



USAID
OD AMERIČKOG NARODA

Raspberry Farm – Source of Income, Therapy, Road Back to Happiness

Fund for supporting businesses owned by marginalized women



Project title: Fund for supporting businesses owned by marginalized women

Project duration: 1. 10. 2016. - 28. 10. 2017.

Funding: 680.000 KM

Project implemented in: Zvornik, Livno, Kalinovik, Visoko, Rudo, Tešanj, Teslić, Konjic i Prijedor

Project summary: Cooperation between USAID/PPMG and its partners – local self-government units – fosters an environment conducive to establishing and improving institutional mechanisms for supporting businesses owned by marginalized women.

There are a lot of intriguing facts about Rudo - it has the shortest river, it was the first town in BiH to use urban planning, and its citizens have faced much adversity.

The people of this small town in the eastern part of BiH mostly live off the land, i.e. agriculture and raising cattle. They don't have factories and companies, so they are mostly left to fend for themselves against the forces of nature. Sanja Mršević is one of the thousands who share this fate. She is a mother of an autistic boy, who decided to make a living growing raspberries. She made a small raspberry patch, but due to the unfavourable situation on the market, the purchase price and weather, it did not suffice. Sanja was not only left with no income, but her family also lived through the shock of her autistic son being expelled from his high school due to a mild form of autism.

Slavko, an autistic boy from Rudo, was expelled from the school that was his biggest source of happiness and only way to be included in the society, although his parents claim that he had a doctor's note assuring the school that he can attend classes. Being rejected by the formal education system left Slavko isolated again, but his mother never gave up. She made him feel useful and included by allowing him to help with growing raspberries. In addition to making Slavko happy, Sanja intended to provide for her family by growing raspberries. She wanted to work and earn a living, but she couldn't do it alone. This unemployed mother of two did not have enough money to expand her business and give her two boys a better life. She received support from USAID's Fund for supporting businesses owned by marginalized women and the Municipality of Rudo.

Sanja used the money she got to plant another raspberry patch, and is now hoping to produce 7 or 8 tons of raspberries. Weather permitting, and if the purchase price is good, Sanja will have an easier life. They used this money to buy a tilling machine, making their work making their work easier and more cost-effective. This money meant not only a better life for Sanja, but also for several young people she hires during harvest, providing them with an income in a town where such opportunities are rare. This money brought hope to Slavko, the autistic boy from the beginning of this story, who works with his mother on the raspberry farm.

Slavko helps tie the plants and pick the fruit, because he can do it. He doesn't have a physical disability, he's full of life and strength, and working on the raspberry farm is like therapy to him. His other son is equally helpful and a hard worker. This raspberry farm on the bank of the river Lim provides this family with an income, but is also a source of happiness.

"The hope this raspberry farm gave us is one of the rare bright spots we see in this struggle. It means a lot to me and my family, and most of all to Slavko. If we win our fight to get Slavko back to school, we will be a happy family." – says Sanja. Every day during recess, Slavko Mršević still goes to the High School Center Rudo to spend time with his friends. His fight to return to school continues, but until that happens, Sanja will continue making him feel included and useful by letting him work on the raspberry farm.

Sanja is one of a hundred women who were supported by USAID's Marginalized Populations Support Activity and nine local units of self-government. These businesses provide them with a livelihood, independence and restore their faith in a better future.