Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
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Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC
Cooperation with Eastern Europe

Active Citizenship and Community Development Learning Trajectory

1. Rationale: Why is community development necessary for Roma Inclusion?

Community development (CD) happens through a process of community empowerment, and generates active citizenship. It is necessary to situate Roma Inclusion initiatives within a CD approach because it is the only way to promote a bottom up and participatory approach to Roma inclusion, which in turn is a pre-condition for ownership and sustainability. Working in this way, we are **building capacities from within the Roma community so that the community itself is able to dialogue with different stakeholders**: other communities, local authorities, decision makers at local and national level, NGOs and funders. A CD approach also builds capacities and expectations within the community to hold Roma interlocutors in these dialogues to account, making these initiatives more likely to be sustainable. Further, working with a community empowerment and development framework enables us to connect up political, social and economic rights, and see the two-way links between active citizenship and economic empowerment. Empowerment through economic activity builds self-esteem, and when linked into a community development process, it helps young people not be so overwhelmed by poverty that they cannot think of the future, and empowers them to fight for their social and political rights.

2. Current barriers to community development

Sustainable community development requires commitment to Roma empowerment at local and national levels of government as well as within the community. This is a process which includes: building confidence and capacity to increase the participation of Roma and especially Romani women in decision-making even at the most local level; providing advice and training to local councils, and working with national governments through policy dialogue. However, when SDC approaches a local authority with a proposal for targeting, the Roma issue is never a priority despite their inclusive discourse. When it comes to the local authority taking over funding the project, they never have the money.

There is a generalised lack of awareness about citizen participation and active citizenship that needs to be addressed in the region, not just in Roma communities. This is reinforced rather than transformed by development interventions which tend to perpetuate clientelist relations between donors and communities, and local authorities and communities. There is also a lack of a systemic approach to Roma Inclusion which means that donors fund specific initiatives without seeing how different barriers (drivers of poverty and inequality) converge in people's lives (e.g. education without addressing barriers to employment for Roma, especially discrimination).

3. Why are some Roma Inclusion initiatives not effective?

a) Roma Local Experts

Roma inclusion mechanisms developed without the input of the local community, lack legitimacy and end up rejected by both communities and local authorities. The Roma local expert sits in the mayor's office to provide advice in developing policy towards Roma communities. However, when they lack the support of an organised, empowered community to legitimise them and to hold them to account, they have to make compromises with the local authority or a political party, and are manipulated at election

time, when they are pressured to bring votes. If the governing party loses, then the Roma experts, Roma school mediators, Roma health mediators are fired. In Romania, only 20% of local authorities have recruited local experts, because they see this role as an imposition and a financial burden on them. **The local expert therefore needs to be linked into community development processes, and accountable to Roma communities**. In Hungary, Roma self-government also perpetuates the division between non-Roma, Roma, with the 'Roma expert' dealing separately with housing (etc.) for Roma, and a parallel non-Roma system for the rest. In effect, this is building two types of citizens.

b) Local Initiative Groups and issues of representation
Local Initiative Groups (LIGs) are set up in Roma communities through SDC projects (via the implementing agencies). These groups should facilitate the relationship between Roma community and the local authorities, and develop a Local Action Plan based on the needs identified by the community, which will be submitted to the Mayor's Office to be incorporated in the Local Action Plan of the commune. LIGs can be strengthened, but this often doesn't reach beyond the group. If the community isn't strong collectively, the LIG is also weak, and won't have strength and legitimacy before the local authority. The wider community tends to leave responsibility with this small group and not participate themselves. **The LIG or community action group needs to be a key step in the process of Roma integration, not an end in itself**. Taking a community development approach means looking beyond the project cycle, which can perpetuate clientelist relations between donors and communities. **The community development process needs to build the capacities of the individuals and of the group to shift mindsets from clients to partners of the local authority**.

c) Barriers to economic empowerment
Economic opportunities can be an entry point for people who would not otherwise participate in community development work, and they can see that there is a way of working together and making their lives better. However, European programmes for economic empowerment have not had the expected impact, and monitoring focused on quantitative outcomes has not provided lessons about what makes a difference for unemployed Roma. We found that when the project was not targeted there was insufficient participation by Roma for fear of stigma, or because they assumed it wasn't for them. Barriers to employment need to be addressed, as in some contexts companies require minimum education for many jobs e.g. 10 years of schooling, which Roma cannot fulfil. Discrimination in the labour market and the workplace need to be addressed. Projects are not well designed: they have artificially employed Roma for one month only, paid the employer to employ Roma, who soon sacked the Roma, or they left because of minimal pay and no investment in further training. Less than 10% remained in employment. While the problem is the design, the result is that Roma are scapegoated as not wanting to work.

4. What can be done with SDC support? (Recommendations)

1. Embed initiatives for Roma Inclusion in a broader community development approach
- Where possible, develop existing Roma structures for CD instead of creating new ones (mediators, LAGs, etc), and equip them with knowledge and skills to advocate for their communities
- Link local experts (LE) into wider Roma empowerment strategies that bridge both individual and community empowerment. Build the active participation of all groups within the Roma community – do not rely on empowering one individual (LE) or small group (LIG) as this doesn't bring about long term sustainable community development.
- See it as a process: start with 'small victories' that persuade people that it is possible to improve things in their community, builds trust and creates solidarity
- Bring in expert organisations to support CD – as long as their approach is to work with the community to establish its own structures, and not come with a prepared model. Make use of the strong networks of community development associations, such as the Central and Eastern European Citizens Network (http://www.ceecn.net).

- SDC implementing partners should use community development approaches to train LIGs and other Roma community 'representatives' to work more collectively, holding community meetings open to all rather than meeting with individual families, which can create mistrust.

2. Use participatory monitoring and evaluation to promote accountability

- Design in regular reviews of the relationship between LIGs and their constituencies to ensure that support to the LIG is translating into wider community engagement, organisation and action; support them to strengthen and include local groups, and develop a system of community decision-making and responsibility that can ensure legitimate representation and engage with decision makers at the municipal level.
- Many ESF Roma projects were found to be '[ghost', 'paper' or 'mirage'](#) projects. While SDC projects are not facing this issue, participatory M&E can build stronger accountability to primary beneficiaries, and should be part of our Roma inclusion programming. SDC currently uses beneficiary assessment in other programmes and should extend this to Roma Inclusion. Clear guidance to country offices on participatory monitoring would be valuable.

3. Address the lack of commitment by local authorities to adopting/institutionalising Roma inclusion projects

- Engage with the institutional racism that means that the local experts are not given any powers. This could include training for local authorities and civil society service providers working with Roma communities, to build *inter alia,* understanding that Roma often have to engage in difficult trade-offs to stay ahead of the oppression they experience.
- Identify and work with champions, start with those leaders who see working with Roma as 'win-win' - progressive leadership can radically change how Roma are treated in the workplace and address dependency on the public employment system, by demanding that investors hire local staff and by setting up mentoring programs for newly hired workers. Another example is a municipality (Spišský Hrhov, Slovakia) which employs Roma with low qualifiications in a municipal company.
- Build the voice of marginalised communities so that they can communicate their needs effectively, and **promote Roma participation in joint planning and joint action plans** (with municipalities), led by citizens organized through CD processes.
- Avoid visible targeting: approach local government with projects which benefit everyone, but within which Roma can be prioritized (rather than visibly targeting Roma). Avoid division of Roma services and non-Roma services which perpetuate segregration.
- Involve different levels of government in policy development so that they are on board with Roma inclusion policies.

4. Address the lack of skills, knowledge and awareness in local authorities and civil society to support Roma community development:

- **Provide capacity building and networking for interested municipalities**: an example in Hungary was a forum with the association of mayors and municipalities. Mayors came who are interested in how to resolve Roma issues in their localities and can learn from each other, and demonstrate to others how it is possible. This could include technical assistance to local authorities for budgeting for Roma inclusion measures, as part of our community development programmes.
- **Produce a map/flow diagram to set out CD actions according to the context**. Possible elements: Supportive/unsupportive mayor; LIG/no LIG; isolated community/community within larger town; trusted & embedded NGOs/no trusted NGOs, etc. The flow diagram would give practical guidance: i.e. If we don't have this then we have to take X approach, if we have a supportive mayor then we can take Y approach.

5. Build stronger synergies between education, employment and active citizenship

- Effective actions have included: an inclusive municipal company set up by the mayor to tackle Roma unemployment issues in his municipality; a universal vocational education project which did

not target Roma, but most who joined were Roma; an economic empowerment project which brought people together in localities where Roma previously never met collectively, and they are now interested in continuing with education and community development work; a scheme to register people for identity cards, since without identity cards people cannot access services or employment schemes.

- Promote entrepreneurship and self employment opportunities in the communities as this is key for empowerment and giving voice to the community, as well as poverty reduction.
- Switzerland can share its expertise in apprenticeships: organizing the private sector in a way that private companies are training young people in professions on the job and at the same time they have theoretical training in vocational schools.
- SDC can draw on Slovakia's and other examples of inclusive tendering, if they are going to extend this work.

6. Tackle discrimination in the labour market

- Provide incentives for employers to hire Roma.
- Include incentives to work in legislation for social assistance by transforming cash aid into assistance for those who are starting to work, e.g. free crèche places, assistance for children who take on care roles if parents are working.

7. Economic empowerment programme design and monitoring are critical:

- Ensure that there are qualitative and inclusive/participatory as well as quantitative methods of M&E, and build in plans for sustainability, the flexibility to allow additional services for employer and employee.
- Think from a donor position about entry points: low-scale examples or inclusive tendering; how to get infrastructure projects into Roma communities; socially sensitive budgeting or participatory budgeting
- 'Fake' jobs don't work ('bridge to employment' etc) because of corruption.