

Panel II – Economic Reintegration

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Since the Kosovo crises in 1999, 34 people were killed and 238 injured in 39 mine-affected villages in Northeast Albania. The main economic activities in the region are grazing, farming, gathering firewood and other subsistence livelihoods. Around 230 families had a primary breadwinner disabled or killed, and saw their livestock and farmland destroyed. Two socio-economic reintegration programs have been implemented to address the needs in the mine-affected region.

In the first which ran from 2003 to 2006, a revolving fund was set up, with US funding through the ITF, for the development of household economies among families of mine victims. A survey was undertaken to identify viable household economies. Beekeeping and animal husbandry, were identified as the most appropriate activity. The survey also determined the situation, needs and capabilities of each family using a set criteria: degree of suffering/disability; economic situation; and experience with relevant agricultural activities. Each family was allocated either one or two cows, (or 10 goats/sheep or five beehives), procured out of the revolving fund (\$1,200-\$1,500 per family). Families were also trained and assisted. Loans have to be repaid in 2 to 3 years. To date, 67 mine survivors and their families have benefited from this support.

The second project, Vocational Training and Local Enterprise Project, will run from July 2006 to June 2007. Thirty beneficiaries have been identified and assisted including through access to vocational training and to business management training for 20 mine/UXO survivors. Mine/UXO survivors were provided with knowledge and expertise to work in vocational professions and support in finding a job following the training. Support was provided to 20 households after training to establish home-based businesses. Ten young mine survivors participated in computer and English classes.

Several challenges were encountered in the implementation of the projects: difficult operating area with rugged terrain and unevenly spread villages with limited road accessibility increased operating expenses; high level of poverty resulted in a failure to accept loans as repayment is considered unaffordable (payback rate was reduced to 70% of the total amount); and, wrong perceptions of assistance, desire for beneficiary only donations and grants.

Several valuable lessons have been learnt: viability of economies, situation, needs and capabilities of families have to be surveyed and properly analysed; a fair system of determining priorities had to be established and approved at village, commune and prefecture level; loans had to be interest-free, but not grants; initial training and continued support are essential; needs were simple and a modest input ensured visible results; families have to be involved to ensure the success from initial loans; revolving fund can benefit the needy in general, once victims' needs have been addressed; very positive psychological impact during the vocational training when survivors stay/talk together; initial activities have already raised the morale of people in the affected areas; economic intervention was critical; need to explore other areas/possibilities for interventions; and, need for development of the area as a whole.