The RREC

The Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (RREC) is an international organisation with a mission to assist in solving environmental problems. Among other activities, the RREC supports civil society organisations (CSOs) to be more effective in their crucial role in the democratic process. The RREC supports CSOs through grants programme, building capacities and organisational sustainability, and strengthening networking. During its 19 years, the RREC has distributed more than EUR 17 million in 5,500 grants to environmental CSOs. In South Eastern Europe, regional and national grants schemes — including those carried out under the MEDIT project — have been used successfully to support projects of CSOs during the last five years.

The SECTOR project

April 2006 marked the launch of the framework programme SECTOR (Supporting Environmental Civil Society Organisations in South Eastern Europe), which helps grassroots groups perform their role as important drivers of community development in the field of environmental protection. In promoting civil society, SECTOR aims to push grassroots groups perform their roles as important drivers of community development in the field of environmental protection. In promoting civil society, SECTOR aims to push grassroots groups to begin realising their organisational development plans. Thirty-seven percent of the projects focused on awareness-raising activities aiming to make cities more green and promote community involvement in development decisions.

The SECTOR Programme in Serbia gave out EUR 175,000 in national grants, enabling CSOs to carry out 19 projects. The grants sought to improve urban areas by encouraging more sustainable habits and targeted a wide range of groups: local communities, experts, municipal governments, schoolchildren and teachers and the media.

Lessons learned

• CSOs developed skills in educating and awareness raising, building up solid references in this area of their activity. CSOs successfully identified relevant stakeholders for the projects, involved them in activities, and created cross-sectoral coalitions on the local level. They used good media to promote their projects.

• Many organisations gravitate toward niches determined largely by external pressures and donor strategies, which leaves important issues unaddressed. This relates to the environment, CSOs still lack the necessary skills and capacity to change policies to reduce pollution.

• CSOs should be encouraged to get long-term benefits out of their projects and establish sustainable operations with more members, more volunteers and more partners.

National SECTOR grants

The national grants were distributed in three rounds and supported 109 projects in total. Announcements ran from 2006 to 2010, with a total of EUR 590,680 distributed. The major themes of the projects included waste management, energy consumption, sanitation, urban greening and urban transport. Sixty-five percent of the projects addressed waste management issues (recycling, composting, waste motor oil, construction waste, disused plastic bags, etc.). Projects sought to change consumers’ habits and to reuse, recycle and take a more conscientious approach to waste disposal.

Thirty percent of the projects addressed energy efficiency, renewable energy sources and climate change. Projects promoted more efficient energy consumption to achieve a more sustainable use of resources. In NOB, for example, activities focused on heat conservation and the use of energy efficient appliances in households, while those in the Brussels-Grenoble promoted renewable energy.

In Slovenia, energy efficient transport was targeted. Several projects have dealt with land use and urban planning, pointing out the conflict between development of urban areas and environment (in Petre, Subotica in Krails).

Distribution of national grants

A number of national grants were awarded to CSOs to carry out projects aimed at addressing specific needs and challenges. The breakdown of projects and grants by theme is as follows:

- Water and wastewater management
- Waste management
- Waste and wastewater management
- Transport and its impacts
- Energy consumption
- Growing cities and urban greening
- Growing cities and urban greening
- Water management
- Transport and its impacts

Serbian grants

The SECTOR Programme in Serbia gave out EUR 175,000 in national grants, enabling CSOs to carry out 19 projects. The grants sought to improve urban areas by encouraging more sustainable habits and targeted a wide range of groups: local communities, experts, municipal governments, schoolchildren and teachers and the media.

Thirty-five percent of the projects addressed energy efficiency, renewable energy sources and climate change. Projects promoted more efficient energy consumption to achieve a more sustainable use of resources. In NOB, for example, activities focused on heat conservation and the use of energy efficient appliances in households, while those in the Brussels-Grenoble promoted renewable energy.

In Slovenia, energy efficient transport was targeted. Several projects have dealt with land use and urban planning, pointing out the conflict between development of urban areas and environment (in Petre, Subotica in Krails).
In order to draw more attention to issues related to waste generation and disposal in Serbia, the Association of Volunteers (AVG) designed a project with following objectives: reduce waste sent to landfill sites; change perception of organic waste as being a nuisance; encourage the number of municipalities and households that practice composting; and bring together various sectors in resolving waste problems. The project was organized at the level of municipalities and aimed at raising awareness of the importance of composting. AVG conducted workshops for the media and students of secondary and elementary schools and the representatives of the local municipalities; carried out a media campaign that included the production and broadcast of a documentary about composting; held a series of information meetings in three municipalities; distributed composting kits (including a composting bin) to all interested municipalities; and carried out information campaigns in the local media. The project contributed to the reduction of waste disposal in landfills and thus contributed to solving environmental problems related to landfills and greenhouse gases. The number of municipalities and households that practice composting increased and the project managed to bring the popular perception of organic waste as a nuisance.

Cities and Civil Society Get a Boost in Serbia

Composting turns trash to treasure

Energy inefficiency in households is a problem in every metropolitan area. In centrally planned economies (such as the former Yugoslavia), energy efficiency was not considered in the development of one of the key energy sources. This is especially true for Serbia, which has one of the highest energy consumption rates in Europe. The local government and the local government in Pancevo, Serbia, contributed to the success of the project’s implementation and impact.

Sparking interest in electricity savings

Information on composting is available in a book published in Serbia. The book was used in an educational module that was implemented in eight primary schools in the Municipality of Pancevo. Twenty-six teachers benefited from the training and 180 pupils attended workshops in schools. Around 1.5 billion plastic bags are used in Serbia each year. They are in use just briefly but take 1,000 years to decompose. Along with other waste material that could potentially be rescued, they end up as one of the two million metric tons of waste generated annually.

Strengthening partnerships

In Serbia, the Wastepal project is supported by the local government and the local government in Pancevo, Serbia, contribution to the success of the project’s implementation and impact.

Recycling for the Future

Reusing materials efficiently reduces energy consumption and the pollution they put on the environment. Citizens can change their own habits and influence their neighbours to do the same. However, energy savings are still not considered a priority for the public. The CSO wanted to change this perception.

Bad bags

Around 1.5 billion plastic bags are used in Serbia each year. They are not just briefly but take 1,000 years to decompose. Along with other waste material that could potentially be rescued, they end up as one of the two million metric tons of waste generated annually.

This project is supported by many organizations, including the plastic bag-producing companies and local public authorities, and is backed by public opinion on consumers, retailers, and managers of companies. Through this project, the Volunteer Centre of Vojvodina managed to strengthen the awareness of the general public of the importance of reducing and separating waste at its source.
The Master Class training series assisted environmental CSOs. The identified development needs were then addressed through stakeholder interviews and background data, were presented in an updated directory of provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). Results Running from April 2006 to April 2010, it has an overall budget of EUR 3.7 million, Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo (as defined by UNSCR 1244). Society toward more sustainable development and improved living conditions in cities. In promoting civil society, SECTOR aims to push the field of environmental protection. In promoting civil society, SECTOR aims to push development planning tool which was used by 58 CSOs. It helped them to better address the concerns of their communities. Thirty-five groups received seed money to implement selected components of their development plans. This granting scheme identified and supported projects to begin realising their organisational development plans. Monitoring government and industry. Two regional CSO networks received grants to better address the concerns of their communities. Thirty-five groups received seed money to implement selected components of their development plans. By theme, the biggest share of projects — 40 percent — addressed waste-related issues, as this was identified by most of the countries as the most pressing urban problem. Project activities focused on awareness raising and education to influence citizens’ behavior and attitudes. Along with campaigns on the classic topics of recycling and reusing containers and other products, many CSOs used innovative approaches such as using eye-catching lorries to consider sensible shopping bags, teaching householders to reduce waste consumption and educating members of the Roma community on waste collection.

Thirty percent of the projects addressed energy efficiency, renewable energy sources and climate change. Projects promoted more efficient energy consumption to achieve a more sustainable way of life. For example, activities focused on heat conservation and the use of energy-efficient appliances in households, while those in Dimitrovgrad promoted renewable energy. In Subotica, energy-efficient transport was targeted.

National SECTOR grants

The national grants were distributed in three rounds and supported 189 projects in total. Announcements ran from 2006 to 2010, with a total of EUR 590,608 distributed. The most popular types of projects included waste management, energy consumption, sanitation, urban greening and urban transport. By theme, the biggest share of projects — 40 percent — addressed waste-related issues, as this was identified by most of the countries as the most pressing urban problem. Project activities focused on awareness raising and education to influence citizens’ behavior and attitudes. Along with campaigns on the classic topics of recycling and reusing containers and other products, many CSOs used innovative approaches such as using eye-catching lorries to consider sensible shopping bags, teaching householders to reduce waste consumption and educating members of the Roma community on waste collection. Thirty-seven percent of the projects focused on awareness-raising activities aiming to make citizens more green and promote community involvement in development decisions. This CSO activities ranged from removing illegal waste near waterways to establishing ‘green zones’ and green educational fields.

Lessons learned

CSOs developed skills in educating and awareness raising, building up solid references in their areas of activity. CSOs successfully identified relevant stakeholders for the projects, involved them in activities, and created cross-sectoral coalitions on the local level. They made good use of the media to promote their projects. Many organisations gravitate toward a niche determined largely by external pressures and donor strategies, which leaves important issues unaddressed. This relates to the environmentally sustainable development cooperation agency (Sida) and the approaches they use. Nevertheless, CSOs still have learning potential, and projects showed that CSOs have little capacity for effective policy change. CSOs often avoid issues that can lead to disagreement with local or national authorities or the business and industrial lobby.

CSOs do not cooperate enough with other CSOs and instead mainly compete. Neither do they exploit opportunities to enlarge membership and engage volunteers. CSOs should be encouraged to get long-term benefits out of their projects and establish sustainable operations with more members, more volunteers and more partners.