

**A NEW SCHOOL BRINGS HOPE BACK TO SAMOLJICA VILLAGE**



*Hanife Nevzadi, teacher in Samoljica school, active in Community Development Council (CDC)*



*The school, the ambulance and the MZ (village council) now in the same place*

SAMOLJICA, SERBIA – Hanife Nevzadi, a teacher in Samoljica School, knew the building wasn't sufficient to provide a quality education to the children of the village. Two classes of students had to share one classroom; the roof leaked during the winter and when it rained; the doors and windows were broken; and there was no water supply in the school building. The children often walked 6 kilometers to attend school in the neighboring village because the conditions were so poor.

Samoljica village is located in the Bujanovac municipality, and has 1300 inhabitants, mostly ethnic Albanians. People work mostly in agriculture and operate small businesses. Living conditions have been very hard during the last few years, and a large number of young people have left this village to work in EU countries. This trend is a threat to the potential future growth and sustainability of this village.

CHF International, through the USAID funded Community Revitalization through Democratic Action (CRDA) Program, built a school in Samoljica in cooperation with the residents of Samoljica, the municipality of Bujanovac, and the Republic of Serbia Government. The project provided for the construction of a school with a basement and ground floor containing six classrooms, two teachers' labs, sanitary facilities, and an entrance hall.

CHF Serbia has operated programs in the country since November 2000 with the support of USAID. The activity of CHF Serbia supports the belief that democratically elected representative community councils and financially independent NGOs serving local citizens are the best guarantees of a strong and just civil society.

The situation in Samoljica has changed a lot during the last year and a half. In a political sense things are calming down: there is a feeling of increased confidence and better interethnic cooperation, local elections have been held, and the new representatives are participating in the local self government.

Ms. Nevzadi says that citizens of Samoljica are successfully addressing their needs through the CDC, which was formed at the beginning of the CHF CRDA process.

"The CDC is the bridge between the community and the municipality", says Hanife. "The whole process wouldn't be possible if people from the CDC were not as active as they have been in the realization of the CRDA program". In addition, she notes, "The Diaspora also sees that things in Samoljica are changing. They help us a lot now and we hope that one day they will come back to their country".