

Partnership for Transparency Fund Project Completion Assessment

Poland: Asjocjace Association in Support of Social Initiatives

Project:

The Transparent Commune: An Instrument Supportive of Societal Control over the Operation of Local Public Administration in Poland

Project Summary

1. The project aimed to make a contribution to improving the transparency and accountability of public finance administration at the level of the Gmina (Commune, or municipality). Specifically, it focused on the area of local public funding, through grants, subsidies and award of contracts by Gmina, using public funds to non-public entities. The project aimed to develop an instrument – a manual on principles and practices – which could be used by civil society to monitor and call to account local authorities engaged in such transactions. As an example of a typical case to illustrate the requirement for increased transparency and accountability, it was described that:

In the Annual Reports of Gmina administrations, whose approval is the testimony to the citizens that the administration has fulfilled its mandate for the year, details of certain payments or contract awards are relegated to annexes, but the annexes are often not made public. So the citizens have no real basis to exercise accountability on the flow of funds.

2. As a pilot effort, involving four Gminas, the intention was to leverage the experience of this development phase, as a bottom-up building block as part of a larger plan, into building a culture of transparency at the local level, and eventually to offer a tool that could be replicated country-wide.
3. The project was executed by the Asocjacje Association, in cooperation with the Warsaw Citizens Group and the Anti- Corruption program of the Stefan Batory Foundation. According the Final Proposal and the Grant Agreement with the PTF, the project had four deliverables: (a) The creation of the elements of the instrument (research into legal, procedural and other aspects of local government finance regulation), (b) the pilot application of a prototype, in four locations; (c) the development of the Manual itself; and (d) the presentation and dissemination of the Manual, through conference and subsequent follow through dissemination. The project was intended to take 11 months, with a start date of 12 November 2001. Its estimated cost, covered fully by the PTF grant, was \$16,200, of which the project cost was \$12,000 and the overhead costs were \$4,200.

The Project Completion Report (PCA)

4. The PCA was completed by the Independent Consultant, during a visit to Warsaw. Discussions were held with the Asocjacje (Ryszard Skrzypiec and Piotr Fraczak, the executors of the project), with the Warsaw Citizens Group (Areta Wasilewska-Gregorowicz and Katarzyna Batko-Toluc) and with the Batory Foundation (Deputy Director Anna Razinska). The Consultant reviewed the historical documents of the project, including two progress reports, a final report, the final financial statement of expenditures, other related materials, and the Manual itself. There was no occasion during the visit to make contact with any of the participating Gminas

Project Objectives and Design

5. With the broad objective described above, i.e. to build greater accountability by civil society of local administrations in their allocation of grants, subsidies and contracts between local government and non-government entities, the project aimed to develop an “instrument” (a Manual) to give local communities a legal and practical way to do this. The project was, in the view of the Consultant, very sensibly designed into four phases (the deliverables already described above) to research, design and test, finalize and then publicize the Manual.
6. In the view of the Consultant, the Asocjacje, an agency whose officers have significant knowledge and previous experience in both the legal and institutional aspects of local government, was well chosen and fully capable of undertaking this type of project. It was, after all, conceived and designed by them. Further, the association that was developed with the Stefan Batory Foundation, and some of its operating anti-corruption programs, gave added credibility to the effort, provided an additional source of technical support, and offered assurance of a follow through capability, which would ensure the project would have continuity into the future. The Batory Foundation is one of Poland’s pre-eminent NGOs, with an international reputation, supported by, among others, the Ford Foundation.

Implementation Experience

7. By all accounts the project was implemented with very few impediments. It was implemented on time (one month less than planned) and largely on budget. The final expenditures were \$17,317, compared to the budget of \$16,200, and the overruns appeared to be for small amounts in a number of categories, rather than a large amount in a few categories. The Consultant did not ask for a detailed account of each over-run, and is prepared to accept the explanation given, that they occurred simply by unforeseen expenditure amounts in reality, compared to

the forecast budget. The Consultant expresses his opinion, therefore, that the funds for this project were properly allocated and expended, in terms of the objectives contained in the Grant Agreement.

8. In response to the question of whether any significant difficulties had to be encountered in the execution of the project, the Consultant was told that the main difficulty was engendering enthusiasm in the administrations of the four pilot Gminas.

Impact of the Project

9. The Consultant would distinguish between impacts measured as *outputs* and those measured as *outcomes*.
10. The impacts measured as *outputs* are clear and factual, and can be summarized as follows:
 - a. The Manual, which was the main output of the project, has been produced, published in 500 copies and has been publicized at a conference, and distributed.
 - b. Distribution has been achieved through a combination of means. This includes direct distribution of the Manual (though not yet to all Gminas, of which there are 2500), publication of topic excerpts, in various publications, and summary presentations on at least two websites, including that of the Batory Foundation, and (forthcoming) the NGO Watch.
 - c. The Batory Foundation has taken a certain custodianship over the Manual and is including excerpts from it in its ongoing *Anti Corruption Program* pamphlets, and in this way is funding and promoting the continuation of the project's output.
11. In terms of impacts measured as *outcomes*, of course, it is early to expect major results. Nevertheless, the Consultant would make three points:
 - a. First, it appears that a process has been engendered by the project, in the sense that it is becoming routine for the manual to be quoted in journals covering this area, and this is spreading awareness.
 - b. Second, the Batory Foundation is using and applying the principles of the Manual as continuing part of its *Transparent Gminas* program in two of the pilot Gminas (Warsaw and Tychy), so it is actually being implemented.
 - c. The Consultant was told that, whereas during the execution of the project it was discovered that each of the four pilot Gminas were guilty of non-compliance, it appears that now there has been an improvement in their behaviour at least in some cases. These judgments were based solely on qualitative information, uncorroborated by any systematic quantitative measurements, or specific anecdotal descriptions.

- 12. Consultants Comment on Impact:** In the Consultant's view, the Manual is clearly a very useful accomplishment, it is rich in content (the outcome of significant research and authorship), and it will doubtless make a contribution, and it will (maybe has) become a reference point on this topic. At the same time, it is not that user friendly, at least for the smaller, rural based communes, and the Consultant doubts that in its current form it will be spontaneously read by un-coached Gmina officers. Further dissemination should focus on the summary sheet and "The Model for Gmina Transparency" that is contained in the Manual.
- 13.** A second comment, more challenging, is that the project team worked more closely with the pilot Gmina officials than with civil society and citizens in the pilot communities. They tried to call a citizens meeting in one community, but only 15 people turned up. The dissemination efforts are being focused on "champions" in communities, not so much on the communities as a whole. Something could be being missed here, because it is civil society that needs to be awakened and to call for accountability. Gminas will unlikely do this on their own, without being being pressed.

Institutional Development Impact

- 14.** The Consultant could not judge whether the project had brought institutional strength to the Asocjacje, or to the Batory Foundation. In latter case (a large and very well established NGO) this is doubtful. In the case of the Asocjacje, there has no doubt been learning. On the other hand, the two people who executed the project are serious, experienced, capable and committed. It was their existing competence that led to a successful project. What does not seem clear is whether the Asocjacje will have a continuing role, since its work on the project was episodic and is now completed, though both people are committed to furthering its goals as they can.

Lessons, Conclusions and Recommendations

- 15.** Small efforts can have big results, but only if they are pushed further. The Consultant is in no doubt that this project was worth the funding, and has left its mark on Poland's transparency seeking landscape. It has the potential, but not yet the actuality, of leveraging itself into a program of national significance. This assessment describes some of the ways in which the message of the Manual is being propagated. However, the actual application of its principles is currently confined to two pilot Gminas, and its spread beyond that is unlikely to happen spontaneously. The follow on phase is in very good hands with the Batory Foundation, and there is hope that this will result in an expansion of the Manual's application, but it will take time. The message of the Manual should be distilled into a one page set of bullets, and more specifically aimed at civil society.

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September 4, 2004.