

## → A process of change: strengthening internal management and improving service delivery

**Country** Serbia

**Project title** Strengthening internal management and creating citizen-oriented, modern public service desks in the City Hall of Municipality Bela Crkva

**Twinning** Municipality of Steenwijkerland (the Netherlands)  
Municipality of Bela Crkva (Serbia)

**Project period** 1 March 2008 to 30 November 2009

**Project budget** € 54.282,49

### Project objective

Establish a citizens' oriented service desk in the city hall of Bela Crkva and improve the internal management of the municipal organisation.

### Project summary

Citizens have the right to get a prompt answer to their questions. This can only be achieved through a good organised and well functioning information system within the municipality. This not only means a proper city hall with information desks, but also properly trained civil servants who are polite to the citizens and are able to answer the most urgent questions. Furthermore, it is important for the quality of local governance to be able to provide feedback to the services provided by the municipality. The municipality of Bela Crkva felt these things were underdeveloped in the municipality and therefore asked their Dutch partner – the municipality of Steenwijkerland – to assist them by improving their internal management and by establishing a front office and public service desk.

### Core information

Bela Crkva is a town with approximately 12,000 inhabitants. The town lays in the North-Eastern part of Republic of Serbia. Together with the 13 surrounding villages the municipality groups approximately 22,000 people, 55% in the town, 45% in rural areas. The villages are between 2 and 20 km far from Bela Crkva. Bela Crkva has started cooperation with Steenwijkerland in June 2005.

### Problem analysis

The city hall of the municipality of Bela Crkva was an old building without front office where citizens didn't knew where to go and who to approach for their needs and problems. There was no operating room, no internet access, no central heating, no computers for the majority of the employees, and no toilets for the citizens. Also, there was no feedback regarding the citizens' problems,

initiatives, and suggestions, even when they brought these in written form. The reason for this is the lack of a registration mechanism for this input and the absence of clear communication between employees, citizens, and local governance. To conclude, the level of municipal service delivery and the structure of the municipal internal management was poor. The municipality wanted to change this situation and improve its service delivery to the citizens.

### **Project implementation**

The first activity was to reconstruct the city hall and to make a front office with public service desks. Furthermore, toilets for visitors were constructed, the entrance was improved and central heating was installed. Secondly, new hard and software was purchased and was put into place. Training in communication and computer skills were organised for the front office staff in the Netherlands, they also learned how to use the new software. In order to increase the communication between local stakeholders, and through this provide an incentive for local economic development, joint meetings with the Mayor, entrepreneurs, and NGOs were held. Furthermore, flyers and brochures were drafted and printed, informing the citizens about the envisaged changes and inviting the citizens to come to the city hall. The project made it possible for the municipality to become a more capable and professional organisation, and for the city hall to become a welcoming place with more efficient service provision for the citizens.

### **Process management**

The exchange of knowledge and experience with the Dutch partner municipality, the team work with different participants, the newly decorated building, and the new hardware changed the mentality of the municipal staff. Also a new foundation for local development has been established by introducing the dialogue among local government and businesses/NGOs. The first steps are made towards an effective communication with the citizens and the citizens needs are taken care of. Finally, a sound communication and cooperation between the front and back office is established and this proves to function well.

### **Recommendations: do's and don'ts**

- Introduce a new structure to the organisation (i.e. new procedures, provide trainings to staff and invest in hardware).
- Ensure improved working conditions for employees, well functioning computers, telephones and internet.
- Improved treatment of, and communication with, citizens in the municipality.
- Stop ignoring the flaws in internal management and the requests of the citizens.
- There can be no development and changes in a municipality without the participation of citizens.