

## CASE STUDY 24

### TOURISM AND FORESTRY IN MIDDLE BOSNIA

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<b>Sector: Forestry and Tourism</b>

#### CONTEXT

The wider Vlašić Mountain area (Middle Bosnia) is a small, homogenous, socially cohesive territory, characterised by common traditions, and a local identity. There is great natural potential in forestry and tourism, but there are also major bottlenecks in the search for sustainable development. Poverty is high, despite the fact that the potential for increasing the quality of life exists. The forest management system is primarily focused on the exploitation of wood as a primary forest product. It has been widely acknowledged that the forest potential has not been adequately used and much space exists to increase productivity, income and employment in this sector. This was the key issue that SNV aimed to deal with over the course of the assignment.

The issues in the wider Vlasic Mountain area relate to local governance, water, forest and tourism. They are similar to those of the rest of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Research shows the need for a systematic approach towards development, and the need for coordinated and joint action from all stakeholders and sectors is essential for achieving change. We found that these sectors can be linked and coordinated. This integration can be achieved either by actions conducted in a single sector, in specific groups of actions or by linking the different players and sectors involved.

The overall aim was to increase income by overcoming constrains of the wider Vlašić Mountain area, including:

- the unused potential of natural resources and cultural-historical heritage for eco-tourism;
- a lack of understanding of the sustainable tourism concept;
- insufficient infrastructure to support diversified tourism in the wider Vlašić Mountain area;
- an area that is economically underdeveloped yet at the same time has great potential for development.

In order to overcome these problems, local authorities need to increase their human and technical capacities. They should pay attention to the planning and programming of projects while taking a longer-term perspective, and should have a full understanding of sustainable development concepts. SNV's overall objective was to build the capacities of the actors, to ensure close cooperation and use this synergy to increase Production, Income and Employment (PIE).

#### CLIENTS

The Cantonal Ministry of Forestry (CMF), a unit of local government in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is aimed at creating and implementing policy related to rural community development following EU standards. It is responsible for the administrative affairs related to the cultivation, protection and improvement of forest plantation, forest communication and exploitation. The regulation of water regimes, water protection and other activities also fall within the competence of the Ministry.

The Cantonal Forest Office of Middle Bosnia Canton was established within the Ministry and is responsible for the collection of data and maintenance of databases regarding the development of all forests and forest land within the Canton; implementation of Cantonal forest development plans and their programmes; encouraging scientific research activities; providing technical assistance to the cantonal forest-economic association; drafting plans for the construction and maintenance of forest roads; and the protection of springs and water flows within the forest resources.

Vlasnik Planet Zivoda (VPZ) is a local NGO and member of The NGO Network VRT Travnik. VRT Travnik is a network of three non-governmental organizations that operate to promote tourist potential and protect ecological values in the Travnik region, with a particular focus on the Vlasic Mountain area (Vlasnik Planet Zivoda, Rosa Brandis and TNT).

SNV found that the capacities of these clients could be strengthened by a coordinated and systematic approach to address the challenges in the tourism and forestry sectors. This would be achieved through advisory assistance for an accelerated economic growth at local community level. In doing this, the clients become more capable of acquiring and organising the relevant knowledge and of supporting the local community in implementing activities. SNV contributed not only by increasing client capacities, but also by connecting these clients to funding sources for activities.

SNV implemented the capacity building assignments by implementing one idea through three separate assignments in forestry and tourism.

**Case 1: "Master plan for developing tourism in Vlasic area"**

The activities within this assignment aimed at strengthening the capacities the NGO Network (VRT) and Vlasnik Planet Zivoda (VPZ). VPZ and the NGO Network (VRT) are main stakeholders in the tourism sector in the area. They would lead the process of identifying and gathering the relevant stakeholders for the development of a strategic document (Master Plan) for tourism in the Vlasic area.

The Master plan is a key document and a basis for all further tourist activities in the area. The overall objective was to increase income, employment and production in the area and to introduce the concept of efficient management in tourism. This was to be achieved by developing tourism opportunities in the poor rural areas through a systematic approach for development and through the promotion of direct and indirect employment opportunities. As a result of the support provided by SNV, the process of creating the Master ensured ownership by governmental institutions and stakeholders.

**Case 2: "Identifying tourism and other potentials in the forest area in Middle Bosnia Canton"**

Following a thorough inquiry process amongst stakeholders, this idea was initiated and supported by local people living in the rural area. They recognized that the forest lands were not only a source of timber wood, but that other opportunities could be offered by tourism, Non-Timber Forest Products, etc.

The potential for tourism in the forest areas (cultural monuments, archaeological sites, nature monuments, potential science interesting sites) were not sufficiently considered in the past. The assignment aimed at recognizing the tourist potential in the forest area. The Cantonal Forest Office was interested in identifying these locations, as well as to revalorize and mark them officially in their maps. They were defined and officially marked, representing a product to offer to tourists. Many stakeholders were involved, such as experts in cultural and archeological heritage, museums and municipalities.

From a rural development perspective, it would open opportunities rural households to be involved in tourism and other economic activities that increase income. Apart from income generation and a valued added to the quality of rural life, it puts pressure on the forestry sector to properly manage the forests and respond to the needs of the community.

**Case 3: "The Vlasic Treetop walk project"**

The aim of this assignment was to implement EU Rural development policy in practice. During the creation of the Master plan, the need for quick intervention to help change the situation was recognized by all stakeholders participating in the Master plan process. The Treetop Walk development was given the highest priority.

The demand for institutional strengthening at the local level was evident. This was particularly clear for EU standards and best practices. SNV's assistance aimed at the enhancement of the capacities of Vlačić Planet Života to facilitate the process of design, construction, promotion and management of the project.

As guiding example a best practice from rural (tourism) development in the Austrian Sauwald region was taken. The example was implemented under EU LEADER+ methodology through Local Action Groups (LAGs). A wide range of community based stakeholders, such as urban and rural households, youth and women's groups, community based organisations, NGOs, local leaders and activists and local authorities were involved.

**The Vlastic Treetop Walk** is a new outdoor tourism product that will be an essential starting point for developing new economic opportunities for the people of the area. Increased tourism activities are expected with direct and indirect employment opportunities, especially for vulnerable groups.

## OUTCOME

The scope of the project was to strengthen the capacities of the NGO Network VRT, as well as local actors such as VPZ, civil society organisations and private sector and the local government.

SNV has presented the idea of the Master plan (Babanovac) to the target group, and throughout the inclusive multi-stakeholder process, the project ensured the government institutions were on board. The overall systematic approach used for tourism development in Vlastic has now been adopted by all parties and resulted in a strong sense of local and common ownership.

The protection of touristic spots located in the forest area of Mid Bosnia is another significant outcome of the project.

In addition the forestry sector understands the importance to respond to the requirements of the community.

For the Treetop walk assignment, the capacity of the NGO VPZ was increased. The draft projects (construction) for the Treetop walk project were finalised and preconditions created for richer outdoor tourist infrastructure, ensuring a range of options throughout the entire year.

## IMPACT

The development of tourism throughout the three assignments ensures a concrete impact on income in the area through the engagement of the local community members.

For the first assignment (Masterplan), the direct beneficiary was the NGO Network VRT and the NGO VPZ. Implementation of the Master plan will contribute to the income of 4000 households in the wider Vlastic area.

The second assignment (identifying tourism and other economic potential) helped the client identifying the local natural and cultural resources for alternative economic activities (such as touristic, historic and cultural monuments; nature monuments; non-timber forest products; scientific sites as virgin forests; etc.). The foreseen impact of this assignment is improved production and income for 6000 households (with average of 4 members per household).

For the last assignment (Tree top walk) the foreseen impact was to generate economic growth and employment opportunities in mostly rural and poor areas of the broader Mountain Vlastic area by introducing a new 'all year outdoor tourism product' following the EU LEADER+ concept taken from Sauwald region in Austria. The expected impact is the employment of at least 10 local people and the indirect engagement of at least 40 households (selling local agricultural and other products to tourists, employment in the existing hotels and restaurants, etc.)

The Tree Top Walk project is now widely recognised as valuable project and has received more than €150,000 in financing from various parties (Federal, Cantonal and Municipal level).

An important lesson is to recognize the importance of establishing close cooperation with the client on a partnership basis and the need to properly assess and correctly estimate the situation and local problems prior to intervention.

We also learnt that success on a local level doesn't always lie in making large amounts of money available, but in group and organisation strengthening and in evidence based policy approach.

All three segments of this intervention are sustainable. The Master plan is a living document which is already accepted by all relevant actors. They showed their commitment to the systematic and organised approach towards development. This is a result of cooperation among the stakeholders (multi-stakeholder process supported by SNV) and key to sustainability.

The NTFP map and natural and cultural assests map Map has all the conditions necessary to be replicated in other parts of the country and wider on the regional level. It helps identifying opportunities for local rural development.

The treetop walk project is a unique project in this part of Europe and is foreseen to be an example joint private and public actions.

#### **Standard data:**

##### Start and end of the assignments:

- Vlašić Master Plan: 01/12/2007 - 01/12/2008
- Increasing PIE for local people by identifying tourism opportunities in the Forest area: 01/03/2008 - 31/12/2009
- Implementing the EU Rural Development policy in practice: The Vlašić area Tree top walk: 01/03/2010 - 31/12/2010

##### Relevant Assignment Agreements for the project:

- AA "Systematic approach towards development of tourism-Vlašić Mountain tourism Master/Business initiative";
- AA "Increasing PIE for local people by identifying tourism opportunities in the Forest"; and.
- AA "Implementing the EU Rural development policy in practice (The Vlasic Treetop walk project)".

##### Composition of the team and invested PP-days:

###### *Vlašić Master Plan:*

- SNV: 40 days (one advisor)
- LCB: -
- Consultant: -

###### *Increasing PIE for local people by identifying tourism opportunities in the Forest area:*

- SNV: 71 days (2 advisors)
- LCB: 45 days
- Consultant: -

###### *Implementing the EU Rural Development policy in practice: The Vlašić area Tree top walk:*

- SNV: 100 days (1 advisor)
- LCB: 53 days
- Consultant: 20 days

##### Relevant partnerships:

- Sauwald region and Sauwald LAG, Austria;
- Cantonal ministries in the Mid Bosnia Canton (Ministry of economy, Ministry of water, agriculture and forestry);
- Local and cantonal institutions and experts (Homeland Museum in Travnik, independent experts in the fields of nature, history and environment).

##### The financial resources invested:

- *Vlašić Master Plan:* EUR 2,500

- *Increasing PIE for local people by identifying tourism opportunities in the Forest area: EUR 3,000*
- *Implementing the EU Rural Development policy in practice: The Vlašić area Tree top walk: EUR 10,000*

Client satisfaction and enhanced capacity scores:

- All assignments were given maximum level scores from the clients

**Photos:**



Demonstration of the Tourism potentials in forests



Illustration of the projected Treetop walk project

**Quotes:**

**Bajro Makić, Minister of Economy, Central Bosnia Canton:**

*"We are able to fully understand and recognize the vision SNV has shared with us when proposed the idea of Tourism Master Plan for Vlašić Mt. The systematic approach to development, that included multiple aspects of our local realities and the surrounding trends in EU, is the only possible way towards getting to concrete results in rural development of the Vlašić area and beyond".*

**Samer Dolovac, President, NGO Network Vlašić Planet Života (VRT), Central Bosnia:**

*"The human centered and result oriented approach of SNV has helped us with breaking the ice among stakeholders and beating the bureaucracy. Now all stakeholders in the Central Bosnia recognize each other and work together on one development agenda".*