



GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONS

Increasing Municipal Revenues

A month-long advocacy campaign resulted in Suharekë/Suva Reka municipality meeting the criteria to receive an incentive grant awarded to municipalities collecting over 247,000 euros of own-source revenues.

Supported by USAID's Local Government Initiative (LGI), the municipality initiated a comprehensive advocacy campaign during December 2005. The plan aimed at collecting household and business property taxes, very often the only source of revenue for municipalities.

The campaign involved members of the high school students' council, who conducted door-to-door meetings with residents, and 17 public meetings in the villages and with public sector staff such as the Health Center. In addition to collecting the property tax, the campaign indirectly achieved another success: it raised citizens' awareness of the need for them to participate in the development of the municipality through municipal development funds. In addition to taxes paid, approximately 500,000 euros were collected from communities to combine with municipal development funds to be used for infrastructure projects in their respective communities.

The Local Government Initiative is implemented by RTI International. Resident municipal advisors are placed in six host municipalities, and lessons learned from one municipality are shared across Kosovo.

Meeting municipalities

On January 20, Dr. Ken Yamashita, USAID/Kosovo Mission Director, visited Suhareka/Suva Reka municipality.

Yamashita was introduced to the municipality's success in reaching property tax collection goals as well as meeting stakeholders engaged in the process, including municipal heads of departments and students of high school councils.



Left to right- Dr. Ken Yamashita, USAID/Kosovo Director, Jeton Cana, Local Government Development Specialist, Dan Wagner, LGI Municipal Representative, and Vitor Markaj, Deputy Mayor of Suhareka/Suvareka Municipality explaining the plan for the Citizens Service and Information Center.

Mr. Yamashita was also briefed by judges of Suhareka/Suva Reka's Municipal Court about legal matters in this municipality, and about working conditions in the court building which has been improved with assistance from USAID's Justice System Reform Activity.

Strengthening Rule of Law Legislation

USAID's Justice System Reform Activity continues to lead initiatives to establish legislation that supports rule of law in Kosovo. As part of this work, the project facilitated the first meeting of the working group on Notary Law of Kosovo in December.

The working group of judges, lawyers and representatives from the Prime Minister's Office reviewed the notary legislation drafted by the International Union of Latin Notaries. The next meeting is scheduled for the end of January.

Eliminating Court Backlog and Improving Case Flow Management

A workshop to introduce mechanisms for improving courts' case flow management and eliminating backlogs in civil cases was held in December for approximately 30 court clerks and judges.

Supported by USAID's Justice System Reform Activity, the workshop brought together teams of judges and court clerks from the Gjilan/Gnjilane, Pristina and Prizren Municipal Courts. The basic concepts and techniques of case flow management and backlog reduction in civil cases as used elsewhere in the world were introduced.

Each team is developing case backlog reduction plans using solutions appropriate to the legal framework, resources, and environment of their court. In addition, the teams are developing plans for improving the future management of civil cases.

The Justice System Reform Activity is implemented by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC).

DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Violence against Journalists Debate Offers Solutions

Violence against journalists and its causes were addressed in a public debate aired on local public and private TV stations. Organized by the USAID-supported Advocacy Training and Resource Center, in cooperation with Association of Professional Journalists of Kosovo and Balkans Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), the debate was designed to address the difficulties journalists are faced with, to increase public awareness on the issue, and to offer ideas on how to deal with such acts and how to prevent violence against journalists.

The debate started with a film about violence used against journalists while working on an assignment, followed by a debate among panelists and participants. Moderator Jeta Xharra maintained a balance between journalists and representatives from different institutions. The speakers focused on the roots of vio-

lence and whether there is systematic occurrence of violence against journalists in Kosovo.

The discussions also addressed police and their approach toward media. Refki Morina, spokesman for Kosovo Police Service, explained that the police force is governed by its own internal regulations, "whereas if a policeman or policewoman exceeds his or her competences, disciplinary measures are taken against them."

In general participants agreed that the lack of cooperation between the police force and journalists should be addressed through joint trainings and regular meetings with new cadets at the police school, and familiarization of journalists with procedures on how to approach the police force.

Fatmire Terdevci, a well-known investigative journalist, spoke about other difficulties journalists face when on job. Violence is not the only means to prevent or scare a journalist from doing his or her job -- other means include preventing journalists' access to needed information or official documents.

The outcome of the debate was agreement that there is a need for cooperation between institutions and journalists. Participants felt that the institutions should be more transparent and cooperative with journalists while journalists should approach the institutions properly by filing a formal request for the information needed.

Upcoming Events

January 31 - February 1, USAID's Justice System Reform Activity organizes a two-day seminar on the Principles of Human Resource Management.

February 3 - USAID's Local Government Initiative dedicates a project in Shtërpçe/Shtërpçe municipality.

February 7 - USAID's Media Assistance Project in cooperation with Kosovo Civil Society Project organizes a roundtable on Law on Access to Public Information

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