



USAID/Kosovo

Monthly Newsletter

Dragodan II No. 1Pristina, Kosovo

telephone: +381 (38) 243-673

email: kosovoinfo@usaid.gov

www.usaid.gov/missions/kosovo

Introducing the first issue of USAID Kosovo's monthly newsletter. This monthly bulletin presents in-depth, on-the-ground stories of the work, achievements and goals of local USAID partners in Kosovo. Each issue will feature a specific area of initiative being undertaken through USAID assisted programming in Kosovo.

In This Issue:

Civic Participation in Kosovo

From ensuring food safety standards to lobbying for rights for people with limited physical abilities, Kosovar citizens and civic organizations are bringing positive changes to their communities and municipalities with the help of USAID funded Civil Society programming.

With the objective to promote democracy and good governance through citizen participation, USAID supports the ability of Kosovar citizens to learn about and participate in civic affairs, not only as a right or privilege, but as a responsibility and obligation as members of a democratic society. By learning how to develop positive and effective relationships with community leaders, local government and the media, Kosovars are now advocating for social, health and economic causes that affect their communities and their lives.



NGOs and citizens are learning how to advocate. The creation of a national park to preserve the Bjeshket e Nemuna mountains near Deçan/Decani is just one project being undertaken.

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NGOs - AGENTS OF INFLUENCE

In the small city of Deçan/Decani, staff at the NGO "Epoka e Re" ("New Era") are working at holding their municipality accountable. First, they successfully lobbied the Deçan/Decani Municipal Assembly to adopt regulation that incorporates public participation into the municipal legislative process. Building on that success, they are now tracking whether the municipality adheres to proper procurement procedures in its management of the municipal budget.

Through the USAID-funded Kosovo NGO Advocacy Program (KNAP), NGOs around Kosovo are becoming experts in "avokim"-the art of using skills and resources as a non-government entity to monitor and influence public policy. In partnership with the East-West Management Institute (EWMI), KNAP is implemented in Kosovo by the Foundation for Democratic Initiatives (FDI), an organization based in Gjakova/Djakovica.

The concept of civil society is hardly new to Kosovars. In fact, when in 1989 Albanian Kosovars were ousted from most government positions, the Albanian language was banned from

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NGOs - Agents of Influence

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official use, and Kosovo lost its autonomy within Yugoslavia, the majority Albanian population created what was virtually a parallel government. Functioning entirely outside the Yugoslav system, Albanian Kosovars developed their own network of formal and informal organizations to educate their children, provide social services, and even care for the sick. "Many people say that Kosovo itself was a kind of NGO for 10 years," said Bashkim Rrahmani, executive director of FDI.

"We wanted to change the NGO's role - not just as service providers, but as agents of influence to push for changes in society."

Since the end of the conflict in 1999 and the establishment of a UN administration in Kosovo (UNMIK), the situation has drastically changed. Elections have been held and gradually UNMIK has begun to transfer responsibilities to municipal and Kosovo-level governments. For the first time, NGOs have the opportunity to influence policy by working directly with a Kosovar government, but many organizations lack the skills to do so. In response to this need, USAID created the KNAP program. Described by Rrahmani, "KNAP enhances NGO's capabilities. We wanted to change the NGO's role in society-not just as service providers, but as agents of influence to push for changes in society."

With that goal in mind, EWMI designed KNAP with several components. First, an Advocacy Training and Resource Center (ATRC) was created in Pristina; a sustainable organization providing training in advocacy and NGO management. Second, FDI assumed the role of implementing partner and grant-giving foundation. All organizations that receive a grant for an advocacy campaign must go through intensive trainings in advocacy, media outreach, and gender mainstreaming at the ATRC, and work extensively with staff to apply their new skills. In addition to becoming gifted advocates, most of these NGO leaders also emerged with the ability to train other NGOs in advocacy-thus impacting over 300 Kosovar NGOs since 2002.

Two other components of KNAP are more directly involved in advocacy. The Kosovar Institute for NGO Law and the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law work together to help NGOs draft legislation on public participation in municipal legislatures and the Kosovo Assembly. Similarly, an alliance of 27 Kosovar NGOs comprise the advocacy coalition known as AvoKo. Since 2002, this coalition has influenced the Assembly to open parliamentary committee meetings to the public, and has helped to draft legislation that would enact a Freedom of Information Act in Kosovo.

"What is most surprising," said Fron Nazi of EWMI, "is the quick impact that the advocacy campaigns have had in Kosovo." In just over one year since the project began, KNAP advocacy campaigns have already led to an amazing array of regulations passed by municipal assemblies, from environmental protection to transparency measures to health standards. According to Fron Nazi, transitional countries like Poland and Albania took five years to achieve the political impact that advocacy projects have achieved in one year in Kosovo.

There are several possible reasons for this. First of all, from the outset FDI was determined to hold NGOs to the highest professional standards, equivalent to those required by foundations in the US and Europe. Secondly, KNAP was well-timed to have an impact. For the first time since 1989, Kosovar NGOs and the public are finally working with new government insti-

tutions and legislatures that represent them. "We have a good environment [here in Kosovo] for NGOs to work, to push things forward, to get policymakers to approve what NGOs are doing," Rrahmani says. Sometimes local government institutions are even grateful for the expertise that NGOs can provide in the legislative and regulatory process.

For many NGOs, the next step is to take advocacy from municipal assemblies to the Kosovo Assembly, or to form NGO coalitions that will do so. The success of NGOs in advocacy is a good example of the unique window of opportunity that USAID has for successful democratic and civil society development in Kosovo. ❀

CITIZENS BRING ABOUT CHANGE

From parent-teacher organizations to civil rights marches to Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), most Americans know that you don't have to be a professional to change the system. Through the USAID-funded Civic Political Participation (CPP) project run by National Democratic Institute (NDI), Kosovar citizens are learning just that.

While NGOs might have the expertise and the resources to help draft legislation, publish materials, and work full-time to monitor the government, one of the goals of USAID democracy and governance programs is to help Kosovar citizens understand that, as constituents in a democracy, they can work directly with government officials to bring about social and policy change. This, in turn, also helps train politicians to be accountable to their communities and constituencies.

Started in 2000 under the name Kosovo Civic Forum, CPP is a highly streamlined project. Five NDI field coordinators work in 12 municipalities, where they help informed groups of citizens to identify needs in their community, and then train these groups to organize, decide on priorities, and advocate for services, policy improvements, and rights. All members of these citizen-based groups are volunteers, and receive no financial compensation for their work.



Peja/Pec region youth in a planning session.

The NDI field coordinators provide training that improves the effectiveness of these campaigns, but more importantly, they change attitudes about democratic participation and work to instill a belief that citizens can have an impact on government policy relevant to their community.

For example, in Spring 2003 a citizen-based group in Obiliq/Obilic successfully lobbied municipal authorities to establish a Committee for People with Limited Physical Abilities as part of the Obiliq/Obilic municipal assembly decision-making structure. This committee will identify priority concerns for people with limited physical abilities, attend to budget allocations, and ensure that these issues are addressed in the municipality.

To a small community, sometimes it is the small changes like these that really matter. Until 1999, most Kosovars saw government as a hostile force and did their best to avoid contact with its institutions. "I see that our mandate is to change the

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Citizens Bring About Change

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culture-how people view their problems and how they address these problems," said Arianit Shehu, senior program manager at NDI. "This program has been able to achieve some concrete, tangible results, and has been able to show citizens that the government should be there for them-to provide services, protect rights, and enhance their lives."

As part of the CPP project, NDI also works with NGOs and youth groups on effective methods of democratic participation. Approximately 60% of the population in Kosovo is under 25 years of age and unemployment among youth is particularly high, thus heightening the need for productive channeling of youthful energies. This year, NDI is helping a Kosovo-wide coalition of youth groups to lobby in the Kosovo Assembly for legislation that will make it mandatory for municipal governments to provide community space for youth in each municipality. NDI field coordinators also encourage citizen-based groups, youth groups, and NGOs to coordinate and work together locally to achieve common goals.

"A municipal leader would more likely listen to a group of 100 citizens than to five citizens, or even 20 groups of five citizens," said Shehu. "This is one of the messages we try to get across. That organizing and numbers count." ❧

MAKING A DIFFERENCE AT 65

Living in a small village outside of Gjilan/Gnjilane, Makfire Uzunalic's life as a pensioner could be a quiet one. Throughout her career, Uzunalic spent over 30 years as a teacher, and 10 years as the director of a kindergarten. Now in retirement, she is trying her hand at civic activism.

For three years after the devastating armed conflict in Kosovo in 1999, no pensions were available for retired Kosovars. Even after the pension system was reinstated in mid-2002, citizens over age 65 receive just 35 euros per month. Uzunalic doesn't feel that this is adequate; "With 35 euros per month, I can buy only basic medicine, nothing else." Uzunalic's husband is also retired and they have no children, but she says they raise bees and get by somehow.

"We wanted to take action. Pensioners have made a big contribution to society throughout our lives," says Uzunalic.

Uzunalic became involved in the Gjilan/Gnjilane chapter of the Association of Pensioners, an organization that had existed for decades in Kosovo but had historically focused on cultural and entertainment activities. In 2001, Uzunalic and a few other members began attending training offered under the USAID-funded Civic Forum project implemented by the National Democratic Institute (NDI). The training teach citizen-based groups to organize and work within the political system to improve their communities, without any financial support whatsoever.



Makfire Uzunalic's life as a pensioner could be a quiet one.

By working with NDI, Uzunalic and others learned effective tactics for political influence: how to work with the media, circulate petitions, organize people, meet with officials, and even stage peaceful protests. Using these methods, they achieved exciting results. First, they convinced the Gjilan/Gnjilane Department of Transportation to provide discounts for all pensioners in the municipality for 2002. In a later campaign, they persuaded the Municipal Directorate of Health in Gjilan/Gnjilane to open an ambulatory care center that provides basic health services to pensioners. They also obtained a 30% discount for pensioners at a state-owned therapeutic care center.

"Our biggest concern is that despite these advances, there is little change in the status and salary of pensioners," said Uzunalic. "We are still working." Just two months ago, they met with Kosovo Assembly deputies representing Gjilan/Gnjilane about the inadequacy of current pension levels. The deputies pledged to help, and to strive to get the issue on the assembly agenda. With 7500 members in the four-city area around Gjilan/Gnjilane, politicians are becoming aware that the Association of Pensioners is a constituency to be heeded.

Uzunalic says they have a good relationship with many municipal officials and Assembly members, and they've learned to make their needs as a constituency known. "When we go there with concrete proposals, they rarely reject us."

Despite her 65 years, Uzunalic radiates charisma, energy, and enthusiasm. "I believe we've done a lot to draw attention to this issue, to engage the attention of institutions and the media. We've learned a lot from Civic Forum and all our successes are the result of the training they held for us, teaching us to achieve our rights in a democratic way." Their fundamental goal? - "So that we can live in peace our last days. We're working at that." ❧

ENSURING SAFE STANDARDS FOR MEAT

For the staff of the Kosova Development Center (KDC), an NGO based in Gjakova/Djakovica, the issue of meat safety standards took on personal significance when one of their friends got sick.

Founded in 2001, the KDC has been working to improve the social economy of agricultural communities in Kosovo. They publish an informational magazine for farmers, conduct training in agricultural techniques, and help to create farmers associations in agricultural communities outside Gjakova/Djakovica. But last year, when one of their colleagues was hospitalized due to an illness caused by contaminated meat, they decided to gather more information on the issue.

The results of their research persuaded the NGO to take action. Beginning at the local hospital, they found that in the past six months 400 people in the Gjakova/Djakovica area had been hospitalized for food poisoning, most of them from consuming contaminated meat. From there, they went to the municipal authorities to learn about meat safety regulations that were in existence.



KDC worked to develop meat safety standards.

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Ensuring Safe Standards for Meat *continued from page 3*

KDC Executive Director Ismet Isufi describes that the lack of proper regulations and inspections was a real health risk for Gjakova/Djakovica citizens. "This is a problem that affects everyone, since everyone is consuming meat and there are about 150,000 meat consumers in the Gjakova area."

The KDC got involved in the USAID-funded Kosovo NGO Advocacy Program (KNAP) in order to learn how they could change government safety standards. After undergoing training through KNAP and being awarded a small grant for an advocacy campaign, KDC staff met with Gjakova/Djakovica municipal authorities again to discuss the meat safety issue.

"We wanted to get support from them at the beginning of the project," says Isufi. "However, at first we were not kindly greeted by the inspectors from the municipality." Initial reactions of government authorities were that the NGO had no business getting involved in this regulatory issue. Faced with this obstacle, the KDC aimed higher and met with the Chief Executive Officer of Gjakova/Djakovica and the municipal assembly chairman directly. Although they hesitated initially, eventually the politicians were convinced of the importance of this food safety issue. Their support, Isufi says, eventually made working with the local health inspectorate much easier.



Ismet Isufi, Executive Director of the Kosovo Development Center (Qendra Kosovare Per Zhvillim) in Gjakova/Djakovica displays KDC's public education poster.

KDC realized that this advocacy campaign necessitated not only changing standards, but providing public education about the dangers of improperly slaughtered and stored meat. They organized a radio call-in show on the issue, sponsored public forums, and designed posters illustrating what conditions are appropriate for meat storage and sale. They also brought experts from Pristina to conduct training on food safety to local meat sellers.

KDC established a working group of agricultural specialists, veterinarians, food safety experts, lawyers, and government officials to draft a law that would regulate all stages of the process—from animal health to slaughterhouse conditions to meat circulation and sale—and establish punishments for non-compliance. Some municipal authorities even expressed gratitude to the NGO for lending their expertise in tackling such a technical issue. On July 30, the Gjakova/Djakovica Municipal Assembly approved the regulation of health standards for slaughterhouses.

Even so, Isufi admits that meat safety is as much about implementation and enforcement as it is about the standards themselves. He anticipates that there will be some slaughterhouses or illegal meat vendors that will seek to bribe inspectors or oppose the regulation's implementation. As a result, KDC will conduct a watchdog campaign of parallel inspections of slaughterhouses and stores, to monitor whether the government is enforcing its own rules. "In a way we [and the government] are partners, but if necessary we will bring arguments against them, and apply pressure to get this implemented." ❧

Kosovo Policies Enacted or Under Consideration through KNAP Advocacy Campaigns

Business Contact Information

Foundation for Democratic Initiatives (FDI)
rr. "Besim Bishtazhini" nr. 12
Gjakova, Kosovo
Tel/Fax: +381(0)39-024-068
Email: fdigjakova@hotmail.com

Advocacy Training and Resource Center (ATRC)
Lidhja e Prizrenit 15
Pristina, Kosovo
Tel/Fax: +381(0)38-244-810
Email: atrcknap@yahoo.com

Kosovo Development Center (Qendra Kosovare Për Zhvillim)
"D. Elirisë" nr. 135
Gjakova, Kosovo
Tel/Fax: +381(0)39-026-374
Email: kdckosova@hotmail.com

NGO "Epoka e Re"
Pallati i Kulturës "I. Gërvalla"
Deçan, Kosovo
Tel: +377(0)44-156-259
Email: xh_shehu@yahoo.com

<p>Regulation requiring handicapped access to public buildings Proposed by NGO Handikos Regulation adopted by Kosovo Assembly</p>	<p>Adoption of Aarhus Convention on environment in Kosovo Proposed by NGO Environmental Protection and Rehabilitation Under consideration by Kosovo Assembly</p>
<p>Regulation on public participation in legislative process Proposed by Gjakova NGO Forum Regulation adopted by Gjakova Municipal Assembly</p>	<p>Regulation on public participation in legislative process Proposed by NGO New Hope Regulation adopted by Deçan Municipal Assembly</p>
<p>Regulation on establishing institutions to treat drug addicts Proposed by NGO "Gjakova" Under consideration by Gjakova Municipal Assembly</p>	<p>Regulation on food quality and safety control Proposed by NGO Kosovo Agribusiness Alliance Under consideration by Kosovo Assembly</p>
<p>Regulation prohibiting food products exposed outside shops Proposed by NGO Our Future Regulation adopted by Suhareka, Gjakova, and Prizren Municipal Assemblies</p>	<p>Regulation for solid waste management in Gjilan municipality Proposed by NGO Elita Under consideration by Gjilan Municipal Assembly</p>
<p>Regulation on usage of school premises by community Proposed by NGO Women's Association Under consideration by Gjakova Municipal Assembly</p>	<p>Regulation of health standards for slaughterhouses Proposed by NGO Kosovo Development Center Regulation adopted by Gjakova Municipal Assembly</p>
<p>Law Declaring Bjeshket e Nemuna Mountains as National Park Proposed by NGO New Hope Under consideration by Kosovo Assembly</p>	<p>Regulation on ethics and conduct standards of Assembly members Proposed by NGO Forum for Democratic Initiatives Under consideration by Gjakova Municipal Assembly</p>