



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina

The OSCE and Civil Society

I will start with presenting the rationale behind our work with CS. I will then explain the strategic approach we follow giving you few examples to illustrate it. I will, then, share with you the lesson learnt and the conclusions.

Rationale

The Public Opinion Researches, (POR) periodically conducted in order to plan our work according to citizens' priorities, show that Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) citizens are disenfranchised with local politicians and lack trust in their work. The POR results also show that in citizens' perception the International Organisations have replaced the CS in playing the watchdog role over the elected representatives and in holding elected representatives accountable for their actions.

Approach

Our strategic approach to improve this negative picture has been to address both the Government and the CS, being convinced that the reform can be sustainable only if both actors are involved and have the ownership of the process.

How do we attempt to achieve the expected result? The main principles we apply are:

- a) To urge Local Governments to establish mechanisms of citizens' participation and outreach, aimed at informing citizens about the tools at their disposal.
- b) To make citizens able and willing to participate, by improving their skills and by convincing them that it is worth participating as their engagement will have a positive impact on their lives.
- c) To promote partnership between Local Governments and CS, by facilitating the understanding of the mutual benefits of working constructively together for policy development, service provision and monitoring.

Our work with CS is characterised by a gradual approach which could be visually represented by a pyramid having at the basis Local Government outreach to citizens, followed by citizens' participation and having on the top partnership between citizens and government, as the main aim of this process.

This approach is illustrated by the Ugovor project, launched by our department in 2005. The project aims at strengthening links between citizens and municipalities based on the principle that efficient and effective local governments require a commitment by both citizens and municipalities to work together. This commitment represents a "contract" between citizens and the Municipalities which signing an MoU with the OSCE accept to achieve clearly defined minimum standards. The five modules composing the programme reflect this dual approach, each of them being divided between a regulatory and commitment to citizens element. Essentially Ugovor is both an end and a means, as by proposing its implementation to Local Governments we facilitate the establishment of mechanisms of participation and partnership to be used by citizens that are going beyond the implementation of the modules themselves.

The fifth and most demanding module is simply called the Partnership module. It is the most challenging step as it implies not only active citizens' participation, but also proactive citizens'

engagement. In partnership CS and Local Government are at the same level, sharing roles and responsibilities. This requires a CS able to partner and ready to hold responsibility.

In order to achieve this ambitious outcome four elements are necessary:

- 1) Citizens and Local Authorities jointly identify a problem and agree about the need to address it.
- 2) Citizens and Authorities jointly design the intervention aimed at addressing the individuated problem.
- 3) Citizens and Local Authorities jointly carry out activities to solve the problem.
- 4) Citizens and Authorities evaluate the joint intervention and the evaluation results are used as a basis for following partnership activities, with the main goal to establish sustainable mechanisms and institutionalise Partnership.

The example of the Community Development Centres

The Community Development Programme is another good example of how we managed to overcome the usual citizens' passiveness, by strengthening citizens' capacity to influence local government policies and to take action on their own behalf.

The project has been implemented in 2005 and 2006 in rural communities, where a significant proportion of the population of BiH lives. These areas are characterised by weak civil society and a virtual absence of the institutional links between citizens and local authorities. Firstly we conducted a local assessment with a view to identifying potential partners and their development needs. The aim was to enable these organisations to develop the skills necessary to become equal partners with municipalities, in order to design and implement projects responding to locally identified needs and priorities.

When possible, the project managers built on and extended the initiatives already started through other "good governance" projects and aimed at establishing mechanisms for consultation and partnership. These mechanisms, including participative budgeting and strategic planning, are very useful tools to address the main citizens' priority, i.e. local economic development. In this regard, the CDP carried out activities designed to improve citizens' understanding of the municipal budget system and to explain how rural communities can influence the budget. This led to public hearings on the budget being held in many rural communities, often for the first time. Local counterparts were trained in holding consultations to identify citizens' priorities and present appropriate project proposals for inclusion in municipal budgets. As a result, the needs of rural communities were better reflected in both municipal budgets and strategic development plans.

The project monitoring and evaluation phase, whenever possible, was carried out by local counterparts using basic public opinion research techniques and revealed a high level of satisfaction amongst citizens and local authorities. Evaluation also focused on the sustainability of the various structures and procedures established through the CDP and ownership of the process. Concerning this, the significant number of activities (68 out of a total of 200) implemented using communities own resources can be considered a success indicator. In addition to establishing sustainable structures, there is also evidence that the CDP has generated a momentum for change, led by citizens. For example, following training in advocacy, a women's group successfully organised an assessment and public discussion on improving women's health care, focusing on the prevention of breast cancer. Municipal representatives, recognizing the quality of the assessment and the validity of the findings, presented them to the municipal assembly. This led to the development of a municipal policy on health protection in rural areas.

Lesson learnt

Develop What is There

It is important to be realistic and optimise the resources. To develop what is appropriate in each community rather than focusing on one particular type of organisation or structure. For example, in the CDP case rather than developing new structures, the managers focused on reviving embryonic or decayed structures in rural communities. These included the pre-war 'local communities' or Mjesne Zajednice (MZs), traditional citizens associations, in addition to emerging groupings of local producers and artisans.

Focus on Issues and Action

Engagement with civil society should be based on specific issues that citizens have identified as priorities and that would produce actions enabling them to address those issues. Generalised discussions, roundtables and seminars should be avoided except where they support this goal. The issues themselves are not important, but it is essential that these issues matter to those involved.

Focus on Results

Disillusioned and disengaged citizens will not become engaged unless they see examples of positive results. It is, therefore, essential that small victories are built into all interventions and that they are highlighted and publicized. Local victories are the most immediate and graphic manner of convincing citizens of their potential to bring about change and of the value of active participation.

Let Citizens Decide

Unless citizens acknowledge that there is an issue which has to be addressed, they have no real motivation to organise and commit themselves to purposeful action. Too often citizens have to conform to a pre-determined agenda and mobilise around issues which are of concern to others – e.g., typically, donors and international organizations – but not necessarily to them. Citizens must instead be encouraged to identify what matters to them.

Stay in the Background

Support to civil society needs to be carefully targeted in order to ensure that the responsibility for action rests firmly with citizens. The focus should be on creating the conditions necessary for civil society to become active. This is essentially a "background" role, carried out through activities such as providing skills training, access to information, or institutional and political support. Above all, citizens should feel that any achievements are theirs.

Conclusions

The existence of a dominant and unresponsive governmental sector, absorbing a disproportionate amount of resources, deepens the apathy of disappointed citizens. Our main goal is to change these political dynamics, targeting the political forces and the CS. It follows that reform of government, especially local government, is an integral component in developing civil society and, therefore, in peace implementation. Similarly, the strengthening of an informed, active and engaged civil society is central to the development of a responsible exit strategy and to the achievement of durable security in BiH.

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