



Branching Out with Environmental Mediation

IN ARGENTINA, THE PROVINCE OF MISIONES is home to an ancient, endangered species of trees called Araucarias. A particularly rich abundance of these dinosaur-era trees exist in the area in and around San Pedro, a small town located in the northeast of the province, on the Brazilian border. Over the past 50 years, this sparsely populated area has grown dramatically in size, attracting a large community of farmers who, unrestricted by zoning laws, often made their homes among the Araucarias.

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is an international organization committed to building sustainable local capacity to advance civil society and a culture of change and conflict management worldwide.

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Promoting a Culture of Democracy Globally

by Raymond Shonholtz, Founder and President

AS THE NEEDS OF THE NEWER DEMOCRACIES in Central and Eastern Europe become more complex, the aspirations of nascent democracies in the republics of the former Soviet Union more frustrated, and the cultural challenges of Latin American democracies more demanding, Partners for Democratic Change seeks to engage in a continual dialogue about the diversity of democratic development.



By recognizing that no single development timeline or model will achieve a culture of democracy, we need to communicate what works and to extract and adapt strategies that support and promote indigenous development of civic participation, civil society building, and institutional structures.

Partners furthered this dialogue with senior policy makers and donors on July 17 with "Communicating What Works: Addressing Change and Conflict in Developing Democracies" a co-hosted event with the Kettering Foundation held at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Beginning with an opening address by former USAID Administrator Brian Atwood, experts on democracy building and citizen participation and participants examined successful models and processes that are building a culture of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, South Caucasus, Latin America, and the United States.

Many of the participants and speakers noted that despite a decade of progress, many democracies are under increasing pressure to implement more transparent processes, and to involve citizens in local and national policy-making, in order to prevent and resolve internal conflicts and to build support for difficult policy decisions. The rationale for pursuing this course lies in the ability of a democracy to better manage the ups and downs of market economies than any other system, and this is because, as Professor Dani Rodrik notes, "democratic institutions are indeed the institutions of

conflict management par excellence." (*Making Openness Work*. OCD, 1999.)

The transitional democracies that have achieved the most in the past ten years and overcome economic challenges are the ones with deeper democratic institutions. The countries with weak responses to change are also the countries with inadequate political institutions and those that lack a culture of peaceful change and conflict management. In looking at democratic development, it is necessary to examine the ways to create institutions that mediate conflict among diverse groups. Societies with deep ethnic, national minority, religious, and economic cleavages need conflict management institutions, especially when economic adversity deepens the contours of the cleavage. Participatory and inclusive political and social systems can "bind the divide" and create a context for negotiating societal inequities. Democratic institution building is not possible without economic development, and sustainable development requires institutional and social mechanisms for addressing, ameliorating, and reconciling social tensions and historical cleavages between groups.

One of the fastest developing methodologies to bind the divide is cooperative action and building indigenous capacity for collaborative initiatives between civil society, government, and the market sector. Partners has been a leader in this development by training trainers in over 20 countries how to train and apply this methodology to local and national issues. We hope to continue in this work in binding differences through cooperative initiatives that make citizens stakeholders in the institutions that govern them. ▲



Partners' staff at the Warsaw regional meeting

Branching Out with Environmental Mediation

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The trees, which are very sensitive to changes in their habitat, did not adapt well to their new human neighbors. Many Araucarias deteriorated rapidly, divesting themselves of branches in the process. In extreme cases, powerful storms even uprooted the trees and blew them over barns and homes in San Pedro. In 1986, the provincial government passed a law that declared Araucarias provincial monuments to be protected, but also granted permission to cut them down when threatening the life or home of a San Pedro resident. Since then, municipal authorities have often sided with those living under the trees and ordered teetering trees chopped down and discarded.

But the most recent government orders to cut down 247 Araucarias prompted fierce retaliation from national and local environmentalists intent on conserving the trees. Environmentalists argued that residents living in close proximity to the trees should be relocated elsewhere, and that the city needs to focus concerted efforts on urban planning to forestall the further decay of such a large volume of rare trees. Local media covered the clash closely as the fate of 247 trees was passionately debated.

Within this context, the Ministry of Ecology approached Partners-Argentina to facilitate discussions surrounding the resolution of this complex environmental crisis. Acting quickly, Center staff met with residents of several neighborhoods throughout San Pedro to explain mediated processes and request their participation in community sessions that would aim to settle the dispute. Partners-Argentina also spoke with the mayor of San Pedro, the Minister of Ecology, the Undersecretary of Economy of San Pedro, the General Director of

Lands in Misiones, various environmental groups, the fire department, teachers and administrators from local schools, park rangers, and the San Pedro Chamber of Commerce to identify major points of contention and commit full participation to the process.

The mediation was enormously successful. During four intensive sessions, 55 participants representing different interests came together and agreed to discuss the two most pressing issues: security of community members and a mechanism to preserve remaining Araucarias. These discussions yielded a mutually agreed upon binding solution which stipulates that dead and dying Araucarias will be cut down and donated to public building projects, while healthy ones will be actively conserved. Most importantly it establishes an Urban Planning Commission that will suspend residential visas until zoning laws are enforced.

Partners-Argentina director, Gachi Tapia, believes the work blazes a trail for future environmental mediation in Argentina: "When we finished our work, all the people told us wonderful things about the knowledge they had acquired through the mediation process. I was really moved, it was very hard work . . . This is the first mediation experience in environmental issues undertaken in this country, and there exists no other precedent of this magnitude. We believe that this experience will open up a new path in the resolution of conflicts by these means in public contexts." The Ministry of Ecology and the Misiones Lands Department will spearhead the design of the new urban planning project and together with Partners-Argentina, the community is working to fully implement the agreement. ▲

With the support of the Ford Foundation and the U.S. Department of State, Partners and Partners-Argentina co-planned and conducted the Latin American Regional Training Program on Change and Conflict Management in Buenos Aires, June 5-8, 2000 for social change leaders from Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, and Peru. The program was a wonderful opportunity to share experiences, suggestions, and lessons across borders. Partners and Partners-Argentina look forward to continued work in the region.



Argentina

Staff of Partners-Argentina participated in national colloquiums organized by the Natural Resources and Environment Foundation (FARN), and facilitated a workshop, "International trade, environment and sustainable development."

The Center has conducted several cooperative planning programs for law enforcement and legal professionals and students, including participants from the Mar del Plata Bar Association of Buenos Aires, the Supreme Court of Cordoba and the "Ramon Falcon" Argentine Federal Police School.

Partners-Argentina joined the Social Forum for Transparency, a coalition of NGOs working to improve transparency in public administration and citizen participation in public affairs, in promoting a freedom of information law, monitoring elections in Buenos Aires, and analyzing public management and information systems available for citizens.

Bulgaria

The Mayor of Satovcha Municipality contracted Center staff for a series of training programs aimed at improving the management and leadership of all division heads in the region.

Partners-Bulgaria continued multiple initiatives with Save the Children, including: hosting and consulting representatives from Save the Children organizations in Romania, United Kingdom and Vietnam; and producing a series of "My Rights/ My Duties" bilingual (Bulgarian/English) booklets for pre-school, primary and secondary level students.

Staff participated in a World Bank conference on social service needs of children in Bulgaria, and submitted proposed mechanisms to adapt current legislation to provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. ►



Croatia

The Center facilitated dialogue through discussions, conferences and dissemination of campaign materials for Glas 99, a coalition of NGOs designed to foster voter awareness, in cooperation with USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives and the National Democratic Institute.

In preparation for election monitoring activities, Center staff conducted workshops for senior citizen volunteers in communication, team-building and community organizing skills.

Partners-Croatia worked with the Pakrac Women's Club, a coalition of Serb and Croat women, to implement a community revitalization project that reopened a laundrette to offer work to women needing income, and developed a service that will offer family planning consultations.

Czech Republic

Partners-Czech was invited to advise on and facilitate a cooperative planning program designed to revitalize Prague district #11, the largest suburban area of the city. The five-year initiative will include housing reconstruction, cultural arenas and urban planning, and will involve intensive participation of local government, industry and citizens.

The Center extended its series of drug prevention programs, including training for secondary and vocational school educators, in Prague, Brno, Most, Hradec Kralove and other communities throughout the republic.



Partners-Czech was selected as "Best Training Organization" by the Czech Ministry of Education for programs aimed at increasing tolerance in society, and its publication, Education Towards Tolerance and Against Racism, ranks first on the Ministry of Education's list of recommended books for elementary and secondary schools. ►

Young Women Unite

WITH THE POLITICAL and economic transition in Central and Eastern Europe, many women with higher education have benefited from easier access to good jobs, university education, and higher salaries. The challenge for young women is how to fully take advantage of these opening opportunities, to gain the skills to be future leaders, and to strategize over the significance of being *women* pioneers in emerging fields. Partners helps young women successfully take on these challenges.

Partners' Leadership Institute for Young Women of Central and Eastern Europe brought over 30 young women, ages 20-25, from Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine together for four regional meetings over two years. They participated in empowerment, leadership, and cooperative planning trainings, and shared lessons learned for promoting women's participation. Between the regional meetings, the young women participated in skill-building and mentoring programs organized by their local Partners Center or an affiliated organization. They completed internships in local business, government or non-profit organizations, attended additional Partners training programs, and met women leaders in a variety of careers. Through the Institute, the participants also developed an international network with their peers that will support them personally and professionally as they progress through their lives and careers. The program was supported by a consortium of funders, led by the Levi Strauss Company (see box).

Partners Centers recruited a talented, motivated group of participants, concentrating on young women who are members of minority groups or who live in underrepresented rural areas. Partners invited local and international media to cover the training programs in an effort to draw attention to the special needs of young women and to highlight the strength and diversity of tomorrow's leaders.

Partners-Poland and Partners-Slovakia hosted the first two training programs, addressing personal empowerment and leadership skills.



Participants toasting the Young Women's leadership Institute

The young women had the following to say:

"I liked the mood and structure of all the participants and positive and negative feedback from trainers and people in the group. I think that I've learned some new things and I've got new information which I can use later on in my work and daily life..."

"I am really looking forward to the next training...first of all to see again all the girls, because each and every one of them filled me with such enthusiasm. Most of all, I appreciated the spontaneous and sincere care that they gave me, but also their numerous and creative ideas for work."

By giving young women the chance to build their leadership skills and develop friendships across national, ethnic, and socioeconomic borders, Partners strives to empower a new generation of women to succeed in any career of their choice and to lead their countries into a more democratic, inclusive, and peaceful era. ▲

Partners gratefully acknowledges the support of the Levi Strauss Foundation toward the Young Women's Leadership Institute.



Partners also thanks the following organizations for their support of the program:

- Aliatel, a.s.
- Konrad Adenauer Foundation
- Counterpart International
- Friedrich Naumann Foundation
- Self-Servis, s.r.o.
- World Learning STAR Network

Mediation: The Prime Time of TV

IN BULGARIA, as in other Central and Eastern European countries, most conflicts are settled in the courtroom. The process is lengthy, costly, and generally at least one party is dissatisfied by the outcome. However, disputing individuals continue to present their cases to juries and judges because there is no other sphere in which they feel protected by the rule of law.

Partners-Bulgaria is working to create new outlets for the peaceful resolution of disputes and to offer alternatives for those tired of grappling with the legal system. In cooperation with Bulgarian National Television, the Center wrote and co-produced a seven-part television series to introduce mediation services to the public. Hosted by Partners-Bulgaria staff members Steli Peteva and Rumén Minkovski, the show depicts everyday instances of conflict, such as the collision of two neighbors in a stairwell or arguments among co-workers in an office, and then demonstrates how mediation may be employed to help disputants

reach an agreement on their own terms.

The show explains that mediation has several advantages over litigation. Because the opposing parties must both agree to the resolution before it becomes binding, it is much more likely that each will abide by the final settlement. In addition, in cases where the relationship between the disputants is important to preserve, a mediated solution will more likely maintain mutual respect and understanding.

To assist Partners-Bulgaria in reaching a wide audience, BNT provided an elaborate set and professional actors that made the skits more realistic and enjoyable to watch. Steli Peteva relates that in a small town near Burgas, her mother gathers up to 20 of the town's residents every week to watch the show together. These devoted watchers have been rewarded; due to the show's popularity, Channel 1 rebroadcast the series last August and discussions about a follow-up series are currently underway. ▲

Networking Across Borders

PARTNERS-BALTIC WORKS TO BUILD a culture of change and conflict management across the entire Baltic region. Last summer, Partners-Baltic, in cooperation with Partners and Partners-Georgia, organized a "Democracy and Conflict Resolution" training program in Elsinore, Denmark for 20 civil society leaders from the Baltics and South Caucasus. The 2-week program combined a training-for-trainers in communication, negotiation, and facilitation skills and an introduction to mediation and cooperative planning with lectures on democratic theory and site visits to non-profit organizations in Denmark. The Danish Democracy Fund supported the program, which was hosted by the International People's College in Elsinore.

The Baltic participants represented a wide variety of civil society organizations, including the Latvian Adult Education Association, the Network of Estonian Non-Profit Organizations, the Latvian Red Cross Youth, the Association of Personnel Development (Estonia), and the Social and Psychological Service Center (Lithuania). The training helped build the participants' ability to promote citizen participation, peaceful resolution of disputes, and democracy in each of their countries. The program also provided an opportunity for the par-

ticipants to build networks with each other across state and regional borders. The unusual mixture of these two regions enabled the Baltic and South Caucasian participants to compare their experiences and recognize how much they have in common.

With this program, Partners hoped to lay the foundation for further dissemination of conflict resolution skills and to provide the participants with a range of models for democratic institution-building. Already, many of the participants have begun training others in their home countries in these important skills and utilizing them within their own organizations and lives. They have also forged new partnerships with each other. For example, the Latvian Red Cross Youth (LRCY) organized a special training in conflict management skills for NGO youth activists in Latvia. With funding from the Open Society Fund-Latvia, the LRCY invited Partners-Baltic to Riga to help plan and conduct the training. By continuing such cooperation with the LRCY and other groups, Partners-Baltic looks forward to supporting a network of organizations committed to promoting democracy and the peaceful resolution of conflict across the entire region. ▲

Georgia

Tea Gvelesiani of Partners-Georgia presented a paper on "Characteristics of Children's Rehabilitation" at the Regional South Caucasus Conference on Post Conflict Rehabilitation of Internally Displaced Persons.

The Center's training manual on Communication, Negotiation, Leadership and Presentation has been translated into Russian, to expand its use in the South Caucasus and in cross-border trainings in Russia.

World Bank support has made possible a cooperative planning program with the active participation of local government, youth leaders from educational institutions, media representatives, NGO/community leaders and others to address several issues challenging the city of Poti.

Hungary

Center staff discussed the use of mediation, as well as multiple outcomes of conflict, on the show "Mélyvíz" (Deep Water) on Hungarian Public Television.

The Center has finished production of eight videos on ethnic conflict prevention and management and presented a



mini-conference on Partners' work in ethnic projects, through support by the Dutch Government and the Mott Foundation.

The Center has begun pivotal work with the Hungarian Supreme Court towards incorporating mediation into the Hungarian court systems, implementing legislation changes and providing training and education for judges.

Lithuania

Center staff conducted training programs in project design, management and needs assessment for mental health NGOs from Lithuania and Estonia.

Through a training program organized by the Baltic Sea Youth Forum, Center trainers provided skills in active participation, problem solving and conflict analysis to youth leaders and trainers from throughout the Baltic Sea region. ►

The Roma

A History of Persecution, A Struggle for the Future

THERE ARE MORE THAN TWELVE MILLION Roma (popularly known as Gypsies, a term considered derogatory by many Roma) in the world. The majority of the Roma, around six million, are concentrated in Central and Eastern Europe. In direct contrast to the myth of the “care-free wandering gypsy life”, the reality of most Roma since their immigration from India to Europe after the 10th century AD has been one of extreme persecution and abject poverty.

In the 20th century alone, the Roma have been denied citizenship, rights to social services, rights to freedom of movement, and have been widely persecuted in terms of expulsion, beatings, murder and even genocide, which is most devastatingly seen in the extermination of one and one half million Roma in the Nazi death camps. With the collapse of communism in 1989, racial prejudice and violence against the Roma is once again on the rise. The Roma are often scapegoated as dirty, uncivilized, lazy, and as thieves; they are considered a blight to European communities. Violent attacks on Romani refugees and immigrants have been permitted to occur with little or no intervention from authorities. The Roma are victims of discrimination surrounding almost every human right, including employment, education, and health care.

However, there are numerous Romani efforts to claim their rights and many of these efforts have resulted in success. The 1990s brought achievements such as the acceptance of the International Romani Union into the European Conference on Security and Cooperation, the Fourth World Romani Congress, and the founding of several Roma publications such as the journal *Roma on the Road* in Poland.

Thus exists both polar realities of increased persecution and discrimination against the Roma and the achievement of certain rights and positive recognition. How to prevent the former and promote the later remains the project of the Roma and all those involved in human rights advocacy. As proponents of Romani rights and positive inter-group relations, several Partners Centers have been working hard to promote tolerance and better conditions for the Roma. ►

Negotiating a Future of Tolerance: The Role of Partners

Partners-Czech

THE TOWN OF MOST, an industrial center for the production of steel, chemical and ceramics, is a prime example of the escalation of conflict between the Roma and ethnic Czech populations. Despite the region's economic viability, majority-minority tensions have isolated Roma residents in economically depressed pockets without equal access to social services or educational and employment opportunities. In addition, a lack of trust and cooperation between Roma and other town residents, make these issues nearly impossible to resolve.

In 1997, Partners-Czech organized a series of round tables in Most aimed at improving the social and economic status of Roma living in the impoverished and isolated neighborhood of Chánov. Center staff initiated the project by bringing together Roma citizens from Chánov and social workers, city officials, teachers, police officers, school district administrators from various neighborhoods in Most to identify areas of highest concern within the community and to commit to building peaceful coexistence. The ethnic Czech participants named public security as a chief concern, while the Roma participants discussed lack of housing and unemployment as the most serious issues.

Partners-Czech then trained the group in effective communication and conflict management skills. Through trust- and relationship-building activities, the training served as a forum by which Czechs and Romas began to understand cultural differences that have for long perpetuated and aggravated tensions. For instance, ethnic Czechs learned that within the Roma community codes of behavior dictate that one must approach the head of an extended family in order to negotiate an agreement or resolve a dispute with

any particular member of that family. The Czechs also learned that the reason Roma did not take advantage of job training programs and other resources is because they had no prior knowledge that these services existed.

Once the group began to develop mutual understanding and constructive ways of communicating, Partners-Czech brought them together in several round tables to discuss concrete ways to mitigate ethnic clashes and improve the living standards of Roma. The sessions were very productive and generated several programs. Roma residents organized a neighborhood system in Chánov to remove large volumes of trash and beautify the block by planting trees. In addition, tenants who had defaulted on rent agreed on timely calendar payments that matched the distribution of welfare checks. In turn, local authorities promised to prevent interruption in water and electricity services. Moreover, the Most municipality employed Roma to repair and maintain a number of old, abandoned buildings in Chánov, providing the basis for a sustainable employment program. And finally the Chánov community founded a Romany civic association to monitor the implementation of these resolutions.

The genuine efforts of the Mayor's office, the Labor office, the Social Affairs Department, local police, and primary schools were crucial in transforming community attitudes toward Roma and ensuring the implementation of a neighborhood improvement programs. The local police force was especially influential in instating better security systems and deploying addition patrols to allay fears of violence and mistrust while the programs took hold.

The program was so successful that Partners-Czech arranged for Roma residents of Chánov to meet with Romas from Pisek and Ústí nad Labem to relate their experiences and encourage these communities to undertake similar efforts. Chánov Roma explained that once they assumed responsibility for basic things like the neighborhood's appearance and payment on apartment rentals, the local government, police officers and school officials were much more likely to treat them with respect and assist them in other areas. Now, coping with larger problems, such as poor education standards and police prejudice, is not nearly as difficult and out of reach as it once was. ▲



Partners-Czech's book against racism



Eva Sisková, trainer for Partners-Czech Republic, and Romani town-hall assistant engaged in conversation

Partners-Romania

TRADITIONALLY, THE ROMA IN GIURGIU, Romania are skilled craftsmen and masons, but these days Roma-run construction companies are unable to compete against larger Romanian construction firms for the few existing tenders in Romania's weak economy. And, the Roma hasten to add, they cannot afford to pay the bribes that are frequently demanded. Low educational levels within the Roma community make it difficult to find jobs in other sectors and, as a result, the Roma unemployment rate is roughly twice that among other Giurgiu residents. Many Roma families survive only with the assistance of their neighbors and state welfare, and many feel they do not have a voice in the decisions that affect them.

Fortunately, several actors in Giurgiu want to stop the deteriorating situation of the Roma. Since last November, the Partners Foundation for Local Development (PFLD) has helped a group of local and regional government officials and Roma representatives explore creative ways to overcome such challenges. The project began when PFLD facilitated a meeting of 20 city hall and council officials, police, county officials, Roma community representatives and local media to discuss opportunities and obstacles to cooperation between the majority and minority communities. The participants recognized many possibilities for collaboration and decided to form a permanent Working Group committed to finding new solutions to old problems.

Partners-Hungary

THE ROMA OF TISZAVASVARI (a town in the Northeast of Hungary) are split into two separate communities: the Romungro and the Olah. The two groups live on opposite sides of town and rarely interact with one another or with the larger Hungarian community. The socio-economic situation of the two Roma groups is quite disparate. While the Romungro enjoy a standard of living similar to the Hungarian community, the Olah live in conditions of abject poverty, which include overcrowding, a lack of running water and adequate heating systems, unsanitary neighborhood conditions, and 100% unemployment.

As crime rates and ethnic tension and violence rose, Partners-Hungary was contacted to conduct cooperative planning sessions to resolve some of these problems. Soon after Partners began work in Tiszavasvari, a scandal broke out that received national media attention. A local school held a separate graduation ceremony for 17 Olah children and it soon emerged that Roma children were generally segregated from Hungarian children in the school and prevented from using certain facilities. The scandal led urgency to the need to continue with cooperative planning processes between Romungro, Olah, and Hungarians.

Partners-Hungary intensified its involvement in Tiszavasvari by conducting trainings or cooperative planning meetings monthly. Partners, through its cooperative planning processes, was largely credited for the election of a Roma Minority Self-Government (RMSG—a political arm of the Roma community) in 1998. However, four of the five-member RMSG were Romungro while only one was Olah in a community where the Olah outnumber the



With funding from The Netherland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Matra Program, PFLD has continued to work with the group, helping members learn how to prioritize goals and articulate potential solutions rather than simply stating problems. The group has decided to focus on creating jobs (particularly in construction), locating funding for a small agricultural project, improving education and social services in the Roma community, and building the capacity of local Roma groups.

The Democratic Roma Association (DRA), one of several local Roma organizations, represents the Roma community in this process. The DRA provides economic and social support to its members in times of need, but lacks the capacity to organize and advocate more proactively for the community. The project thus presents an opportunity for the Roma to learn how to organize on behalf of their community, while forging partnerships with local government. PFLD is also trying to recruit other local Roma organizations to the Working Group, in order to strengthen cooperative relations within the Roma community. With this project, the Working Group members hope to attract much needed attention and resources to the plight of the Roma community and to use their collective voice to set a positive example for majority-minority relations across Romania. ▲

Romungro 2:1. This outcome was largely due to the fact that the two Roma groups could not agree on a unified platform and thus, many non-Roma voted to ensure the election of the Romungro candidates. The importance of Romungro-Olah cooperation in addition to Roma-Hungarian cooperation and the need to focus on the specific problems of the Olah community were made evident to Partners' staff and manifested in its future work.

With the aid of Partners, Olah Roma have made additional gains. With a focus on agricultural issues and job creation, including a long-term goat breeding project facilitated by Partners, more Olah representatives are participating in the community planning project and an Olah representative was brought on to advise the RMSG. In the Olah neighborhood, a new school is being built, Olah children receive three full meals a day at school, the main road through the neighborhood was improved, and public hygiene measures to exterminate rats, vaccinate wild dogs, and provide garbage service and water taps were taken. A new street of 30-40 houses was built in the Olah neighborhood and there is now significantly less violence between Olah and Hungarians. Also important, relations between the Romungro and Olah communities have somewhat improved through recreational activities and informal contact. Most recently, Partners worked with a local NGO to start a community planning program for the Olah neighborhood which garnered much Olah support.

These successes do not indicate that there is still not much work to be done in Tiszavasvari, but show the applicability of Partners' methods to handle disputes and to help Roma groups gain skills to advocate for themselves. ▲

Empowering Women at a Critical Juncture

IT SEEMS LIKE MUCH OF THE NEWS out of the Caucasus recently has been bad: war in Chechnya, alleged vote rigging in Georgia, continued tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In fact, cooperation at the grassroots level is spreading across the region. In the South Caucasus, as in so many other places across the world, women are a driving force behind such peaceful change. However, they have had less success achieving political and economic power and advocating for their own needs. This is a result of both traditional cultures and weak leadership, organizational, and networking skills. Women leaders and women's groups are at a critical juncture today—they must work together to change the attitudes and policies that do not recognize women's accomplishments, contributions, and needs.

To help women accomplish these goals, Partners-Georgia is managing an 18-month South Caucasus Women's Leadership and Networking Program. With funding from the US Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (formerly USIA), and the Heinrich Böll Foundation (Germany), a group of 18 women leaders from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are participating in a series of trainings-for-trainers to build their leadership, communication, and organizational talents. The women then return to their home communities to train other women in these same skills. The program thus improves women's leaders' and groups' abilities to achieve their goals through strengthened communication, negotiation, collaboration, and leadership. The program will culminate in the formation of a South Caucasus Women's Leadership Network in which the participants will continue to work together to promote women's participation in all areas of social, economic, and political life across the region.

The program has already shown results. To date, participants have trained over 2,500 women in community groups, NGOs, business-

es, local government institutions, and the media, as well as students and youth leaders, internally-displaced persons and refugees, teachers, doctors, and women in prison.

Several of the Georgian participants cooperated to develop training programs for NGOs, internally displaced women, and other groups in Tskhinvali, a town in the secessionist region of South Ossetia. As a result, several Ossetian NGOs developed and submitted new proposals to funders; and the IDP women shared the lessons and exercises they had learned with their neighbors, thus igniting strong demand for further trainings in their community.

Another participant from Azerbaijan worked with women refugees from Chechnya who had no idea how to organize and advocate for them-



Participants of the South Caucasus Women's Leadership and Networking Program

selves. Following the trainings, the women formed an organization, wrote a statute and program, and began the legal registration process. Membership in their organization has since grown from 300 to 1000 women.

A third participant in Armenia gathered a group of housewives and taught them new ways to organize themselves around community issues, such as childcare. The women went on to create the "Women's Club of the Neighborhood," in which they meet regularly to discuss common problems. The trainer summarized the importance of this process, "... the program made them realize they could make some changes in their lives, and that they are not alone in this society, which is still new to them." ▲

Partners-Baltic provided training programs in team building, mediation and volunteer management to the Vilnius University Legal Clinic, while in exchange the Legal Clinic will provide consultation to Partners-Baltic on legislation and public policy, as well as legal issues and due process for the Center's mediation program.

Poland

Through the USAID-sponsored Local Government Partnership Program, Partners-Poland has worked with the mayor, city council, school principals and others involved in the economic, cultural and civic life of the gmina of Dukla to enhance its capacity to address citizen concerns.

The Center developed and implemented multiple programs addressing Poland's accession into the European Union. Center trainers provided introductory negotiation skills to national government employees who will negotiate environmental standards with the EU, and also began a program for NGO leaders on how to facilitate an effective meeting.

Partners-Poland conducted a conference, "How to Introduce Family Mediation to Poland?" that was well-attended by future mediators, family counselors, therapists, lawyers, judges and representatives of the Ministry of Justice. The conference included a comparison of family mediation systems in different countries, and received national press coverage from "Rzeczpospolita" (Republic).

Romania

Partners-Romania coordinated the development of two training manuals on "Building Bridges Between Local Government and Citizens to Work More Effectively Together" for use by the CEE regional network of training institutions, as well as for the wider use of UNCHS Habitat training programs. ►

Partners-Romania promoted mediation as an alternative dispute resolution through 3 training programs for law students, attorneys, judges, legal representatives and NGOs that were realized through partnerships with the Open Society Foundation, the Law University, the Ministry of Justice and the American Bar Association.

Chemonics, under a USAID contract, enlisted Partners-Romania's expertise to train inspectors from Romanian Environmental Protection Agencies in designing and conducting programs to disseminate new environmental guidelines and strategies.

Slovakia

Center trainers received high marks for their component of a training program for deputies of Slovakian Parliament, organized by the National Democratic Institute.

Partners-Slovakia proudly received accreditation from the Slovakian Ministry of Education, recognizing the Center's training programs as higher and continuing education credit for government employees throughout the country.

"Citizen and Democracy" a primer for high school teachers, was written by Partners-Slovakia's staff and was recently published. The book is a supplement to Citizen and Democracy NGO, written by staff member Jano Hrubala.

United States

Partners-US has been working with St John's Educational Thresholds Center, a youth group in San Francisco's Mission neighborhood, to infuse their youth leadership programs with the negotiation, facilitation, and problem solving abilities that give youth practical skills for their successful civic engagement. Other organizations from throughout the country are now seeking Partners' help in developing community youth councils. ▶



Robin Hood Recipes for the 21st Century

OVER THE PAST DECADE, NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe have spearheaded grassroots community development initiatives, educated the public about their rights under new leadership, and served as a constructive outlet for citizen activism.

However, countless NGOs do not survive beyond nascent program phases due to a lack of funds. The international funding community awards grants for specific projects, but donors are unlikely to cover core operational and administrative costs that enable organizations to develop and achieve long-term goals. As laws prevent NGOs from organizing their own profitable ventures, many do not have sufficient resources to continue to pursue their missions past the term of a particular project grant.

The Non-Profit Enterprise and Self-Sustainability Team (NESsT), an NGO based in Santiago, Chile, set out to address this issue by exploring models for the financial sustainability of NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe. NESsT contracted Partners-Slovakia to conduct an extensive research project on the financial independence of NGOs in Slovakia and to recommend solutions to the challenge of long-term sustainability.

Partners-Slovakia staff prepared five case studies that showcase measures NGOs may take to ensure financial stability. In Slovakia, NGOs cited competition over scarce resources as a primary reason for the closure of worthy organiza-

tions. They also stated the withdrawal of many international donors from the region and the lack of clear laws that safeguard the tax exempt status of NGOs as causing additional financial woes.

In response, Partners-Slovakia, along with other NESsT researchers, name several ways for NGOs to generate income that can be reinvested into mission-related activities. Among these are charging fees for consultative services; producing and selling products such as newsletters and books; and developing a membership base which would pay dues in exchange for discounted services or products. The case studies in full are outlined in a book compiled by NESsT, entitled "Profits for Nonprofits: an Assessment of the Challenges in NGO Self-financing."

Partners-Slovakia is simultaneously running a project called "Effective Functioning and Organizational Development of the Third Sector." This forms the basis of the next phases of the NESsT project, currently underway, in which Partners-Slovakia designs and implements intensive trainings and consultations for NGOs on diversifying their financial resources. To date, the Center has trained 12 NGOs to organize income-generating activities, delivered several lectures on NGO business planning, and written a chapter in the *Reader for Advanced NGOs* on developing organizational skills to pursue on-line fundraising, enhance relations with the market sector and strengthen overall financial sustainability. ▲

Youth Transforming Their City

LOMIANKI, A SMALL TOWN outside of Warsaw, struggles with problems stemming from the disintegration of its community. In particular, the youth of Lomianki suffer from a lack of resources. Some of the main problems are: a tremendous lack of recreational centers and events, the overcrowding of schools, and the increasing socio-economic gap between old inhabitants of Lomianki and newcomers.

Partners-Poland, with a grant from the Alfred Jurzykowski Foundation, is implementing a program in Lomianki on cooperative planning and youth problem-solving. Through interviews with city officials such as the mayor, head of police, and the headmaster of one of Lomianki's biggest schools and through interviews with youth activists and youth at risk, Partners identified the most pressing problems for youth in Lomianki.

Partners-Poland presented the findings of their interviews and research in a local committee meeting, which generated a large amount of debate and initiated a cooperative planning process. During seven meetings over five months, the local committee developed a strategy for youth for the city. Parallel to the committee meetings, youth leaders were having their own meetings to organize a youth movement in Lomianki. With enormous success, they organized the First Lomianki Festival of Culture and Entertainment in July, which youth at risk also heavily attended.

Partners-Poland continues to work in Lomianki to build support around the youth strategy, to encourage its implementation by the City Council, and to support the continued growth of the Lomianki Youth Movement. ▲

Strengthening U.S. Communities

SINCE 1999, PARTNERS' NEWEST CENTER, Partners-United States, has been building the capacity of ten organizations throughout the country to use and sustain collaborative planning and problem-solving and other consensus-building skills and processes. The purpose of this work is to enhance the capabilities of organizations, primarily serving diverse and lower-income communities, to address critical social, economic and environmental justice issues. Funded by the Louise and Claude Rosenberg, Jr. Family Foundation, SURDNA Foundation and Philanthropic Ventures Foundation, Partners-U.S. also strives to increase the number of people of color and youth who use the skills of consensus-building in their communities and professionally.

Partners-U.S. offers a program of on-going support to each participating organization, including needs assessment, project design and consultation, skill and process training and opportunities for mentoring and networking. In October 1999, Partners-U.S. kicked off the program with a four-day training for three representatives from each site. Content included an overview of facilitation and problem-solving processes, relevant issues of culture and inclusion and "readiness" factors for each organization to consider in understanding such capacity-building efforts. To date, Partners-U.S. has focused its support on youth programs, health and environmental groups, citizen engagement organizations and community mediation centers.

Work at each site responds to specific local needs. These are a few examples:

With Focus-St Louis, Partners has helped to develop the capacity of that organization's Regional Citizens Network to offer public facilitation to seek and gauge community opinion on significant local and regional issues

In Louisiana, Partners has worked with the Louisiana Health Care Campaign, enhancing the ability of Public Hospital Community Advisory Committees throughout the state to better utilize consensus building and public participation tools to assess community health care needs and respond to community concerns

For Conciliation Forums of Oakland, Partners prepared volunteer mediators to better address complex community disputes through a multicultural collaborative problem solving process

Working with the Colorado People's Environ-



Partners-U.S. and Partners-Argentina staff at the Joint SPIDR/CRENET 2000 Conference in New Mexico. (Left to right: Selina Low, Hilda Gutiérrez Baldoquín, Terry Amsler, Gachi Tapia)

mental and Economic Network, Partners has assisted grassroots organizing efforts to use collaborative visioning and related processes to address issues of Superfund clean up controversies

Work with each of the sites has been exciting and illuminating. It has provided a window into how community members in the U.S. can gain and sustain the capacity to use consensus-building processes to address issues, solve problems and plan for the future together. Our work continues on how to best ensure that multicultural and power dynamics are a central part of our process model. Our experience suggests that collaborative process capacity placed in communities to address real community needs is an important pathway to democratic practice and change. ▲

Lunching With Reno

Hilda Gutiérrez Baldoquín, Associate Director for Partners-United States, attended a Community Dispute Resolution Forum in late March hosted by the Office of Justice Programs in Washington D.C. More than twenty national experts in the field of Alternative Dispute Resolution participated in discussing current trends in the field and explored implications for the future. A highlight of the day was the participation of Attorney General Janet Reno, who joined the Forum after lunch for a very personal exchange and a reiteration that community dispute resolution is of the highest priority for the Department.



Partners-US now assists non-profit and other organizations around the country in developing their capacity to understand and use collaborative planning, problem solving and other consensus building processes. Initial requests for assistance are coming from community mediation programs, youth serving and organizing groups, and health related organizations.

Regional Partnership

The Regional Partnership represented Partners' expertise and experience in the "CEE-SEE Democracy Building Brainstorming Session," co-sponsored by the German Marshall Fund and the Open Society Institute. The session included exploring the most constructive means to improve the work of Central and Eastern European democracy-building NGOs in the Balkans.

Through the support of the National Endowment for Democracy, the Regional Partnership is working with Partners-Baltic to expand Partners' regional expertise in addressing the needs and rights of people with disabilities.

The Regional Partnership represented Partners in a workshop, "Education and Youth Task Force of the Stability Pact," that explored ways that Partners can bring its expertise to this critical component of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

Cross-border Highlights

Trainers from Partners-Baltic joined trainers from Portugal, Sweden, Belgium, France, UK and Germany in developing a training program for international youth teams under the EU Program "Youth for Europe."

Partners-Poland was contracted by the Lviv School for Leaders to train Ukrainian trainers in team development, understanding conflict, negotiations, project planning, public speaking, group dynamics and small group facilitation, and other skills.

At the request of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (Germany), Partners-Slovakia co-conducted a training program on "Political Consultancy and Strategic Planning - Experiences from the Third Sector" for the Foundation's seven regional directors based in Egypt, Singapore, South Africa, India, Hungary, Brazil and Indonesia.

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