



SUCCESS STORY

New Community Centers Strengthen Local Bonds in Kosovo

Facilities provide place to gather and discuss local issues.



Photo by Community Action Initiative Program

Residents of Staro Gracko/Grackë e vjetër gather around their newly-renovated Community Center.

“These new facilities are a great gathering place for young people here, helping to keep them off the streets and out of trouble,” said Marko Ratković, the village community forum leader.

For the people of Kosovo, family is the foundation of a vibrant culture that values bringing people together regularly to celebrate the big events, like holidays and weddings, as well as the commonplace, like traditional family lunch on a Sunday afternoon. In many of the country’s remote villages, community is a vital extension of the family unit – with families regularly working together in farm cooperatives and town councils.

The village of Jošanica/Jashanicë in northern Kosovo has 350 residents, many of whom are young people. With unemployment high in the Serb-majority village, keeping the community’s youth occupied was a major concern for parents – so they decided to take action. With a \$76,000 grant from USAID’s Community Action Initiative Program, citizens of Jošanica/Jashanicë were able to rebuild their long-neglected Community Center and sports field, as well as build a brand new children’s playground.

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Through this program, USAID has committed over \$220,000 to rehabilitating dozens of community centers across Kosovo – including major renovations for nine – to create a place for residents to come together to celebrate important community events and give young people a place to call their own.

Since 2011, the Community Action Initiative Program has worked in 40 minority communities throughout Kosovo to strengthen civil society and promote community and economic development. The program has frequently partnered with the local municipal government on projects identified by the community, like in the Bosniak-majority community of Dobruša/Dobrushë, where the Municipality of Istok/g dedicated \$66,000 on top of USAID’s \$20,000 commitment to build the village a new community center.

The process of planning and building the community center is just as important for community cohesion as the completed center itself. This was the case for the multi-ethnic village of Staro Gracko/Grackë e Vjetër, whose residents completed their new community center in January 2014 with support from USAID.

“This center means a lot to us. It’s a place where the whole village can come together to celebrate important life events and find common points of understanding,” said resident Zoran Ćirković.

USAID’s Community Action Initiative Program concluded in July 2014.