

Local Government Development Centre, Slovakia (gp98)

Democratic approaches to Local self-government in 1996 was still quite a novelty in countries of the former Eastern Block. Several training programmes were already in place, such as those supported by the European Union's Training Foundations, British Know-How Fund programmes and USAID. All of them were dependent upon financial funding and identification of points of emphasis from donor countries. Thus, they were also referred to as donor-driven programmes. The Local Government Development Centre in the Slovak Republic established as a link between the already existed Local Government Training Foundations and USAID, from the very start, tried to develop "user-driven" approaches, i.e. programmes which were tailored to the needs of Slovak local governments and geared towards establishing new partnerships among them. All the more so as any continuation of the training and resource centre would evidently have to be financed by the country itself, the EU programmes and the USAID project having been designed for the duration of two and three years respectively only.

Fred Fisher, the first head of the LSGAC (Local-State Governmental Advisory Committee) Centre, had previously worked together with UN HABITAT on the preparation of an Elected Leadership Training Series which he subsequently wanted to install as a tried and tested method for developing local government by way of training.

He now looks back on the initial process as a very difficult time. Cooperation between USAID and the EU-Local Government Training Foundation was marked by deep mutual distrust, a fact further aggravated by the personalities of the programme managers on both sides.

Thus, to begin with the donor organisations had to be convinced by the Slovak representatives that a "user-driven" process established with the participation of Slovak municipalities was necessary. The UN HABITAT Guidelines Elected Leadership were translated into Slovak and discussed with representatives from Slovak municipalities prior to publication, taking into account participants' proposals for changes.

Meanwhile the British Know How had been concluded and the LSGAC was able to secure the participation of local trainers trained by the Know How Fund which was a very important step as because of the language only local trainers can provide the efficiency required. Luba Vavrova was appointed LSGAC Senior Advisor and also Project Manager for several projects ~~director~~.

In September 1996 LSGAC organized a workshop which was to test the four different project courses and recruit new trainers. 54 persons attended 26 of whom agreed to become trainers — all of them local government representatives — mayors and councillors. The participants in the workshop knew that few of their colleagues in local governments would recognize the advantages of innovative planning based on participation unless they were shown tangible processes and results. Thus, 13 "marketing" events were held which more than 300 mayors took part in. They proved highly successful and more than 200 training workshops for elected local representatives were subsequently held.

In 1999 US Aid funding came to an end but by then the network had become tightly knit so as to ensure sustainability of the centre with the support of institutions, such as the Slovak Association of Towns and Cities and the World Bank, amongst others.

The following main success factors were identified by the LSGAC:

- Training should be done by local experts, especially in countries like the Slovak Republic where language might otherwise pose problems.
- Using training material provided by international agencies like UN HABITAT is both cost-effective and to the point. Such material should, however, be adapted to local circumstances.
- Persons addressed by the programme must be included in the planning, development and implementation processes of the programme from the very start.
- Training must be practical and ready for use.

Main emphasis in the different training series was placed on:

- Team building for infrastructure development,
- A systematic approach for financial managers ~~seal administration~~ in cities,
- Protection of the environment,
- Presentations and media work for local governments,
- A "Survival Kit" for mayors to support respectful and constructive assignment of powers from former to future mayors where needed,
- As well as training sessions on how to stimulate NGOs, and citizens' initiatives on the part of municipalities.

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- One new association of local government professionals was set – Association of Municipal Finance Officers and all kind of institutional development activities done for several others – mainly Association of City Managers.
- About 50 publications and manuals of the workshops were also compiled. Newly prepared series of 15 manuals for Financial Management was initially, these were available in Slovak only but since then have been integrated into Capacity Building at UN HABITAT, following evaluation by the latter's experts.

Formátované: Odrážky a číslovanie

New NGO was set in 1999 at the end of project to follow LSGAC experience, know how and network called Local Government Development Centre (LGDC which is CRS in Slovak) is a small NGO in charge of carrying out all of the initiatives in partnerships. The biggest current achievement is joint conference of three Slovak LG associations – Association of City Managers, Association of Finance Officers and the Association for LG education with full support of LGDC.
Experts present their activities also at international conferences and training sessions for colleagues in Central and Eastern Europe and disseminate all good lessons learned.

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