

Environmental protection bridges differences

Bank project in Bosnia and Herzegovina helps build new coalitions

December 17, 2002—Seven years have passed since the end of the war that created the country of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). While still trying to heal its war wounds, this young nation is also struggling to provide its people with better access to public services and a clean environment in which to live.

The country of BiH has long been a land of pristine landscapes, beautiful parks, picturesque mountains and crystal clear water resources. Recently, however, both its environment and water quality have been placed in jeopardy as the result of illegal dumping and poor solid waste management.

Illegal dumpsites, including some which predate the war can be found in every municipality. "We get rid of our waste and then the neighboring settlements dump theirs here," said a citizen from Mesihovina who was interviewed during the pre-project social assessment.

These dumpsites contain myriad household, industrial and hazardous wastes, including animal carcasses. Their very existence poses serious risks to the environment and to the quality of water, which, as an interviewee commented during a recent World Bank social assessment, "means life in Bosnia."

Despite these difficulties, the World Bank is helping BiH protect its natural resources through the recently approved Solid Waste Management Project, the third water and sanitation project in the country.

With this latest project, there is a focus on close cooperation with the public and private sector, inter entities and government officials at all levels, an approach that is especially appropriate in BiH where regional and local governments play critical roles in service delivery.

"Given the institutional fragmentation, working in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not easy," said Seema Manghee, Task Team Leader. "The country is made up of two entities—the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska—each with its own laws for the delivery of water and waste management." The two share solid waste disposal and water management responsibilities within the complex structure of decentralized cantonal, regional, and municipal governments.

The project, noted Manghee, "is showing that the Bank



Signs of degradation caused by illegal dumping are evident in rivers, creeks, roadsides and mines



Estimates indicate that over 1100 "wild dump sites" are scattered across the country



Mostar's old front-line. For the first time after the war the two parts of the city will use a common landfill

can play a major role in facilitating new coalitions. One factor in the successful preparation of the Solid Waste Project was the joint Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Signing the MoU served as a self-selection process for the participating areas. It was demand driven, characterized by a readiness to work with different ethnic groups and a willingness to work together on a commercial basis."

During project preparation, an innovative social assessment paired the worlds of social science and communications to identify possible concerns and roadblocks. "Working together paved the way for a countrywide Public Communication Program, designed to strengthen institutional capacity, motivate public support, and encourage fee collection, thereby ensuring greater sustainability," added Emanuele Santi of the Bank's Development Communications Division.

The success of previous infrastructure environmental projects in a post-war setting enabled the Bank to facilitate a regional approach to solid waste management. For such a small country, it is useful to focus on achieving economies-of-scale by limiting the number of landfills—especially where individual initiatives are often hampered by a lack of cooperation and by political realities.

Even with these divisive conditions, regions in Bosnia decided to cooperate in solving common problems. Their commitment to change and willingness to collaborate is reflected in the government's willingness to have a single Project Implementing Unit—the first time a Bank-financed project in BiH will not have a PIU for each entity.

To date, the Solid Waste Project has succeeded in creating 4 regional landfills where regions have started to work together.