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Citizens of Tatabanya, Hungary, renovating an underdeveloped section of the city as part of a Public Employment Program

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT FOSTERS ROMA EMPLOYMENT IN HUNGARY

A once prosperous coalmining city, Tatabanya now faces high unemployment and inter-ethnic tensions. Poverty and crime levels have risen as workers have been driven out of the labor sector due to closed mines. In order to diffuse these escalating tensions, Partners-Hungary, in cooperation with the Hungarian Minority Office and the Ministry of Labor, implemented a unique Public Employment Program to reintegrate unemployed workers back into the workforce. The project was designed to encourage citizen participation in local affairs while working to renovate an underdeveloped section of the city.

Sandor Gesko, Project Manager, describes its aims as fourfold: to involve citizens in the democratic cooperative planning process by including them in discussions with local government; to renovate houses in Mesztelep, a poor region of Tatabanya which is home to many disadvantaged Roma inhabitants; to publicly employ previously unemployed Romas for a 6 month period; and to foster community building for the entire neighborhood.

Cooperative planning meetings were held to select project participants, bringing together a diverse group of local government and social welfare organizations. The group selected 200 citizens to work in 2 groups of 100, for two 6-month periods. Most of the workers selected were Romas, had been unemployed for a lengthy period, and lived in the area chosen for renovation. Due to the collaborative selection process, work teams have been successful and productive, and the Roma workers have begun construction and renovation in Mesztelep.

The second phase of this project focuses on evaluating and addressing workers' concerns about permanent work possibilities. The project group organized a meeting with local government officials and local employers, discussing ways to keep participants employed after the project ends.

The program, evaluated in February by the National Council of Public Employment, was the most successful public employment program in Hungary. The first of its kind, the project successfully found jobs for disadvantaged minorities, fostered communication and cooperation among local organizations, and helped to reduce biases against Roma community members. Partners-Hungary hopes to replicate this project in other communities.

CITIZEN-GOVERNMENT DIALOGUE INITIATED IN POLISH CITY

Partners-Poland is currently conducting a cooperative planning and problem-solving process in Opole-Lubelskie, a city of 10,000 people in Eastern Poland. The goal of the project is to encourage citizens and local government to work together to identify and address issues of local concern.

Funded by the Jurzykowski Foundation, the project began through Partners-Poland's contact with the city's mayor, who demonstrated a strong interest in engaging citizen participation in municipal affairs. Partners-Poland then conducted a survey among the city's elected officials to determine areas of citizen-government cooperation. A group of active and concerned citizens was then identified for participation in the project, followed by an outreach effort in which the Partners team explained to government officials and citizens the benefits of establishing a cooperative dialogue.

Partners-Poland Director Maciej Tanski and trainers Bohdan Roznowski, Katarzyna Czayka-Chelminska and Dariusz Fijolek facilitated several meetings with the citizen-government group, which consisted of citizens, the mayor, city council members, directors of municipal institutions, school officials, entrepreneurs, and media representatives. The Partners team divided the participants into two working groups, each of which was asked to identify an issue of local importance. The first group selected the construction of a new sewage system in an underdeveloped neighborhood; the second group chose the development of a day care facility and youth club for disadvantaged families.

One important outcome of the process was the establishment of the Opole Development and Promotion

Forum (ODPF), a citizens' advocacy group developed by program participants which will serve as a mechanism through which citizens can voice their issues to local government.

Partners-Poland is now in the process of providing communication, negotiation and effective meeting skills training for the participants. These skills will enable the various sectors of Opole-Lubelskie's society to work collaboratively to address the sewage and day care issues, during cooperative planning sessions to be conducted by the Partners team in the coming months.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN - Integrating the Tools for Change

Those who have traveled the "transitioning democracy" world know the truth of Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation, Jan Pronk's words when he states that "peaceful change and development are intrinsically linked."

Peaceful change and development in transitioning democracies are moved forward in part by international assistance which has been mostly in the realm of "first generation" work and funding.

First generation work has generally focused on strengthening civil society through NGO development; enhancing governmental structures through training of judges and parliamentarians; or improving market sectors by strengthening financial institutions. First generation activity promotes discrete time-bound projects with limited indigenous capacity building or sustainability.

These limitations can be overcome through a "second generation" strategy that includes:

- * Integrating indigenous accomplishments within a strategic plan for social and economic change that incorporates government, NGO and cross-sector interests; and

- * Utilizing sophisticated cooperative planning and problem-solving methodologies for institutional and systemic social change.

Second generation strategies call for greater cooperation between NGOs as service providers and local government. This is now seen throughout Central and Eastern Europe and makes up an increasing part of Partners' training and application work. For example, an American consultant trained Partners-Hungary staff in a cooperative planning process that they applied in the City of Nagykanizsa. The tax department and finance committee directors, NGO representatives, local businessmen, and citizens collaborated to design a new municipal taxation system. Meeting several times in a facilitated planning process organized by Partners-Hungary staff, the parties have developed and agreed upon new municipal taxes. Processes such as this utilize democratic decision-making, foster cooperation among several sectors, and build long-term partnerships for local development.

This second generation work requires expertise that generally remains a specialty of American and some European organizations. Funders and international NGOs working with key indigenous leaders ought to be engaged in more long-term cooperative strategic planning. Funders ought to focus American expertise in this area of activity.

Peaceful change and development are intrinsically entwined with cooperation between NGOs, government, and foreign organizations, such as Partners, that have the capacity to build indigenous long-term strategic alliances for social change. "Cooperative integrative change strategies" are the second generation development processes for democracy building in the late-1990's.



Sandra Ceballos, Director of the Teaching Tolerance Program, and Raymond Shonholtz, Partners' President, in Cartagena, Columbia

PARTNERS' PRESIDENT VISITS COLOMBIA

Partners' President, Raymond Shonholtz, delivered a keynote address to 700 Colombian professionals, academics, and university students at the International Symposium on Negotiation and Conflict Resolution in Cartagena, Colombia, on March 23, 1997. Noting the history of violence in one of Latin America's oldest democracies, Shonholtz outlined the diverse domains of conflict management and their application in contemporary democratic societies.

As part of his visit to Colombia, Shonholtz met with the former Colombian Foreign Minister, now head of the National Commission on Reconciliation; the National Ombudsman; the National Commissioner for Human Rights; the leadership of the Colombian Red Cross; and leaders of NGO organizations, academic and funding institutions, and private corporations.



Roma Leaders trained through Partners-Czech Community Leadership Institute

PARTNERS-CZECH CONDUCTS COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE FOR ROMA ACTIVISTS

Roma citizens of the Czech Republic often face social, economic and cultural obstacles that have prevented them from fully exercising their democratic rights in local affairs. Through Partners-Czech's Community Leadership Institute, funded by the Czech Open Society Fund, Roma activists have significantly increased their participation in local affairs and have developed positive, cooperative relationships with their local governments. Twenty-five Roma leaders from five cities were selected to participate in the Institute, based on their demonstrated commitment to resolving local minority-majority issues.

The Institute consisted of nine 2-day residential seminars, conducted between April and October, 1996, in Prague and Rokycany.

The Partners-Czech staff trained participants in a range of conflict resolution skills, including effective communication, mediation, and consensus building. A series of workshops on community project preparation, conducted by a team of professionals including lawyers, activists, social workers, and local government officials followed. Participants received an overview of minority and NGO statutes, and rules and laws for cooperating with local governments. Participants were also trained in fundraising techniques, proposal writing, networking, and outreach techniques.

The "final exam" required participants to apply their new skills within their community and to present the results to the group. One participant from Beroun facilitated a dialogue with a club owner who refused entry to Romas; the result was the owner's reversal of the policy, and the drafting of anti-discrimination policy for club owners throughout the city.

Since participating in the Institute, the Roma activists have achieved concrete results in their communities, including:

* In Kladno, a Roma Advisor position was established at the City Hall.

- * A Romany Cultural Center was established in Most.
- * In Rokycany, the municipal government agreed to support a Roma nursery school.
- * The Pardubice city government agreed to work cooperatively with the local Ethnic Conciliation Commission.
- * The Cultural Union of Romas in Beroun established a close working relationship with City Hall.

Dr. Tatjana Siskova, Partners-Czech's Ethnic Coordinator, sees the Institute as an important step in solidifying majority-minority relations: "Institute graduates managed to open the doors of their City Halls and to create favorable conditions for future work."

Partners-Czech plans to host a roundtable discussion with participants and local government leaders, and hopes to conduct another Institute training in the coming year.

PARTNERS-LITHUANIA TRAINS YOUNG LEADERS IN BELARUS

In a climate which is growing increasingly challenging to NGO activity, a group of young intellectuals and NGO leaders met in Minsk, Belarus, to participate in a young leaders training. The training took place in Minsk on January 31 and February 1, 1997.

The cross-border training was co-conducted by Partners-Lithuania Director Juozas Lakis and National Forum Foundation volunteer Shirley Lundin. It was an exciting event which Lakis describes as "opening the doors from both sides towards new opportunities."

Participants included young university and secondary school teachers and university students from areas throughout Belarus. The attendees were representative of young Belarussian intellectuals, who are oriented towards reformist politics and who are interested in how western systems operate. Participants expressed interest in the work of NGOs in Lithuania and how they operate in a civil society. The first part of the training focused on conflict resolution skills such as team building and effective communication. Next, participants were trained in organizational development and NGO-building skills, covering topics such as recruiting volunteers, developing an organizational image, and fundraising. Lakis is pursuing more cross-border training opportunities and foresees participants using their new skills to help build a thriving NGO community in Belarus.



Partners-Bulgaria's Mediators trained by Allen Snyder (front row, second from the left)

PARTNERS-BULGARIA TEAM MEDIATES PROLONGED COMMUNITY DISPUTE

Winter of 1997 in Bulgaria was marked by soaring inflation, mass protests in Sofia, threats of a general strike, and a severe energy crisis.

Despite these challenges - or perhaps because of them - citizens in Bulgaria are striving to empower themselves to resolve local conflicts. Partners-Bulgaria successfully mediated a neighborhood dispute, marking the first mediation in Sliven, Bulgaria.

Partners-Bulgaria's mediation team has been conducting an intensive educational outreach campaign since Fall 1996. Nevertheless, getting the first disputants to the table was no simple task. "Perhaps the greatest obstacle," according to Partners-Bulgaria Director Antoinette Shishmanova, "was overcoming skepticism and having people understand that our mediation service is neutral, confidential, and trustworthy."

When a resident of Sliven requested Partners-Bulgaria's services to mediate a conflict with a neighbor, Partners immediately contacted the second party to arrange a mediation session. "Convincing the second party that we were not advocates for the first party was not easy," states Shishmanova, "but after a number of individual meetings, we gained trust with the second party, who eventually understood that mediation would give them far greater control over the process and outcomes than litigation."

Further complicating the process was a two-year history of violence between the disputants. Among the challenges was moving the disputants from a revenge mentality to one conducive to expression of personal concerns and mutual interests. The mediation process, in which a team of two trained mediators facilitated a discussion between the disputants, resulted in a signed agreement. This required three separate mediation sessions, several individual caucuses and, above all, patience. "It's easy to be discouraged when one party storms out of the room, or refuses to continue the dialogue," says Shishmanova. "But the bottom line was that both sides wanted a solution, and despite their occasional hostile positioning, they realized it was in their best interests to work things out."

According to Partners-Bulgaria mediator Mitko Marinov, "amidst the cynicism and uncertainty in Bulgaria, mediation can be accepted as an effective means of resolving disputes and preventing violence."

USIP SPONSORS PARTNERS' ACADEMIC PROGRAM

The United States Institute for Peace (USIP) recently awarded Partners for Democratic Change a grant to develop conflict management courses in universities in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Lithuania. In collaboration with Professor Dennis Sandole, of George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution and other academics, Partners will conduct Academic Workshops that will result in the development and teaching of conflict management courses. Ilana Shapiro, Partners' Regional Coordinator, and other American academics will participate in the program as well.

Partners will also develop an informational directory of conflict resolution courses being taught at universities throughout the region. Partners' academic network and the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX) will distribute the directory internationally to individuals and organizations engaged in scholarly research and policy-making activities.

The goal of this academic initiative is to enable academics from participating countries to teach peacemaking and conflict resolution courses at their universities in the coming year, thus strengthening the intellectual foundation for the legitimization of conflict resolution in these transitioning societies. Since 1990, Partners has been working with university academics to develop and teach conflict resolution courses throughout Central and Eastern Europe.



Jan Hrubala, Director of Partners-Slovakia's Mediation Center

FORMER JUDGE INTRODUCES MEDIATION TO SLOVAKIA

Jan Hrubala, a former judge and Vice-President of the National Judges Association, now serves as Director of Partners-Slovakia's Mediation Center. Partners-International interviewed him during a recent trip to the United States.

What is the relationship between the Mediation Center and the judicial system?

We have an informal relationship with the courts in which judges can refer clients to mediation. Judges are required by law to ask disputants if they would like to reach an agreement before the litigation process begins. This has largely been a formality, as no viable out-of-court settlement process existed. Mediation, however, can make this formality a reality. Nevertheless, our relationship with the judicial system remains informal because there is no legislation in Slovakia which recognizes mediation.

How have judges responded to the introduction of mediation?

Judges have been extremely positive about mediation because it gives disputants another means of resolving their conflict. Further, most judges I've spoken with believe that any mutual agreement is better than the best dictated decision. They realize that when the parties control the outcome, the agreement is likely to last.

How would legislation foster the acceptance of mediation?

Legislation which acknowledges mediation would go a long way in legitimizing the process as a trustworthy dispute resolution mechanism. However, a law that requires mediation prior to litigation may actually detract from its effectiveness, as it would negate a key advantage of mediation - the fact that it is a voluntary process.

How does mediation contribute to the development of rule of law in Slovakia?

Any judge will tell you that the court system is overwhelmed in Slovakia. Judges find it difficult to do their jobs with such an overburdened caseload. Mediation can free up the courts so that attention may be given to pending cases. In addition, mediation gives citizens another tool for legally resolving disputes without resorting to coercion or violence; this will ultimately strengthen the rule of law in Slovakia as it places the initial responsibility to resolve differences on the disputing parties without recourse to legal proceedings.

What are the challenges ahead for legitimizing mediation in Slovakia?

We have no tradition of mediation in Slovakia, so education of the judiciary and public on the benefits of mediation is a key priority. In the absence of a formal law, we must legitimate mediation by example - by successfully mediating cases. As of now, our cases have been resolved to the disputants'satisfaction, which will help us educate citizens and judges alike to the value of mediation.



Partners-Czech and Partners-Slovakia Mediation Center Staff with Partners-Czech Director Dana Rabinakova (seated)

PARTNERS' HIGHLIGHTS

Bulgaria

Members of the PDC-Bulgaria Ethnic Commission and the Sliven Community Dialogue Group held an organizational meeting with municipality officials, police officers, NGO representatives, and citizens which was sponsored by the Institute for Sustainable Communities and the USAID Democracy Network. Trainers Ventseslav Pantchev, Mitko Marinov, Anna Marinova, Reneta Veleva, Maya Grekova, and Plamen Makariev facilitated the meeting. The Ethnic Commission also held a training for new members in community mediation. Nikolai Gantchev and Tanya Krasteva trained business students in Communications Skills and Self-Image Building. Annie Marinova and Renata Veleva also conducted a Communication Skills training at the Kozlodui Nuclear Power Station.

Czech Republic

Director Dana Rabinakova and trainer Pavel Baboucek performed a series of SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats) analyses for 7 different NGOs in the Czech Republic, as part of a Capacity Building Workshop Series, in cooperation with the Foundation for a Civil Society. In December, the Center completed the final training of a three-year USIS sponsored project, "Democracy Development in the Educational System in the Czech Republic," which focused on work in 7 regions of the Czech Republic. As a part of this project, Conflict - The Spice of Life, a new textbook, was published for the Czech high school educational system. The Center is working with Partners-Slovakia to develop a similar textbook.

Georgia

Partners' new Center in Tbilisi has set up its office and is getting ready to conduct its first training with

Georgian Parliamentarians this spring. The Center is also researching training opportunities in other sectors. In February, Director Vano Matchavariani was part of a delegation that accompanied the Chairman of the Georgian Parliament, Zurab Zhvania. During the delegation's visit to the US, they met with representatives of the World Bank, the State Department, and other governmental organizations.

Hungary

In Kiskunhalas, Istvan Herbai trained community leaders in coexistence and cooperation between the Hungarian and Roma population, as part of a cooperative planning project. The group is discussing social employment problems and brainstorming possible solutions. Another Roma-Hungarian cooperative planning project was initiated in Tiszavasvari. Sandor Gesko conducted a training in Communication, Negotiation, Biases and Tolerance for police chiefs and Roma leaders in Salgobanya. This project is partially funded by the Hungarian National Police Headquarters. Director Kinga Goncz traveled to Japan, to film part of a TV series on "Japan through a Hungarian's eyes," a project funded by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation.

Lithuania

Director Juozas Lakis and trainer Roma Pivoriene conducted Team Building and Facilitation trainings for NGO activists in municipalities throughout Lithuania. This project, "Promoting the Skills and Capacities of NGOs," is funded by the USAID Democracy Network Program. Lakis also conducted a series of lectures on Inter-Personal Conflict Resolution for university students under the project "Strengthening Democratic Processes in Lithuania," funded by the US Embassy in Lithuania. Trainer Jurate Tamosaityte visited Estonia to attend a seminar for NGOs from the Baltic States. The Center recently published several brochures, including: "Majority and Minorities in Multinational Society" and "School Community: Through Conflict Towards Cooperation." Both of these publications will be distributed to university and secondary school teachers and students.

Poland

Under a grant from the Ford Foundation, Director Maciej Tanski and trainer Ilona Ilowiecka held a workshop for female NGO activists on creating a positive image for women's organizations in Poland. Trainers Katarzyna Czayka-Chelminska and Dariusz Fijolek held a training for NGOs sponsored by the School for Young Civic and Political Leaders. In addition, Iwona Langer-Kowalewska and Bohdan Roznowski led Negotiation Skills trainings for the School. Partners-Poland also trained a group of Polish and German elected officials in Cooperation, Public Relations, and Presentation skills.

Slovak Republic

"Public Participation in Building Democracy in Slovakia," a project funded by the Pew Charitable Trust, was initiated by Director Dusan Ondrusek and trainer Maja Zelenakova in three Slovak towns and aims to foster community collaboration over ethnic and social conflicts during a two-year period. In Osrblic, a village near the Czech-Slovak border, a transnational training was held for Czech and Slovak community activists, conducted by Zelenakova and Gabriel Bianchi. Ondrusek led a training in Coalition Building for 26 Estonian NGO leaders. A "think-tank" workshop was held for 40 NGO leaders to assess the needs of Slovak NGOs, the results of which are scheduled for publication. Jana Pruzinska and Zuzana Simkova are coordinating a project, funded by PHARE, to assess the long-term needs of Slovak social workers. Ales Bednarik, Katarina Karaszova, Hela Grofova, and Zuzka Simkova led four project-design trainings for

Roma leaders. In Banska Bystrica, Bianchi and Vladimir Labath held a training for city police officers on dispute resolution and constructive cooperation with citizens.

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