

LEVER

Voluntary culture as leverage of cultural activities in sparsely populated areas with added value for democratic and community bonding

"United Way"

Belarusian National Non-Governmental Organization
Informational and Analytical Centre for Belarusian NGOs

I. Common pilot work strategy

1. Background and objectives with reference to the need analysis

Collectivization in Western Belarus in the post-war period was carried out against the background of intensive growth of cities, particularly Minsk, which was prior in growth rate in Europe during 1955 – 1980.

At the same time, the peasants were assigned to land; no passports were issued to them. The army and education improvement were the remaining sources of escape from collective farms and state farms. Consequently, free and generally accessible secondary special and higher education in the USSR contributed to depletion of the part of population – best from intellectual and cultural viewpoint – from villages.

Post-war exchange of the population with Poland in order to smooth the consequences of multiple modifications of the state borders in the Neman area resulted in the significant Polish minority, and anti-religious assaults of the communist government contributed to its consolidation behind the Roman Catholic churches.

Total russification within the concept of construction of communism and creation of a new community “Soviet people” did not come into widespread acceptance. Regions where migration was of a push-pull nature, where children who had escaped from collective farms were able to visit their parents often, where Belarusian school was maintained – kept their national identity.

Economic strategy aimed at creation of the so-called agro-towns in this country is put in practice consistently, contributing to degradation of social infrastructure of small settlements.

The population of villages affected by the mentioned circumstances (the villages of Rakov and Ivenets village councils being the most typical in this respect) has a strong need for reintegration into economic, social and cultural relation networks, which will provide an opportunity to live and develop decently.

Thus, the objectives of the proposed project will be as follows:

- enhanced studying of economic, social, and cultural potential of small villages;
- identification of local NGOs acting in the respective field and potential local leaders;

- determination of initiatives which are of interest for the population;
- familiarization of local administrators (officials) and local NGOs with the project;
- involvement of specialists in the fields of ecotourism, hotel business, release of ecologically clean production, traditional medicine, ancient skills, folklore to interaction with the local population and administration;
- integration of efforts of all interested parties on the basis of reconstruction of the network of settlements as an ancient cultural complex.

2. The essential key activities and deliverables with advices for efficient approaches, incl. quality indicators and evaluation procedures

Activities:

- polling in small villages in order to reveal a real economic, social, and cultural situation;
- conduct of project issues-related seminars with local activists, members of self-government bodies, workers of local administration;
- meeting with the population of small villages (three stages): a) familiarization with the findings of household polling, and problem statement; б) discussion of problems; в) decision making;

Materials:

- Books: Find Your Way; Do Good; System of Local Self-Governments in Estonia; Elaboration of Region Development Strategy; Strategy of Economic Development of Gorky District;
- Minutes of polling, meetings, decision of local administration;

Approach to the problem:

- Consistent pragmatism at each stage – from formation of an initiative group to completion of the pilot project.

Quality indicators:

- rate of coincidence of factual and anticipated results;
- appraisal of results by the population/active group;
- appraisal of results by the press/ administration at all levels;
- evaluation of the project results by the sponsors.

Evaluation procedure:

- acquisition of data;
- preparation of the report/ evaluation of the report by the sponsors;

3. Suggested content and form in local courses

- Seminars (on the basis of the aforementioned books) for workers of local NGOs, activists, self-government and administration;
- Arts and crafts courses; guest sessions – master classes, patronage-mentoring, traineeships for practitioners;

4. Dissemination strategy

- printed materials based on the results of events;
- placement of information at the Internet resources (www.ngo.by, web-sites of village councils, villages (if any));
- placement of information in social networks (on activists' pages);
- placement of information in the local press;
- dissemination of information through the UWB E-Mailing System
- dissemination of information through private conversations with interested persons/ call centers;

5. Time schedule

To be agreed.

II. Local pilot strategies

1. The local priorities of need and objectives

- For local administrations: social welfare, communication, land-use planning and control, transport, self-sufficiency/ budget;
- For self-government: use of territories, social care, communication, medical servicing, poverty rate;
- For farmsteads: interaction (communication) with relatives residing in cities and towns; housekeeping/farm management; self-sufficiency; growth of income, lifting the social isolation;

2. The specific 1-2 local pilot plan (where, what, when, with whom)

Local pilot projects:

a) polling as a catalyst of social activity;

- will be carried out in small villages;
- the population, property, relative and social ties, problems, attitude to hypothetic projects will be recorded (our expert has an experience of polling in Chudin village of **Gantsevichy district and in Bereza district**; he states that social effect is exceptionally strong for all participants);
- identification of local leaders; creation of the correspondence network;
- polling will be carried out from May till October (as transport accessibility is restricted by this season);
- polling will be carried out by volunteers upon agreement with local officials;

b) familiarization with the achievements in arts and crafts and private farm management;

- will be carried out in small villages together with the administrators (in situ);
- achievements in dairy husbandry, chicken farming, bee-keeping, arts and crafts, agro-tourism, etc. will be demonstrated at the seminars (courses);
- will be carried out from October to April – in the period when agricultural works cease;
- will be carried out by the representatives of respective businesses and non-governmental organizations;

3. Content and form of local training courses for culture boosters

After identification of priority wishes and opportunities short training courses for workers of local NGOs and local leaders will be held in the selected topics.

(Examples: Cultivation, gathering, treatment, storage and use of medicinal herbs; Traditional knitting; or Organization of traditional sports games for children and adults; etc.).

4. Dissemination plan

A “seesaw” scheme of information dissemination is planned:

- UWB Portal – local web-sites – media – UWB Portal
- social networks (pages of local NGOs and activists)
- activity of local NGOs and local leaders as news topics (3 – 5 news topics per year);

The target group will receive information mainly in the printed form and through personal conversations.

5. Evaluation plan and selected quality indicators to monitor and evaluate

Formation of centers of activities caused by the project, as well as attitude to people already engaged in the activity – from the part of those who has refrained from the same will be the most essential indicator.

It is reasonable to base on opinions of local leaders (NGO leaders) and information obtained from local correspondents.

It is worth mentioning that coverage of 4% of the target group is deemed successful for Western Belarus.

III. Local concept materials for the local pilot work

1. The local concept materials presenting the local pilot strategy in a short, more pedagogical form with an appealing layout, National languages

Local strategy is not aimed at consolidation of efforts of local and arrived population with a view of improving the life of communities and territories “in the shadow” of Minsk metropolitan agglomeration. So the materials will be focused on cultural aspect.

The preliminary list of materials:

- Возрождение деревень: от госпрограмм до трудных исканий энтузиастов. Инна Гармель (Renewal of villages: from state programs to strivings of enthusiasts. Inna Garmel)
- Агротуризм в Беларуси (Agro-tourism in Belarus)
- Традиционная белорусская деревня в европейской перспективе. В.Л. Носевич (Traditional Belarusian Village in the European Perspective. V. Nosevich)
- Ветковский музей старообрядчества и белорусских традиций им. Ф.Г. Шклярова (The F.G. Shklyarov Museum of Old Belief and Belarusian Traditions. Vetka)
- Текстильные традиции деревни Неглюбка Ветковского района (Textile traditions in Neglyubka village Vetka district)
- Этнографічны турызм у Беларусі (Ethno-Tourism in Belarus)
- Музей старинных народных ремесел и технологий (Museum of ancient arts and crafts)

The list will be complemented.

2. It is used as promotion to establish local pilot teams and engage a wide range of local stakeholders to support the pilot work.

The listed and other materials will be used for involvement of local activists for formation

of initiative groups, and also for involvement of specialists from local lore museums, members of non-governmental organizations (e.g. of beekeeper, rabbit-breeders), owners of farmsteads, craftsmen, folk craft masters, owners of local internet-resources in the project.

IV. The multilateral pilot work strategy

The final multilateral pilot strategy paper presenting the common strategy as well as short outlines of the varied local strategies

- Apart from the “standard” reports about the activities carried out within the project and the degree of fulfillment of the project objectives and tasks, also materials based on questioning the project beneficiaries (i.e. target group, especially its active part) must serve a final document;
- Analysis of cultural shifts in small villages and probable transformations as consequences of the project (as we have mentioned more than once, that only elements of traditional culture for the population of small villages can improve life in any fashion);
- Thus, the final document will reflect legal, social, cultural and economic proposals of the project performers and the degree of implementation thereof by the target group.

The key feature of local projects is the invasion of external forces/ project performers in stable and quite closed small groups, which by itself disrupts stability of the objects.

That is why the strategy must be based on our efforts not to do an ill service to such people whose social, legal and political situation (in terms of protection from adverse external impacts) is at the well-forgotten by Europe level of 1939-1989.

That is why the strategy starts from study of communities and establishing strong contacts with people, and is based on establishing and maintaining of equality in communication so that to avoid social dependency and obedience to the powers engrain to them by the communists.

The result of such strategy must be raising confidence, self-respect and ability to make new non-traditional decisions – private decisions for the sake of common deeds.