

**FORUM  
PROCESS  
DONOR'S BRIEF**

# CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD</b> .....	5
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	7
<b>1 THE FORUM PROCESS</b> .....	8
1.1 WHAT IS A FORUM? .....	8
1.2 SCOPE OF A FORUM .....	9
1.3 KEY PROTAGONISTS.....	9
<b>2 FORUM EXPERIENCE</b> .....	10
2.1 BACKGROUND OF THE FORUM APPROACH.....	10
2.2 NECESSARY ADAPTATION TO TRANSITION AND DEVELOPMENT .....	12
2.3 THE STANDARD FORMAT USED IN BULGARIA.....	14
2.4 TESTED DIVERSIFIED FORMATS .....	15
<b>3 WHY SET UP A FORUM PROGRAM?</b> .....	20
3.1 THE FORUM AS A TOOL IN GOVERNANCE.....	20
3.2 POTENTIAL OF THE FORUM PROCESS.....	20
3.3 LIMITATIONS.....	21
3.4 OUTCOMES EXPECTED FROM A DONOR PERSPECTIVE .....	22
a) Direct project results .....	22
b) Institutionalized capacities .....	24
c) Intangible outcomes.....	24
<b>4 HOW TO EXPLORE A PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT</b> .....	25
4.1 SITUATION IN GOVERNANCE.....	25
4.2 POTENTIAL INITIATORS .....	25
4.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC BASIS .....	25

<b>5 HOW TO DESIGN A FORUM PROGRAM</b> .....	26
5.1 OBJECTIVES .....	26
5.2 SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS.....	26
5.3 KEY STAFF.....	26
5.4 PROCEDURES.....	27
5.5 MONITORING .....	28
5.6 MEASURING RESULTS AND IMPACT.....	28
<b>6 HOW TO SUSTAIN FORUM ACTIVITY BEYOND DONOR SUPPORT</b> .....	30
6.1 TRAINING FUNCTION.....	30
6.2 FORUM CENTRES.....	30
6.3 TENDER PRACTICE .....	30
6.4 ASSOCIATIONS .....	31
6.5 FUNDING.....	31
<b>ATTACHMENTS</b>	
1 THE FORUM IN ITS STANDARD FORMAT .....	32
2 MATRIX OF FORUM RESULTS .....	34
3 SAMPLE OF TENDER PROCEDURE .....	35
4 SAMPLE ORGANIZATIONAL CHART.....	36
5 ACTIVITY FIELDS AND PROGRAM OBJECTIVES .....	37
6 CASES OF FORUMS REALIZED IN BULGARIA .....	38
a) National Forum: The National Forum on EU Priorities.....	22
b) Regional Forum: Smolyan/ Zlatograd Cultural Forum .....	24
c) LEADER Forums: The case in Suedinenie, Hisar and Kaloianovo .....	24
d) Neighbourhood Forum: Example of a Forum at village level .....	22
e) Budget Forums.....	24
f) Some projects resulting from Community Forums .....	24

## FOREWORD

In pursuance of its willingness to promote decentralization and a strong participation of citizens in local governance, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) decided in early 2000 to launch a new participatory initiative in six Bulgarian municipalities in the region of Central Stara Planina.

The Forum Program, as this initiative was named, aims to strengthen local participatory democracy in a transition context. The approach was designed to overcome the numerous obstacles linked to the existence of a passive socio-political mentality and a centralist political system. Its main goals were (i) to show the local population that their participation in public life can make a difference, (ii) to allow citizens to take democratic decisions on projects to be implemented, (iii) to increase the transparency of local decision-making, and (iv) to provide a learning platform for local groups on how to design and implement a project.

Given the popularity of the pilot cases, the program was greatly expanded over the following years. This expansion was at first geographic in character. Until today, Forums have reached more than 40% of all Bulgarian municipalities. The strategic focus of the program also was broadened: the Forum approach was applied to new topics and target groups. Examples are the Cultural Forums, which aim at preserving the regional cultural heritage through participatory processes, and the Regional Development Forums. In the context of Bulgaria's EU membership, so-called LEADER Forums are a pioneering instrument for accessing EU Structural Funds. At the national level the Forum helped derive priority operational programs within Bulgaria's National Development Plan 2007–13.

To promote and foster the sustainability of the Forum approach, the program made great efforts to train and build the capacity of Bulgarian civil society organizations so that they would be in a position to continue organizing and implementing Forums once SDC had ended its support to the program. As a result of these efforts, ten Bulgarian institutions have acquired the necessary qualifications to carry out a Forum without external support and close to 200 persons were trained to render facilitation and coordination services.

Now, after seven years and hundreds of Forum sessions conducted, I can firmly say that the Forum program has improved the transparency of democratic processes. It has helped to substantially increase the exchange of information among the various protagonists - civil society, business and local authorities. And, last but not least, it has contributed to a more direct and active involvement of the population in the management of local affairs.

I am confident that the Forum Publications will give access to knowledge, information and skills to those willing to participate in, and further develop, this innovative and creative approach.



Walter Fust

Director of the Swiss Agency  
for Development and Cooperation

## INTRODUCTION

### Acronyms & Abbreviations

AEAF	Agency for Economic Analysis and Forecasting
ASA	Agency for Socio-economic Analyses Ltd
BA	Balkan Assist Association
FLGR	Foundation for Local Government Reform
EU	European Union
HDR	Human Development Report
JOBS	Job Opportunities through Business Support (UNDP program)
LAG	Local Action Group (central institutional element of the leader approach)
LEADER	Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale (an initiative encouraging sustainable rural development financed by EU structural funds)
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSRF	National Strategic Reference Framework
OP	Operational program
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SWOT	Strength/Weakness/Opportunities/Threats assessment
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

The **FORUM** is a participatory process used in a developmental or a transitional context to bridge private, civil and public, informal and formal segments of society. The Forum process is result-oriented in effectively motivating citizens to develop their own projects in cooperation with others. It empowers them to decide on the use of the financial means available, starting with a public survey on perceived needs, and ending with reports on the results of recommendations given, plans developed or projects implemented. The Forum approach has also demonstrated the potential to address and improve diverse concerns in the greater context of governance.

**SDC** introduced the approach and tested its adaptability in a Community Development Program in Bulgaria. After seven years of intensive operation (2000–2007) the program has now been completed. During the same period, governance as a transversal theme has gained momentum in the donor community. **SDC** therefore intends to document the Forum approach and the range of tested applications, and share its experience with other international or local development agencies.

This publication compiles the Forum experience from a bird's eye perspective of a donor agency. It concentrates on the essential advantages and limits of the approach. It should convey in what context a Forum program may be useful, what a Forum program may be expected to achieve, what the setting up of a program implies in financial and organizational terms, and how its outcomes could be monitored in regard to its substantial range of objectives. The attachments also contain some more detailed accounts of particular Forum profiles

and projects that were implemented under the Bulgarian program.

The Donor's Brief is complemented by a series of separate publications, each addressing key functions required to make a Forum process happen. The series includes guides for the initiator, the coordinator and for the moderator. A separate brochure documents the main groups of Forums realised between 2000 and 2007 in Bulgaria, giving an idea of the range of possible formats under which the approach can be used. Finally, there is a DVD presenting the story of Forum experience to the visually inclined. It has the big advantage of adding a whiff of real life to the concepts which are dry matter when reported on, whilst the program as such was always full of life.

# 1 THE FORUM PROCESS

## 1.1 What is a Forum?

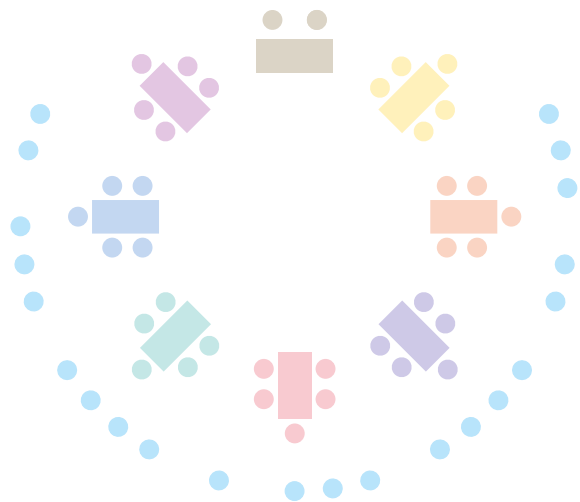
A Forum is a **public meeting** of citizens to discuss important questions of mutual interest. Forum meetings are convened in a **neutral place** and discussions **moderated** by a neutral person with no direct link to the possible outcome of the Forum. The participants are seated at Tables representing different groups of stakeholders. The structure of the Forum has to be tailored to the theme and content of a Forum.

A Forum session with at least half a dozen participants per stakeholder group (Table), and six to ten Tables, is a major public event, involving some 60 to 80 active participants. With guests, media and experts attending, this is a large audience of up to 100 persons.

Forum discussions continue over several sessions which, given substantial pre-

paratory work, may be held in four to six week intervals. Depending on the topic, several sessions are necessary to deal with all relevant aspects to the satisfaction of the participants. A Forum may take up to ten sessions and can last a full year. There is no fixed rule in this, as duration of the Forum, the frequency of sessions and the content of discussions taking place at each session have to reflect the objectives and results aimed at.

A central feature of the Forum is the **transparency** of its proceedings and its actions. "Running protocol" is maintained on flipchart or screen during sessions, sessions are accessible to outside guests, members of the media are invited, and a bulletin is published and distributed within the broader setting of the Forum (e.g. the community in question) after each session.



## 1.2 Scope of a Forum

Designing a Forum entails shaping it on the basis of three different components: **Coverage / Theme / and Type of Results** aimed at. Together, they define the scope of the Forum.

**Coverage** refers to the range of participants or stakeholder groups taking part in a Forum. For example, in a Forum devoted to the introduction of new agricultural techniques, special groups interested in the topic, such as farmers, businessmen, traders, agriculturists, and relevant departments within public administration, may all be involved. Or a Forum may aim at covering all relevant groups within a community, where the topic involves improvements to be made to the urban living environment. It may also combine several municipalities or involve groups linked to a regional issue such as the promotion of tourism within a specific region as a whole.

It is obvious that the main groups at the community level are not the same as those selected for a Forum at regional level. The coverage always has to be tuned to the **topic or theme** selected for discussion. An identical theme, e.g. "waste disposal and recycling" will be treated very differently if the coverage is a community or a Forum of industrial producers at regional level.

Typical **results** of a Forum would be:

- recommendations addressed to authorities and institutions;
- direct collaborative actions taken by Forum participants or groups;
- prepared project proposals ready for financing;
- implementation of selected projects.

## 1.3 Key protagonists

There are three roles of importance in setting a Forum process in motion.

At the outset, a person of relevance with specific governance issues on his/ her mind is needed to act as the **initiator**, calling for public discourse. Usually this is the mayor of a town, or some representative public institution. The initiator launches the Forum process, but gradually withdraws to the position of observer in order not to influence the course of discussions.

The Forum process as such, deliberations during a series of sessions and in-between session activities, are facilitated by an **outside Forum moderator**. Ideally this should be a person professionally trained in participatory methods and facilitation. Since a Forum is a comprehensive and prolonged process, session support, training of participants, retrieval of expertise and organizational matters amount to a substantial task. Such support services are offered by a **Forum coordinator**, usually found in an NGO, a consultancy or an agency of public service.

### A slice of theory on political systems and informal social processes

In almost all countries of the world, the established **political system** is based on the division of power in the basic functions of the state: legislative, executive, and judiciary. Within society as a whole the “system” relates primarily to “citizens” with their particular rights and obligations. Functioning of the system is highly regulated and legalized. Blind spots within the system, such as inadequate recognition of minority rights, are inevitable. Sometimes the system needs a reassessment to adjust to the changing needs of society.

**Participatory processes** take place outside the “system” and relate to society differently. They work with social groups, NGOs, associations, institutions and individuals, who most often are regular citizens. Functioning of the informal processes is highly variable and may be occasionally reshaped. An arrangement in a circle of equal partners structured by social groups is possible and may be considered ideal according to democratic principles, but one has to be aware that in any setting hierarchic process handling not only occurs but is often necessary.

**Links** between the participatory world and the established political “system” take the form of **consultation**, when the system interacts with some informal parts without changing its own procedures. Interaction originating from outside the system may take the form of **lobbying**. As a rule, the system exerts some control over the informal sector. If some parts of the system genuinely work together with an informal grouping, then some form of **cooperation** under a new set of participatory rules takes place. True cooperation in a participatory approach implies a willingness of the system to share its power with the informal partners.

A kind of “**social contract**” not between system and citizen but **between system and the informal part of society** has to be arranged for cooperation to occur. However, there may be very basic obstacles and legal constraints to this, sometimes as simple as inadequate budget procedures.

## 2 FORUM EXPERIENCE

### 2.1 Background of the Forum approach

Participatory approaches have a long tradition in Western European countries. Some of their roots reach into the field of **social learning**, some to **urban planning** procedures involving the population. They can all be traced back to democratic principles as regards the equal weight of the voice of each participant, and the transparency and accountability of collective decision-making procedures.

The customary Western form of a Forum has not been project-oriented. It has represented a facilitated discussion process, structured in interest groups, with the sequence of sessions tailored to the particular theme addressed. Yet the **sole objective** is **improved communication** between groups, leading eventually to strategy development. Examples that could be mentioned include municipal issues, the re-development of urban amenities, the utilization of natural resources or the research policy of a university. In one such comprehensive Forum the possible future of an urban region was discussed. Several models of urban development were derived in a number of specialised workshops, followed by plenary sessions. The process lasted close to two years and involved some 500 participants who endorsed a set of recommendations to municipal and regional authorities and institutions.

In all these examples the need for information inputs is substantial, preparatory work time-consuming, and participation quite demanding. The process includes in-between workshops and several sessions which typically last, as mentioned earlier, a year or longer.

Structured Forum-type approaches are also popular in moderated one-day or **single event conferences** on any type of policy issues. With participants arranged in interest groups, positions become easily recognizable, and focussed discussion leads to quick results. Examples of themes on record are numerous, ranging from business strategies to export promotion, innovation policies, or complex risk assessments for large infrastructure projects, to cite but a few.

In these established Western formats, improved communication is the overall objective. Participants learn more about different viewpoints; if there is an issue, they learn about its facets from the different angles of stakeholder groups. Participants become better equipped for compromise and creative solutions. They may find new partner groups and coalitions. In a society of citizens this is all that is needed: having reached with the help of the Forum an understanding of the issue at stake, citizens and institutions may then take the steps they deem advisable in their own capacity and competence.

### 2.2 Necessary adaptation to transition and development

All of the above-mentioned Forum’s attributes take a different flavour in a society undergoing a period of transition or socio-economic development. In such contexts, neither the capacity nor the competences of citizens may be evident. Forum formats therefore need to be adapted.



**Improved public life on the grounds of better communication certainly remains the overall Forum objective.**

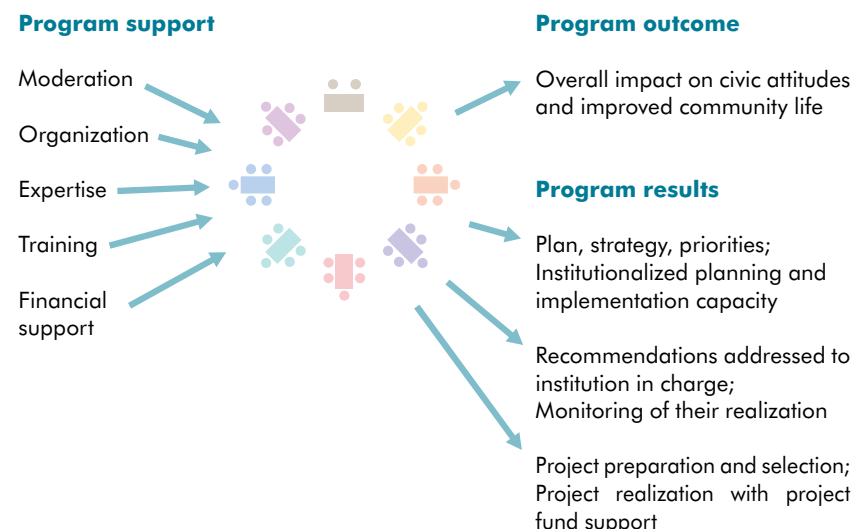
Yet in developing or transition societies, citizens and institutions have as much to learn about their own interests as about those of other groups. They have to be introduced to the handling of proper information flows and techniques for the selection and prioritisation of ideas. Furthermore, in a development setting, improved awareness alone is not enough for the realisation of ideas. Citizens often find themselves too restricted to simply get together to propagate and implement solutions on their own. Economically they cannot afford to realise ideas. Lastly, a society in development may not yet have moved towards decentralised governance structures, and the space left for citizens to pursue common interests as individuals may be constrained.

Therefore, one of the **central adaptations of the Forum approach** to societies under transition and development is to have the Forum process also explore ways for realisation of the ideas it

brings forward – at least to some extent. Because it is in the real world that people have to experience the impact of their engagement in, and as the outcome of, constructive discussions. To allow for this, the Forum process in the Swiss program was equipped with training facilities offering technical advice to working groups of Forum participants engaged in project preparation. And – as important – the subsequent implementation of Forum project proposals was supported from an investment budget financed jointly by SDC and the Forum initiator such as a municipality.

In an economically advanced society with mature governance, improved information flows among participants may be all that is aimed at by a Forum. In transition or developing societies these objectives are more diverse. They would also include training of personal skills, institutional capacity building and the outcome of projects implemented (see Table A). Each of these aspects could offer enough reasons to a donor agency to opt for a Forum program.

**Table A Necessary inputs and range of possible results of a Forum program**



### 2.3 The standard format used in Bulgaria

SDC used the Forum approach extensively in its community development program. The Bulgarian context was that of a **country in transition**: weak political institutions; overdue decentralisation; limited confidence and reluctant democratic engagement of citizens; and little tradition of public discourse. From 2000 to 2007 the Swiss program realised some 66 Forums in various parts of the country. Some transfer to neighbouring Balkan countries occurred. A second program was launched in Macedonia in 2006 in an inter-ethnic setting, and is showing good results.

The program has become popular in Bulgaria through its most widely applied format – the **community Forum**. This is a platform endeavouring to represent all social groups in a community concerned by a theme. Among the factors behind this success was that community Forums usually included a budget funded jointly by SDC and a municipality. These Forums therefore did not only debate, plan and recommend, but were also able to develop, select and implement joint community projects. (See also Attachment 1 for the standard format.)

Years of practice allowed the flexibility and adaptability of this basic approach to be explored. Forums were tried in a variety of formats, not only at community level, but also in regional and even national contexts. In some cases they were organised by civil sector organizations while in others by public administration bodies. Some Forums dealt with themes involving professional groups; others united ministries and lobby groups at the national level. Outputs and results also varied, from the development of agricultural sector strategies, to the creation of Local Action Groups (LAGs) under the EU LEADER program, to concrete community projects and municipality budget discussions.

Time and again, the Forums reached astonishing results in terms of immediate outcomes arising from their work sessions. Feedback regarding their common overall objective – to improve participants' attitudes and motivation towards society – was also widely positive. A UNDP National Human Development Report, Bulgaria, Sofia 2001, assessing citizens' attitudes towards government, used Forum participants as a statistical control/comparison group. Their view of public life was significantly more positive than that of the general public.

### 2.4 Tested diversified Forum formats

In the later course of the Swiss program in Bulgaria, almost every element within the initial Forum concept was altered and the effect studied in order to explore the limits of the instrument in different settings (see Table B). Thus the **key functions** were performed by different kinds of protagonists, and procedural elements such as the number of sessions were adapted. The main diversifications tested with respect to the scope of the Forums included the Forums' geographic and social coverage and concomitant outcomes. Along with the changing scope went adaptations in structural elements: a budget discussion would take fewer sessions; a national one had them at longer intervals and so on. The last phase also brought extensive **links to other (future) forms** of project financing. Forum formats were adapted in response to organizational and procedural requirements for project financing from Central Government and EU Structural Funds. In general, the Forum approach survived all kinds of adaptations, as the short description of the main types of Forum indicates below. Yet each change in scope left its imprint on the outcome, calling for some fine-tuning in the organizational framework. The Forums' continuing capacity to weather and perform under its diverse formats has all the more reconfirmed the effectiveness of the initial idea of the **community Forum** as a tool. Its features are described extensively in the other guide-books of this series, especially in the Initiator's Guide.





**Table B Stages of differentiation of concept in the Swiss Forum program in Bulgaria**

<b>FORUM STRUCTURE</b>	<b>Scope</b> →
	Coverage: Community • Region • Groups • National
	Objectives: Implemented Projects • Recommendations • Plans • Strategies • Institutions
	Content: Citizens' cooperation • Group action • Individual action
	Themes: Living environment • Youth • Tourism • etc.
	<b>Key functions</b> →
Initiator: Municipality • NGOs • Reg. Institution • Reg. govt. • Central govt.	
Coordinator: Support org. • Local Forum Centres • Municipality • NGOs • Consultancies	
Moderator: SDC-trained • Locally trained	
Support finance: SDC • SDC/Municipality • Municipality • Other	
Project finance: SDC/Forum • SDC/Municipality/Forum • Other	
<b>Financing instruments</b> →	
Project Fund • Community Fund • Budget Share • Regional Funds • Ministries • EU Special funds	
<b>Procedural elements</b> →	
Tables • In between session activity • Duration • Sessions # • Series of Forums	
<b>Related Forms of Citizen Participation</b>	
Round Tables (promotion, issues)	
Focus Groups (group problem solutions)	
Agenda 21 Forums (project coalition)	
USAID Forum (project promotion)	

Main formats in **Phase 1**  
Tested formats **Phase 2** and **Phase 3**

### a) Budget Forums

Budget Forums were the obvious extension of program activities at the municipality level. The concept started off in places where a community Forum had already been realized. Budget Forums address the legal requirement (in Bulgaria) of holding public hearings on the municipal annual budget. The format usually involved three sessions. The structure by working tables was widely accepted as conducive to purposeful discussion. Moderation in this type of Forum was quickly passed on to local administration. This solution would probably be contested if issues to be debated became sizeable (e.g. in larger towns). An interesting feature emerging here was that part of the (municipal) budget was sometimes put aside for allocation by the Forum participants. In effect, some municipalities established a "community project fund". Another feature is that these Forums tend to become recurrent. Following a first run, and to keep access open to citizens, the Forum has to be re-launched every year. See Attachment 6 for more details.

### b) Topical Forums

Topical Forums convene groups of specialists, professionals or the direct beneficiaries of the possible results that can be expected of a Forum on a highly specific discussion theme. In Bulgaria topical Forums took place at sub-municipal, municipal and regional levels. One example was a Forum on agricultural technological innovation in a municipality; others were on regional issues such as waste disposal and tourism quality standards. All topical Forums were called by specialist institutions including a regional association of tourist organizations or a regional association of municipalities, among others. In this type of Forum requirements on moderators and coordinators were more demanding than usual, as a certain professional familiarity with the special topic was required. See Attachment 6 for more details.

### c) Regional Forums: LEADER program

In its endeavour to promote sector development at a comprehensive level, EU Structural Fund has defined access criteria for potential beneficiaries. To make local project ideas eligible for joint EU and sponsor financing, the EU requires a consolidated rural development strategy for a geographic area of minimum size and the setting up of a Local Action Group (LAG) for project processing. In Bulgaria, the Forum approach was used to do precisely this: LEADER-type Forums combined several municipalities. In two sessions they adapted the national rural development strategy (established by the Ministry of Rural Development) to local conditions. In later sessions participants elected the staff for a LAG in their respective region and proceeded to generate project ideas. See Attachment 6 for more details.

### d) Regional Forums: Cultural Forums

With the same intention to consolidate local needs at regional level, cultural Forums brought together several adjacent municipalities under participation of the Ministry of Culture. They developed regional projects in line with a general national strategy on cultural heritage. The Forums focussed on the potential of cultural heritage as a factor for the development of the region. Expertise was provided from the Ministry of Culture and the National Cultural Fund. The range of stakeholder groups participating was adapted to include cultural and educational institutions, tourist businesses, folklore groups, young people, local and regional authorities. Financing of projects was secured from the Ministry and the National Cultural Fund, but exclusively for projects covering several municipalities. See Attachment 6 for more details.



**e) National Forums**

Successful as they all were, activities at national level produced a different set of issues to be tackled. Obviously national Forums would deal with matters of state relevance – a strategy, a new policy, a legal framework. A Forum here is playing an ancillary role, or at least a more restricted one than in other contexts, as it is always covering only part of the long process such large issues would usually have to undergo. Whatever the outcome of the Forum, it will be carried forward by some of the protagonists in another politically defined setting. A legal framework concerning, for example, a country-wide vocational education and training system may gain from a Forum debate involving as many stakeholders as possible. But at the end of the day, the proposal will have to be formally processed by relevant government and parliamentary authorities. Special requirements are therefore needed for the Forum:

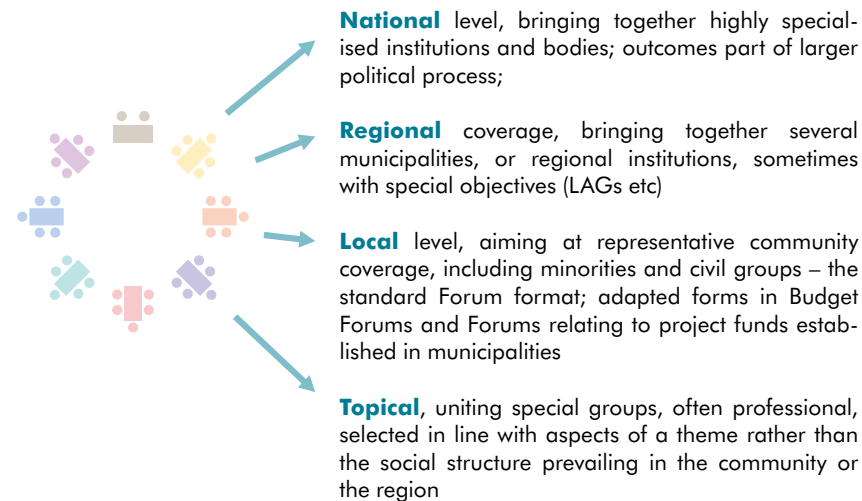
- to specify the role of the initiator (who always plays a political role concurrently)
- and to specify in advance what outside expertise would be brought in (otherwise considered as manipulative).



Setting clear time-lines beforehand, namely for the ending of the Forum intervention, is also useful. Often, new participants appear during the process, or some find it advantageous to extend the Forum cycle in order to delay the taking over of tasks by the institutions in charge. See Attachment 6 for more details.



**Table C Diversification of the Forum approach**



The entire range of diversified Forums should not divert attention from the fact that the genuine context of putting the Forum approach to use is always that of a “bridging situation”:

- a common issue involving groups that otherwise act separately;
- addressing formal and informal segments of society tending to neglect each other;
- any solution requiring a balance of interests or a compromise overarching diverging interests.

All of these are governance concerns, in one way or another.

### 3 WHY SET UP A FORUM PROGRAM?

#### 3.1 The Forum as a tool in governance

Over the past decade, **governance** has evolved rapidly as a broad transversal theme in development policy and today it is manifested in many forms of application. *“The term refers to the way in which power is applied by the government institutions at all levels (regional, local), as well as on the relationship of the state with its citizens and with the private sector. ...Governance encompasses mechanisms, processes and institutions through which the citizens articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and resolve conflicts.”* (SDC Governance as a transversal theme, Bern 2007). The concept is linked to basic human rights as the foundation of individual and institutional development processes at any level of society. Therefore governance is a relevant issue at sector and local level as well as on a national or even global scale, each with its proper characteristics.

Donors engaged in transition or development programs at any of these levels would find in the “Forum approach” a method to reliably lead a public discourse towards specific objectives – a basic concern of governance. In doing so, the Forum observes the basic **principles of governance: accountability, transparency, non-discrimination, participation and efficiency.** Moreover, it concurrently reinforces governance-relevant capacities of persons and institutions involved in the process.

#### 3.2 Potentials of the Forum process

The merit of the Forum process lies in the fact that it is democratic; the **autonomy of the citizen** (or of the participant

in general) is at its core. At the same time, the process is structured, putting together an audience of different socio-economic groups. Forums are principally **non-discriminatory** in the selection of participants. Individuals associate with their group; the groups in turn are defined and composed according to the level of governance in question (local, regional, national, topical etc.); together the groups cover both the formal and informal segments in society, or public and private sector, state and civil society. Effectively, the Forum **works on power relations** between all types of societal groups. From the outset – sometimes starting with a survey amongst citizens on their perceived needs – the process leaves the **right to define the needs** to those participating and to the groups involved in the Forum. The top-down charity-type definition of needs (by donors) is avoided. Acting as a tool, the Forum approach bridges social divides, engenders discussions, joint resolutions, new coalitions and even commonly approved projects across different groupings and spheres.

Experience has shown that the closer the link between a Forum’s participants actions and the expected outcome of session work, the more intensive the commitment of participants and the more relevant the results of the discussion.

As a method designed to mediate between different segments of society, the Forum approach enhances cooperation without replacing the activities of established institutions. Nor does it become an institution of its own. It is a method of social interaction, lasting as long as the process it is steering. The Forum approach does not generate a perfect but unsustainable arrangement

in some remote sector detached from reality. It is actually **designed to avoid creating parallel structures.** When shaping the Forum coverage, the Forum initiator and coordinator will involve relevant authorities to introduce them to the type of outcomes the Forum might come up with and to prepare the ground for later acceptance of the Forum results. (This preparatory process is described in detail in the Initiator’s Guide).

#### 3.3 Limitations

The initial concept in the Swiss Community Development program in Bulgaria was to have the Forum cover a community, a village or a town. Indeed, the process is **best** handled at the **municipal level** where a certain familiarity with the social structure – if not even individuals – adds to the motivation of participants to achieve something via discourse. The community, however, should not be too small since it has to shoulder a rather complex process, and its social structures should be differentiated enough to allow for genuinely diverging viewpoints on a single issue. In large towns, on the other hand, a reduction of the coverage to a district may be advisable, or then at least the level of participating interest groups has to be adapted. In a difficult socio-economic setting with antagonistic, poorly integrated or economically marginalised groups, it is recommended to first arrange focus group meetings with individual interest groups and only later combine them into a Forum.

Assessments carried out on Forums of all types of formats and themes have pointed to one central insight: **empowerment of the participants must be commensurate with the expected results of a Forum.** It is here that the approach also meets its limits. A Forum should not deal with issues that are the domain of particular groups or institutions, its role ending with the decision to address a recommendation or to contribute financially to a project.

If the objective of a Forum is to develop a plan, participants should not start conjecturing projects for realisation under the plan, as this concerns other protagonists and calls for adequate tender procedures. If the Forum, however, is to develop specific projects, then the limitations of the approach show up differently. Forum projects are always prepared in detail by a group of participants mandated by the plenum. If the proposal is selected by the Forum for financial support, then the group charged with the implementation and later the management of the project should implement and later manage the project, and report on it to the plenary. It is the group that becomes responsible for the project’s day-to-day management; for legal reasons this is usually a legal entity within the group, such as an NGO, an administrative office, or a business.

#### The following is an example linking the Forum and its own projects:

First, a Forum on regional tourism development would adequately define priority areas for investment and generate competent guidance for preferred tourism projects. Interest groups could then agree on direct action and cooperate in the setting up and maintenance of new hiking paths in the region. Yet in cases where a commercial investment project is envisaged, such as a ski lift, the Forum could possibly tap into the project fund. However, to run it would require further legal considerations: to establish it on a private commercial basis, in public private partnership, or on a cooperative basis – outside the Forum. The Forum can help in legal arrangements, but then it should step back and let the project evolve on its own.

In short, **the Forum cannot perform management functions.** If there are projects, the Forum is a policy board, as in a shareholder company. The Forum retains the role of controller to oversee the proper use of funds it provided to implement selected projects. In this way, the participants exercise their right to know what happens to the funds they put at the Forum/projects' disposal.

If the comprehensiveness and differentiation of the Forum is at the core of its strong performance, **compared to straightforward output production the process also requires more time and resources.** Admittedly, any donor could realise such outputs in plans and projects without a Forum more efficiently, especially the projects. Forum procedures can be time-consuming and risky since a sizeable part of the proposals will be rejected by the plenum and possibly never realised. On the other hand, any of these results (recommendations, plans or projects) achieved on the grounds of a Forum process will most likely be better accepted and more sustainable. In this way Forums balance the relative costliness of their results with better effectiveness.

**The Forum cannot be turned into an institution.** Even if the session cycle lasts more than year, the Forum is of temporary character and therefore is not intended to be sustained. It is a method. As such it can be applied, ending with the conclusion of the process it is supporting. What can be made sustainable, though, are the skills in moderation and coordination, by training persons qualifying for the activity, and by improving the capacity of their home institutions and firms. The training capacity as such can also be institutionalised when training courses become integrated into academic or NGO curricula as a sustainable (commercial) activity much in demand in countries under transition and development. The same in terms of sustainable institutionalisation applies to training needs in Forum processes linked to project preparation skills.

### 3.4 Outcomes expected from a donor's perspective

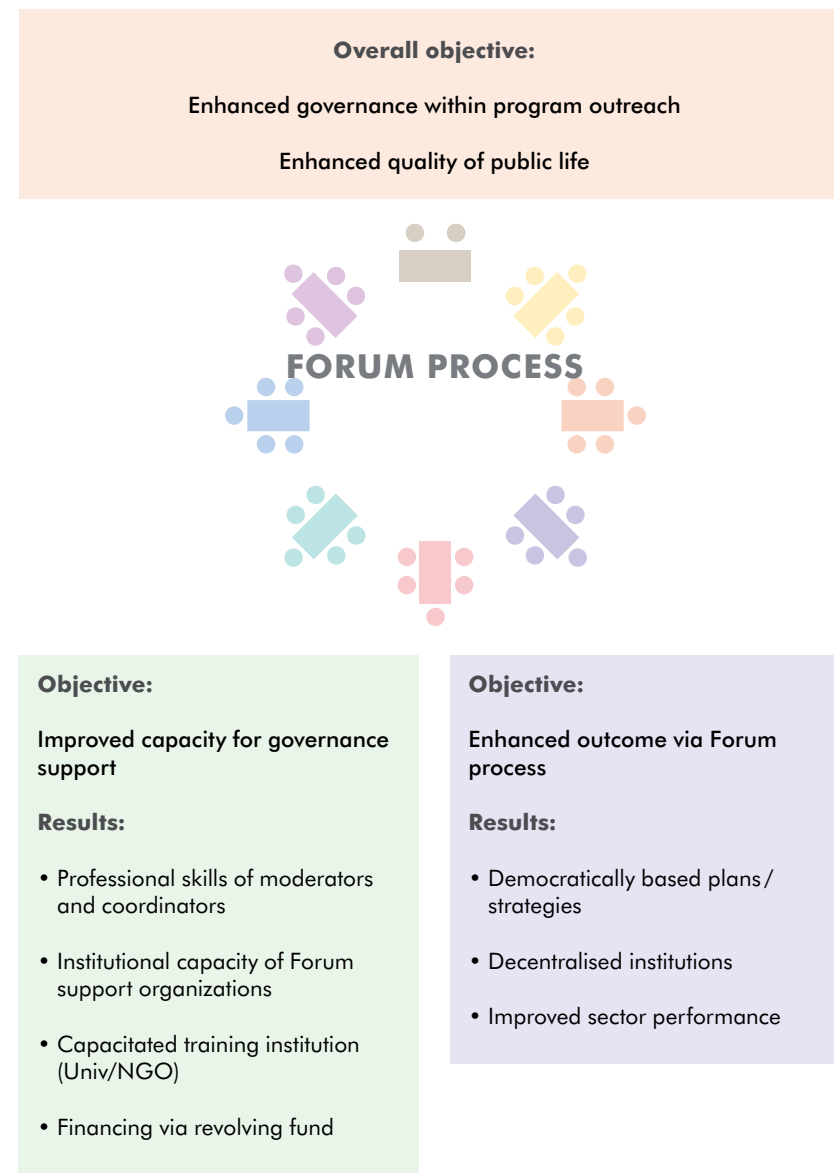
Table A (on p. 13) on Forum results can be turned easily into a template of possible program objectives (as in Table D on p. 23). It would depend on the orientation and specific emphasis of a particular donor's policy. But it is rare in development policy that inputs as well as outputs of a process can be considered as positively enhancing an overall objective.

#### a) Direct project results

The immediate output of a Forum could be a recommendation for action by the municipality or some institution, an elaborated plan or strategy for later implementation by whomever is in charge, or a number of concrete projects. These can represent very desirable results to a donor, especially if generated in a participatory way. Despite the relative costliness of a participatory process, there are large donors sustaining programs with an eye on direct results in some economic sector. A prominent example is the *UN Agenda 21* program promoting environmental investments worldwide. The program is interested in the number and volume of projects, using a process similar to Forums precisely to achieve acceptability and sustainability of the sector results.

If the interest of the donor is less in sector achievements and more in governance in general, then the immediate output of a Forum in sheer numbers of recommendations and projects fades into the background. The Forum process as such with its overall impact on public life and motivation, and the various skills embedded in capacities to run a Forum, moves to the centre of donor attention.

Table D Forum process and donor objectives



### b) Institutionalised capacities

Indeed the various forms of skills imparted to **trained and experienced moderators and coordinators** are of great development value in themselves. Trained staff capacitates their home institution in the handling of all kinds of similar events at any level of a society in public life. The range of related participatory practice, such as mediation, supervision and social cooperation, is broad enough to allow moderators to turn their particular skills into a profession, as many consultancies and NGOs from previous experiences would confirm. There is also great demand for moderation and coordination skills from government offices, administration, and from the private sector. To create such capacities in a country would represent a substantial achievement for a donor agency.

**Project preparation skills** are a major ingredient strengthening development processes. Reinforcing NGOs and consultancies in these capacities is of undoubted relevance for transition or development countries. It helps multiply the number of donor counterparts. It enables them to become active on their own. Under an institutional perspective it is a prerequisite for serious decentralisation efforts. Again, for a donor agency to capacitate institutions in this respect could be taken as an objective in itself.

### c) Intangible outcomes

Sometimes, under particular political circumstances, consensus between contending groups of society is difficult to achieve. Consensus building is the primary purpose of the Forum process. Forum participants are free to choose modest and everyday issues so that groups which are politically wide apart start cooperating without giving up their more fundamental interests. A donor may find this particular aspect of Forum activity as a **training ground for consensus building** enough of a basis to create a program with this objective in mind. In this context, some practical training to improve the capacity of Forum participants and institutions in the handling of information flows would be conducive to good results.

A blend of such overall considerations has been behind the objectives formulated by the Swiss Forum program in Bulgaria. The overall objective was to improve public life with the help of enhanced governance (**enhanced and enriched community life based on new forms of citizens' participation and cooperation**). Operational objectives concerned the promotion of Forum-specific skills and their institutionalisation. Projects, considered as an important Forum output to the participants, were linked to the governance aspects in the eyes of the donor. Project generation without interference from outside influence etc. is valuable under a governance point of view.

(See Attachment 5 for the actual set of objectives used in the Swiss Forum program in Bulgaria).

## 4 HOW TO EXPLORE A PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

Being familiar with the basic features of the Forum approach, a donor agency would take a closer look at the program environment as a first step towards eventual program design.

### 4.1 Situation in governance

Most countries in transition or development are already active on issues of national and local governance. A would-be donor will certainly have to take stock of policies in place and of existing experience. One would also review the programs of other donors, especially in regard to potential synergies with a possible Forum activity. A first overview would also help **locate institutions** capable of offering the necessary support services in a Forum program. To assess the capacities, skills and professional record of a wide range of institutions is certainly no labour lost, as Forum activity would have to be based on reliable support organizations. Relevant experience could also be located in some **related fields** to Forum activity proper (such as training, project implementation and institutional support services). Potential candidate organizations could be NGOs from the civil sector, universities, or departments and special agencies of public administration or private sector consultancies.

### 4.2 Potential initiators

Another aspect of program environment would be to find out if potential **Forum initiators** could be found and mobilized in a society. In the Bulgarian Forum program, the prototype initiators – persons of public stature launching the idea for a Forum with theme and coverage – were

the mayors of municipalities. This need not be the case in another society. In other contexts one would possibly refer to a different type of protagonist at a different level of society, be it a district or a region. Or then initiators may be found in NGOs, agencies or associations. Program realities later may be offering some surprises as to the originators of Forum initiatives, yet it would not be advisable to start a Forum program without ensuring that a certain social group is committed and in a position in principle to launch the particular type of Forum the donor has in view.

### 4.3 Socio-economic basis

There are other **aspects of a more sociological nature** to be explored. The society concerned by the Forum program needs to be socially differentiated enough to really carry a Forum through, generate a substantial discussion and to fully absorb its results. In certain social environments a common concern may not necessarily be present. Some countries have settlement structures offering limited potential for a positive engagement on the part of the inhabitants. A minimum starting point is needed to get people to actually sit and discuss matters of common concern. To improve social life in circumstances where a minimum cannot be taken for granted would call for a different approach. A Forum might not even get off the ground.

## 5 HOW TO DESIGN A FORUM PROGRAM

### 5.1 Objectives

The socio-economic setting is the backdrop for a donor’s program design with respect to Forums. Obviously the orientation of a program would have to be in line with donor policy. Section 3 of this Brief describes the wide range of possible **donor objectives** that could be imparted on Forum activity:

- on the program input side → building up of institutional capacities
- on the output side → promoting sector objectives

Both sides and the Forum process itself sustain the overall objective of improving governance or social life in general.

### 5.2 Support organizations

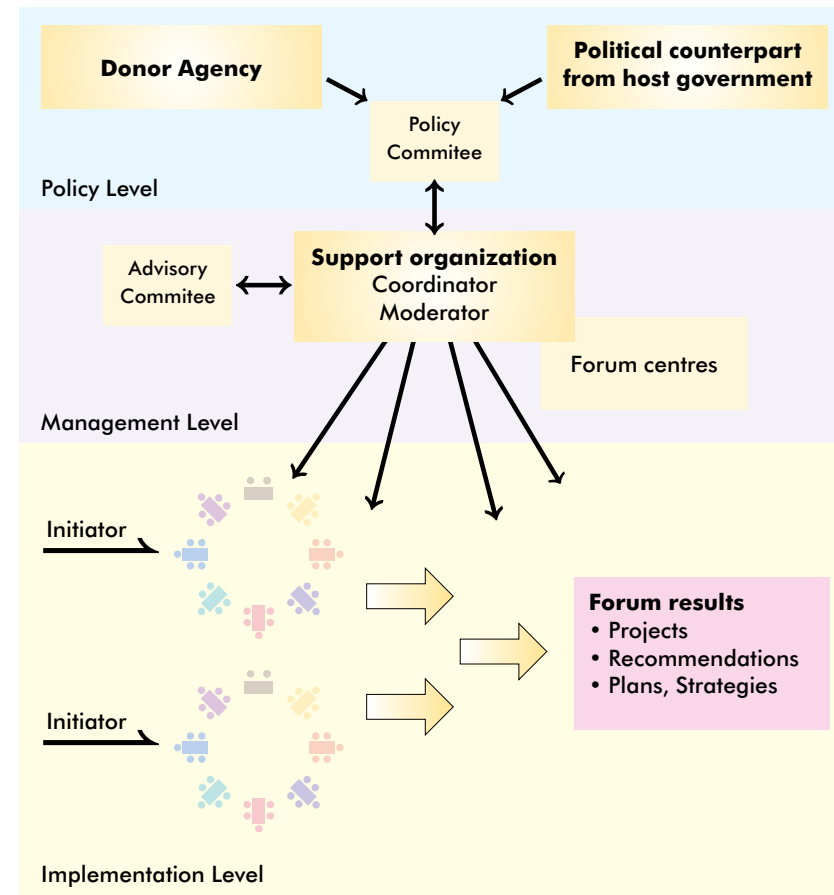
Whatever the prevalent donor objectives, the Forum process will have to be carried by **support organizations**. They will be offering moderation and coordination services on behalf of the Forum initiator – who retreats to an observer status once an individual Forum is set up and starts holding sessions. The interplay between these key protagonists is important for program success, but amply described in the companion volumes to this Brief. Relevant here is the need to select and possibly upgrade one or several institutions early on for the handling of the Forum process as such, as well as of the activities concerning preparation and implementation of Forum projects. Whilst acting as a moderator is an individual capacity that could also be offered by a trained person, the coordination services needed to run a Forum call for an organizational basis, an NGO, a municipality department, an agency or consultancy.

### 5.3 Key staff

Once the support institutions are selected one would proceed to questions of **key staff**. If possible, a Forum program should be run by local staff. When scheduling a program one should keep in mind that before any Forum can start, an extensive round of introduction and training for sizeable groups of key staff must take place. First of all, moderators have to be recruited and trained in Forum facilitation skills. Training and outside coaching must also be provided to coordinators with regard to all the input services that are later delivered to the Forums in operation.

At the outset of a program local trained staff is a very limiting factor. A program cannot be jump-started into Forum activity. The ground has to be prepared in terms of institutions and staff supporting the process.

Table E Blueprint of program levels



### 5.4 Procedures

With the support organization becoming operational, the process of Forum **site selection** can start. From then on on all the necessary steps in the setting up of individual Forums will be carried out by the support organization. At this point the donor agency would have to come up with program guidelines and the selection criteria for Forum sites, best developed in collaboration with a coun-

terpart. As in any program, to have a local **policy counterpart** would be indispensable. Whether this should be the ministry of regional development, of environment, of agriculture, or any other would depend on the donor and host government objectives. Cooperation at policy level would imply the setting up of a “Policy Committee” as the policy interface governing program activity.

### 5.5 Monitoring

Any program should have a monitoring and **control feedback** to its originator. The donor has to arrange for program information flow from management to policy level. In the Bulgarian program a Policy Committee took care of this aspect. Process monitoring was done via Forum session summaries, filled in by the operative group assisting the moderator and complemented by regular visits of a coaching and control group.

### 5.6 Measuring results and impact

Concrete results are the measurable reflection of the Forum's objectives. If a program, for example, aims at improved information flow, then the outcome should be better-informed and possibly even better-motivated citizens. If the aim were improved cooperation between socio-economic groups, then new coalitions between stakeholders in project

formulation and implementation would be proof of that. If the objective of a Forum program is sector-oriented (e.g. upgrading environment through concrete projects), then results should be tangible project outputs.

Most Forums will serve a number of direct but also indirect objectives. The impact of the Forum outcome will be felt in a variety of aspects of social and economic life. The illustration below shows a **set of indicators** used as a basis in impact assessment of the Swiss Forum program in Bulgaria. As is fit for a donor, five out of seven indicators indirectly relate to the donor's overall objectives of the program. Note that the two indicators on direct results of a Forum in projects (6) and recommendations (7) are oriented towards the appropriate handling of these instruments rather than towards concrete outputs. The donor's interest was therefore in the governance aspect rather than in the sector contribution of the individual Forum projects.

**Table F Forum Results and Impact Assessment**

<b>1</b> % of social groups covered by Forum	<b>2</b> # of active NGOs before + after Forum	
<b>3</b> Levels of discussion reached by Forum	<b>4</b> Cooperation level between partners	<b>5</b> # of Forum contacts with citizens
<b>6</b> Sustainability of Forum projects	<b>7</b> Treatment of recommendations	

1 = adequate positioning of the Forum (inclusion of all relevant social groups)  
 2 = impact on civil society;  
 → both (1 + 2) indirectly supporting the **overall objective**  
 3-5 = Governance indicators; proxies for improved communication flows: more pertinent (3), in new coalitions (4), more intense (5) → **overall objective**  
 6-7 = → **direct results** (here emphasis on proper handling; would be more detailed if sector results were a prominent program objective)

Within the Swiss program **assessments of results and impact** were carried out for each group of Forums upon conclusion of the session cycle and subsequent project realisation. They were based on Forum session summaries – an extended protocol in a prescribed format filled in by the operative groups of each Forum – and on interviews with participants and key persons with questionnaires again reflecting the objectives. Each of the seven indicators was reported on in the form of facts and interpretation.

In contrast to a donor agency, the local initiator of a particular Forum may be more specific and down to earth with regard to the type of expected results. A municipality might concentrate on tangible results. However, the intangible governance side of Forum results will be there anyway, whether the initiator measures them or not.

All indicators relate to the process within one single Forum, and are there used for controlling purposes. However, a donor program may involve more than one Forum. Regarding the program as a whole, conclusions were drawn from consolidated results of all its Forums.

A glimpse of the **impact** of the Swiss program in Bulgaria **at the level of the overall objective** was gained once in the context of a survey on citizens' attitudes towards public affairs (UNDP, National Human Development Report, see p. 14). Forum participants taken as a statistical control group showed a significantly more positive attitude towards government than the average citizen without Forum experience. Of course this is an exceptional spotlight on the complex interactions between Forum events and general citizens' attitudes. Such outcomes would have to be explored in much more detail, and without doubt would be a costly exercise. The HDR may serve here as an example that in principle it would not be impossible to trace the relevance of a program even in the elusive realm of governance.



## 6 HOW TO SUSTAIN FORUM ACTIVITY BEYOND DONOR SUPPORT

The Forum as such is not to be sustained: it is a method and not an institution. What could be endeavoured by a donor agency, however, is the securing of skills to make the Forum process happen again in future.

### 6.1 Training function

In the course of the program certain support elements needed in the country over a longer period deserve to be securely established within local institutions. Experience shows that a **training function** for Forum moderators and coordinators is likely to find broad demand. The same holds true for project design and implementation monitoring and control, and for PR and communication skills. Courses could be established with a university institute or with a relevant, publicly recognised NGO. A prerequisite for the establishment of training capacity most probably would be the **training of local trainers**. This is a time-consuming task, as the capacity would have to be built up over years. In other words, early assessment and decision by the donor on the location of training capacity is recommended to achieve some **institutionalisation** of this function by the end of the program.

Facilitation as a training topic is rather specialized, yet there may be some institutions at hand engaging in related methods with similar training needs. So to coalesce and join forces in training for ombudsmen, mediators or supervision specialists would result in considerable synergies. An institution engaging in diverse lines of facilitation training would have a better chance of survival on the market.

### 6.2 Forum Centres

Apart from targeted capacity-building (mostly by training) in all the skills needed to run Forum sessions and to develop and control their results – a donor could work towards establishing selected institutions as Forum service providers or **'Forum Centres'** in the market. The Bulgarian program apart from four support organizations in the capital, certified six Forum centres across the country as relay stations for Forum service provision. The idea was to broaden and standardise the services, but also to lower the management cost of the Forum process by getting geographically closer to the sites.

### 6.3 Tender practice

To familiarise the program with market procedures, both sides – Forum initiators looking for services and the institutions providing them – would have to be encouraged to introduce **program tenders**. The donor agency could base the selection of Forum sites in its own program on tenders. (See Attachment 3 describing tender schedules in the Bulgarian program: here covering the initiator's part only; the provision of Forum services was still fully controlled by the donor agency). The procedure in Bulgaria caught on and Forums rapidly spread without donor financing, but also without quality control.

### 6.4 Associations

**Quality control** would therefore be another field where a donor agency could contribute towards sustaining the Forum methodology over the long term. To firmly establish performance standards in Forum support services, from session moderation to process coordination, is a task to be divested from the donor and transferred to a local institution in the course of the program. A good format for this is the creation of an **association of NGOs** and consultancies or an **association of moderators and coordinators**. This again is something better envisaged by the donor early on in the program's cycle. Institutions would have to learn this quality dimension of Forum activity as a task pertaining to all those involved. The lesson is learned more easily before competition sets in; the latter tends to make cooperation in standardisation and service regulation much more difficult.

### 6.5 Funding

Another field for work towards sustainability is the financing of Forum projects, e.g. the **community funds** and budget shares that are set aside for project financing by a Forum convened on a regular basis. If the Forum program contributes over a period of time to a project fund and all stakeholders get used to its advantages, then the municipality may be induced to maintain the scheme on a permanent basis.

With such measures a donor agency could set the stage for sustained recurrence of Forums engendering participatory discourse and democratic decision-making. The level reached in this respect could be considered as an indicator of improved governance.

The Forum's approach comparative advantage is the following:

- it is predominantly driven and owned by local participants, thus delimiting dependency on continued external (donor support); donors act as "enablers", as seeds, start-up engines (with some level of monitoring of course) rather than managers or drivers of the process;
- linked to above, the Forum co-identifies and joins donor with local participants' objectives; donors and local society consequently collaborate in a symbiotic relationship throughout the Forum process, both achieving their own but complementary objectives;
- it is flexible, able to adapt itself or be customised to address actual needs of local groups, sectors, institutions and organisations; giving donors adequate amount of flexibility in program design in different contexts;
- complies with good democratic practice – e.g. transparent, accountable, inclusive and participatory;
- achieves procedural improvements (often linked to better governance issues) - linking systemic, procedural as well as tangible improvements in peoples' everyday lives;
- skills and experience gained throughout process are potentially internalised and institutionalised in different (formal/informal) degrees among participants and in institutions.



## ATTACHMENT 1

### The Forum in its standard format

- The standard “Community Forum” is initiated by a municipality. It relates to the community as a whole and deals with themes derived from a survey carried out prior to the Forum. The sessions involve 60 to 80 participants, in groups formed according to common background and interest, at six to eight working tables. The aim is for the groups to be representative of the main social groupings existing in the community.  
(In diversified versions of the Forum oriented towards special groups or a more comprehensive geographic level, the groups are to cover the entire range of possible interests in the topic envisaged.)
- The Forum is guided by a moderator, a skilled person from outside supported by a local “operative group”. The logistics and organizational aspects, as well as provision of training and expertise, are taken care of by a coordinator, usually a person linked to an organization with sufficient organizational capacity.
- The Forum participants meet for a series of sessions every four to six weeks over a period of up to one year; one session usually lasts 4 to 5 hours.
- The same groups discuss a common topic of their own choosing, usually derived from the survey previously conducted by the initiator.
- Training and technical assistance, e.g. for media relations, project development and implementation, are provided by professionals.
- The discussion process leads the groups to consolidate their interpretations of the issue and to agree on appropriate solutions.
- The groups draw up recommendations for local administrations and other institutions.
- They agree on project ideas to be developed by working groups between the Forum sessions.
- They prioritise finalised project proposals.
- A joint fund is established for the financing of projects, with contributions from donors and the municipality. The Forum participants implementing the projects add their own contribution in money or kind.
- During its last session, the Forum lists all eligible project proposals and prioritises the most suitable amongst them. Through a voting procedure by tables, the Forum selects the final list of projects to be financed from its fund. (A substantial number of project ideas, processed by as many working groups in the course of and between the Forum sessions, are turned into completed project proposals. Those not selected for financing by the Forum can still be used to attract funding from other institutions or investors.)

## ATTACHMENT 1 (contd.)

### The Forum in its standard format

- An implementation phase of the Forum-selected projects follows the conclusion of the sessions. This phase involves only those working groups in charge of relevant projects. The operative group continues monitoring the projects’ implementation and results.
  - After 6 and 12 months, the Forum is reconvened for a follow-up session, to draw conclusions about the outcome of financed projects and to learn about the fate of recommendations addressed to outside institutions.
  - The entire process of one Forum including follow-up sessions to Forum participants (subsequent to implementation of projects or recommendations) can easily extend to over two full years.
- In its standard format (relating to community needs), the Forum mediates between civil society, informal groups and the official institutional system by offering a platform for interaction. It neither replaces nor competes with public authorities such as local councils or municipal administrations.
  - Forums in adapted form (e.g. a *Regional Forum* between municipalities or a *National Forum* between government bodies or national organizations) will treat other types of themes with groups of participants corresponding to the level concerned. Such Forums have a proven capacity in structuring and sequencing planning processes and public negotiations. They can also successfully design and implement projects at the respective level, and – in other versions – lead to the setting up of regional project development capacity.

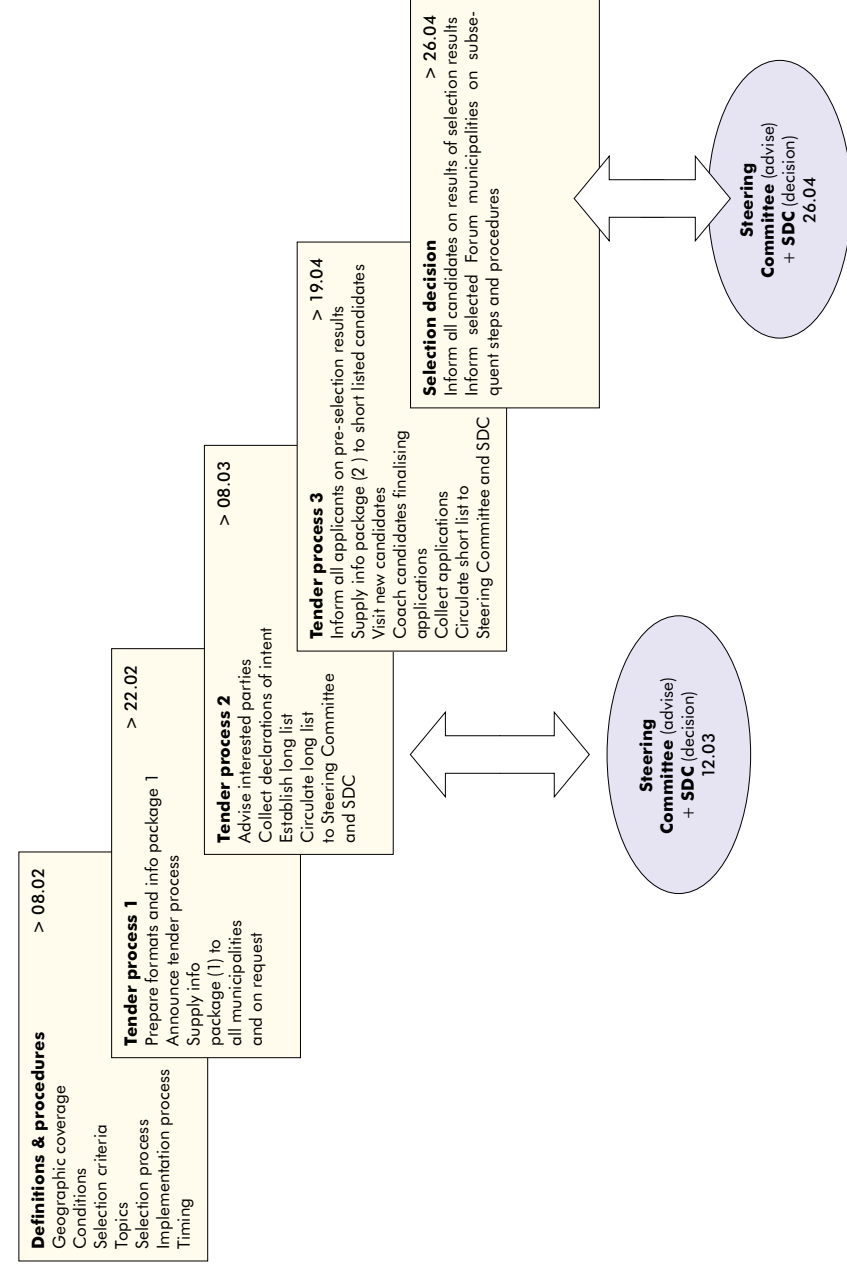
## ATTACHMENT 2

Matrix of Forum results corresponding to Forum coverage and type of results

Type of results Coverage / Type of geogr.-social groups	(A) Clarification of issue (new stakeholder coalitions)	(B) Direct action by Forum participants	(C) Recommendation to institution or Plan/Policy / Strategy	(D) Preparation of projects for implementation (by outside group)	(E) Preparation + implementation of projects (by Forum group)
(N) National level Institutions/ Groups	Need to adapt national construction regulations	Work on the statutes of a national association	Sector stakeholders to establish national priorities and indicators		
(R) Regional level Institutions/ Groups	Discussion of waste disposal arrangements	Introduction of quality label in tourism	Regional policy on utilization of cultural heritage	Trans-border environmental development	Tourist package on regional topical tours
(L) Representative coverage local community	Confidence building after chemical disaster	"Clean city" Program of NGOs and municipality	Municipality to include needs of disabled in new public buildings	Master plan (blueprint) of Center for Artisans	Beautification of pedestrian area in town quarter
(G) Specialized groups in community	Measures to improve working conditions	Setting up of local Crafts Association	Clinics to adapt handling of psychiatric outpatients	Introduction of new agricultural technology	Setting up and operation of Business Centre

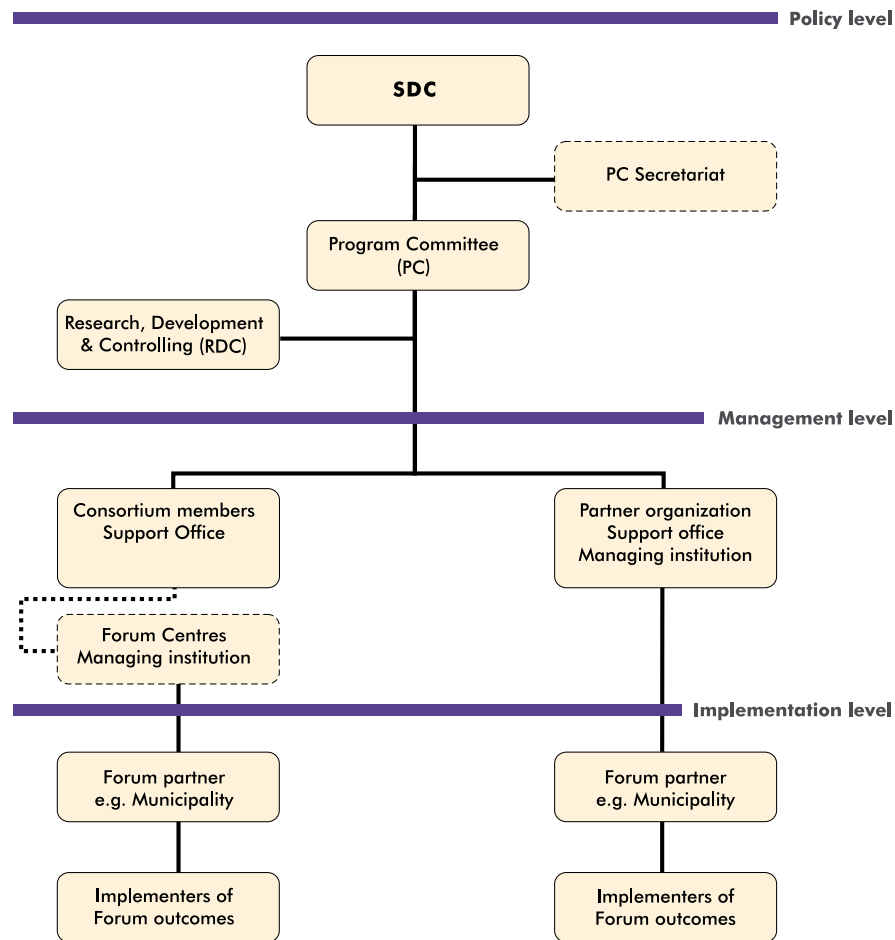
## ATTACHMENT 3

Sample of tender procedure



## ATTACHMENT 4

Sample organizational chart: Bulgarian program Phase 3



## ATTACHMENT 5

Activity fields and program objectives Bulgaria Phase 2

### OVERALL OBJECTIVE

Enhanced and enriched community life based on new forms of citizens' participation and cooperation

### FORUM SELECTION

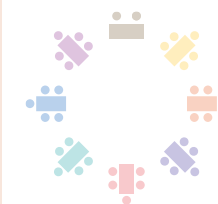
*Objective*  
Establish Forum as an instrument in region

### ADVOCACY + POLICY

*Objectives*  
General knowledge by relevant circles and acceptance of the Forum as an instrument  
Improved framework conditions for participatory processes

### FORUM PROCESS

*Objective*  
Enhanced and enriched community life based on the Forum approach



### PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

*Objective*  
Measurable development outcome of project activities

### STEERING + ADVISORY FUNCTIONS FORUM OPERATION + PROJECT PREPARATION

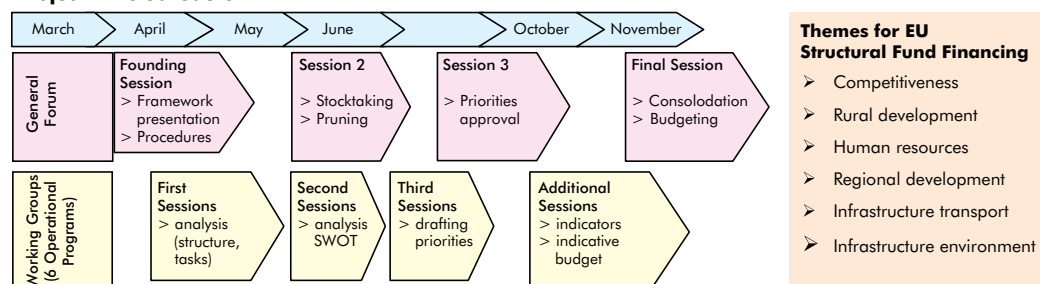
*Objective*  
Enhanced communication skills and project preparation skills at community level

## ATTACHMENT 6a

### National Forum: The National Forum on EU Priorities (Industrieconsult, Sofia)

When Bulgaria prepared her entry to the EU, the government established a National Development Plan (NDP, November 2004) as a background for a range of priority programs to be financed under EU Structural Funds. Over seven years from 2007 to 2013 substantial EU assistance was to be used countrywide in priority development projects. Starting from a blueprint of the NDP the decisive step in 2005/06 was for Bulgaria to derive national priorities along a number of themes pre-defined from the EU side.

#### Project Time Schedule



The problem was that each theme had its own complexity, each spread awkwardly across the competence of several ministries that dealt with it from different points of view. Moreover, ideas regarding the operational programs were to be collected from many sides, and the involvement of interest groups outside government in this process was a condition for EU funding.

So the Forum approach offered a possibility to bring together a range of ministries and very diverse stakeholder groups in each of the themes in order to derive an operational program of priority actions. Helping in the consolidation of opinion on national priorities, the Forum had a central but limited role. The generation of program priorities as such, and the subsequent (governmental) decision-making process linked to the finalized operational programs, was left to the institutions in charge inside and outside government.

The Executive Agency for Economic Analysis and Forecasting (AEAF) of the Ministry of Finance held a coordinating role within the process. It had previously compiled the NDP along established procedures internal to the government. In 2004 it invited Industrieconsult, one of the partner organizations of the Swiss Forum program, to set up the structure and program of this rather unique Forum exercise. The concept comprised six Working Groups with a moderator each to work on national priorities in each of the themes. These Working Groups called on those ministerial departments and interest groups that had something to offer with respect to their specific theme.

## ATTACHMENT 6a (contd.)

### National Forum: The National Forum on EU Priorities

From time to time plenum sessions, the so-called General Forum, brought together representatives from all six Working Groups plus additional stakeholders of national relevance, minorities, universities etc and the national media. The plenum was first to initiate the process, and then to eliminate overlaps between the operational programs: activities envisaged under the heading of "Competitiveness" could very well collide with programs formulated for "Rural Development" or "Human Development". Beyond the question of conflicting contents and approaches to the same issue, competence matters had to be spotted, if not resolved between ministries and stakeholders of national relevance: associations, labour unions etc.

The **first plenum session** was held in March 2005 with the topic "Discussion of the SWOT Analyses of the six operational programs (OP)."

The **second plenum session** was in June 2005 with the topic "Presentation of the OP Draft Priorities. Discussion, Avoiding Overlapping". Due to the change of Government the process was delayed and continued in the autumn of 2005.

After consultations with the Agency, the EU ex-ante evaluators and others, the **third plenum session** was organized with representatives of the six OPs only in order to improve the co-ordination and the interaction in their work on the elements of the OPs (measures, indicators, budget). For the first time at this point the two new OPs ("Administrative Capacity" and "Fishery and Aqua Cultures") that were established in the summer of 2005 joined the process.

The **fourth and last session** was held in December 2005. The draft OPs were presented with their main elements and indicative budgets.

The overall process of the NDP and OP elaboration continued in 2006. The Agency worked on the final draft of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) jointly with the Ministry of Finance. At the same time the work on the OP finalisation was ongoing. Some OP group moderators continued supporting individual groups, especially the two additional OPs created during the Forum process.

After the first session of the Forum, a specialized company was contracted to develop and implement **Communication Strategy and PR** action plan at a national level. For **capitalization of the results** a survey among the OP working group participants was performed by ASA Ltd. A questionnaire for the moderators was also developed. Below are some of the results of questions asked to Forum participants.

## ATTACHMENT 6a (contd.) National Forum: The National Forum on EU Priorities

On the whole, how appropriate is this form of discussion for reaching concurrence between national institutions?

	Human resources	Competitiveness	Regional development	Transport	Rural development	Environment	Total
Very appropriate	66,7%	60,0%	87,5%	66,7%	80,0%	66,7%	74,1%
To some extent	33,3%	40,0%	12,5%	33,3%	20,0%	33,3%	25,9%
Inappropriate							
Cannot say							

Was it useful that the Forums were led by an external moderator?

	Human resources	Competitiveness	Regional development	Transport	Rural development	Environment	Total
Yes	33,3%	80,0%	87,5%	66,7%	60,0%	100,0%	74,1%
To some extent	66,7%		12,5%		40,0%		18,5%
No		20,0%					3,7%
Cannot say				33,3%			3,7%

Did the Forum contribute to avoid overlapping of priorities between different OPs?

	Human resources	Competitiveness	Regional development	Transport	Rural development	Environment	Total
Yes		80,0%	37,5%	100,0%	40,0%		44,4%
To some extent	100,0%	20,0%	62,5%		60,0%	100,0%	55,6%
No							

Which was the most interesting session?

	Human resources	Competitiveness	Regional development	Transport	Rural development	Environment	Total
First (SWOT)		50,0%	12,5%				13,0%
Second (Priorities)	66,7%	25,0%	25,0%	50,0%	20,0%		30,4%
Third (Coordination meeting)	33,3%	25,0%	12,5%	50,0%	60,0%	100,0%	34,8%
Fourth (Final)			50,0%		20,0%		21,7%

## ATTACHMENT 6a (contd.) National Forum: The National Forum on EU Priorities

The assessment concluded on the following main difficulties experienced in the Forum on National Priorities:

- AEAF: lack of experience in the co-ordination of such complex process
- lack of timely decisions at political level
- ambiguous regulation of the process on the part of the EU (change of procedures)
- no clear phasing out of the support offered by the Forum

and regarding the particular profile to be sustained in a Forum at national level the assessment recommended:

- Topics must be of public importance and of controversial opinions.
- Structured discussions. Stakeholders are split in tables that articulate their particular interest and position in the discussion.
- Forum sessions “produce” working groups that work between sessions and report to the Forum.
- Participatory approach should significantly involve non-governmental stakeholders in the dialogue. Otherwise Forums turn into expert discussions.
- External moderation is not for its own sake. It is needed to involve a wide range of groups and to reach consensus among controversial stakeholders.
- External expert support has to be provided as a rule. The Forum discussion needs to be substantial and productive.
- There needs to be a concrete outcome of all Forums: e.g. at national level a document ensuring that discussions end with a clear result.

## ATTACHMENT 6b

### Regional Forum: Smolyan/ Zlatograd Cultural Forum (FLGR, Sofia)

Cultural Forums have been organized at regional level in Bulgaria since 2005. They focused on opportunities using cultural heritage as a means for local and regional development. The Forum process has been supported organizationally by the Foundation for Local Government Reform (FLGR), Sofia and through expertise from the National Cultural Fund and the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture.

Forum results most often lead to the adoption of a Regional program promoting local cultural heritage and including a start-up implementation phase of several smaller projects. Such concrete steps ensure that the program does not become a mere promotional tool, but that it also tangibly contributes to advancing regional development.

In the autumn of 2005, the FLGR and the National Cultural Fund, under the competence of the Ministry of Culture and in partnership with Smolyan and Zlatograd municipalities, applied to implement the Forum approach for the first time. The focus of the Forum theme proposed was 'management of cultural-historical heritage'. On an equal basis, citizens, tourist institutions, educational institutions, museums and cultural houses in both municipalities participated in discussing various issues linked to the promotion and preservation of cultural-historical heritage in the region.

As a result of the five sessions conducted within each Forum process, participants succeeded in finding more efficient mechanisms for using the cultural-historical heritage as a means for regional development. Joint inter-municipal initiatives resulting in common cultural products, such as the strategic document *A Common Policy of Smolyan – Zlatograd Region in the Area of Cultural-Historical Heritage for the Period 2007-2013*, and which was later approved by the Municipal Councils of both municipalities, is one example of such an outcome. Subsequently, based on this document, twelve specific project ideas were proposed and five of them were implemented with the financial support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the National Culture Fund and both municipalities.

The experience of Smolyan and Zlatograd municipalities in the area of managing the cultural-historical heritage was widely promoted at national and international Forums. Among the seven significant regional topics, the following were selected and approved by the Smolyan-Zlatograd Community Forum (on its third session) as potential follow-up activities: "The older trans-Rhodope roads" and "Cult places in the Rhodope mountains – traditions and succession". Both topics go beyond regional level with possible trans-border impact for Bulgaria and Greece.

Two months after the Forum, an information campaign of PHARE Trans-border Program Bulgaria – Greece started. The Program was called "Promote the development

## ATTACHMENT 6b (contd.)

### Regional Forum: Smolyan/ Zlatograd Cultural Forum

of cultural, tourist and human resources in the trans-border region" and its main focus was the adaptation of archaeological objects dating back to XIV Century to turn them into tourist destinations.

The municipalities of Smolyan, Chepelare and Rudozem, in partnership with the Regional Historical Museum, Smolyan, elaborated projects dedicated to cultural objects and concepts and linked to both regionally significant topics outlined at the Smolyan/Zlatograd Forum. This fact was underlined in the project documentation submitted to the Assessment Committee as a value added to the projects.

## ATTACHMENT 6c

**LEADER Forums: The case in Suedinenie, Hisar and Kaloianovo (ASA Foundation, Sofia)**

### Preparing for LEADER through community forums in Bulgaria

During 2006 – 2007 the ASA Foundation in cooperation with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) supported the establishment of four intermunicipal LAGs covering the territories of eleven municipalities – **Panagurishte, Lesichovo, Strelcha, Hisar, Kaloianovo, Suedinenie, Karlovo, Sopot, Brezovo, Rakovski, Bratia Daskalovi** with a total population of about 220 000 citizens. In each territory a grassroot community Forum of about 60 – 80 local representatives was established. It included farmer and non-farmer businesses, cultural, social and educational institutions, as well as the village and municipal authorities. Each intermunicipal Forum discussed and elaborated a local LEADER strategy. Subsequently the Forum with its participants formally became the general assembly of the Local Action Group (LAG). The LAG proceeded to elect its Board and elaborate its internal rules of governance according to the LEADER principles. To prepare for the real LEADER the four LAGs were supported in the organization and writing of tenders, project selection and later in the co-financing of 22 public and private sector projects. Particularly helpful to the community were the “local product” projects for very small farmers. Developing drop irrigation, small green houses or bakeries for example proved to the local people that LEADER is a realistic and useful instrument, even if the beneficiaries had to fully finance their projects before obtaining the LEADER refund.

SDC subsequently supported two other organizations to implement similar activities in the municipalities of **Omurtag and Antonovo** (Balkan Assist) and respectively **Yablanica and Teteven** (Foundation for Local Government Reform).



## ATTACHMENT 6c (contd.)

**LEADER Forums: The case in Suedinenie, Hisar and Kaloianovo**

### The case in Suedinenie, Hisar and Kaloianovo

A good Forum is about bringing together competing and often contentious interests. The intermunicipal LEADER Forum in Suedinenie, Hisar and Kaloianovo municipalities aimed to develop a LEADER strategy for their shared territory; to establish a Local Action Group (LAG) in a participatory way, and to gain practice in administering funds according to the LEADER rules.

Challenges arose when participating stakeholders from the three municipalities had to agree on the priorities of the common strategy as a basis for later disbursement of the LEADER funds. Two of the municipalities – Suedinenie and Kaloianovo are typically rural. Their economy is primarily dependent on agricultural production, namely cultivation of vegetables. The land is very flat, fertile and with access to irrigation. The area is historically significant because on its vast plains the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire used to keep and breed horses. The third municipality – Hisar – is an ancient Roman settlement. Nowadays it is a tourist centre, famous for its archeological excavations, mineral springs and spa hotels.

Due to the conflicting core activities among the three municipalities, during the Forum, the agricultural producers of Suedinenie and Kaloianovo stood up against participants from Hisar who favoured priorities linked to tourism. Expert inputs informing the Forum that “rural development requires a diversified and integrated economy” did not help much. The problem was solved, however, when the municipalities were encouraged to work on a joint project. In the end, representatives from the three municipalities decided to fund, with additional financial support from the SDC, a joint agro-tourism fair. The event brought together the agricultural producers as well as tourism businesses. Producers of dairy products, vegetables and wine from Suedinenie and Kaloianovo had the opportunity to meet their tourism partners from Hisar. They not only met but also did some business together. The mayors and the business elite of the three municipalities also had the opportunity to meet and present themselves to the local media as joint partners.

What could be learnt from such Forum cases?

- Do not form tables by municipalities – but place people from different municipalities according their stakeholders’ interests at the same table.
- Make sure that different and opposing stakeholders not only talk together but also work together – let them join common working groups.
- Lead discussions that end with practical outcomes – pragmatic project ideas and realistic recommendations, which can be financed in the very near future.
- Bring out and create an understanding about controversial and sensitive issues at the Forum, rather than hide them for the sake of a peaceful hall.
- Involve local leaders – both business and local political elite.

## ATTACHMENT 6d

### Neighbourhood Forum: Example of a Forum at village level (Forum Centre “Knowledge Association Lovech”)

#### Slogan: “Let us discuss and decide”

#### The background:

The program “Local Eco-Initiatives” of EcoSociety Foundation is giving grants for civil initiatives aiming at citizens’ involvement in environmental protection and living areas. The Forum centre Knowledge Association received a grant of 7100 Leva, of which 3000 Leva project fund.

The Forum centre “Knowledge Association Lovech” was aware of the problems of small settlements in Lovech municipality.

The local authority in Doirentsi showed readiness to cooperate.

The people from the village (1277 inhabitants) were ready to participate.

#### The goal:

To encourage the participation of people from a small settlement in the process of policy formulating for sustainable environmental local development, by means of:

- Public discussion using the Forum approach in environment protection, keeping the values and individual characteristics of the village and motivating the people to take part
- Recommendations to the local municipal authority and institutions related to the improvement of open spaces and environment protection and incorporating them in the municipal development plan.

#### Structure of the Forum:

- 1 local authority
- 2 civil organizations, clubs, citizens
- 3 young people
- 4 businesses, companies
- 5 educational institutions
- 6 operative group

**Format:** 3 sessions

#### Results:

Two civil initiatives were launched with more than 200 people involved, volunteers in projects’ implementation – coordinator, accountants, assistants etc. The children, young people, business people, elderly people, local officials, all together took part in the civil initiatives.

## ATTACHMENT 6d (contd.)

### Neighbourhood Forum: Example of a Forum at village level

#### Do you want to initiate a Forum in a village? Here is what the village of Doirentsi learned:

One of the challenges of living in a small settlement is the chance to influence development, governance and decision-making at the local level.

Through the Forum approach people from villages can effectively influence the policy and strategy adoption of the much larger municipality of which the village forms a part. But you must also have in mind that villages are closed communities, often isolated, with limited perspectives for the citizens, who have poor self-confidence and little ambition to undertake activities.

Nowadays, initiatives in villages are scarce and sporadic. To initiate a Forum process in such a settlement, you should choose an interesting topic capable of getting people involved. This should be a topic they are aware of, feel familiar with and are prepared to contribute to.

#### Some hints if you are initiating a Forum in a small village:

- Number of sessions from three to five, but three is best;
- Invite everyone: once you offend some you will never be able to involve them again;
- Show them that you like their village: there is no one living in a village not proud to be part of it;
- Show them that their village deserves to have a Forum process: people from smaller settlements appreciate having confidence placed in them;
- Mediate: especially between them and local municipal administration;
- Collaborate: the help you give with strategic or official documents will multiply and return to you;
- Find partners: companies settled there are motivated to give financial support: maybe it is difficult to attract them to work voluntarily, or to sit through all the sessions and discuss, but they will contribute financially.

There are no small or big Forums (as far as the financing or project fund is concerned), there are only successful or meaningless Forums.

#### The unexpected results from Doirentsi Forum:

- the level of participation;
- the readiness to express opinions;
- the financial contribution of the local companies;
- the in-kind contribution – none of the coordinators, accountants, helpers in the projects decided by the Forum were paid;
- the peoples’ acceptance of the Forum approach; in fact they were amazed by it and compared it favourably to ways of discussing in former times;
- the involvement of the mayor, attracting financial support from businesses.

#### Still to be done:

Convince the municipal officials to estimate the achievements not in cash money but in the added value created.



## ATTACHMENT 6e

### Budget Forums

(Balkan Assist Association, Sofia)

Long after the democratic changes in Bulgaria many things look different but still there is a lot to be done towards real democratic government. At the local level, municipalities have taken a great step on the way to public dialogue and partnership. However, the municipal budget – the annual agenda of a municipality, is still a matter of expertise rather than a real public process. Since 2003, the Municipal Budget Act has provided for the local authorities to conduct a public discussion on the draft budget prior to its submission to the City Council for approval. In most of the cases though, these “discussions” are formal, fruitless, and discouraging for the few participants.

The **Budget Forum** comes to fill that gap by its special characteristics:

Unlike the ordinary (one and only) public discussion, it is a process. This gives the citizens enough time to enter the philosophy and terminology of the matter and feel more comfortable when giving recommendations. A well-designed workshop in the beginning of the process introduces the participants to the main elements of the municipal budget and what parts of it can be influenced. Three consecutive Forum sessions deal separately with **Budget revenues**, **Budget expenditures**, and the **Investment program**. Thus, participants realize that in order to spend more from the budget, they have to contribute more – in the form of increased taxes and duties. The process continues parallel to the elaboration of the draft budget by the administration. In this way, **recommendations** can be considered at every stage and in advance before the final draft is expected. A fourth session is organized after the adoption of the budget by the City council to inform the participants about the results of their recommendations.

The Budget Forum has its special structure. As the topic of the municipal money concerns every citizen, all the various social groups are stakeholders. Representation provided by the working tables guarantees that the public significance is the major criteria for any recommendation. The neutral moderator gives more comfort both to the participants and to the local authorities – no hierarchy, no rude criticism, only well-grounded proposals from equal participants.

Public consensus on budget issues as a result of such a Forum is very important. Decisions made after listening to all the parties interested are well founded and sustainable. They lead to partnerships, coalitions, and new project ideas. Sometimes they are not even money-dependent – recommendations may concern increasing the percentage of the tax-collection or the organization of the cultural events. What matters is that people learn to talk about public budget as “our money”, the money **of** the community and **for** the community.

## ATTACHMENT 6e (contd.)

### Budget Forums

Since 2004, budget Forums were held by Balkan Assist Association in about 10 Bulgarian municipalities with the support of SDC. Most of them continue discussing their budgets in this way without external support. Some other municipalities are interested in applying the Forum approach as well. No project fund is needed for such Forums – it is accepted that part of the **municipal budget is in fact the project fund**. The results are recommendations to the draft budget, prioritization of the investment projects with regard to their public significance, some new project ideas. Fundraising campaigns were held in some places to mobilize local resources and co-fund projects. In some of the municipalities, separate project funds were established within the budget, allowing for citizens, NGOs and community groups to apply with projects. The Forum is the jury – all the participants decide on which projects are to be financed.

## ATTACHMENT 6f

Some projects resulting from Community Forums

### APR 02

#### INTERNET CENTRE APRILTSY

The Internet Centre Apriltsy is a vivid example of a public-private partnership between the Municipality and a private company. Together they have established an Association for the purposes of the project. The idea of the Internet centre was launched by the Business Table as a reply to the serious telecommunication problems in the region, developing as a tourist destination.

The Nison Consortium technical experts installed a radio-relay Internet system covering the whole territory of the Municipality. An Internet club was opened in one of the quarters in 2002. The contribution of the Municipality was the provision of premises for the Internet club for a period of ten years without rent. The Forum financed the repair of the premises, PC equipment (seven computers), Internet connection. User fees were sufficient to maintain the system.

A second club started to work in another quarter in the spring of 2003 - subsequent to the project. The Internet centre Apriltsy has provided employment for young specialists from the small town. New communication and information opportunities have been actively used by the local people, the business and the tourists. Starting with seven computer configurations, presently the Consortium provides Internet connection to schools, hospitals, administrative buildings, hotels and private houses throughout the region. The number of private users has diminished recently.

In 2002 the only Internet club (the project) in the region produced a sensation. It was also a good start for the private company to develop in this field, and a nice example of a Public-private partnership (PPP) in those gloomy years. However things change rapidly in telecommunications. Facilities are more easily available in the region today. Most likely the PPP need not be sustained for the entire period of ten years envisaged at the outset.

Total budget: BGN 37 906  
SDC contribution: BGN 29 330  
Own contribution: BGN 8 576  
Implementation period: August – November 2002

## ATTACHMENT 6f (contd.)

Some projects resulting from Community Forums

### SEV 03

#### MAPPING THE SEWAGE SYSTEM IN MUNICIPAL VILLAGES

Initiator of the project was the Working Table of Big Enterprises.

A project team involving technical experts and village councillors has made professional analyses of the sewage system in six villages. The underground and map information gathered has enlarged the database and provided conditions for feasibility studies and projects to renovate the sewage system. Complete information has been placed at the disposal of interested Municipal, Regional and State institutions. It has become a basis for the underground cadastre, developed and updated by a private company.

Jobless people were employed during the project realization. Local people highly appreciated the good will of the Municipality to improve village infrastructure.

Based on the data gathered by the project team, the National Trust Eco-fund has financed a pilot project for constructing a waste-water treatment plant. Its realization is envisaged in the Municipal Development Strategy for the period 2005–2013.

Total budget: BGN 3041  
SDC contribution: BGN 1250  
Own contribution: BGN 1791  
Implementation period: July – September 2001

## ATTACHMENT 6f (contd.)

### Some projects resulting from Community Forums

#### TET 07

##### PUBLIC APIARY

The project idea was promoted at the Forum by the Association of Beekeepers *Balkan Nektar*. Its aim was to establish a Public Apiary as a ground for training unemployed, students and other people willing to take up beekeeping.

Teteven Municipality provided a free area for the apiary. Beehives, bee-families and a honey extractor were bought by the project team. Supported by the local branch of the State Forestry Enterprise, the schools, and with the volunteer labour of beekeepers and young people, they planted 1 hectare of trees around the apiary. The *Balkan Nektar* Association organized beekeeping courses for students and unemployed people from the region.

As a result of the project and its broad popularization, many citizens from Teteven region are currently practicing beekeeping. On the one side, it results in better pollination of plants and, on the other, an increase in family income.

Five years later, the Public Apiary is presently used for demonstrations and is maintained by the Association of Beekeepers.

Total budget: BGN 7 900  
SDC contribution: BGN 4 400  
Own contribution: BGN 3 500  
Implementation period: August 2001 – June 2002

## ATTACHMENT 6f (contd.)

### Some projects resulting from Community Forums

#### TET 10

##### COMMUNITY CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF TETEVEN

During the Forum process, the citizens of Teteven discussed and unanimously supported the idea of establishing an organization working for the development of the Municipality, being a unifying factor of the activities of local institutions. The Association was established in the spring of 2001 by 21 juridical bodies and seven natural persons, among them the Municipality and other key institutions and eminent citizens. After six years of work, the Centre now has more than 50 members.

During the project implementation there were two employees. Now the Centre for Sustainable Development employs nine young specialists with diverse professional qualifications.

In 2003 it was included in the JOBS Program, implemented by UNDP and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and became a Business centre aiming at stimulating local SME. It is now sustained by remunerated provision of services in project planning and implementation.

Since its establishment, the Centre has realized 20 projects in partnership with various organizations.

The Forum instrument has been broadly used in their activities. The Centre has initiated or has acted as a partner in three Forum processes on various themes such as: Tourism, LEADER approach, Waste Treatment. The latest Forum was conceptualized and initiated by the Centre in a public tender.

Total budget: BGN 72 306  
SDC contribution: BGN 42 124  
Own contribution: BGN 30 182  
Implementation period: October 2001 – December 2002

## ATTACHMENT 6f (contd.)

### Some projects resulting from Community Forums

#### Sample project of a regional Forum

##### REG 01

##### QUALITY MARK OF TOURIST SERVICES

Development of tourism has been a subject of discussion in most of the Forums in the Region of Central Stara Planina. One of the main problems defined has been the quality of tourist services provided. The idea to develop a system to qualify and certify the tourist services was put forward by specialists in tourism at a regional Forum session in 2001. The Regional Tourist Association *Stara Planina* agreed to elaborate and implement the project.

A systematic assessment of the tourism services offered in the region was carried out. Local business was actively involved in the competitions *Quality Mark* and *The Best Tourist Place*. Thirty-nine tourist places have been awarded the Quality Mark for the services they render. Local tourism managers became interested and were willing to improve their professional performance. A Tourist Services Quality Guide, issued in 500 copies, was introduced by the entrepreneurs. Fourteen leading travel journalists visited the region and numerous articles were published in the national media about the region's tourist potential. This fact has resulted in an increase of tourism in Central Stara Planina.

Partners in the project realization were local Tourist Associations, Bulgarian Hotel and Restaurant Association, Bulgarian Association of Tourist Agencies, Commission of customers' protection at the Ministry of Economy, Department *National Tourist Policy* at the Ministry of Economy, and specialized schools in the region.

Activities initiated by the project have now been continued sustainably for several years. The Association was awarded the annual prize of *The Best Tourist Place* for the fifth time in 2006. Journalist tours organized every year help to boost the image of Central Stara Planina as a tourist destination. The system of voluntarily certifying the tourist services has been adopted by other organizations, thus stimulating creative competition in the sphere.

Total budget: BGN 23 753

SDC contribution: BGN 18 271

Own contribution: BGN 5 482

Implementation period: January 2002 – March 2003

