



Democratic Process Yields Results in Romania

In Romania, local government spending is derived from taxpayers and public budget hearings are required by law. However, since public hearings are part of a democratic system currently under construction in Romania, local governments are not experienced in holding such hearings nor in using hearings to set priorities. Neither are citizens used to being consulted in matters of local public interest.

With USAID's help, community members initiated and conducted twenty-two public hearings to discuss the 2004 draft budget - over 1,000 citizens participated. Senior local government officials presented their plans for the next budget year and invited citizens' suggestions and proposals on budget expenditures, as well as on selecting sources of revenue.

Participants in this active process received over 10,000 copies of the "Budget in Brief" brochures outlining for their city or town where money was planned to be spent and the sources of revenues that would fund this spending. 700 posters were posted in the communities and the local media informed citizens about the public hearings.



Photo: GRASP/Kristina Creosteanu

A farmer from Sura Marei asks for funds from the local budget to provide security from thieves stealing his crops.

In 2002, GRASP was established as a means for USAID to provide assistance in decentralization of government, and support to local authorities through sustainable public/private partnerships. As a result of the program, citizen input was reflected in the 2004 budgets approved by local councils in budget meetings held in December 2003.

The reports from the hearings, including the citizens' proposals and suggestions for more effective use of public funds, were submitted to the Local Councils. Additional meetings are planned to allow officials to explain specific spending decisions. As a result of public participation, most mayors report changing their spending plans.

"This is the first time we have held public hearings to hear citizens' concerns about how money should be spent."

- Vice-Mayor Toma Constantin

This democratic process is already yielding results. Public officials agreed with many of the concerns articulated by citizens and later set aside funds for legal assistance and some of the infrastructure improvements that participants voiced as important needs. Nineteen mayors have reallocated funds to address citizen priorities which include additional funding for cultural activities, and the rehabilitation of a communal road.

All of the parties involved appreciated the initiative and requested the replication of this democratic exercise in the following years. Additionally, the Vice-Mayor agreed to publicize the final approved budget and include special notations of citizen initiatives. Romanian citizens are learning that they can make their local government listen. USAID, through GRASP, is successfully helping citizens get involved in setting local budget priorities.

