

People's Voice Program in Ukraine: Citizen Report Cards

The history of Ukraine has been dominated by its relations with Russia, and more recently with Western Europe. In the 19th century, the largest part of Ukraine was integrated into the Russian Empire, with the rest under Austro-Hungarian control. After a chaotic period of incessant warfare and several attempts at independence following World War I and the Russian Civil War, Ukraine emerged in 1922 as one of the founding republics of the Soviet Union. Ukraine became fully independent after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. This began a period of transition to a market economy, in which Ukraine was stricken with an eight year recession and the country lost 60% of its GDP. Since then, the economy has been experiencing a stable increase, with real GDP growth averaging seven percent annually.

Ukraine is a unitary state composed of 24 oblasts (provinces), one autonomous republic (Crimea) and two cities with special status: Kiev, its capital, and Sevastopol, which houses the Russian Black Sea Fleet under a leasing agreement. Ukraine is a republic under a semi-presidential system with separate legislative, executive and judicial branches. Since the collapse of the USSR, Ukraine continues to maintain the second largest military in Europe, after that of Russia. The country is home to 46 million people, 78 percent of whom are ethnic Ukrainians, with sizable minorities of Russians, Belarusians and Romanians. The Ukrainian language is the only official language in Ukraine, while Russian is widely spoken and is known to most Ukrainians as a second language.

Feedback mechanisms for Service Providers in Ukraine

Until recently few mechanisms have existed to solicit feedback about service provision in Ukraine. As a consequence, service providers have lacked information about the quality of, and access to, services limiting their ability to respond to citizens needs. This lack of information also hinders the ability of progressive politicians and administrators to design and implement improved policies and reform existing institutions. Civil society groups have also been unable to effectively advocate for better services and hold service providers to account.

Some key challenges to the improved use of feedback mechanisms in Ukraine include:

- **Suspicion of formal structures:** Despite the opening up of civil space since independence, Ukrainians remain conscious of the abusive nature of formal structures under the previous regime. The Soviet state used "civic groups" such as the Komsomol youth group and trade and other unions to control the masses. There remains deep suspicion and distrust of most structures, whether they are part of civil society, the state or the private sector. Many Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) also mirror the top-down structures of state institutions,

adding to the mistrust in which many are held. As a result, citizens tend to shy away from these structures and rely instead on informal ones, particularly relationships with family, friends and trusted colleagues¹.

- **Lack of public consultation in decision making:** Whilst the collapse of the Soviet Union has weakened the capacity of the state, officials largely continue to see themselves as uniquely qualified to make the 'right' decisions for the benefit of the people. They can therefore be dismissive of CSO attempts to influence policy making, and often perceive CSOs as being 'unprofessional'. To protect this position of power information has been tightly controlled and decisions often made behind closed doors with little or no public consultation. As a result officials have not had accurate information about public perceptions of public services, and citizens have generally not felt motivated to engage with local government.

- **Lack of linkages between CSOs, the state and the private sector:** When CSOs have reached out to local authorities and businesses they generally have done so in search of resources, or to complain about the problems that they and their target groups face. Unsurprisingly, the reputation of CSOs among these sectors as well as in the community remains poor. Relations within civil society are also often strained. With resources scarce, competition between CSOs inevitably prevails, further undermining the potential for collaboration. As a result of this lack of collaboration, CSOs have rarely provided a forum for real citizen empowerment.

- **Perceived lack of integrity in local government services:** A 1997 National Integrity Survey² highlighted citizens' perceptions of a lack of integrity and high levels of corruption among government officials. The survey revealed that whilst 80 percent of citizens were aware of government rules and regulations, 50 percent claimed that these rules and regulations were not followed by public agencies. Furthermore, 93 percent of the respondents had never filed a complaint because of their belief that no positive action would ensue.

- **Capacity of CSOs to design, administer and manage report card scheme:** The lack of a culture of public participation in local governance has meant that local level organizations do not have well developed skills in undertaking initiatives to promote citizen engagement, such as facilitating public hearings and designing report card surveys.

The Ukraine People's Voice Project and Citizen Report Cards

The objectives of the Ukraine People's Voice Project³ (PVP) were to (a) help selected Ukrainian cities to improve their service delivery to households and businesses, whilst enhancing their level of integrity in the process; and (b) strengthen the capacity of citizen groups and officials to interact with each

¹ Democratizing Ukraine Evaluation Report, 2006

² National Integrity Survey, 1997, jointly conducted by the Ministry of Justice and the World Bank

³ Funded by the World Bank, CIDA, the Open Society Institute and the Canadian Bureau of International Education initiated in March 1999

other in order to strengthen the overall quality of governance in the selected municipalities.

A key aspect of the PVP was the use of Citizen Report Cards (CRC) to develop feedback mechanisms between local people and local government service delivery institutions.

Citizen Report Cards are public accountability mechanisms based on citizen surveys of the performance and quality of government services. They allow citizens to monitor state performance. In addition, they:

- Provide quantitative information from the perspective of public service users which can help government agencies make changes and improve services;
- Can assist in prioritizing reform efforts and allocating public resources;
- Aggregate and communicate poor people's realities to government officials, decision makers, and the public;
- Foster voice, discussion and debate, and build demand for reform;
- Treat users of public services as clients or customers whose voices matter in the design, delivery and assessment of government services.

As a first step, two cities were selected by PVP to pilot CRC⁴. They were chosen based on the receptiveness to the scheme of the political leadership, including the willingness of the mayor to act as the 'local champion' of the scheme. The second factor related to the capacity and willingness of local NGOs to implement the schemes, and their willingness to form coalitions to conduct the surveys.

Surveys were carried out under the supervision of local NGO coalitions. The formation of coalitions was a pre-condition for inclusion in PVP, and was necessary to ensure that implementing agencies had the required mix of skills and knowledge. Coalition members were selected by PVP to represent a cross section of the community. Particular effort was made to include groups representing women, youth and environmental issues.

Prior to conducting the first survey, the project conducted a needs assessment to identify the training and capacity needs of the implementing partners. As a result, coalition members received training in survey design, basic management and policy development. Study tours were also arranged, in which coalition members were able to develop links with organizations which had previous experience in conducting CRCs in other countries. Organizations developed skills in monitoring service delivery, conducting research and surveys, sharing information with the general public, and instituting public debates on relevant policy issues.

Surveys were conducted among households, the business community, and public officials. Respondents were asked to identify the key problems associated with major services, and to identify the public's priority service needs⁵. The

⁴ Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk were the initial cities selected, followed by Chuguiv and Kupyansk in 2001

⁵ The surveys asked citizens and business people about their experiences with the following government agencies: the post office, health services, phone service, housing authority, school authorities, state savings

information gathered from the surveys, which included data on corruption, was widely distributed through the local media, public discussions, and NGOs, putting pressure on local leaders to respond to specific criticisms and open channels for greater participation. At this stage, PVP initiated discussions between government officials and the citizens' groups. Advisory boards consisting of the city mayor, local public officials, and representatives of the NGOs were formed. These Advisory Boards jointly identified target sectors and spheres for specific policy reforms. Following the initial survey, smaller, quarterly surveys were carried out⁶, in order to assess progress and evaluate changes in service provision.

Once priority areas for reform were identified, PVP made an assessment of the training needs of public officials, in order to help them to effectively carry out the reforms. On-the-job training was then carried out, aimed at building their administrative capacity to develop future policies and to continue to respond to the priority sectors identified by the surveys.

Results

The process of implementing PVP, including conducting the CRCs has facilitated the creation of links between CSOs, as well as stimulating dialogue between citizens and public officials. As a result of PVP, CSO coalitions are functioning in all pilot communities. Coalition working has eroded the competition which had existed between these organisations, promoting the pooling of resources, both human and financial, and the creation of mutually supportive networks. The resultant increase in efficiency has improved the reputation of the organisations involved, leading to a more positive perception of their role in the community by local people, as well as a stronger and more productive relationship with local authorities.

In response to the dissemination and public discussion of survey results, PVP has generated increased dialogue among citizens and public officials, and prompted more responsive local government institutions. The creation of Advisory Boards has provided a platform for citizens to directly address their concerns to public officials, backed up by the information gathered in the surveys. This free-flow of information has resulted in unprecedented actions by municipal authorities and by citizen groups for improved public services. For example, municipal officials in Ternopil set up several task groups to develop concrete solutions to the most critical problems identified by survey respondents. The surveys also mobilized Ternopil residents to pressure the local government to create "service centres" as one-stop shops where people can pay for all of their municipal services.

Regular information dissemination and active public participation have enforced transparency in government operations. For example, widespread dissemination of the results from the quarterly monitoring surveys allow for citizens to assess progress made in improving public services, and to hold officials to account. The

bank, office of social benefits, tax inspection, road police, hospital, local executive committee, customs service, visa department, police, and courts.

⁶ Covering 150 households each time

enthusiastic support of local media has played a key role in keeping check on the work of public officials.

The capacity of local organisations to conduct CRC and to use the results to push for improved service delivery has improved, and the skills developed have spread. A practical handbook into conducting CRC has been developed and is readily available, and CSOs continue to conduct training courses into their use. When the PVP came to an end in February 2008, several dozen Citizen Report Card Surveys had been carried out, not only in municipalities originally involved in the program, but in other areas also.

Although one of the aims of the project was to reduce corruption, no concrete reduction has yet been reported. However, the perceived integrity of local government officials seems to have improved, as citizens are less cynical about the merits of engagement with local government bodies. It would appear that as local government institutions have become more responsive to the demands of citizens, so citizens have been motivated to engage further, creating a virtuous cycle.

References

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