



Association Svatobor – Romano Barardo /Romanies – the gardeners/ :

project description

The aims or why we support gardening among Roma people

Our 10 year experiences declare that the supporting of social inclusion through the education and development of the gardening activities among Roma people makes sense, as there are several positive changes among Roma people that are gradually emerging. The changes fulfil these aims:

***Bringing the meaning of life and developing the inter-ethnic dialogue and cooperation – garden as the place for building up the bridges among people**

In the localities where we operate we can see how the Roma gardeners have built up the respect among the non-Roma people. The Roma gardeners take care about their houses and gardens and so bring harmony and beauty in to their village. They bring new meaning to their lives. The non-Roma talk more to the Roma people and they offer them some job opportunities or seasonal work opportunities. In this way there is the space for the mutual dialogue, knowing each other and peaceful living.

***Lowering the crime rate (thefts and vandalism)**

The socially excluded Roma people who can grow their own fruit and vegetables have no interest in stealing these products from the non-Roma people any more. Moreover, after hard physical work in the garden there is no more energy for vandalism. Moreover, if a Roma (e.g. the former garden theft) begins to farm, he can realize then that how much energy it takes to grow even the common vegetables like cucumbers or onions. Such a Roma gardener can become more empathetic to the other gardeners who have been rubbed after the long hours of hard working on the fields.

***Improving the health conditions of the Roma people by healthy nourishment**

The majority of the Roma people with low or no school education consume a lot of meat, sweets and products from white flour, they also drink a lot of alcoholic beverages and most of them smoke. By producing fruit and vegetables on their own they consume them more and this leads to the improvement of their health conditions. Number of medicaments taken, occurrence of hospitalizations and epidemics are lower if there are healthy people.

***Supporting the food self-sufficiency/decreasing the hunger in the poor communities**

After an unemployed Roma uses the social benefit from the state (it is in Slovakia amount of approximately 120 EUR) to pay for basic expenses (like electricity, rent, etc.) there is no more money for food. However, if he produces a part of the needed food by himself, he can go through the harsh times of hunger more easily.

***Economic benefits for the society and cultivation of the country**

When the Roma-gardeners live in peace and do not break law, the society do not need to monitor them with the expensive camera systems or with the army forces, to build fences from barbed wires around the private lands or to build new prisons for them. Better health conditions of the Roma people with healthy nourishment means also savings in the resort of the Ministry of Health or social security. The Roma people, who cultivate the country, compost their waste and can live meaningfully due to the gardening, improve their skills and their food self-sufficiency, and even more who can offer the surplus of vegetables or fruit to other consumers, can earn some more money and so increase the income for their families.

Key activities

We could run these activities with the Roma people via the project;

- Eco-gardening – production of vegetables, walnuts and fruit trees;

- Water economy arrangements – retention of the rain water to use it for watering;
- Composting – i.e. processing the garden waste;
- Environmental education – for children, teen-agers and adults;
- Cultivation of the country and therapeutic activities – bringing the beauty to the world as the way for the cultivation of soul and human relations.

Results (quantity evaluation, quality evaluation is in the part about the aims of the project)

Since 2006 Association Svatobor with its partners have:

- provided job opportunities and income for 123 Roma people and 115 non-Roma people;
- activated 121 volunteers;
- provided the schooling services and engaged more than 1 000 people (mainly Roma) into the gardening and country cultivation in 31 localities;
- have got rid of 2 large illegal waste dumps and on those places in the cooperation with the local communities they have built up the eco-gardens with the sports playgrounds (for volleyball, mini-football and tennis) and have made 3 beautiful water storage reservoirs with the rain water gathering system
- have processed over 3 000 tons of bio-waste and from them they have produced over 1 000 tons of compost
- have produced 100 000 kg of vegetables and fruit that reduced hunger in many families

Association Svatobor- the people involved in the project

The project is led by the association Svatobor. To fulfil the aims of the project there are 12 people in charge that are paid by association (project manager/fundraiser, assistant for the international communication and partnerships, financial manager/administration worker, accountant, tax and economic advisor, journalist, photographer, manager of farming/lector with 2 assistant gardeners/lectors, compost worker, selling and distribution assistant) and 121 volunteers.

Main funding resources and partners

There has been invested more than 900 000 EUR into the project during the 10-year period of its realization. Main resources of its funding are:

- 1.incomes from the farm product sales (vegetables, fruit, walnuts);
- 2.donations from the state budget and from the EU Funds (the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family);
- 3.foundations (Ekopolis foundation /Norwegian financial mechanism/, Carpathian Foundation, Open Society Foundation) and other donors (e.g. United Nations Development Program – GEF SGP, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs,...);
- 4.financial support from the members and sympathizers of the association Svatobor (donations come mainly from the founder of the association – Štefan Straka and his family which gives part of its income from the construction company to the public, educational and charity services to support the social integration of the Roma communities).

There are several other partners who take part in the project implementing, e.g.:

- *non-governmental organizations (Friends of the Earth Slovakia – they provide mainly counselling service);
- *Slovak Land Fund and Greek-Catholic Church (they provide the land for the gardening of the Roma people);
- *Companies (e.g. agricultural cooperative that helps with the specific cultivating works);
- *Municipalities (mainly from the district of Vranov nad Topľou)

Activities and the procedure of their realization

Association Svatobor proceeds in fulfilling of the project aims through the combination of several arrangements concerning Roma people. E.g.:

- we school them (mainly via practical activities) so that they know how to grow vegetables, fruit or how to compost the bio-waste on their own;

- we search and mediate land for them, so that they have place for their gardening activities;
 - we provide them with the start-up packages with the seeds, equipment, trees, so that they have requisites for their work;
 - we advise and help them in long terms when they build gardens, composts, water storage reservoirs, or with the cultivation of the country;
 - we gradually develop community supported agriculture and box of vegetables delivering system through which we sell vegetables, fruit, walnuts from the Roma gardeners for the restaurants, organic shops or other consumers;
 - we try to crosslink more partners (e.g. people from the municipal offices, companies, civil associations, foundations, churches, state institutions and organizations,...), to connect financial and non-financial recourses, so that the conditions for the garden activities are set up even in the other localities;
 - we lobby for the new legislative and financial supporting mechanisms;
 - we try to address mass media to help us to communicate good experiences;
- and
- we look for the ambassadors who would help us to spread the Romano Barardo project (Romanies – the gardeners).

Project summary

The project is focused on the development of the gardening activities of the Roma people (mainly Roma women). It is innovative because in Slovakia it brings:

- new idea, i.e. social integration of the Roma people (former nomads/migrants) via developing their gardening skills and caring about the country;
- creative approach towards the involving the target groups – e.g. via connecting social services with several disadvantaged communities (disabled people, Roma people, youngsters after leaving orphanages,...). Fulfilling of the project activities brings also the development of the potential of low-qualified people and long-term benefits for the people living in the poverty (e.g. improving the food self-sufficiency, health conditions, living surrounding,...) Our approach is characterized not only by involving the individuals, but also whole families; emphasis is on the developing practical skills, using motivators for educating /e.g. mayors, priests/; education results /=harvest/ help families living in poverty,...;
- different way of work/education of people from the poor settlements- e.g. developing of the knowledge and practical gardening skills reacts on the limited possibilities of people living in poverty to travel, and so it takes place right at their homes and estates that the Roma people own/rent. Another specificity of the project is that it is realized through multisource financing in a long term (more than 10 years) and in a complex way (counselling service, start up packages of seeds and equipment, land providing, ...) which brings visible positive changes in the community development (e.g. in the attitudes towards the education and work) and the cultivation of the country (composting of bio waste, getting rid of illegal waste dumps, making the environment beautiful, ..);
- changes in perception of the Roma people among the non-Roma public – via national and regional media (e.g. TA3, sme.sk, TASR, Markiza TV,...) which repeatedly brings positive news about the Roma gardeners and via good evaluations/responses the project received from abroad (e.g. from UNESCO – Konfucius prize 2015 - for social inclusion and education of the Roma people through the development of their gardening skills and activities; Štefan Straka /project manager/ was due to the project chosen by the Ashoka organization to become an Ashoka Fellow - 2015) and in Slovak Republic (e.g. Roma Spirit 2012 - 1. place in the category of non-governmental organization; Orange foundation prize 2015 – 1. place in the category of the community development) which positively influence the common repute. The Roma people from the localities where we operate are no longer perceived as parasites, but as people socially useful. Roma people from other communities in Slovakia are also interested in gardening, so the word of thanks goes also to this publicity and effort of the partners of the association.

Video – display- the report from TA3

<http://www.ta3.com/clanok/1067019/unesco-udelilo-konfuciovu-cenu-slovenskej-ekofarme.html>