

PEOPLE'S VOICE PROJECT: UKRAINE*

I. Abstract

The World Bank–funded People's Voice Project (PVP) was initiated in March 1999 as a pilot project in four Ukrainian cities, with the objective of improving the quality of public services through public participation. The project intended to induce integrity in government functioning and moderate the high level of corruption in governance that had led to poor service delivery. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the form of citizens' groups conducted surveys, voiced demands, held discussions with public officials, and monitored the steps taken by the government toward enhancing service delivery. Capacity-building exercises were conducted for both the public officials and the NGOs so that they could work together effectively toward improving service delivery.

Citizen engagement mechanisms such as conferences, public hearings, media campaigns, and report cards empowered citizens to be a part of the project proceedings and thereby gain easy access to project-related information.¹ These mechanisms also helped to induce transparency and promote accountability in government operations.

Twelve policy groups that were formed as a part of the capacity-building exercises for the public officials are in the process of developing policy documents in areas such as strategic planning, budgeting, human resource planning, and transportation. Initiatives such as the Education Reform Program, Communal Housing Program, and a gender audit have commenced in the pilot cities of the project. It may be too early to ascertain the impact of the project in terms of building integrity and reducing corruption.

II. Background

In August 1991, when Ukraine declared its independence from Russia, the hope was that political freedom and economic growth would follow soon. Instead, corruption, characterized by misuse of funds and lack of transparency in government operations, became rampant in post-Soviet countries and Ukraine was no exception. Anticorruption campaigns and initiatives undertaken in the country were short lived. In 1997, a National Integrity Survey was conducted jointly by the Ministry of Justice and the World Bank. The survey results highlighted citizens' perceptions of the low quality of services, lack of integrity, and high level of corruption among the government officials. The survey revealed that 93 percent of the respondents had never filed a complaint because of their belief that no positive action would ensue. A strong need was felt to develop a mechanism that would involve citizens in influencing policymaking and its evaluation. This would keep a moral check on the practices of government officials, and in turn would enhance the quality of public services.

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¹ Citizen "report cards" are public accountability mechanisms based on surveys of citizens about the performance and quality of government services. They allow citizens to monitor state performance and provide quantitative data from the perspective of public services users that can aid in the improvement of services.

The People's Voice Project was initiated in March 1999 as a three-year pilot project with the objective of improving government functioning through public participation. The project was funded by the World Bank and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and implemented by the International Center for Policy Studies.² The project made an attempt to bring together both the demand and supply sides of reform, that is, citizens' groups and local officials.

The selection of pilot cities for the project was undertaken by PVP and was based on two factors. First, the cities had to be progressive and receptive to innovations and reform in undertaking municipal functions. Second, the cities had to have an NGO that could participate in and support the initiative. The PVP examined the cities where they had been working in terms of both factors. Subsequently, two cities were selected: Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil. In 2001, two additional cities, Chuguiv and Kupyansk, were included in the project. The main local NGO partners in the four pilot cities were: the Urban Development Agency in Ternopil; the Association of Economic Development in Ivano-Frankivsk; the Agency for Municipal Development in Chuguiv; and the Fund for Kupyansk Development in Kupyansk.

As the first step, surveys of the quality of public services were conducted among local citizens, public servants, and business representatives in Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil.³ Survey results were shared with citizens through conferences, public hearings, and the media. At this stage, discussions also were initiated between government officials and the citizens' groups. Advisory boards consisting of the city mayor, local public officials, and representatives of the NGOs were formed in both cities. NGO coalitions were set up, and their members were trained to work individually and collectively toward project implementation.⁴

Based on the survey feedback, the coalition of NGOs and their partners from city government and the management of the project outlined targeted spheres of activities in Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil. The identified spheres in Ivano-Frankivsk were strengthening of the local government's capacity, education reform, the utilities and communal housing program, monitoring of public service delivery, and strengthening of local NGO capacity. In Ternopil, spheres of activity included education reform, strengthening of local NGO capacity, communal housing reform, local reforms of policy development for municipal services, communal payment centers, and a gender audit.

In order to initiate policy reforms in these identified areas, capacity-building exercises were carried out for the public officials through a 10-month training program (initiated in March 2001), entitled "Policy Development for Municipal Services Initiative." As a part of this program, policy analysis groups, with public officials as members, were formed in the cities of Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil. In each city, six groups were formed,

² The International Center for Policy Studies (ICPS) is an independent, nonprofit research organization in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv. The main goal of the center is to promote the introduction of public policy concepts and practices in Ukraine. Source: <<http://www.icps.kiev.ua/eng/about>>.

³ The survey in Ternopil was carried out between April and June 1999, while in Ivano-Frankivsk it was conducted at the beginning of 2000.

⁴ In Ternopil, the NGO coalition included members from 14 organizations.

consisting of five or six public officials each. The officials belonged to different government departments and were selected from the two municipalities. The groups represented sectors such as education, human resources, budgeting and finance, strategic planning, transportation, and housing.

On-the-job training for the groups encompassed three key areas:

1. assistance in the development of sector-specific, service-related policy documents;
2. further development of institutional capacity; and
3. public policy training for local government officials.

NGO coalitions received training in basic management and policy development. Study tours to countries such as Canada, Lithuania, and Slovakia were organized. This enabled the NGOs to monitor service delivery, conduct research and surveys, share information with the general public, and institute public debate on relevant policy issues. Finally, quarterly surveys were conducted for periodic assessments of public opinion.

A number of international and local consultants, and experts specializing in diverse fields, were recruited to offer advice on project matters and to help conduct training on topics such as education, communal housing, and NGO management. In Kupyansk and Chuguiv, PVP conducted training programs for public officials in collaboration with the LARGIS (Local and Regional Government Institutional Strengthening) project.⁵

III. Impact/Results

Enhanced Capabilities: Public Officials and NGOs

The 10-month training program in policy development provided practical training for public officials in order to build their administrative capacity for developing future policies that respond to and benefit all sections of society. Twelve policy groups that were formed as part of this exercise are in the process of developing policy papers at the municipal level. However, the effectiveness of the training program will be known only when the policies being developed are actually implemented and address the problems that they are intended to remedy.

The project has provided ongoing support to NGOs to undertake initiatives in citizen engagement, including public hearings, report card rankings, and surveys. The requisite training has been provided, and guidelines and procedures to conduct each of these activities have been outlined. As a result, the capacity of NGOs has increased in terms of:

- facilitating public hearings and forums;

⁵ The LARGIS project was initiated in 1999 with the objective of supporting the process of territorial administrative reform in Ukraine in order to increase the effectiveness of public services at the local and regional levels.

- monitoring service delivery (report cards);
- mobilizing interests (catalyst to citizen engagement); and
- conducting research.

A study tour of NGO representatives to Slovakia led to a joint project by the Association of Economic Development of Ivano-Frankivsk and a Slovakian university. Many citizen groups were also contracted to conduct research and public awareness campaigns in such areas as school ratings, education advisory boards, and transportation advisory councils.

New Initiatives

Project activities gave rise to three additional initiatives: an education reform program, a communal housing program, and a gender audit.

1. Education Reform Program

Survey findings in Ternopil revealed that educational services in the city were inadequate, educational policymaking lacked transparency, and public participation in school administration was limited and ineffective.⁶ To address these issues, focus groups and ad hoc committees were formed through the participation of parents, businesses, NGO groups, and senior students. A series of study papers, report cards, and guidelines were presented in public hearings and conferences. Huge audiences attended these meetings, and they gained immense media support. In addition, a Ternopil education plan for 2005, entitled "City Blueprint for Education," was outlined.

A key outcome of these activities was the establishment of Community Education Boards in Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil, with education specialists, public representatives, and representatives of parents' committees as members. It is hoped that the boards will continue to work toward education reform after the project implementation period is over.

In Ivano-Frankivsk, a study tour to Lithuania was organized for the participating NGOs. Based on the knowledge gained on the tour, one of the local NGOs undertook to integrate children with special needs into regular schools. The project is currently being implemented with funding from the British Council.

2. Utilities and Communal Housing Program

Initial survey results indicated that communal housing and utility services were the most corrupt and received the lowest scores among the public services. Initiatives to improve service delivery in this sector were undertaken in coordination with experts from the LARGIS project.

⁶ Source: <<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/nispacee/unpan003601.pdf>>.

Communal payments and utility centers were set up as independent working units in Ivano-Frankivsk in 2001.⁷ These centers provide information and consultation services in the communal housing and utilities sphere. A complete set of databases is maintained on individual households and other information used for calculating utilities payments. The centers also facilitate the application and follow-up of citizen complaints.

The Communal Housing Project was initiated in Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk with the objective of privatizing housing services for effective management. This was done by conducting surveys of local tenants to assess housing needs, and by developing local knowledge and approaches to contracting for housing services. Steps were taken to develop and manage condominiums within the city.

3. Gender Audit

A public survey on gender issues was conducted in June 1999 in Ternopil. The survey concluded that women tended to be more vulnerable than men in the labor force, and that they were less successful in pursuit of complaints even while they made more unofficial payments than their male counterparts. A gender audit was initiated in September 2000 with the following objectives:

- to guide NGO groups in conducting a gender audit of regional and local government in terms of personnel policies and practices, as well as in relation to public policy issues and program delivery; and
- to develop the capacity of local NGO groups to undertake policy advocacy activities in order to increase sensitivity to the gender dimension in local government reform.

Within the framework of the audit, interviews and research were conducted to define the involvement of women in decisionmaking processes at the local level, and to assess the extent to which their needs were addressed by policies. The results of the audit were presented in a conference in November 2000. As a logical continuation of this work, a Department of Gender and Social Resources was formed in the Ternopil Agency of Urban Development.

The outcomes of the project in Chuguiv and Kupyansk are less clear because of their late involvement in project activities. However, there have been indications of enhanced NGO skills and the raising of important public issues for discussion and future reform.

⁷ The initiative was supported by the World Bank, the city administration, and the Association for the Economic Development of Ivano-Frankivsk. The World Bank provided computer equipment for the center, the city administration provided the space, and the Association for the Economic Development of Ivano-Frankivsk provided experts and methodologies in developing databases and software, as well as monitoring public complaints and the level of public services.

IV. Key Elements of Empowerment

Information

Information dissemination was the key to encouraging public participation and reducing corruption in government functioning. Public hearings, conferences, and information bulletin boards (in Ternopil) were some of the channels through which the latest proceedings of the project were communicated to citizens' groups and the general public. Implementation of the communal housing program in Ternopil included a broad public information campaign, which included several articles published in the local newspapers, broadcasts of programs on local channels, and information seminars.

The communal payments and utility centers enabled access to detailed monthly records of payments made and any outstanding debts of individual households. A newsletter titled the *People's Voice* is published every week, presenting an update on the latest happenings around the project.

Inclusion/Participation

One of the key objectives of the project was to develop a system that would ensure public participation and influence on decisions taken at the municipal level. For this purpose, several mechanisms were set forth for active citizen involvement. These included surveys, report card rankings, advisory councils, TV and radio broadcasts, public hearings, conferences, and seminars. More than 350 people attended the public hearing on education reform conducted in November 2000 in Ivano-Frankivsk.

Accountability

Regular information dissemination and active public participation enforced transparency in government operations. Citizen input from surveys and report card rankings were used to improve the delivery of public services. In Ivano-Frankivsk, quarterly monitoring surveys helped in assessing the progress made by the project, as well as in tracking the improvement of public services. Two such surveys, covering 150 households each time, have been conducted, and the findings have been disseminated to the media through a local press conference. Active media support played a key role in keeping a check on the work of public officials.

Local Organizational Capacity

This project was the result of a coordination of citizens, NGOs, and municipal officials. NGOs were organized into coalitions that represented various sectors. After training, NGO coalitions and public officials together initiated discussions and formed a consensus on future reform activities to be undertaken as part of the project.

V. Issues and Lessons

Challenges

Frequent changes in government have not allowed policies and procedures to be carried forward. To address this issue, small projects with concrete goals and well-defined measurement indicators should be promoted. Another alternative could be to implement long-term projects (not less than five years) that are flexible and less dependent on the political situation or the election cycle.

Although one of the aims of the project was to reduce corruption, no concrete evidence of such a reduction has yet been reported. It may be the case that some positive results in terms of increased integrity and reduced corruption levels have not yet been documented. However, it is also important to remember that corruption is a complex problem that cannot be resolved through quick-fix solutions. Corruption needs to be addressed on a sustained basis, and tangible changes can be produced only in the long term.

Key Factors for Success

Training, extensive policy analysis, and the application of policies should be an ongoing process. Real capacity building among officials will take place only when these elements are part of day-to-day activities. The goal is that municipal officers who have undergone the 10-month training session will replicate their policy developmental work in their departments.

It is important to sustain the initial momentum generated among public officials. There have been instances in which a sense of urgency about operations is missing. An example of this is the late submission of the final policy documents by the policy groups. Because of pressing municipal matters related to elections (in March 2002), the documents were submitted much later than the set deadline (January 2002).

VI. Further Information: References and World Wide Web Resources

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