

Civil Society Receives Criticism. Deservedly?

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JULY 12 - PRISHTINA. The Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED) publicly released their report, "A Changing Society, A Changing Civil Society: Kosovo's NGO Sector after the War" at ATRC. The report raised the same issues that have been raised time and time again regarding nongovernmental organizations' (NGOs) public image. However, few new solutions were mentioned.

After working directly with NGOs and becoming experts on such issues, ATRC and its partner the Foundation for Democratic Initiatives (FDI) feel that one solution is long term investment in civil society, which will enable NGOs to develop into sustainable agents of change. Through the Kosovo NGO Advocacy Project (KNAP), we have attempted to do this by providing organizational and advocacy training to NGOs and helping them to elevate their public image.

A key indicator that NGOs are publicly acknowledged as agents of civic society will be when they begin to receive domestic funding (which is partially dependant on a semi-developed economy).

A few NGOs have done this. They have also been very effective because not only do they have the right issues in mind, but they have also gained public support for their initiatives. Some of their stories are told in the following



Citizens Want to Know:

Do you make more than €250 a month? Does your NGO drive a jeep? What concrete results can you show from your roundtables and conferences?

pages as case studies.

Yet, as we have noted numerous times, the reality is that most NGOs are created as a job opportunity rather than a civil responsibility. Citizens are not slow to see this, which could explain why they are slow to support NGOs, especially financially.

"It's all in the approach. People who role up in four-wheel drive vehicles won't hear the community's real problems. They need to build a trusting relationship before people will communicate the truth." - local activist

"Many Kosovars associate the name NGO with small groups of individuals driving a jeep and carrying home a fat paycheck, spending most of their time chasing donors whose funds they embezzle by organizing largely meaningless trainings, conferences and roundtables," the report's author Besnik Pula describes rather accurately.

Ironically, most NGOs spend hours (if not publicly in pointless conferences, then in private over cappuccinos

with friends) hypocritically criticizing political parties and other NGOs for being unprofessional and not interacting with citizens. They rarely look in the mirror to discover that they are in a coffee shop or conference room rather than out developing a relationship with citizens to discover real community needs.

As NGOs sip coffee and criticize each other, we are quickly losing support from the public, who we will soon rely on for support. Meaning, currently we can take advantage of the situation where government officials lack experience and expertise in order to pass legislation. However, to advocate effectively in the future, NGOs will need to cooperate both with each other and with citizens to gain the necessary financial and human backing to push through laws and regulations.

As Xhemë Shehu, the Director of New Era in Deçan said, "Advocacy campaign successes so far were accomplished based on government weaknesses rather than on our strengths. Now we need to engage more citizens to really effect change".

Through this issue of "The Advocate," we seek to address Mr. Shehu's comment and the KIPRED report's second finding that "the direct impact of civil society on the policy process is still rather weak" by providing concrete examples of effective advocacy. ■

Key Critiques in the KIPRED Report

- Most NGOs lack internal organization, expertise and professionalism;
- Many pin the entire authority and reputation on a single individual [Director];
- There may have been a squandering of funds on relatively irrelevant and low-impact projects;
- NGOs form to take advantage of funding opportunities, regardless of the usefulness or effectiveness of the programs they implement [...They] tend to be organized towards the provision of services (such as week-long training programs) as opposed to lobbying for women's rights or seeking greater political representation.

Successful NGO Advocacy Campaigns

We asked NGO activists throughout Kosovo what the most successful advocacy campaigns were. They mentioned the following:

Freedom of Information: with expertise from the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and backing from Article 19, a coalition of NGOs cooperated to successfully pass Freedom of Information legislation. Through the process, they also built NGOs' credibility among legislators.

Handikos: united citizens throughout Kosovo to successfully advocate for wheelchair accessible ramps outside public buildings.

Kosovo Group for Local and Regional Initiatives: studied international cases, worked with experts, cooperated with a NGO coalition and will involve the community through a door-to-door information campaign to advocate for applying the referendum mechanism for decision-making in Prizren municipality.

Forum of NGOs from Gjakova: a coalition of NGOs cooperated in drafting a regulation on implementing clauses from the Gjakova municipal statute on public consultation and participation.

New Era in Deçan: following the Forum of NGOs' methodology, successfully drafted a regulation for implementing Deçan's municipal statute on public participation.

Association of Independent Intellectuals in Deçan: worked closely with institutions and successfully advocated to adopt a regulation on making proper scrap metal deposit sites.

Vision Towards the Future: drafted a development strategy for Shtime municipality. They actively sought citizens' input for the strategy through public debates. They also involved many actors, including local governing institutions, unions and labor syndicates.

Citizen's Union Brings Regulation to the Central Level

Peja's Board of Directors and the Committee for Policy and Budget have approved a regulation against smoking in public places drafted by the Citizen's Union of Peja, a project funded by FDI. The local assembly agreed to pass some of the regulation soon. However, parts of the regulation were outside the assembly's competencies.

The local government has control over smoking in schools, hospitals and public institutions but not over restaurants, transportation and other public places. These areas are under the competency of the central government, so the Citizen's Union joined a working group to establish a regulation at the central level, too. The group hopes to influence decision-makers to include parts left out

of the local regulation in the central regulation.

Their methodology included 1) drafting a questionnaire and getting feedback from the community; 2) holding roundtables with citizens and government representatives; 3) compiling an expert's group to draft the regulation; and 4) involving the media in a public education campaign.

What is successful about their methodology?

The Citizen's Union asked citizens their opinion and provided an opportunity for citizens to become involved in decision-making, in avenues other than through a political party. Also, when they encountered problems pass-



The Citizen's Union has successfully gained smokers' and non-smokers' support for a regulation against smoking in public places.

ing all of their regulation locally, they advocated centrally.

How could they have improved their campaign?

1) Rather than depending on journalists' work alone, written their own articles about the issue; 2) formed a concrete strategy for implementing the new regulation; 3) mobilized more citizens, especially students, to support them in their campaign. ■

Top Ten Weaknesses among Kosovar NGOs

We asked NGO activists throughout Kosovo what they thought NGOs' weaknesses were, and this is what they said:

1 Donor-driven. Many NGOs run after money for projects rather than choosing projects that follow their organization's mission.

2 Short-term thinking. As NGOs get caught up implementing their current projects, they often neglect to think about their future. This includes devising a strategic plan that works towards the organization's mission and goals and is not based solely on donors or projects.

3 Internal organization. Many NGOs need to re-evaluate their missions, visions and policy manuals to make sure that these fit their work and are not just copy and pasted from other

organizations' materials.

4 Proposal focused. Many NGOs spend more time writing their project than actually implementing it.

5 Unfinished business. NGOs often give up too easily when encountering problems, rather than trying to solve the problem and finish what they started.

6 Fear. Most NGOs are afraid of addressing big issues like corruption in an effective manner (e.g. writing articles in the newspaper that name specific individuals and their involvement in corrupt activities versus posters or less effective methods).

7 Show-offs. Really active NGOs are seldom in the media and those that are more donor-driven with large budgets are often in the media, but show few real results.

8 Teamwork. Many NGOs

work more as individuals both internally and externally. **9 Laziness.** Effective advocacy takes a lot of effort, including properly researching the issue and potential solutions, gaining public support, advocating in the government, overcoming unexpected problems, finishing what we start even if the budget runs out, and making sure that regulations are implemented after they are passed.

10 Re-assessment and uniqueness. Civil society has the tendency to over-assess. For example, how many papers have been written on what led to the March events? We could still be assessing what happened when it happens again, since few NGOs have acted to implement the recommendations provided in previous reports. ■

Do you know of other successful NGO advocacy campaigns? Do you know of NGO Advocacy Campaigns could have been done better? Write to us and tell us these stories. We'll include the information (anonymously if you want) in our next issue - let's work together to hold NGOs accountable to higher standards and to improve our public image: info@advocacy-center.org.

Methodological Breakdown: What Motrat Qiriazhi Did

- 1 Detected a problem
- 2 Discussed it with citizens to learn more and identify citizens' wants
- 3 With citizen involvement, built a case to advocate
- 4 Advocated with citizens' support
- 5 Showed the need for funds to local community members and to the diaspora to raise funds
- 6 Built the school

Seven Steps to Successful Advocacy

1. **Issue:** the problem that requires a policy action.
2. **Goal & Objective:** the goal is a specific, measurable, realistic statement of the general result you want to achieve. Objectives are the incremental steps towards achieving the goal.
3. **Target Audience:** The policy makers you are trying to influence to support your issue (e.g. parliamentarians, local officials, ministry officials)
4. **Message Development:** creation and distribution of message.
5. **Communication Channels:** television, radio, press conferences, one-on-one meetings, roundtables, hearings, debates, fliers, etc.
6. **Building Support:** building alliances with other groups, organizations or individuals who are committed to supporting your issue. This includes building a relationship with citizens as well as with the government. Whether this relationship is formal or informal, the influence and mutual benefit is the most important part.
7. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** of your advocacy campaign. What results can you show the public? ■

Case Study for Community-Based Advocacy Methods: How Citizens Successfully Advocated for a School

In 1995, citizens cooperated in community-based "advocacy" to open the first high school in the rural region of Has.

When Motrat Qiriazhi ("Sisters Qiriazhi"), a local non-governmental organization (NGO) began working with women in the Has region, they found that few women had access to a high school education. They organized meetings with the community to find out why.

Community members explained that they did not want their daughters to attend school in Prizren due to security concerns. Representatives from Motrat Qiriazhi suggested bringing the school to the citizens instead.

They began their advocacy work by organizing individual and group meetings to collect information regarding how many people could not access education, especially women. They took this information to the Kosovar Ministry of Education and requested permission to build a school. After a few months advocating, the ministry finally gave the community permission.

Since the government could not provide any funds to build, the community began fundraising both locally and internationally. They went throughout Europe to areas where the diaspora



Motrat Qiriazhi worked with citizens in 1995 to advocate and raise funds for a school in Gjonaj village.

was located, organizing meetings to explain why they needed a school. Within a few months, they raised enough money to build.

With a limited budget and without a big donor, Motrat Qiriazhi worked with local people for community-based advocacy. Rather than getting money to do advocacy work, the community gathered funds after it identified and publicly presented its issue.

If the issue is important, money comes. However, without citizens' support, advocacy campaigns will lose their effectiveness in the near future.

As donors exit Kosovo, NGOs will need to work more closely with the community to become sustainable. The community can provide support for effective advocacy campaigns as well as contribute monetarily to campaigns addressing issues that are important to them. ■

How NGOs Can Cut Advocacy Costs

Two activists from Motrat Qiriazhi provided some examples of other ways to cut the cost of advocacy campaigns. Here are their hints:

- **Get on TV for Less:** Rather than saying "we want to do a show, how much?", say "we are going to do an advocacy project to help the community. We would like to do it through your station because we know that you care for the development of your community. At the same time, we can offer you this amount and help you, too." In this way, you can choose a lower price and simultaneously make it your campaign more of a community-based project by involving the media in "co-advocacy".
- **Radio for Free:** Go the radio station and explain that you are doing a project in the community's benefit. Tell them you are also filling their hours. While they should pay you, you could agree to do it for free.
- **Roundtables and Meetings:** If you are a community based NGO, form a community council, involving both men and women. With the council, identify the community's key needs. Then, discuss the need with the whole community, gain their support and advocate for the issue together. Speaking directly with community members better explains your message than posters or fliers, and it is less expensive.

How Can We Hold Ourselves Accountable?

For many NGOs, donors' perception is more important than citizens', as their main focus is funding rather than community concerns.

However, this approach is backwards. Before one can formulate a concrete fundraising strategy, one must first set goals and form a strategic plan as an organization. Once a NGO identifies the community's real needs and focuses on concrete issues, funding will come.

This approach is increasingly important. As big international donors leave,

NGOs will need to depend more and more on locals and the diaspora for donations. In the past, the diaspora supported community initiatives and was especially responsive to transparent projects that show concrete results.

Moving forward, NGOs will need to address real issues in order to get funding from the community and diaspora. In addition, they will need to demonstrate transparency and high standards in order to receive funds from locals and

the diaspora.

One way to do this is by following a Code of Conduct. A code of conduct is like a regulation, in which an umbrella of NGOs chooses to follow a set of standards and regulates itself to gain trust from governmental institutions and the people. A work group has already formed to start drafting a Code of Conduct for NGOs in Kosovo. To learn more about the code of conduct or to contribute to its drafting, please contact ATRC at info@advocacy-center.org. ■

ATRC Holds Second Annual Training Week

July 14-17. Prishtina. ATRC organized their second Kosovar NGO Training Week this year, targeting mainly NGOs that are potential Kosovo NGO Advocacy Project (KNAP) grantees. The training week combined three different trainings.

First, "Successful Steps for an Advocacy Campaign" held July 14-15 focused on issues, such as: what is advocacy and public policy; steps in the advocacy process; and, building networks and an implementation plan for an advocacy campaign.

Second, "NGO Management" held on 16 July focused on issues related to NGO structure; the importance of strategic planning; fundraising; and, project design.

Third, "Gender Awareness" held on 17 July focused on issues of gender and sex; gender needs; and, gender mainstreaming in organizations and/or advocacy campaigns.

Forty NGO leaders, members, volunteers and university students from various regions of Kosovo attended these workshops. They received a clear understanding and sound basic skills for advocacy work. In these trainings par-



Mentor Thaqi led a training on "Successful Steps for an Advocacy Campaign" at ATRC on July 15.

ticipants also developed concrete ideas on advocacy efforts that they could undertake to benefit their community. After completing these trainings, most NGOs apply for funds at the Foundation for Democratic Initiatives.

ATRC will be organizing a similar training week in September 2004. ■

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Did you notice some changes in this issue of "The Advocate"? Please share your thoughts on what you like and what you'd like to see improved by writing to info@advocacy-center.org.

Guest Article: Reprinted from *Kosova Sot* and *Epoka e Re*, July 16

Melihate Tërmkolli Was Rude to Women

By the KWN Board

On Wednesday, July 15, representatives from the Kosova Women's Network (KWN) met with women members of parliament. Most parliamentary groups were represented. In this meeting, KWN representatives presented ideas for continuing their "Women Propose" campaign, which will serve to support women candidates during the electoral campaign for [Kosovo's] general elections this October. Women parliamentarians gave suggestions for the campaign as well as for other legal and public education initiatives.

This meeting is part of the growing collaboration between women in politics and those from civil society. The meeting was organized with support from the Fridrih Ebert Stiftung office in Prishtina.

Why this article?

Rather than waiting for the media to write a story, KWN took the initiative to write and publish this article. The article itself does two things. First, it tells the public about KWN's work, which supports a positive public image and shares information about KWN's project. Second, the article openly criticizes, by name, a politician unwilling to cooperate, which can negatively affect the party's votes in the coming election and can pressure the party to listen more to women's concerns. Following this issue of "The Advocate", which discusses ways to strengthen our advocacy, this demonstrates one form of advocacy: article-writing.

Unfortunately, women parliamentarians from Kosovo Democratic League (LDK) [the party currently holding the majority of seats] did not participate in this meeting. However, Ms. Melihate Tërmkolli, Head of the LDK Women Forum and Chair of the Parliamentary Commission for Gender Equality made a scene outside the meeting room before the meeting. She publicly demonstrated a deep lack of respect and courtesy towards KWN representatives.

Such attitudes undermine efforts to achieve gender equality in Kosovo, which is a goal under the Parliamentary Commission for Gender Equality's mandate. Moreover, her attitude demonstrates a misunderstanding of the important role civil society has in building Kosovo's democratic institutions.

KWN is a network comprised of more than 50

women's NGOs from all of Kosovo's regions. The network protects and supports women's and girls' rights and interests throughout Kosovo, regardless of religion, political affiliation, age, education level, sexual orientation and ability. KWN leadership is constituted of eminent women's rights activists from Kosovo who are recognized in Kosovo and internationally.

Tërmkolli is known as a person who has never publicly demonstrated good behavior. For example, during a LDK branch Assembly in Lipjan, Ms. Tërmkolli threatened and insulted one of the municipality's first activists from LDK. Since her reelection as Chair of LDK Women Forum, she has performed in an authoritarian manner. Reaction articles were written on these events as well. ■