterprises that, through their activities, can be considered to benefit the wider community, particularly in cooperation with Maja.

- **Social entrepreneurship as an idea is beginning to develop fully in the minds of project stakeholders, but the project did not address the concept in its full capacity. Therefore, the recommendation from the midterm report is still very strongly supported by evaluators.**

Recommendation 5: Greater effort should be put into supporting municipalities to start initiatives toward support of women/social enterprises through the organisation of forums or in cooperation with RAS experts.

- **The recommendation was fully taken by Bratunac and Vlasenica, municipalities while less so by Srebrenica and Milići municipalities.**

Recommendation 6: Forums with municipalities and meetings with banks and donors should be used to maximise the potential for Maja to develop a bank for women's entrepreneurial activities.

- **Based on evaluation results, this recommendation is still relevant**

Recommendation 7: In later special calls, a special focus should be placed upon inclusion of enterprises that are considered to benefit the wider community through their activities, due to limited evidence of the social orientation of women's grants and inclusion of social enterprises, following the model of the 'Zena' cooperative developed prior to the project's outset.

- **Based on evaluation results, this recommendation is still relevant**

Recommendation 8: Inclusion of aspects of social entrepreneurship and an awareness of greater need for cooperation between stakeholders in the media campaign run by Colosseum to trigger greater discussion on the topic.

- **The media campaign placed a greater emphasis on the need for social entrepreneurship in the areas covered by the project, helping significantly in terms of awareness-raising.**

Recommendation 9: Greater involvement of Maja in the media campaign, in order to improve their visibility, bearing particularly in mind that many of their would-be clients have a low level of technological uptake.

- **Based on evaluation results, this recommendation is still relevant.**

Recommendation 10: Improve capacities in regard to English language knowledge for Maja officials, possibly through the project's internship program.

- **The project's priority was to employ an advisor for agriculture in MAJA's premises, which was achieved. Based on evaluation results the recommendation to strengthen English language support for MAJA's officials is still relevant**

Recommendation 11: More time should be planned when advertising the call for grant applications, taking into account holiday periods and other events or activities which may prevent applicants from applying for a particular call.

- **Although no more calls were issued throughout the duration of the project, this recommendation should be borne in mind when publishing calls for future projects.**

Recommendation 12: Introduce more quantitative goals expected for the achievement of indicators (i.e. number/percentage/value) to aid measurement of success of the results.

- **The project management started to quantitatively follow project progress and success through the beneficiary monitoring table, developed in part as a result of the mid-term evaluation. Although the table still lacked full information, it was seen by the evaluation team to be a great improvement in record-keeping. It would be recommended to use the monitoring form developed as the basis for collection of quantitative data in similar or related projects, with a control group also monitored throughout the period of project implementation to allow for the measurement of external influences.**

Conclusions

Based on the evaluation results, it can be concluded that the project has been successfully implemented. The project contributed to the development of joint initiatives between municipalities and economic development institutions, and this indicator was fulfilled. Moreover, different strategic documents have been initiated, providing a valuable project legacy for all target groups. In addition, although none of such documents have yet been adopted, certain initiatives focused on strategy development in municipalities have been created. Current cooperation between stakeholders could be used as a foundation for the development of further strategic documents.

The project contributed directly to sales activities, and indirect export contracts were signed, with goods being distributed via intermediary companies. At the same time, the organisation of fairs was effective. While the first fair was postponed due to the devastating effects of the floods in May 2014 throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is positive that the preparations already made within the scope of the project were not wasted, with resources already allocated instead being used for immediate support for a discussion on post-flood recovery for small and medium agricultural enterprises in the affected municipalities. Four trade fairs were held in total, surpassing the initial number of planned fairs. The results of the Needs Assessment studies were fully utilized in planning activities, which proved to be both a beneficial and correct approach to achieving the project's results.

The exchange forums were welcomed by beneficiaries, but it can be noted that the inclusion of banks in the earlier forums could have been better planned. To this end, a vetting procedure, via which project stakeholders could have analysed the intentions of participating financial institutions, should have been employed. The establishment of sales-oriented partnerships was achieved, and this component looks particularly sustainable, with yields of berry-producing beneficiaries expected to increase year-on-year for the foreseeable future.

At the same time, the young professional program has been implemented successfully and achieved greater than expected results, while the Regional Advisory Service has increased its capacities, opened a satellite office in Vlasenica municipality (with strong support from municipal authorities), diversified its service portfolio, and serves an increased number of clients.

The foreseen number of 40 food production SMEs and agricultural cooperatives and their members that developed business plans was surpassed (84 in total), as was the number who successfully implemented them. Similarly, the initial number of 18 women grant beneficiaries was eventually increased to 30. The support provided to individuals who had attended the training in drafting the business plans proved to be very beneficial for all target groups. The eventual 84 completed business plans from SMEs and cooperatives exceeded the target of 80 set for this activity.

Maja has continued to develop as an organization, significantly expanding its outreach to its target audience, and has become an established and recognized resource centre for the promotion of women and social entrepreneurship. Although some improvements regarding communication between women

and municipality officials have been made, these are more evident in Bratunac municipality than elsewhere. However, it would seem that there has been a certain degree of progress in all four target municipalities of the project in this regard.

Lessons learned:

- All beneficiaries considered project either extremely beneficial or at least partly beneficial. The project manager leadership skills are one of the major reason for this success rate of the project. Project manager was extremely devoted to success of the project and as a result the project ended with overachieved results in almost all criterion and indicators.
- Political situation in the selected municipalities has highly influenced the project implementation when it comes to cooperation with municipalities.
- The cooperation between municipality officials and project beneficiaries is heavily influenced by internal/personal interest of municipality officials. In the phase of the municipality selection it is important that this aspect is also considered.
- Social entrepreneurship as a concept should be more promoted while communities should be educated about the idea.

Beneficiary needs that can be used for new initiatives:

Based on the questionnaire sent to all grant beneficiaries, the following results regarding potential project improvements have been identified:

What individual producers would like to be improved:

- To speed up the procedures for receipt of grants
- To increase the value of grants available

What SMEs would like to be improved:

- To adapt trainings to the varying knowledge levels of different participants
- To speed up the procedures for receipt of grants
- To increase the periods for training implementation

What cooperatives would like to be improved:

- To speed up the procedures for receipt of grants
- To increase the periods for training implementation
- To adapt trainings to the varying knowledge levels of different participants