

From Poverty to Prosperity



Shared Successes of **JOBS PLUS** in Moldova



JOBS
plus



GIVING HOPE TO A WORLD OF NEED

Jobs Plus is a three-year poverty reduction program focused on new job creation in rural labor markets with the social “plus” of village-lead improvements in the quality of life. By initiating public-private enterprise partnerships in 20 rural localities throughout Moldova, the program will create 1,500 new, sustainable jobs over three years and help the rural poor in targeted communities transition from a position of vulnerability to one of prosperity and greater well-being.

WINTER WONDERLAND
A blanket of fresh snow envelopes the sleepy streets of Ceadir-Lunga on a cool December day.



INTRODUCTION: *Rolling out Jobs Plus*

MOLDOVA WAS rocked by successive political and economic challenges in 2009 — the year Catholic Relief Services was rolling out its enhanced Jobs Plus program.

A disputed parliamentary election in the spring triggered the largest protest in the history of independent Moldova and left the ruling Communist party short of the three-fifths majority needed to elect a president. In a subsequent election, held in July with the aim of breaking the impasse, the Communists lost their parliamentary majority after eight years of rule.

Opposition Democratic, Liberal and Liberal-Democratic parties formed a coalition government but did not win enough seats to end the deadlock over the presidency. The political uncertainty continued in 2010. A referendum in September to permit the direct election of president by the people failed due to low turnout. No party won enough seats in a parliamentary election in November to resolve the stalemate.

In addition to a volatile and tenuous political landscape, the Moldovan economy suffered multiple blows as a result of the global financial collapse. Remittances from Moldovans working abroad dropped by one third. Moldovans consumed less in response, adversely affecting non-exporting enterprises, which make up about 30 percent of Jobs Plus partner employers. At the same time, the number of production contracts for exporting enterprises declined. Moldovans who had been working abroad returned home in droves as jobs became scarce in Russia and Europe, causing unemployment rates to double in Moldova.

Jobs Plus program partners were not im-

Jobs Plus is innovative because...

- ✓It merges two elements — job creation and social development — in one program.
- ✓It establishes public/private partnerships where employers move beyond acts of corporate responsibility to make socially responsible business development a central component of their management strategy.
- ✓It provides program beneficiaries with the opportunity to engage in social entrepreneurship and improve the quality of life in their communities.

mune to the pernicious influences of the compounding crises. Several business partners who had signed on at the beginning of the project were forced to withdraw either because they went bankrupt or had downsized their enterprises.

Unpredictable migration, identified as a potential risk for the Jobs Plus program, did prove significant but not in the way originally foreseen. Moldovan workers, returning home from abroad, created a surplus of human resources in rural communities that drove up already high unemployment and poverty rates. With the spike in available workers, the impetus for large urban employers to relocate operations to remote villages in search of workers was gone.

The calamitous circumstances under which CRS launched the Jobs Plus program make the need for its job creation, community partnership and social initiatives all the more important, timely and urgently necessary.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Opening up markets for enterprise products

✓CRS seeks out partner businesses working in diverse industries — agro-processing, leisure services, import distribution, production of PVC windows and doors, which account for 19 percent of the newly created jobs.

✓CRS recruited a marketing consultant to identify new clients and markets for partner businesses. The consultant helps partner businesses build their capacity for marketing, enabling them to perform this function more effectively and helps businesses become more competitive.

✓CRS built linkages enabling Jobs Plus partners to help one another. Partner employers that have the capacity and surplus of orders are encouraged to outsource to partners that are at the early stage of their development or are going through a more difficult period.

Stemming migration

✓CRS partnered with businesses that were already operational in rural locations, helping those businesses to expand and absorb returning workers. This proved effective in meeting the needs of both unemployed rural residents and partner businesses.

✓CRS and partner employers invested in building up transportation and recruitment systems to involve beneficiaries from two or three communities surrounding the partner employer's location.

Building capacity for change

✓CRS is building local village capacity for change and development. The project provides local coordinators and local volunteers with training and coaching since they are the agents of change in their communities. They are learning skills to develop participatory and representative community needs assessments and community action plans and to manage community improvement projects.

HOW JOBS PLUS WORKS

Building upon its successes of previous job creation programs, CRS:

- Recruits and partners with private sector businesses to invest in rural areas through the creation of new social enterprises in select villages that benefit communities as well as their investors.
- Provides access to demand-driven technical skills training, employment, and income generation for rural workers.
- Provides access to select capacity building opportunities such as women's empowerment, training in sustainable livelihoods, business management skills and others.
- Initiates local Social Investment Funds through which rural residents can undertake needed community improvements.

Jobs Plus not only addresses the economic side of poverty but the more human elements as well, working to improve the quality of life in each selected rural community.

Beneficiaries include:

- Unemployed rural residents — particularly working-age women who receive targeted training and sustainable employment, along with an educational program designed to improve livelihoods and empower beneficiaries.
- Partner employers and rural communities — both of which benefit from a spectrum of business-support and development services.



BACK FROM THE BAKERY
A Gordinesti villager clutches
his loaves of bread.

The Jobs Plus program "is an important project and it is important that it succeeds... It has already addressed one of the fundamental challenges facing Moldova: how to retain sufficient numbers of its working young people, including young parents, in the country rather than migrating to other countries."

—Independent Mid-Term Evaluation, 24 January 2011

UNLIKE MANY aspiring entrepreneurs, Dinu and Elena Gutu were not motivated purely by self-interest when they began mulling over the notion of launching a new business.

Besides making a profit, the couple were eager to choose an enterprise that would allow them to leave behind an enduring legacy not only for their children, but also for future generations of workers in Dinu's hometown of Gordinesti, Moldova.

"Our first concern was the future of our children," say the couple, who have an eight-year-old son, Artem, and expect to have more children in the future.

"Our second was to create a business in the area where I was born in order to help, a little bit, the community in the rural areas, who have a harder life than other parts of the country. I have dreamed about doing some kind of business in my village," says Dinu, 34.

A LEGACY OF WALNUTS

In their quest to achieve these objectives, their thoughts turned to nuts and, in particular, walnuts because of the long-term viability of the tree.

Although it takes up to a decade for a typical walnut tree to produce nuts, once it does, the tree can continue to produce nuts for decades — sometimes as long as 100 years.

The couple officially launched their business, which they christened BioClub, in December, 2009.

The name was Elena's idea. Since the nuts will be produced without chemical fertilizers, pesticides or artificial agents, she thought it appropriate to select a business name that connotes organic farming methods.

The long-term plan is to plant four species



DIVERSIFYING THE ECONOMY

BioClub orchard workers plant walnut saplings at the orchard in Gordinesti. BioClub was an attractive collaborative partner for CRS for several reasons, including the novelty of walnut production, which met the organization's objective to work with a diverse assortment of businesses and the fact that one of the owners was born in the village and cares deeply about the well-being of his community, which improves the likelihood of sustainability.

of walnuts and two species of almond trees on 99.8 hectares (247 acres) of land for a total of 13,000 trees. The Gutus expect to invest about 9.8 million Moldovan lei (US\$820,000) in starting up the orchard.

As of mid-December, 2010, the couple had planted 68 hectares (165 acres) of walnuts and expected to have the remaining trees in the ground by the following autumn.

Acquiring the land has not been without its challenges because land ownership in highly fragmented in Moldova, Dinu points out.

Following Moldova's independence from the Soviet Union, the collective farming system, known as *kolkhoz*, was abolished. Land was transferred from the state to Moldovan citizens, who received plots ranging in size from 0.3 to 0.75 hectares (0.7 to 1.9 acres) for each family.

"...you can have all of the money you want, but it means nothing if you don't have the personal relationships."

—Dinu Gutu

"So, you can imagine how difficult it was to acquire 100 hectares (247 acres) of land," says Dinu, before quickly adding: "It wasn't a matter of money." Rather, the acquisition of such a large and consolidated parcel of land required delicate negotiation.

Some landowners were eager to sell or swap their plots of land; others were reluctant, explains Elena, 32.

Thankfully, Dinu's father, who was personally acquainted with many of the residents of Gordinesti, interceded on the couple's behalf and managed to persuade those



INKING THE DEAL

BioClub owners Elena (far left) and Dinu Gutu (center) pose with Catholic Relief Services Program Manager Ludmila (second from left), Operations Manager Viorica Cemitan and Business Development Specialist Igor Fetiniuc after signing their partnership agreement.

who had resisted parting with their plots to accept land swaps.

"Sometimes you can have all of the money you want, but it means nothing if you don't have the personal relationships," observes Dinu.

SHREWD TECHNICAL AND BUSINESS PLANNING

The couple are by no means entrepreneurial neophytes. They are both economists by education. Dinu studied in the U.S. and Elena in France, each earning a master's degree in business administration.

For the past seven years they have owned and operated, with a Danish partner, a successful frozen food distribution business. The company is the country's fifth or sixth largest importer of frozen fish, meat and vegetables, says Dinu.

The couple were required by Moldovan law to coordinate with the Ministry of Agriculture in carrying out their plans for the orchard. They also had to have a detailed technical and feasibility assessment of their orchard done by an agricultural specialist before they were permitted to begin planting.

The comprehensive plan included an analysis of soil, regional temperatures, the species and gender of the trees to be planted, and under what sort of conditions to optimize pollination and prevent the degradation of the land.

About half a dozen experts with PhDs had to sign off on the plan, which cost the couple 57,000 lei (US\$4,770) to have completed.

“We need to do exactly as the plan dictates on precisely the land where the analysis was done,” says Dinu, who notes with some amusement that the technical study dwarfs BioClub’s business plan.

That, too, is grounded in a methodical and thorough analysis of the risks associated with starting up a walnut orchard.

“This is much more familiar to us,” says Dinu, gesturing towards BioClub’s business plan, which was developed in collaboration with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) as part of its Jobs Plus program.

The couple became official participants of the Jobs Plus program in July 2010, a few months after founding BioClub.

A NOD TO HUMAN CAPITAL

Besides unpredictable weather, one of the other risks the Gutus identified to the successful launch of their business was attracting and retaining good employees. Participating in the Jobs Plus program, they reasoned, was an excellent opportunity to help mitigate that risk and they were eager to make good use of CRS’s offer to help recruit and train BioClub employees.

A community assessment of Gordinesti commissioned by CRS found that farmers in the village are eschewing agricultural activities that require human capital in favor of mechanization. Crops that yield a high market value but require a sizable labor force are stagnating, the study found.



ON THE ORCHARD BioClub employees carefully place the walnut saplings into the ground according to the specifications of a technical plan approved by Moldova’s Ministry of Agriculture. While many of the country’s agribusinesspeople are mechanizing, the Gutus are developing their orchard to be a labor-intensive enterprise.



The Gutus are bucking this trend by deliberately developing their orchard as a labor-intensive enterprise.

“As founders of the business, we wanted people who would work with us in a mar-

ket economy-oriented enterprise, who would grow with us and be part of this company for the long-term” explains Dinu, adding that he and Elena were confident that the Jobs Plus project would “help us in this regard.”

Some analysts have suggested that certain behavioral or psychological barriers, which trace back to the Soviet era, may be impeding current agricultural development in Moldova.

“...we wanted people who would work with us in a market economy-oriented enterprise, who would grow with us and be part of this company for the long-term.”

—Dinu Gutu

“Independent, risk-taking behavior that was anathema to Soviet ideologues is essential today,” one analyst observed in the World Bank’s Agricultural Strategy for Moldova, “Accelerating Recovery and Growth.” In other words, “the independent spirit of farmers must be restored,” the report suggested.

The Gutus agree, “there are still collective farmers who have old-style thinking and the main problem in this part of the country is people still, maybe because of low wages, they are not taking into account productivity measurements.”

Says Elena: “We want to motivate them to work honestly, to work harder.”

As an incentive, Jobs Plus staff suggested and the couple agreed to provide jobs on a permanent basis even through the winter, which runs counter to current standard practices in Moldova, where agricultural workers tend to be employed seasonally, per day or per task.

“We were happy to collaborate with CRS from the very beginning,” continues Dinu. “We were only two people in the company when we started our collaboration with CRS and now we already have about 14 employees. By March (2011), we’ll have about 25 people in the company.”

CRS, through the Jobs Plus program, also is supporting the Gutus by providing a tractor for use on the orchard.

“It’s not our property but if we succeed in achieving the objectives of our business plan, CRS will donate the tractor to the company at the end of the project,” says Dinu. “This is very good because we saved quite a lot of money in startup costs, about 300,000 lei (US\$25,106). It gave us the opportunity to make all of our processes faster and also to employ additional people.”

The Gutus say the support provided by the Jobs Plus local coordinator has been invaluable in assisting them in identifying good candidates to hire and they also are pleased with the training for sustainable livelihood that CRS provided to BioClub employees.

“The local coordinator is a psychologist who has helped us a lot. For us, it’s very important to create a team with personalities that will fit well together. The technical part will develop. We have a strong manager with lots of agricultural experience, especially in orchards. We have an external consultant to help us with the technical part. But our belief is that people have to develop themselves day by day, not only in their professional work, but also in other topics. We think that helps them become better workers. Besides salaries and benefits, it also helps them stay motivated. This will be a kind of non-material motivation,” suggests Dinu, who recalls how excited he was early on in his professional life when his employer singled him out to complete a task.

“It was my first job during university and the salary itself wasn’t the only thing that was important, but also the chance to meet different people, and to be involved in training and the decision making process of the company. I remember (being given) a task I had to do by myself and I was totally motivated. I would like to do the same with this company as well,” he recalls.

10TH TOP PRODUCER OF WALNUTS

Moldova’s rich soil, warm summers and

mild winters have made it one of the most productive agricultural regions since the beginning of recorded human history and a significant supplier of agricultural products in southeastern Europe.

Gordinesti has a rich agricultural history in its own right with its abundance of wheat, corn, barley, sunflower and sugar beet. Cattle ranching and poultry farming also have been practiced in the village.

During the Soviet era, many of Gordinesti’s residents worked on a very large *kolkhoz* that produced grains and tobacco, which requires the use of a considerable amount of pesticides. (The *kolkhoz* is the Russian term for a form of collective farming that existed during the Soviet era.)

Besides the health hazards associated with working with pesticides, tobacco farming has been linked to other health hazards such as smoke inhalation, ‘green tobacco sickness’ from picking the wet leaves and inhaling tobacco dust from the dried leaves.

Dinu and Elena say workers at their walnut orchard are “proud and happy to be producing a product that is not harmful” to themselves or others and a crop that has so many uses. In addition to the edible nut, the leaves of the tree have been used to heal skin and to cure digestive problems. Oil from the nuts is a popular ingredient in culinary dishes in some parts of the world and the walnut tree has been coveted for its timber for centuries.

Despite its diminutive size, Moldova is the world’s 10th largest exporter of walnuts and the country is not even close to peak productivity.

While researching the viability of starting up a walnut orchard, Dinu discovered that only about 7 percent of the earth’s land surface is suitable for growing walnuts, but Moldova’s soil and climate is such that the nut will grow anywhere in the country.



Partnership Promises

Jobs Plus provides a tractor and apparatus that will be donated to the company once it achieves its partnership goals.

BioClub commits to creating 23 jobs and making annual contributions to the Social Investment Fund.

WORLDWIDE DEMAND FAR EXCEEDS SUPPLY

Worldwide, the demand for walnuts far exceeds the supply, which was another compelling reason to invest in the nut.

The Gutus intend to leverage their existing network of business associates to export their walnuts to Germany, Austria and the United Kingdom.

Thus far, walnuts have not been cultivated to optimize yields in Moldova. Rather, they’ve been planted along the country’s roadways, which makes them more difficult to harvest and inferior in quality those grown on orchards, says Dinu.

But that is likely to change soon.

Spurred by strong demand and favorable growing conditions throughout the country, the nut was identified as one of the priority business sectors in the national poverty reduction strategy developed by the Moldovan Government and international financial institutions, Dinu points out.

Moldova exported the largest volume of walnuts in the country’s history in 2009. The poverty reduction plan calls for production of walnuts in Moldova to increase 500 percent by 2020. To reach the target, about 1,500 hectares (3,706 acres) of additional walnut saplings will have to be planted each year.

The Government has set up a fund for walnut producers, which was established with contributions from existing walnut exporters. In 2010, investors in Moldova’s walnut sector received about 10,000 lei (US\$837) per hectare as an incentive, notes Dinu.

Moldova’s Union of Walnut Farmers also provides support to new growers. Over the past couple of years industry specialists, mainly from France —regarded as the world’s leading authority on the nuts — have partnered with Moldovan growers to nurture the growth of the walnut sector.

The burgeoning interest in walnuts has piqued the interest of foreign investors as well. Dinu knows of a French company interested in planting 1,400 hectares (3459 acres) of walnuts in Moldova. A Russian oil company has already planted 350 hectares (865 acres) of a walnut plantation that is expected to balloon to about 3,000 hectares (7,413 acres).

According to their business plan, the Gutus expect it will take about seven years before their orchard achieves peak production. They expect to spend about 70 percent of their total investment in the first year, but it will take just one good harvest to recoup all of their startup costs.

The couple are aware of the risks associated with launching a business, but “without risk, you do not drink champagne,” laughs Dinu.

Elena and Dinu have faith in their business plan and, with support from CRS and the Jobs Plus program, they believe their investment will pay off for themselves, their children and the local community.



CHAMPIONING JOBS PLUS
Svetlana Danciuc, left, is the Jobs Plus local coordinator and Ana Gutu, a member of the Local Project Management Board in Gordinesti.

Collaborating to Build Community

ANA GUTU is heartened by the support Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has provided in carrying out the sorts of projects that foster a stronger and closer-knit community.

Initially, she confesses, “it was difficult because the (Local Project Management Board) gathered after we were finished our regular jobs. This meant that one had to sacrifice the time that could have been spent with family,” recalls Ana, 55, who is a member of the Jobs Plus program’s Local Project Management Board (LPMB) and the director of the high school.

But that sacrifice feels effortless today because team members have seen the fruits of their labor. Ana has noticed a conspicu-

ous spike in the level of enthusiasm for Jobs Plus projects and a myriad of other community building efforts and the desire to get involved in the community.

The LPMB in Gordinesti also includes the head of the local parent-teacher association, the mayor, the director of the kindergarten, a BioClub employee and the Jobs Plus local coordinator, Svetlana Danciuc, who is the psychologist at the local high school.

Svetlana, 31, says the board is a well-rounded group made up of individuals who complement one another nicely. “The mayor knows everything about the community and can help a lot and the parent association has donated money. We understand

and support each other.”

CRS selected Svetlana as the local coordinator because of her background as a psychologist, her eagerness to work with Jobs Plus beneficiaries and her interest in sustainable livelihood concepts. “She is excited about making a contribution to developing the Gordinesti village,” says CRS Program Manager Ludmila Ungureanu.

Svetlana did a fine job of spreading the word about the Jobs Plus program, its purpose and goals to the community and LPMB members, says Ana.

One of the LPMB’s first orders of business was collaborating with Dinu and Elena Gutu and BioClub workers to raise funds for the Jobs Plus Social Investment Fund, which were used to purchase kitchen utensils and beautify the dining room of the high school canteen.

BioClub contributed 6,000 lei (US\$502) and their employees provided some cash. Additional contributions were provided by the school’s parent-teacher association, which donated 2,700 lei (US\$226), the Village Administration Council, which provided 2,000 lei (US\$167) and two of the high school’s teachers, who donated their time and labor to make the improvements to the dining room.

Besides poverty reduction through job creation in rural communities and imparting knowledge and capacity at the local level for socially responsible enterprises such as BioClub, the Jobs Plus program aims to empower individuals to improve the quality of their personal and community lives through village-led improvements. Jobs Plus gives people the opportunity for personal development and the chance to learn the skills needed to deal with life’s difficulties and challenges.

BioClub’s owners Dinu and Elena Gutu share the goals and values upon which the Jobs Plus program was launched.

Local Project Management Boards

LPMBs are a key component of the Jobs Plus program. Board members recruit and select Jobs Plus project beneficiaries and identify local opportunities for in-kind and cash contributions for community improvement efforts.

CRS has learned from experience that where such boards are in place and operate effectively, projects are much more successful at achieving outputs, resolving critical sustainability challenges and ensuring that the local community takes ownership and supports the projects.

Often, skilled facilitators will guide the formation of the board to help the group get off to an auspicious start. Over time, the Jobs Plus local coordinator or a chairperson appointed by the board usually replaces the facilitator.

“It was very important to us that our collaboration with CRS would not only benefit us but the local community and society as well,” says Dinu, who is thrilled to see the positive impact the Jobs Plus program is already having on the community. “When children who studied in the school found out about the initiative, they also contributed. Everybody was involved. I was amazed.”

Adds Elena Gutu: “The people really liked the initiative and could see the benefits of working together as a community to achieve a common goal for our children and the future of our children. Our employees were proud to work for a company that would do such a thing. They liked the idea of doing something useful for society.”

CRS promotes the idea that efforts to improve the community are infectious, says Elena. “If people do something good for their community, other people will want to be included in the process. People naturally like the idea of something useful for society rather than acting simply out of self-interest.”



TRAINING TO BUILD TEAMS
Gordinesti Local Project Management Board members receive training in teambuilding and public-private partnerships

The LPMB is already hard at work on its next community improvement project — the construction of a footbridge. Svetlana and Ana expect the footbridge will be a busy artery for pedestrians who will use it instead of an existing vehicular bridge that is very narrow to get to school, church, a cemetery and various community shops. A local businessman has offered the use of a tractor to complete the project, says Svetlana.

Meanwhile, training provided through the Jobs Plus program on team building and public-private partnerships is helping community leaders like Ana and Svetlana supplement and diversify their toolbox of community building skills.

“The training was a great help to us and enriched our knowledge in the field of organizing and developing community projects. The Jobs Plus project will be a significant support for us,” says Ana.

For Svetlana, the Jobs Plus program was an opportunity to widen her circle of acquaintances in the community. “Now, I have the opportunity to discuss issues related to the well-being of the village with many more people in the community.” The contacts will prove indispensable in facilitating future community initiatives.

For her part, Ana feels “a strong sense of satisfaction” about the support she has

Social Investment Funds

Local Project Management Boards (LPMBs) work with employers and beneficiary employees to establish a Social Investment Fund in each Jobs Plus program community.

The funds are created from contributions from the employers and administered by the LPMB. The board and the employer meet regularly with beneficiaries and other community members to decide how best to spend the money for the good of the community.

Boards may decide to leverage additional contributions for community improvements from the local or regional government, local businesses or others.

Catholic Relief Services expects at least 25, and possibly more, locally designed and funded community improvement projects will be implemented under the Jobs Plus program, improving the quality of life in the communities as well as imparting knowledge and capacity at the local level for socially responsible enterprises.

received from CRS and the results of her efforts.

“The greatest strength of this project is people are very satisfied with it,” agrees Svetlana.

KEEPING COMMUNITIES INTACT

WHEN WORD spread through Gordinesti that a fledgling business was hiring workers, many villagers dismissed it as a lark, recalls Sviatoslav Derlibas,

“People didn’t take it seriously and considered it to be a joke,” says Sviatoslav, 44, of a community notice that villagers who were looking for work should apply for a job at BioClub.

They had cause to be skeptical.

GORDINESTI STRUGGLES TO RECOVER

The village of Gordinesti is located 220 kilometers north of Chisinau in a region of the country that is known for its rich natural resources. A picturesque 315-hectare (778 acre) natural landscape preserve, known as “La Castel,” draws visitors from around the country.

The region’s fertile soil and mineral deposits made Gordinesti a prosperous hub during the Soviet era. Back then, many of the village’s residents were employed on a large collective farm, specializing in grain and tobacco production. It was such a lucrative venture, it achieved the coveted status of *kolkhoz* millionaire. Others worked at one of two limestone quarries operating in the village at the time.

After the country’s independence, commercial activity in Gordinesti slowed almost to a complete halt and the villagers are still struggling to recover, economically as well as socially.

The collective farming system was abolished. The village quarries were dismantled and the high-tech, specialized machinery packed up and shipped back to the Ukraine and Russia. A large cultural center was shut down due to a lack of interest and sponsors.

After a long period of stagnation, there are a few encour-



HAPPY TO BE EMPLOYED
Sviatoslav Derlibas (under a wall hanging of iconic Moldovan monarch, Stephen the Great) was relieved to be recruited as a security guard at BioClub because it meant he would not have to attempt to go abroad to work.

aging signs of economic recovery: recent investments in livestock, a partial resumption of limestone mining, and complaints from agricultural business leaders about a shortage of arable land to rent.

Though a majority of the town's workers have been trained in the agricultural sector, many of Gordinesti's agribusiness operators are reluctant to hire permanent farm hands due to disputes over taxes. The employees refuse to have taxes deducted from their salaries and employers argue that footing the bill to cover a tax bill equal to 27 percent of the earnings of each worker would run them out of business.

In fact, an aversion to hiring farm workers is driving a move towards agricultural mechanization and away from crops that require a substantial labor force for cultivation.

A casual observer may catch a glimpse of the village's seasonal agricultural workers assembling in the center of town, waiting to be transported to other communities to work instead of working on local farms.

A dearth of employment opportunities is pushing working people, and particularly young people, to seek opportunities elsewhere, usually in Moldova's urban centers or abroad. It is impossible to measure the precise number of Gordinesti residents who work outside the country because much of the migration is illegal. It is estimated that about a third of the Gordinesti's workers have left to find jobs in Russia, Israel, France, or other European nations.

Sviatoslav was among those from Gordinesti who considered working abroad illegally. He made it as far as Hungary before he was sent back to Moldova.

His luck changed when he responded to the job posting that many villagers thought was a "joke." In the autumn of 2010, he was recruited by BioClub to fill the post of security guard. He considers himself for-

lunate to have found work in his community.

"This is a very responsible job. I worked as a guard before. In the army I was also entrusted to safeguard the banner and afterwards I worked as a guard. So I know this kind of job," says Sviatoslav, adding that if he had not found the job he likely would have tried leaving the country again in search of work in Moscow or Europe. "I am happy that I have a job, a salary and I can pay the bills and give some money to my children."

Sviatoslav earns 1,500 lei (US\$125) per month and though he reckons he could earn as much in a day working in Europe as he does in a month in Moldova it would mean living away from his family and that's a sacrifice he is relieved he will not have to make.

FAMILIES STAY TOGETHER

Jobs Plus local coordinator Svetlana Danciu and Local Project Management Board member Ana Gutu have both witnessed firsthand how perilous working abroad can be for Moldovans.

As a school psychologist, Svetlana has observed how difficult it can be for children who are left behind by parents who seek work away from the village.

One woman, who has since found work through the Jobs Plus project, left her two sons with their grandmother when she went abroad to work. The boys didn't misbehave, but Svetlana could tell they weren't receiving the quality of care they needed.

Svetlana says her neighbor was also grateful to find work in the village because it meant she didn't need to leave periodically

"The project gave hope to many people."

—BioClub employee
Berliba Galina



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE
New BioClub recruits Berliba Galina, left, and agronomist Mancus Ion discuss the project under a "Jobs Plus" bulletin board at the local high school.

to work in Moscow and she could care for a young child who is very ill.

It was Ana, the director of the high school, who received an urgent distress call when the Hungarian authorities detained Sviatoslav and some of his traveling companions because they didn't have passports. It wasn't until she transmitted documents from her school's fax machine proving the identities of all those being held that they were released from custody and ordered to return home.

The fact that the Jobs Plus program keeps families together is perhaps its most positive and possibly will be its most enduring impact, says Ana. Even more of Gordinesti's residents will benefit from the program in the future, she adds, since more workers will be needed at the orchard as the walnut trees grow.

BioClub's agronomist, Mancus Ion, and his family struggled after he lost his job when the *kolkhoz* shut down. The 52-year-old father says he considered seeking employ-

ment abroad, like so many of his countrymen, but chose not to because he could not bear the thought of being apart from his children.

"If someone leaves, he may earn some things and lose others. And the losses are greater," he says sagely. "If I had left, my family would have disintegrated and what's the most important thing for a man? His family, his children."

He earns a salary of 2,500 lei (US\$209) per month at BioClub and he is pleased to be working in his trained profession and on a walnut orchard, which as far as he knows is the first of its kind to grace the northern part of the republic.

He expects the orchard will be a source of more jobs in the future because "when we have yields, the walnuts will need to be processed."


Dinu and Elena Gutu were "amazed" to learn that so many of their recruits would have had to go abroad to work and endure long periods away from their families if they had not been offered employment at BioClub.

"They are really happy to find a job in their home village, close to their families. They appreciate that they can stay in their community to work," says Dinu.

"We didn't expect to have such an impact, but for the employees it is very significant," adds Elena.

Berliba Galina, a 42-year-old mother of two, appreciates the medical insurance that comes with her job on the orchard. In fact, all of the people who landed work at BioClub "are very happy, and their children, too. This project is a great support for us. We wish other villages could benefit from such projects."

"The project gave hope to many people. Even people from other villages heard about it and wanted jobs," says Berliba.



“The project is highly relevant to the rural communities and vulnerable groups in Moldova. It goes to a key problem facing this country: retaining the skills and energies of its young people and maintaining family and community life.”

—Independent Mid-Term Evaluation,
24 January 2011

HORSE AND WAGON

A couple of Oniscani villagers ride through the streets on a crisp winter day. Legend has it Oniscani was founded in the 15th century by “Onis,” a prominent soldier in Ștefan cel Mare’s army. Official documents trace the village back to March 6, 1654.

Inspiring new GOALS

EVEN THOUGH she admits to initially being unsure about collaborating with Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Axenia Barasiant says the Jobs Plus partnership was just what she needed to revive her flagging entrepreneurial spirit.

“At the most difficult time, CRS came to me, encouraged me and assured me that everything is manageable. They really believe that together we can achieve something,” says Axenia, owner of Daxen-Com shoe factory.

CRS provided Axenia with the funds to purchase equipment to add a second production line and create 64 new jobs in the impoverished community of Oniscani, located 27 kilometers from Chisinau. But, perhaps even more importantly, the collaboration has inspired her to set new business goals.

By autumn 2011, Axenia hopes to have 150 employees in place and to be manufacturing 500 to 2,000 pairs of shoes per day. She says she intends to use some of the profits from her business to buy a new mini bus to shuttle workers from their homes in nearby villages to and from the factory. Currently, she rents a vehicle to transport her employees.

“Later, I’d like to buy some gym equipment and renovate the school gymnasium. I would like to open a small store for people to buy household staples. Oniscani could become a center for the surrounding villages because it is a big community. I have many plans and I’m always thinking about how I can realize them,” she says, add-



STAMP OF APPROVAL

Axenia Barasiant, top right, and Michael McKennett, Catholic Relief Services Head of Office, put their stamp of approval on the Jobs Plus partnership contract. A Daxen-Com employee, right, assembles a shoe at the factory.

ing that the support she has received from CRS “represents five to 10 steps of progress” in her plans.

Axenia was educated as a doctor, but she was employed in the field of commerce before embarking on a career in the shoe-making industry. She ventured out on her own after serving as general director of a shoe factory in the capital of Chisinau. “I’ve always said the future is in production and not in commerce,” she notes.

The doctor-turned-entrepreneur rented factory space in Chisinau for a year-and-a-half before it occurred to her that “a better place for my business would be in a rural village.” She chose to relocate her business to the sleepy agricultural community of Oniscani, located about 27 kilometers from the capital, quite “randomly,” she says.

“I didn’t know anyone in Oniscani. Somebody told me that there were buildings I could buy and that the mayor is a good person. I visited the village, met the mayor, bought one building and started with one production line. I met an Italian business partner who said that he would help to produce the shoes, but to do so I would need to buy a second building for a second production line. That’s when CRS invited me to become part of the Jobs Plus project,” explains Axenia.



LEARNING NEW JOBS SKILLS
A Daxen-Com seamstress assembles a shoe at the factory.



LIFETIME COMMITMENT

Axenia Barasiant, who is in her late 40s, doesn't expect her shoe factory (bottom photo) will be an overnight success; rather, it's a lifetime commitment she's making "for my family, children, grandchildren." It is also an investment in the community since socially responsible business development is a fundamental component of her management strategy. She already has helped renovate the village church and she is brimming over with other ideas to improve the community. "I consider myself as a local and will try to do only the best for Oniscani," she says. The Jobs Plus program is helping to "change people's mentality and way of thinking" about how they might improve their lives and their community, she says.

CHANGING ATTITUDES AND WORK HABITS

She says she sincerely appreciates the support from CRS, especially since running a business in Moldova can sometimes feel burdensome.

Besides identifying a market for her shoes, purchasing equipment, securing suitable workspaces, and solving logistical problems like transportation for employees, she has struggled to motivate and retain workers who do not always appreciate the complexities of operating a business in the global free market economy.

"My business didn't go as smoothly as I had hoped it would in the beginning. During the first week of relocating to Oniscani I tried to find a specialist to repair the equipment and couldn't. It was hard ... I probably had 30 people who worked one week and left only to come back. It took me half a year to make people understand that the workday is from 8 am to 5 pm, lunch is lunch and discipline is discipline," she says.

But Axenia has noticed a striking difference in the attitude and work habits of her employees since her collaboration with CRS began.

After newly recruited workers received training for sustainable development from

Jobs Plus facilitators, villagers "became very interested in job creation efforts," and eager to know more about Daxen-Com's future plans, says Axenia.

In fact, she adds, about 20 people are eagerly waiting for the new equipment to be installed so they may begin working at her factory.

CRS Business Development Specialist Igor Fetiniuc says the Jobs Plus program fosters a culture of mutual trust and understanding among entrepreneurs and employees.

Entrepreneurs have to be good at managing people or their employees "will always be looking for new opportunities," he points out. On the other hand, workers must appreciate that launching a business "takes a lot of courage and funds," entrepreneurs are "not running a charity," and they need to make a profit to survive.

"It is very good to make people think about each other," says Igor. After all, "businesses are dependent on the community and the community becomes dependent on the business so they need to help each other."

Axenia certainly can vouch for the program's effectiveness in her community. With the project's help "people trust me and believe in me," she says.



Revitalizing local economies, transforming communities

THE JOBS PLUS program is not only changing the lives of new workers, it is transforming whole families and reviving a struggling community

Jobs Plus Local Project Management Board (LPMB) member Danila Angela, 42, knows of one woman who was unemployed for quite some time before she was offered a job at Daxen-Com. The woman's husband was also out of work, which meant that the couple and their three children were struggling to get by on the income of a grandfather who also lived in the home.

"This enterprise is developing and we are happy for the parents who have a job and income to support their families. Their financial situation has improved and their lives have changed for the better," she adds.

Jobs Plus local coordinator Nicolae Grecu says another woman had become so frustrated and unhappy about being unemployed she had begun to abuse alcohol and neglect her children. Nicolae observed a visible improvement in how her children are cared for after she was recruited to work at the shoe factory.

Daxen-Com owner Axenia Barasiant says she knows of a few people who were considering leaving the community to work in Russia, but once they landed jobs at her shoe factory, they decided to stay. "People understand



DAXEN-COM WORKERS

Mariana Revenco, left, and Maria Grecu are pleased with their jobs in Oniscani.

that the Jobs Plus is a serious project that will produce long-term benefits,” she says.

DIVERSIFYING OPPORTUNITIES

Oniscani has a rich viticulture history. During the Soviet era, it was home to a famous winery known as “Proura vin,” which processed as much as 1,000 tonnes of wine each day. If they weren’t working at the winery or vineyards that produced grapes for it, most villagers were employed at a lucrative collective farm that attained the status of millionaire *kolkhoz*.

In spite of its tremendous potential for growth, Oniscani’s economy declined sharply after the country’s independence. The *kolkhoz* shut down and agricultural land was transferred from the state to private citizens. But instead of being cultivated, much of the land lay fallow.

The population shrunk as Oniscani residents left the village to work in cities or

abroad, infrastructure deteriorated and the prevalence of alcohol abuse rose in the community. Young people, in particular, are reluctant to remain in the community—borne out by the fact that a new home has not been built in Oniscani since 1993.

Today, Daxen-Com is the town’s largest employer. The launch of the shoe factory has sparked an economic revival and diversified employment opportunities in the community, according to a study commissioned by CRS.

For the past decade, local public administrators have attempted to stem the flow of residents leaving the community and increase the attractiveness of Oniscani to prospective investors by developing infrastructure and social services.

Axenia says the mayor was extremely helpful when she was starting up her business in Oniscani and his support was one of the reasons she decided to establish her shoe factory in the community.



Partnership Promises

Jobs Plus co-financed the purchase of sewing machines to add a second production line.

Daxen-Com commits to creating 64 jobs and making annual contributions to the Social Investment Fund.

CREATING JOBS, IMPROVING ENTERPRISE INFRASTRUCTURE

If you ask any one of the women who are employed at Daxen-Com they will tell you how grateful they are to have found a job in a rural area, say local residents Maria Grecu and Mariana Revenco.

Mariana, 23, a seamstress at the factory, says her salary varies depending on her productivity. “I am a beginner and my sewing speed is slower.” Experienced seamstresses may earn up to 3,500 lei (US\$292) per month, she adds.

Maria, 48, has done practically every job there is to do at the enterprise. She says she enjoys sewing the most “especially when I get the final product manufactured really well without mistakes.”

The women say working conditions at the factory have improved as a result of Daxen-Com’s collaboration with Jobs Plus.

“It was difficult working at the factory in the beginning. The enterprise lacked many things, but with support from CRS, the enterprise got new equipment and hired more



EMPOWERING COMMUNITY

At 23, Nicolae is the Jobs Plus program’s youngest local coordinator. A computer science teacher at the local high school, Nicolae was born in Oniscani. He was an avid volunteer before he joined the Jobs Plus program. “As local coordinator, my role is to change people’s mentalities, inform the community about the program and to help people find work at Daxen-Com.”

employees from villages around Oniscani. For a rural area, this is a big plus,” says Maria.

Job creation and community development programs are rare in Oniscani, she adds, which is why “we’re so excited about Jobs Plus. The enterprise is employing people who will stay close to their families.”

The project also created a space for public discourse on community development.

“People in the village got informed about Jobs Plus, want to be employed and are really interested in this option. We’ve gained new skills, learned about manufacturing and how to communicate better with our employer,” say Maria and Mariana.

Nicolae appreciates that “the Jobs Plus program is so transparent and encourages open communication. We feel supported by CRS.”

Nicolae checks in with the employees at the shoe factory at least once a week. “I see that they enjoy the workplace. They are satisfied with their jobs. I see many young women employed who before were staying home with their children, not going anywhere.” Since poverty is the greatest challenge facing his community and the country as whole, Nicolae believes job creation is the Job Plus program’s greatest strength.

SPURRING COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENTS

With funds from Moldcell, the LPMB spearheaded the renovation of a medical room in one of the community’s schools, which Danila describes as “one of the greatest projects we have ever implemented in our village.”

The LPMB’s next activity was working with the employer, beneficiary employees and the community as a whole to establish a Social Investment Fund.

“First of all, we would like to renovate the school canteen and later the school gymnasium to make it accessible for everyone in the village. We’re also thinking about improving the library and adding more books since a shortage of books is a big problem for the school,” says Danila. “Of course, all of the money will be used to improve living conditions in the community.”

The LPMB has an important role in the community, she adds. “We are nine members from different spheres and each of us is very active. We want to realize all planned activities and do beautiful things.”

As word spread about the positive impact the Jobs Plus program was having on the shoe factory, community confidence and trust in CRS activities grew and the LPMB managed to leverage additional contributions for the Social Investment Fund from villagers.

“People are curious about the Jobs Plus program and participate at LPMB meet-



TRAINING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

An Oniscani villager participates in a training for sustainable livelihoods session provided to give rural residents the tools the need to break free from the grip of poverty.

ings,” says Nicolae, who points out that attendance doubled after the first gathering. Initially, he adds, residents did not believe it would be possible to make improvements to the community, but their attitudes changed after the medical office was upgraded.

“We’ve collected the funds from different sources. We found a few enterprises that donated additional money for our projects. We applied for funds from the local administration. About 70 percent of the costs are covered by the Jobs Plus business partner and the rest from the other resources,” he says.

Vetting businesses to ensure a good mix

The first question CRS asks itself when choosing partner enterprises is “does the business really need us to succeed?”

THE JOBS PLUS program builds on experience from similar job creation ventures launched by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in Moldova and elsewhere. CRS works with the enterprises to establish, expand or sustain operations in extremely poor towns and villages with proven human resource potential.

Each enterprise is thoroughly vetted and workplaces inspected by the Jobs Plus Program Management Team prior to the selection of partner business.

The first question the team asks when choosing partners is: “Does the business really need us to succeed? ... We basically try to find a balance and work with businesses who need us but not so much as to make it impossible for them to survive without our assistance,” says CRS Program Manager Ludmila Ungureanu.

When developing a list of potential business partners, Jobs Plus Business Development Specialist Igor Fetiniuc says he first considers how deprived the community is where the business is operating. If the

town or village is in urgent need of jobs, he will scan for prospective employers and gauge the needs of the employer and the community for jobs as well as the number of jobs that conceivably could be created with support from Jobs Plus.

How Jobs Plus Chooses Where It Invests

The small towns and villages considered for job sites are assessed and profiled for selection based on a number of factors:

- The rural character of the community and the proximity of the job site to beneficiaries.
- Land and/or facilities for creating a factory and, if needed, attracting a business partner.
- Adequate access to utilities (or at least the possibility of acquiring electricity and water within a reasonable period of time at a reasonable cost).
- Available human resources.
- Reasonably good roads and/or railway access.
- Strong local government and regional government support.
- A demonstrated willingness to contribute to the project.

Obtaining a good mix of business partners also is a consideration. “We would like to partner with employers from different industry sectors,” says Igor.

The advantages of securing well-established business partners is they tend to have secure markets and sound operational business plans already in place, expertise in targeted industry and cash or in-kind inputs they can bring to the project.

Most businesses are motivated for a number of reasons to join the project. Many see the Jobs

Plus Program as a component of their human resource acquisition strategies and as a vehicle to gain local trust and cooperation. For others, the program may serve as a means to secure new and additional markets for their products.



“This is an impressive project with its integrated approach on both the supply and demand side of jobs and on the economic and social development of rural communities with a pro-poor bias to empowering their vulnerable members.”

—Independent Mid-Term Evaluation, 24 January 2011

HOMEWARD BOUND
A boy heads home from school in
Oniscani.

Helping expand ENTERPRISES

VALENTINA UZUN lives by the adage: “there are no problems, only objectives to be reached.”

It is a philosophical blueprint that has served her well in business. Her company, Azamet Group, has become a national leader in food distribution in three short years, employing some 260 Moldovans.

“We work with several Ukrainian companies. Our final consumers are all the population of the republic of Moldova to whom we deliver various foodstuffs of high quality. Our clients are shops, supermarkets, retail trade enterprises,” says Valentina.

Besides importing and distributing food, Azamet Group operates a trendy franchised pizzeria and soon will launch its own brand of food that it will sell along with the popular products that have made the company so successful.

Azamet Group became a Jobs Plus partner in the autumn of 2008, agreeing to create 100 jobs.

From a purely business perspective, the funds provided under the Jobs Plus contract freed up resources “for enterprise development (making the partnership) really necessary and advantageous,” says

Valentina.

Moreover, the Jobs Plus partnership has impelled the company to work towards a common purpose.

“CRS helped us clearly understand what our objectives are, that we have to work more intensively with our employees — not only in the aspect of good salaries — but

to make them understand that we should be bound by the same goal,” explains Valentina.

Valentina Uzun is serious about honoring her agreement with CRS. “CRS is our partner and we never forget our obligations under the signed agreement, for example to present reports, collect contributions, and regularly remind employees about the project.”

TAKING CHARGE OF IMPROVING CAREERS AND COMMUNITIES

Several factors influenced the 38-year-old entrepreneur’s decision to collaborate with Catholic Relief Services (CRS).

“The generations living here before us tried to improve this country, so, in our turn, we can also make our contribution to its development and be socially responsible ... I believe we are responsible for people who live and work with us, and I would like our employees to feel such responsibility, too,” she says. “One more thing ... is the fact that we need young people because distribution is a relatively new field for us.”

As one who values self-reliance and “never seeks for easy ways,” Valentina respects



MAKING PLANS
Valentina Uzun of Azamet Group discusses her plans with Catholic Relief Services Program Manager Ludmila Ungureanu.

the efforts of the Jobs Plus program to empower beneficiaries to take charge of their futures.

Some Moldovans find it easier “to criticize the authorities, the business, or the country” than to take responsibility for improving their lives, observes Valentina. “But we should understand that authorities and country are not abstract notions. They mean people, our people. They are we. When someone starts with changing oneself, gradually he changes the people around him, the community he lives in,” she points out.

Funds provided by CRS were used to fix up some of the facilities at Azamet Group. “We repaired the rooms of managers and operators, the canteen, storage areas and adjacent areas. That means, we’ve improved working conditions for employees,” says Valentina, who quickly adds that she stressed the fact to Azamet Group employees that the cash from CRS was “not a simple gift. We also had some obligations — to create a fund for collecting contributions from employees and to organize a coordinating committee, which will make decisions about the use of the collected money.”

A noteworthy Jobs Plus achievement was its expansion into Ceadir-Lunga, which is located in the minority area of the Republic of Gagauzia. It is a semi-autonomous region in southern Moldova populated by ethnic Gagauzians and several other minority ethnic groups such as Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Russians and Roma.

The region is considered a successful example of how ethnically-based autonomy can work, both politically and socially. But there is an urgent need for economic development in the region.

By helping to create jobs in Gagauzia, the Jobs Plus program not only is contributing to the well-being of vulnerable people, it is playing a part in the social and politi-



INCREASING RESPONSIBILITIES

A couple of employees attend to their tasks at Azamet Group in Ceadir-Lunga.

cal stability of the region through its community empowerment initiatives.

Valentina held a series of meetings to educate her employees about the Jobs Plus project. “It took some time to explain to the employees that it is necessary to think not only of the present day, and that they can realize their importance and usefulness not only for their families because all the processes that happen in the community influence their families too as they all live in this community. We must understand that sometimes we may need to be helped; sometimes we may offer support. Each of us can make a contribution, maybe small and at first sight insignificant, but it’s possible,” she says

“I am very glad we have such employees who actively participate in the company’s life. For me it is an index that proves we are going the right way.”

*—Valentina Uzun,
Azamet Group*

Employees were told that an account had been established to collect funds for the Social Investment Fund to which they would have an opportunity to contribute and it was stressed that, collectively, they would be able to make a significant contribution to their community.

“We explained that together we may get results. With only 20 to 30 lei (US\$1.70 to \$2.50) per month, it is impossible to do great changes, but when the number of contributors is large it may help those who really need help,” says Valentina.

The employees and the Local Project Management Board are still deliberating over how the funds will be used. One idea that has been bandied about is to assist pupils from a boarding school in Ceadir-Lunga, many of whom are orphans.

“I am very glad we have such employees who actively participate in the company’s life. For me it is an index that proves we are going the right way,” says Valentina.



Partnership Promises

Jobs Plus funds improvements to the company’s food distribution work facilities.

Azamet Group commits to creating 100 jobs and making annual contributions to the Social Investment Fund.

Encouraging socially responsible business development

Labor contracts are required under Moldova’s labor law. But, for a variety of reasons such as high worker turnover or unwillingness to pay the taxes associated with employing workers, some of the country’s employers refuse to enter into labor contracts with their employees.

The contracts are necessary for workers to obtain an employee record card that they need to access medical insurance and other social services such as government pensions and maternity pay.

Since socially responsible business development is one of the pillars of the Jobs Plus program, all partner enterprises are required to sign labor contracts with their employees and to provide record cards.

Jobs, meanwhile, are created for project beneficiaries by helping an employer fill existing vacancies in an operational enterprise and/or working with a partner employer and local community stakeholders to create a new enterprise in a small town or village.

Nurturing Careers



BLOSSOMING CAREERS

Ania Topal thrives on the fast pace of her job. Her career has blossomed since she joined Azamet Group.

ANIA TOPAL was thrilled to land a job near her hometown of Cazaclia shortly after graduating from the state university in Chisinau, especially since many Moldovan employers prefer to hire experienced workers as opposed to those fresh out of university.

“Before the defense of my graduation project I was sent here for practical training. Perhaps the company’s managers liked me because after the defense of my graduation project I was offered the opportunity to fill a vacant position. I was very glad to find a job immediately upon graduating from university. It was so exciting after finishing my studies to immediately get a job,” says Ania, 22.

Since she began working at Azamet Group in August 2009, Ania’s career has blossomed in ways she didn’t think possible.

About Ceadir-Lunga

Ceadir-Lunga, located 130 kilometers from Chisinau, dates back to the 16th century, when descendants of the nomadic tribes known as “Oguz” pitched their tents. The word Ceadir means “tent” in Turkish while Lunga is the name of the river that flows near the town.

Like most other communities in the country, Ceadir-Lunga has struggled since Moldova’s independence from the Soviet Union and the economic crisis that ensued, which resulted in the cessation of industrial activity, a scarcity of jobs, an alarming rate of depopulation, emigration, declining standards of living and a deterioration in infrastructure. An estimated 200 families leave Ceadir-Lunga for other countries each year and the town lost a significant number of specialists in important spheres of activity to emigration.

“During my practical training I got acquainted with the different stages of the work process. Afterwards, when I began working at the company, I was charged to do certain tasks and then the volume of work that I was entrusted with was increased. I was promoted to the position of simple operator to accountant. Certainly, this position implies more responsibility,” she says.

Her salary has also increased, varying from 2,000 to 2,700 lei (US\$167 to \$226) per month.

Ania says she finds her work very interesting. She thrives on the rapid pace of her job and she is happy to work for an expanding company.

“Day by day, the volume of work increases and I have to keep pace. I am interested in doing as much work as possible, to get more and more experience and to move forward together with the enterprise,” she says. “As the volume of work increases, there is a need to hire more employees. For example, in the accountancy department,

we were three just accountants, but due to the increased volume of work, the company hired one more person.”

She also feels fortunate to work for a company that takes such a progressive approach to responding to the needs of its employees.

“Speaking about the salary and conditions of work, personally, I’m very satisfied and I’ve never heard any of my colleagues complaining about it. We have a very intelligent and understanding management. When there is anything that doesn’t satisfy me, I may bring it up with my manager and propose suggestions that will be examined and a solution found that satisfies both the employer and me,” she says.

Ania never had any desire to work abroad. “As soon as I finished my studies I had a definite purpose to find a job here, in the country, and to develop my professional career, to get experience, and, finally, to get a work record card.”

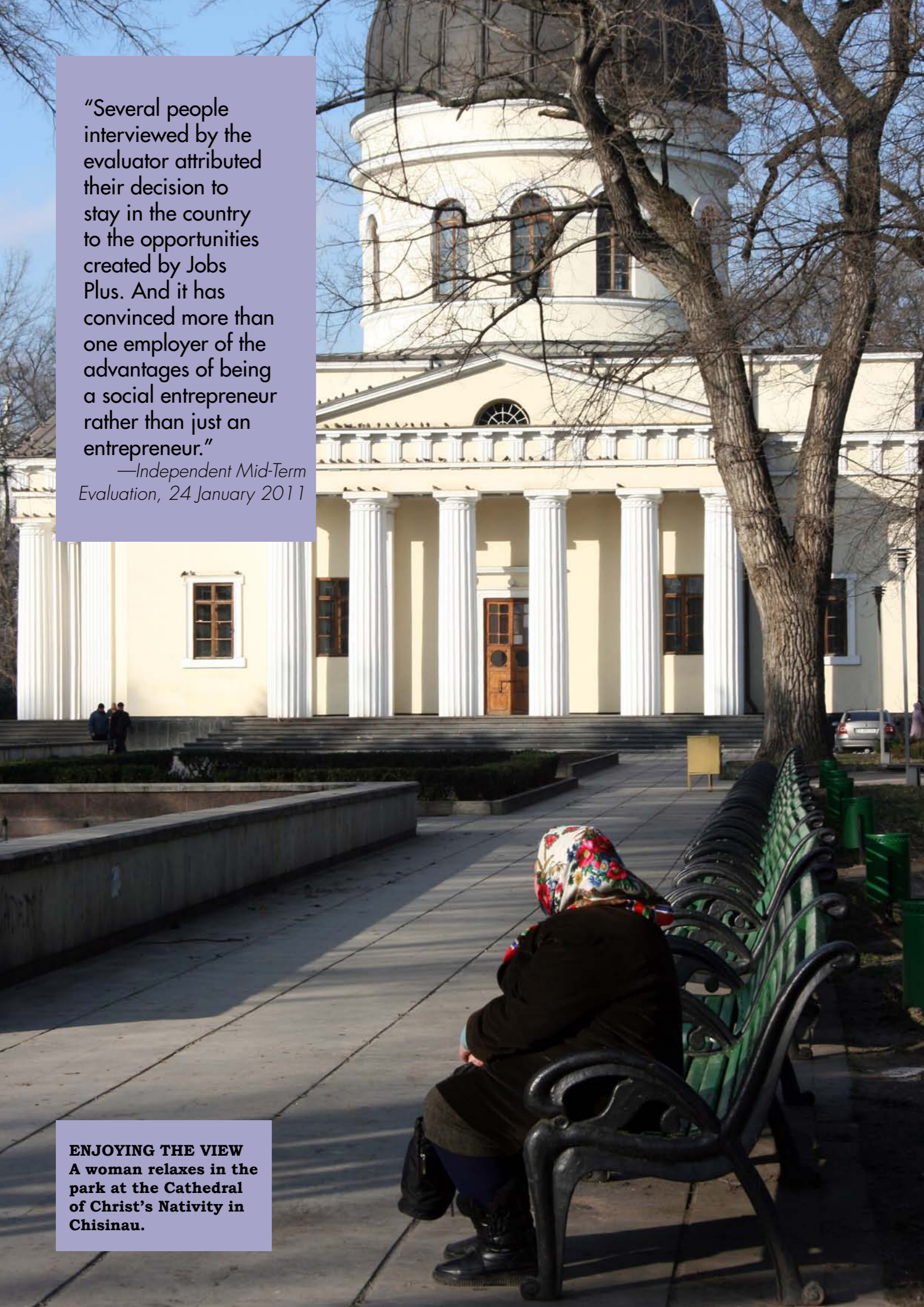
The young accountant will be balancing career with family soon as she is expecting her first child and she says job security is another advantage of working at Azamet Group.

“As you can see, soon I’ll be on a maternity leave, but I am sure that I will have a workplace to return to. I can mention the stability as a positive quality of the company,” she says.



“...I had a definite purpose to find a job here, in the country...”

*—Ania Topal,
Azamet Group employee*



“Several people interviewed by the evaluator attributed their decision to stay in the country to the opportunities created by Jobs Plus. And it has convinced more than one employer of the advantages of being a social entrepreneur rather than just an entrepreneur.”

—Independent Mid-Term Evaluation, 24 January 2011

ENJOYING THE VIEW
A woman relaxes in the park at the Cathedral of Christ's Nativity in Chisinau.

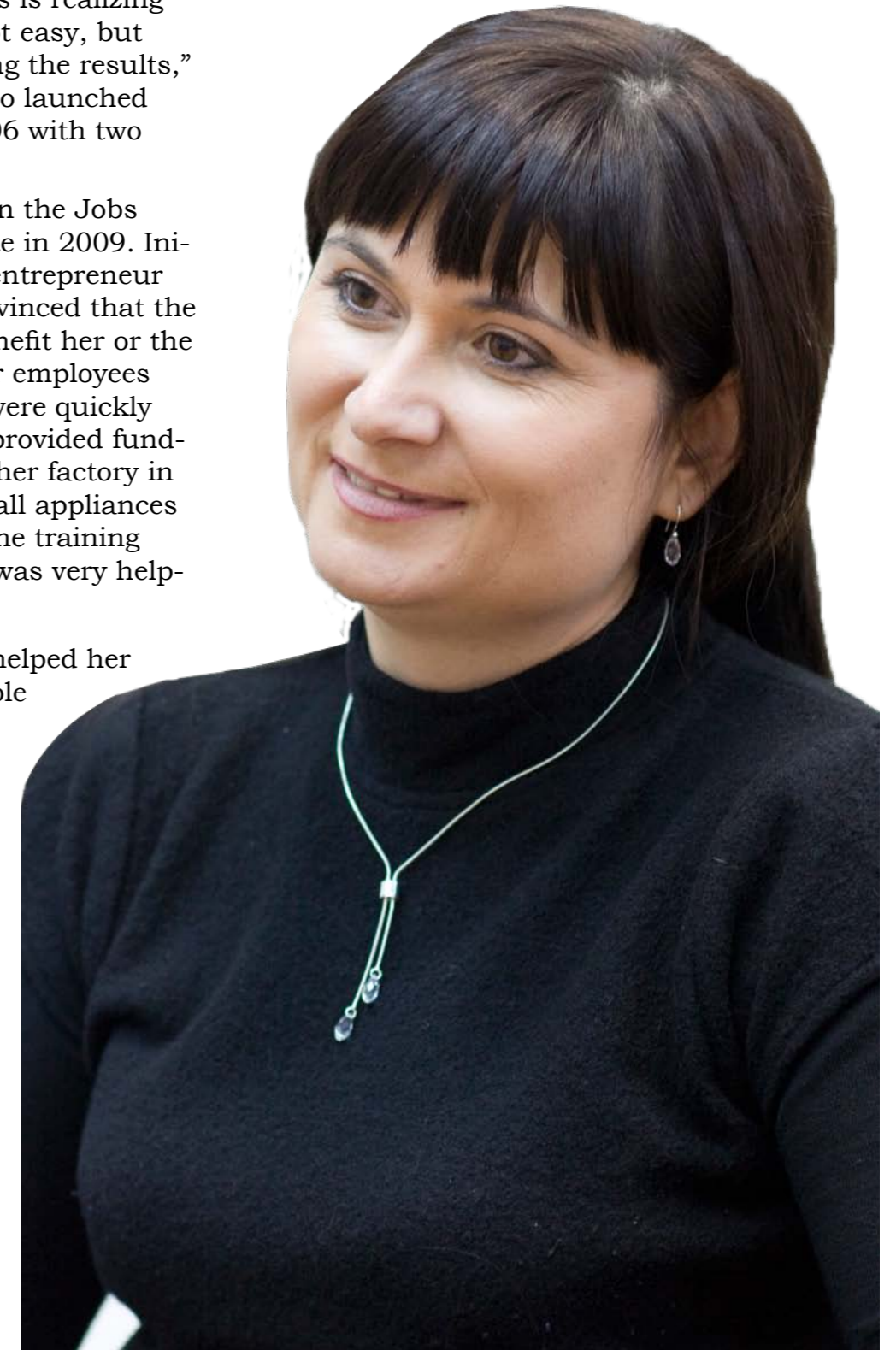
BENEFITS FOR BASARABEASCA

“Catholic Relief Services is realizing beautiful things. It’s not easy, but step by step we’re seeing the results,” says Violeta Esanu, who launched Victoria Fashion in 2006 with two Italian partners.

Violeta’s participation in the Jobs Plus program began late in 2009. Initially, the 39-year-old entrepreneur admits, she wasn’t convinced that the collaboration would benefit her or the communities where her employees work. But her doubts were quickly laid to rest when CRS provided funding for her to renovate her factory in Basarabeasca and install appliances in the canteen. “Also, the training provided by Jobs Plus was very helpful,” she adds.

She says the program helped her realize the important role she has in stemming the tide of migration abroad. “People are excited when jobs are created locally and they do not have to leave, that they can earn a monthly income in their villages.”

Violeta also is excited about the prospect of contributing to community development through the Jobs Plus Social Plus initiatives and the Social Investment Fund. The first community improvement activity will be to install benches in a park.




SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR

Violeta Esanu is pleased to operate a business that is encouraging young Moldovans to remain in the country.

"All those interviewed reported positive impacts: for most it was the financing of equipment or facilities. For employers who were already 'natural' socially responsible entrepreneurs, it allowed them to fulfill their own values of how they wanted to provide for their employees and in other cases employees and community."

—Independent Mid-Term Evaluation, 24 January 2011

A woman with short dark hair, wearing a bright green short-sleeved shirt with a white floral pattern and a purple skirt, is focused on ironing a light-colored garment on a blue-topped ironing board. She is holding a black steam iron. In the background, other workers are visible at their stations in a well-lit factory setting with overhead fluorescent lights and racks of clothing.

SEWING IN SOLDANESTI
A worker at Gemeni
Clothing factory puts the
finishing touches on a
newly made garment.



RIBBON CUTTING
Moldcell General
Director Chiril
Gaburici, above
photo left, and
Catholic Relief
Services Head of
Office in Moldova
Michael McKennett
officially open the
medical center in
Soldanesti.

Social Entrepreneurial **SUCCESS STORY**

STUDENTS AT A. Mateevici in Soldanesti visit the medical room more frequently these days to have their height measured, to find out how much they weigh or to receive care from the school’s medical assistant.

“The attitude of the students towards the medical room has changed,” says Jobs Plus local coordinator Aliona Tinica, 39. They used to go there “unwillingly because it was somehow obscure. Now, they show interest,” she says.

Attitudes changed drastically after drastic changes were made to the medical room because the Jobs Plus Local Project Management Board (LPMB), led by Aliona, cre-

“Sincerely, I did not know this simple thing — to go and ask. People are very open and responsive and they will help if it is possible.”

—Jobs Plus
 local coordinator
 Aliona Tinica

ated a virtuous circle of community support for renovating the room.

Moldcell Corporation contributed a portion of the funding as part of a strategic partnership with Jobs Plus, which provided a perfect opportunity for program beneficiaries to engage in social entrepreneurship and improve the quality of life in their communities.

With funding from Moldcell already in place, the Jobs Plus LPMB was tasked with determining where to target the funds.

Aliona convened a meeting of interested folks from Soldanesti’s schools, including the directors, medical assistants and the



leaders of parent-teacher associations. The consensus was that the medical room at A. Mateevici was especially deplorable and should be refurbished.

FORGING STRONGER BONDS

The school director, medical assistant and parent-teacher association leader from the school were all very excited about the project, which boosted Aliona’s confidence that the group would work well together even though it was her first collaboration with the school.

After pondering their options for a couple of days, the group agreed that the medical room would be moved to another part of the school. “We realized that significant investment would be required to make all of the necessary changes” and though she feared the group may not be able to raise the sufficient funds, the enthusiasm demonstrated by the school director helped soothe her anxiety, recalls Aliona.

Aliona is married to Alexandru Tinica, the mayor of Soldanesti. When she is not busy with Jobs Plus and Social Plus activities, Aliona assists her husband as a public relations and economic development officer at the town hall. Naturally, both are active in the community, but since the school is funded by and falls under the jurisdiction of the district council neither Aliona nor Alexandru had interacted much with the folks from A. Mateevici school.

“Nobody thought that here, at the mayor’s office, the LPMB and the community would support the project at the high school,” says the



UPDATED FACILITY

Over 250 students and 50 teachers have access to the new, improved medical room and the care provided by the medical assistant featured in the photos above. The community has plans in the works to create a dormitory at the school, which means even more will have access to the facility in the future.

Social Plus Programs

The Jobs Plus program provides Social Plus programs in rural communities that address the human elements of poverty, especially as they affect families, women and youth. Poverty is more than a shortfall or lack of income. It is the absence of economic, political, social and physical opportunities that deny a person the right to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-esteem and the respect of others. These activities are designed to encourage rural Moldovans to undertake improvements in their communities, enhance the quality of their personal and community lives and provide opportunities for women and youth, in particular, to build their capacities.

mayor, adding that most villagers assumed the renovation would be done to a medical room in the primary school, kindergarten or high school that fall under the jurisdiction of the town council.

But the “correct” decision was to make A. Mateevici school the beneficiary of the funds and once it was confidence in the community improvement project grew, notes Alexandru.

The school and town council forged a stronger bond as well, which Aliona considers one of the project’s greatest achievements.

GALVANIZING SUPPORT AND RAISING FUNDS

To raise the funds for the ambitious renovation plans, LPMB member Katherine Rose, 24, a Peace Corps volunteer from the US and an experienced fundraiser, immediately set about organizing events to generate cash.

Since fundraising “is sort of a new concept in Moldova” Katherine held a seminar on the topic for members of the Soldanesti Youth Council, a group of 13 young people elected by their peers. The Council orga-



ON THE JOB

Employees at the Gemeni Clothing factory press newly made garments in Soldanesti, an agricultural town located on the banks of the Ciorna River in northeastern Moldova.

nized children’s games at a community festival to raise funds for the project.

Katherine also arranged a fundraiser, known as a “penny war” in her home state of Texas, at the local elementary school. Students were encouraged to collect coins, referred to as *banuti* in Moldova, that were placed in jars in their classrooms. A running tally of the amount collected was displayed on a blackboard for the whole school to see. As the totals were updated daily, interest in the fundraiser blossomed, sparking a friendly competition. Prizes were awarded to the class that collected the most coins and first, second and third prizes handed out to the top individual fundraisers.

“We raised a good amount of money, around 5,000 lei (US\$418) in about two weeks,” which was enough to cover the cost of the entrance door of the medical office, says Katherine.

After the hugely successful “penny war,” the fundraising effort continued to gather momentum as the teachers of the students figured “if our students can raise that sort of money then as adults we really need to raise money as well.”

Parents contributed some cash and authorities at the district office and town hall also made donations. As enthusiasm for the fundraisers escalated, news about the project spread through the community. A journalist, who also is a member of the LPMB, wrote three articles about the project, which appeared in the local newspaper.

“It was a perfect example of a snowball effect,” says Katherine of how the community improvement project gathered momentum.

LPMB members also approached local businesses and were rewarded for their efforts with donations of bedding and a bedside table. The chief of staff at the hospital



STRATEGIC PARTNER

Moldcell, one of Moldova’s leading telecommunications companies, is a Jobs Plus strategic partner, agreeing to provide financial support to communities where there is a dire need for improvements to medical facilities. The establishment of such private/public partnerships is innovative for Moldova, providing an opportunity for employers to move beyond acts of corporate responsibility to make socially responsible business development a central component of their management strategy.

donated two beds.

A particularly “special moment” that Aliona relishes is when she learned the parent-teacher association of the town’s primary school would be donating cash for the project. “That was something extraordinary for Soldanesti — for one association to donate money to another association,” she says.

Aliona feels a tremendous sense of accomplishment when she reads the messages of gratitude from parents of students in the school to the medical assistant that regularly grace the local newspaper these days, often with photographs of the renovated medical room.

All told, about 25,000 lei (US\$2,092) were raised for the project.

It was a revelation for Aliona. “Sincerely, I did not know this simple thing — to go and ask. People are very open and responsive and they will help if it is possible,” she says.

Portrait of a LOCAL COORDINATOR

“**THE FINAL** positive result,” is what Aliona Tinica enjoys most about her work as a Jobs Plus local coordinator.

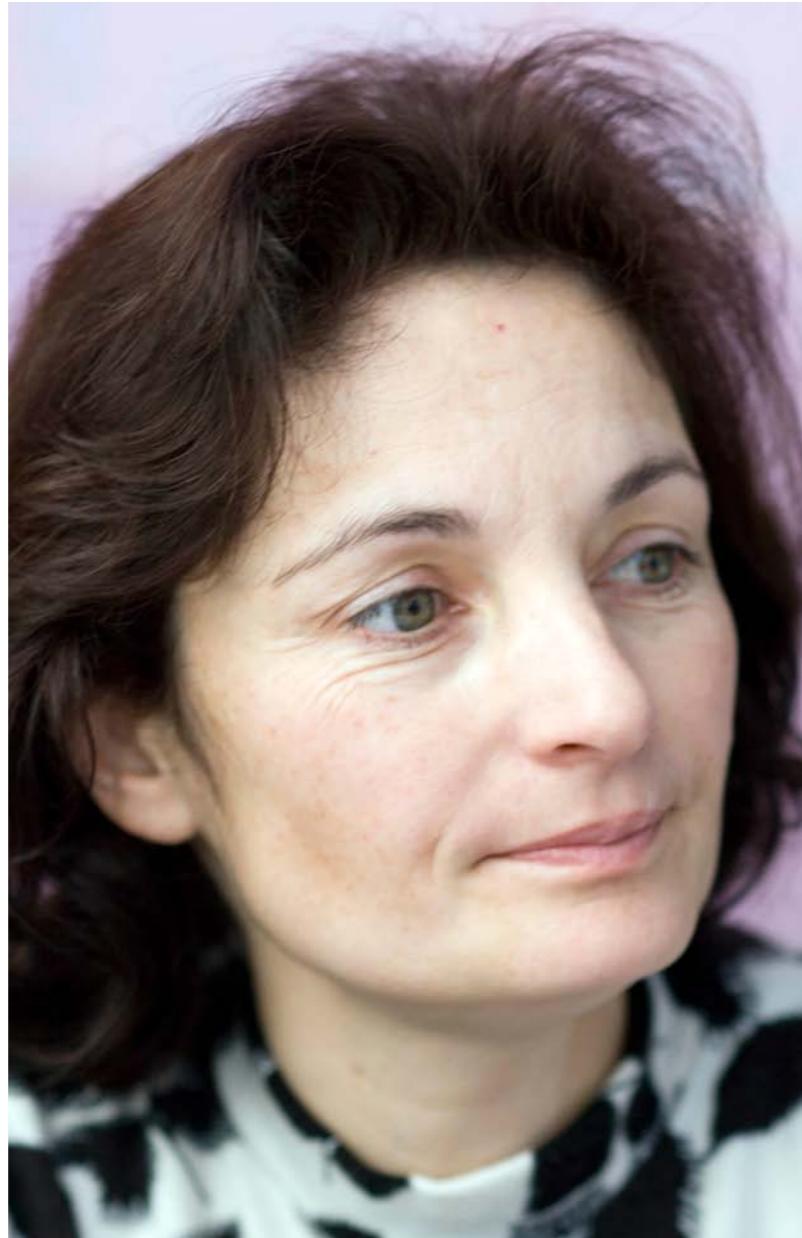
“I feel I can make a difference and I feel the same way about the Jobs Plus program. It is helping our community make the sort of changes that are so necessary for us today,” says Aliona, 39, who adds that she is grateful to have such a meaningful job that also allows her to remain in her community.

“I don’t want to go to work abroad. I want to work here in my community and I want my children to have their mother by their side. I believe it is possible and the Jobs Plus project is helping us do that,” she adds.

Besides addressing the economic side of poverty through the creation of sustainable jobs, the Jobs Plus program empowers communities to engage in social entrepreneurship that tackles the human elements of poverty. Local coordinators play an indispensable roll in carrying out these initiatives, which are referred to by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) as “Social Plus” programs.”

Aliona was selected as the Jobs Plus local coordinator in Soldanesti “because of her interest in community mobilization and her background in economic development,” says CRS Program Manager Ludmila Ungureanu.

Aliona’s husband persuaded her to resign from her position as a teacher to assist him at the town hall.



“I feel I can make a difference and I feel the same way about the Jobs Plus program.”

—Jobs Plus local coordinator for Soldanesti, Aliona Tinica

Members of the Local Project Management Board (LPMB) recommended her for the position.

The job description of a Jobs Plus local coordinator is lengthy. Responsibilities include informing and recruiting beneficiaries, organizing training in sustainable livelihood, providing employment assistance and counseling to beneficiaries, organizing activities of the Jobs Plus LPMB, collecting data for the monitoring and evaluation of job creation projects and submitting regular reports to CRS about Jobs Plus activities.

NURTURING STRONG COMMUNITY TIES

While their precise activities may vary depending on the design of the local job creation program, all of the Jobs Plus local coordinators share at least one characteristic in common: They all are leaders in their communities.

Unquestionably, Aliona demonstrated that fact with the renovation of the medical room at the local high school — the first of many community improvement projects that Aliona expects will result from the Jobs Plus program.

While several factors contributed to the success of the project, LPMB member Katherine Rose credits Aliona’s knack for nurturing community ties as one of the keys.

“Aliona and the mayor are incredible at their jobs and really good at developing relationships ... and I think that went a long way,” says Katherine, who also praised Aliona for her open-mindedness, persistence and willingness to try new things and make adjustments when needed.

With Aliona capably at the helm, LPMB members have worked constructively, reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses and seeking to make improvements when they see an opportunity.

Local Coordinators

Past experience has shown several advantages to employing a local coordinator at the launch of Jobs Plus activities, including: A more effective startup, better local coordination, improved monitoring and data collection and more successful implementation of activities.

Local coordinators serve the beneficiaries, employers and LPMBs in different capacities depending on the design of the local job creation project and whether it is situated in a small town or a village. They are the point of contact for beneficiaries seeking counseling and assistance. They also may be called on to assist the employer in identifying beneficiaries as well as overseeing recruitment programs when new jobs are created. Local coordinators sit on the LPMB and often acts as the facilitator and secretary to the Board.

Local coordinators work with CRS and the local community to coordinate and implement the Jobs Plus “Social Plus” programs that empower women and youth to make changes to improve the quality of lives and communities and to counter some of the effects of poverty, forced labor, domestic violence and human trafficking.

“We are united, mobilized (and) collaborate rather well,” says Aliona of the LPMB.

LPMB member Sergiu Cumatrenco says Aliona is also an excellent listener.

“Half a word is enough for her to understand what someone wants to say, what he needs or expects,” says Sergiu, a 53-year-old journalist whose articles about the group’s social entrepreneurship have appeared in the local newspaper.

Jobs Plus activities are challenging longstanding mentalities and helping the community as a whole “become more conscious and self-confident ... I believe the changes will be both in the short term and in the long term,” adds Sergiu.



Capacity building *Enriches lives*

SINCE JOBS PLUS launched its partnership with Soldanesti in June 2009, the Gemeni Clothing factory has created 50 new jobs, trained its new employees and purchased specialized equipment. The community at large, meanwhile, has been dabbling in social entrepreneurship and benefiting from the Jobs Plus Social Plus programs.

Social Plus activities are designed to empower people in rural communities to undertake improvements that enhance the quality of their personal and community lives. They also are meant to build the ca-

capacity of women and youth, in particular, to assertively address their challenges.

To that end, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) presented a series of capacity building community development seminars on a variety of topics based on the needs identified by the community.

The first seminar was designed to create favorable conditions for participant cooperation in training, encourage the exchange of information and experiences, and cultivate good collaborative and fundraising habits. Other seminar subjects

LEARNING AS A COMMUNITY

Capacity building participants in Soldanesti, photos top left and right.

included teamwork, advocacy, communication and presentation skills, modern approaches to management and leadership, business initiation, and working out requests for funding.

Launching the Social Plus program with a series of informational seminars was a marvelous idea, says Aliona Tinica, Jobs Plus local coordinator.

Emboldened by the success of their first initiative (explained in further detail in

Community Capacity Building

Capacity building is a cross-cutting theme of the Jobs Plus program designed to provide opportunities to learn technical skills required for working in and running an enterprise and personally empower project beneficiaries, and women and youth in particular. Capacity building efforts focus on training for sustainable livelihoods, business planning, preparedness for work, social enterprise, worker's right, mainstreaming gender and board administration.

cash to create a new playground for children at the kindergarten. When it was discovered that misunderstandings and miscommunications were causing tension between the parents and school adminis-

the accompanying story), community members quickly began working on successive projects and applying the skills they were learning at the seminars as they were learning them, she says.

Participants searched for additional funding sources and managed to secure some

Participant Feedback On Training

Some of the feedback from participants of training sessions held in Soldanesti:

"Where there is mutual understanding, you can reach the common goal."

"Everyone's opinion matters."

"I want to be a leader, now I am able"

"My attitude about collaborating with other people changed."

"I know myself better."

"I feel more clever."

"In a group, you must consider everybody and have a common aim."

"I understand my rights better."

"I hope I can encourage the young people of Soldanesti to speak about their rights."

"I can express my opinion without fear."

"I realized there are certain things I can change."

"I am more self-confident."

"We became more compassionate."

"I feel more free, confident."

"I understand the essence of a business."

"I want very much to have my own business."

"I will use this knowledge to start my own business."

"With this knowledge, maybe I'll try something new."

"I feel more self-reliant."

"I discovered that there are many possibilities to do good things for the community."



Partnership Promises

Jobs Plus provides funding for machines and job training.

Gemeni Clothing commits to creating 50 jobs and making annual contributions to the Social Investment Fund.



"It's been a great way to get to know my community better and to build relationships, which have helped propel other projects ... to help me identify needs in the community and to work with people in a productive way to figure out how the community can meet those needs. That's been the best part for me."

*—Katherine Rose,
LPMB member in Soldanesti*

trators, the administrator was invited to attend the seminars. Gradually, relations began to improve.

Another young man successfully launched his own business, a motorcycle repair shop, after attending a seminar.

Local Project Management Board member Katherine Rose says the Social Plus component of the Jobs Plus program has "created a lot more openness to collaboration between organizations and it has allowed community members to meet their own needs. That is a very powerful statement and a really important lesson to learn."

After all, she adds, successful community improvement efforts aren't strictly about money. They also are "about the people, the discussions and sometimes the arguments ... (and) improving and



CREATING JOBS TRANSFORMS COMMUNITIES

The factory's partnership with Jobs Plus began in June 2009. The factory is Soldanesti's largest employer, launching its operations in the community in 2007. Financial assistance from Jobs Plus was used to purchase equipment for newly hired employees and to provide on-the-job training to the recruits. Like most rural communities in the country, Soldanesti has challenges to overcome. Drinking water is not always accessible in households due to very old water pipes, the sewage system is barely functional and a staggering number of the town's 6,000 inhabitants are considered vulnerable because of their very low family incomes. Still, the community is also a shining example of the transformative power of job creation and capacity building programs.

building upon the knowledge base of community members."

The seminars drew in many villagers, and particularly young people and women, who haven't necessarily been active in the community in the past.

"This may not seem like a big deal but Moldovan women do nearly all the house work, cook all meals from scratch, prepare food for winter, raise children almost on their own, and have a garden and farm animals to attend to," explains Katherine.

In spite of all of their other responsibili-

ties, women were active participants at the seminars and used their newly acquired knowledge to make changes in their community. "That is phenomenal," enthuses Katherine.

When asked to cite the greatest strength of CRS's Jobs Plus program, Aliona says: "I consider all the moments as strengths because formerly nothing was done. Even if some projects were started, all of them were limited to repair work, which may change the appearance of the community but not the mentality. I think the changes in my community have only just started."



OPENING CEREMONY

Catholic Relief Services Head of Office in Moldova, Michael McKennett, left, and Moldcell General Director Chiril Gaburici are presented with a gift of baking at the opening ceremony of the community's upgraded medical center.

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