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KOSOVO CIVIL SOCIETY STRENGTHENING PROJECT EVALUATION

FINAL REPORT

NOVEMBER 2010

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
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| ATRC | Advocacy Training and Resource Center |
| CCSG | Center for Civil Society and Governance |
| CCSD | Center for Civil Society Development |
| DSK | Down Syndrome Kosovo |
| EC | European Commission |
| ECLO | European Commission Liaison Office |
| ISC | Institute for Sustainable Communities |
| K-CSSP | Kosovo Civil Society Strengthening Program |
| KADC | Kosova Advocacy and Development Center |
| KCSF | Kosovo Civil Society Fund |
| KFOS | Kosovo Foundation for Open Society |
| KPAN | Kosovo Policy Action Network |
| LAP | Local Action Partners |
| NAP | National Action Partners |
| NDI | National Democratic Institute |
| SIF | Special Initiative Fund |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This evaluation examines the Kosovo Civil Society Strengthening Project (K-CSSP), a USAID Cooperative Agreement-funded grant program of the U.S.-based Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC), designed to strengthen civil society in Kosovo. The program is intended to run for three years, from 2009 to 2011, and has a budget of US\$4.0 million. K-CSSP is now entering its final year, and ISC has presented its third-year workplan to USAID for approval.

The project's stated goals and its division into four corresponding activity components are as follows:

1. Improving the legal framework and cultivating NGO-Government partnerships;
2. Stimulating advocacy successes through multi-layered assistance;
3. Providing customized capacity-building assistance; and
4. Prioritizing outreach to and inclusion of Kosovo Serb NGOs.

K-CSSP pursues these activities principally through a small grants program to Kosovo NGOs, accompanied by technical assistance to grantees for institutional capacity building. ISC makes direct grants itself to NGOs and has two local Intermediate Support Organizations, the Advocacy Training and Resource Center (ATRC) and the Center for Civil Society Development (CCSD), which receive block grants from ISC to carry out their own small grants programs, also accompanied by customized technical assistance for capacity building.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was performed through an examination of numerous program reports, previous evaluations and other relevant documents, all of which can be found in Appendix A. Following the document review, from October 12 to October 21, the team interviewed a broad range of civil society actors, donors and observers in Kosovo. The team conducted the majority of interviews in Pristina, but team members also met with CSOs and local government officials in Peja, Gjilan, Mitrovica and Gracanica. The team met several times each with USAID, ISC and ATRC, as they were central to the programs being evaluated, but for logistical reasons met with CCSD only once. The team also met with several grantees of ISC, ATRC and CCSD as well as some local NGOs that had not recently received USAID funds. The team also interviewed non-U.S. donors, government officials at the national and local levels, and a political party representative for a better overall insight into civil society in Kosovo. In addition, the team interviewed two U.S.-based ISC employees who work on civil society programming in Kosovo. The evaluation was qualitative, relying on information gathered from documents, interviews and reports rather than upon quantitative data.

FINDINGS

The evaluation focused on both the state of civil society in Kosovo and the K-CSSP program. This combined approach presents a more complete picture of the topic at hand and

provides a foundation for comprehensive recommendations to USAID. The team's principal findings are as follows:

- Although many donors with ample financial resources provide support to civil society, this source of funding distorts the priorities, activities and strategies of CSOs and leaves some key strategic needs unmet.
- Small, short-term grants are not the best strategy for achieving the project's goals and are no longer appropriate for USAID.
- Relations between government and advocacy- and service-oriented CSOs are relatively good.
- The strongest CSOs are working primarily in the areas of service delivery and democracy/watchdog capacities, but not in advocacy.
- Because CSOs do not rely upon citizen mobilization as an advocating strategy, advocacy has limited impact on democratic development, highlighting a lack of meaningful interest representation.
- Civil society reflects an emphasis on consensus rather than pluralism.
- ATRC and ISC seem to work well with grantees, but the current project structure does not maximize USAID investment.
- Civil society activity and support is relatively well distributed between Pristina and the rest of the country, except for north of the Ibar.
- CSOs north of the Ibar are not as strong as those in the rest of the country and an advocacy strategy is particularly problematic there given the limited capacity of local partners north of the Ibar.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the team recommends that USAID:

- Update its approach to support for civil society by adopting a strategy that focuses more effectively on advocacy, and develop an exit strategy.
- Give direct grants to a smaller number of larger NGOs seeking to improve their interest representation and include technical assistance for capacity building in this area through outside consultants.
- Encourage NGOs to strengthen advocating capacity through interest representation and constituency development.
- Support other USAID strategic objectives (EG, LG, Youth, ROL) directly and offer interest representation technical assistance to NGOs working in those fields as well.
- Recognize that CSOs will not only focus on a breadth of issues but represent a range of opinions, and begin to transition the country, and civil society, away from an emphasis on consensus.
- Encourage NGOs to reach across ethnic lines based on shared interests.

- Do not pursue an advocacy or interest-based strategy north of the Ibar, but support service-oriented CSOs through a different program.

CONCLUSION

In sum, this evaluation recommends that it is time for USAID/Kosovo to move beyond the kind of civil society programming it has done over the last 10 years in three similar projects, including K-CSSP. The model of providing short-term, small grants to a large number of NGOs, with limited capacity-building technical assistance and shallow advocacy efforts, has run its course and outlived its usefulness. This conclusion is not meant to negate the value of K-CSSP but rather to propose a different approach that we think can generate greater impact at the national level on a more sustainable basis.

Kosovo civil society is maturing and should be ready to progress to a more substantive, powerful kind of civil society activism based on interest representation that can connect CSOs to the most critical needs of citizens in their daily lives. USAID support to civil society needs to evolve accordingly. Without force-feeding favored NGOs, USAID needs to make discerning choices to match CSOs with important interests at the national level that need better representation.

Arguably, USAID could support a whole range of CSOs across the board. It is difficult to pick “winners” in advance and concentrate resources on just a few CSOs. It is predictable that some of them will fail to build their constituent bases and will not represent those interests well. USAID must be prepared to cut its losses mid-term if “losers” become apparent. But on balance, in our measured judgment after seeing the conditions in Kosovo and studying civil society in the early stages of independence, we believe that there is a critical strategic need for a limited number of strong, constituency-based CSOs to emerge around key national issues, which could include health care, the environment, workers’ rights, or women’s issues. Such CSOs are needed to counterbalance the current personalistic political system and to provide checks and balances outside the state to prevent a drift over time toward an institutionalized, semiauthoritarian regime. This strategic objective should be the driver for future DG civil society programming by USAID in Kosovo. Elections alone will not create a strong democracy, and neither will assistance programs conducted solely with the government.

I. Introduction

BACKGROUND

Kosovo is the newest country in the world. It is situated in landlocked position in the Balkan Peninsula bordering Albania, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro. During the last two or three decades Kosovo has undergone a rapid and often rough transformation, both socially and economically. During this time, Kosovo has been part of Yugoslavia, part of the post-breakup Yugoslavia, and an international protectorate. It is now an independent state. Since the unilateral declaration of independence in 2008, 71 countries have recognized Kosovo's independence, including the U.S. and 22 of the 27 E.U. Member States.¹ The declaration of independence was proclaimed in line with the Comprehensive Proposal for Kosovo Status Settlement of the UNOSSEK, H.E. Mr. Martti Ahtisaari,² a document that is also recognized in the Kosovo Constitution.³

Throughout the 1990s, the Kosovo society of non-Serbian ethnicity organized itself under the umbrella of the parallel system, which entailed shadow institutions and service provision in all vital areas of the society. Education and healthcare had gone underground for the Kosovo Albanian majority population, with the education system severely weakened, structurally and financially. The consequences of this troubled past can be noticed even today in the fairly poor education system and troubled health sector.

Economically, since 1999, the change meant moving from a socialist to a liberal economy, with challenges in the provision of social assistance and services. Nevertheless, Kosovo's economy has managed to avoid the worst effects of the recent global financial crisis. In fiscal year 2009, Kosovo's economy was stable with macroeconomic indicators remaining at similar levels as in previous years. Inflation fluctuated around 2.5 percent—a rate that has not changed substantially for the last four years.⁴ Real GDP growth was calculated to be around 4.4 percent for 2009.⁵ The two main drivers behind this growth are consumers and investments. In the last several years, government spending on capital projects has increased significantly. Along with this increase in government spending on capital projects, there has been an increase in the number of allegations of misuse of public wealth and corruption by civil society actors and the political opposition to the government.

Although the country's laws and regulations are advanced and progressive, their implementation has been not always been effective. The judiciary, in particular, has functioned poorly, as there is a huge backlog of cases at all levels of the court system, and there have been a number of bribery and corruption scandals. Such elements have been the source of significant negative publicity and have produced an overall bad image for the judiciary in the eyes of the general public.

It is estimated that around 40 percent of the active population in Kosovo is unemployed. This is a staggering level of unemployment compared to neighboring countries and West-

¹ More information is available from the Kosovo Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mfa-ks.net/?page=2,33>.

² More information on the proposal is available at: <http://www.unosek.org/unosek/en/statusproposal.html>.

³ More information on the Kosovo Constitution is available at: <http://www.mfa-ks.net/?page=2,1>.

⁴ Kosovo Ministry of Economy and Finance, Buletini Gjysmëvjetor Makroekonomik.

⁵ Ibid.

ern Europe. According to the Ministry of Economy and Finance, roughly 320,000-350,000 people have a job. Registered employees receive an average salary of € 280 per month.⁶ The country's labor market is characterized by high labor growth and low labor force participation.

About half of Kosovo's population is poor, with around 30 percent estimated to live in extreme poverty. There has been an increasing trend of migration from rural areas into urban centers, especially to the capital, Pristina.

In addition, Kosovo has yet to resolve the issue of ethnic reconciliation. Influenced by the public discourse and supported by the Serbian Government, the Serbian ethnic community has generally lived in isolated communities with little or no contact with the rest of the country. In 2009, this situation began to change, with the decentralization process moving forward in almost all majority-Serbian areas aside from the four northern municipalities, which have yet to change allegiance from Belgrade to Pristina.⁷

CIVIL SOCIETY CONTEXT

The history of the development of civil society in Kosovo can be divided into the pre-conflict and postconflict periods. This division is based on the overwhelming change that the sector has undergone since the conflict. During the pre-1999 period, civil society was organized around the idea of freedom and independence through peaceful resistance to the Milosevic regime, and CSOs were predominantly service-oriented. In the post-1999 period, due to the increased presence of donors, a large number of non-service NGOs were established. Today, the NGO sector counts more than 6000 organizations that are legally registered either as Foundations or Associations. Of these NGOs, it is believed that fewer than 500 hundred organizations are active and functional.

Since 1999, NGOs have played an active role in Kosovo's ongoing political development. At times they have been vocal on policy matters and issues of public interest, but they have also often partnered with government institutions to achieve higher ends. Nevertheless, most of the NGO activists and civil society observers with whom we met described civil society as largely implementing the preferences and goals of the donors.

As far as the capacities and structures of NGOs are concerned, there are a handful of CSOs that have consolidated their positions and have developed strong infrastructures comparable to their peers in more developed countries. The annual operating budgets of some of the NGOs amount to several million Euros.

In the Serb-populated areas, the situation is considerably different and far more hostile for civil society activists. NGO leaders are perceived as not advocating for the good of the people and as tools of the international community. Their image within their communities is poor, and their activities are mostly focused on community work and issues of general concern for their areas. On several occasions, civil society leaders from the Kosovo Serbian community have been subjected to threats and intimidation, and there have even been attempts on their lives. Furthermore, the capacities of Kosovo Serbian NGOs are far less developed than those of organizations in the rest of the country.

⁶ Ministry of Economy and Finance. Buletini Gjysmëvjeter Makroekonomik.

⁷ Municipalities of Mitrovica North, Zvecan, Zubin Potok and Leposavic

Throughout the country, civil society organizations rarely create coalitions or mobilize resources to advocate causes jointly. Over the past several years, there have only been a handful of initiatives in which the NGOs have reached critical mass and united around common issues. There are even fewer examples of alliances and/or coalitions between organizations from different ethnic communities.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was performed through an examination of numerous program reports, previous evaluations and other relevant documents, all of which can be found in Appendix A. The team reviewed these reports before meeting in Kosovo. Following the document review, the team interviewed a broad range of civil society actors, donors and observers in Kosovo from October 12 to 21. The team conducted the majority of interviews in Pristina, but team members also met with CSOs and local government officials in Peja, Gjilan, Mitrovica and Gracanica. The team met several times each with USAID, ISC and ATRC, as they were central to the programs being evaluated; but due to logistical reasons only met with CCSD once. The team also met with several grantees of ISC, ATRC and CCSD as well as some local NGOs that had not recently received USAID funds. These meetings provided a broader context and the means for comparative analysis. The team also interviewed non-U.S. donors, government officials at the national and local levels, and a political party representative in order to get a well-rounded insight into civil society in Kosovo. In addition, the team conducted interviews with U.S.-based ISC employees who have been working on civil society strengthening in Kosovo. The Kosovo interviews were done in person, and the U.S. interviews were conducted over the telephone. The evaluation was qualitative, relying on information gathered from documents, interviews and reports rather than upon quantitative data.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

The Kosovo Civil Society Strengthening Project (K-CSSP) is a USAID Cooperative Agreement-funded grant program of the U.S.-based Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) designed to strengthen civil society in Kosovo. The program is intended to run for three years from 2009 to 2011 and has a budget of US\$4.0 million. K-CSSP is now entering its final year, and ISC has presented its third-year workplan to USAID for approval.

The project's stated goals and its division into four corresponding activity components are as follows:

1. Improving the legal framework and cultivating NGO-Government partnerships;
2. Stimulating advocacy successes through multi-layered assistance;
3. Providing customized capacity-building assistance; and
4. Prioritizing outreach to and inclusion of Kosovo Serb NGOs.

K-CSSP pursues these activities principally by awarding small grants to Kosovo NGOs, accompanied by technical assistance to grantees for institutional capacity building. ISC makes direct grants itself to NGOs and has two local Intermediary Support Organizations, the Advocacy Training and Resource Center (ATRC) and the Center for Civil Society Development (CCSD), which receive block grants from ISC to carry out their own

small grants programs, also accompanied by customized technical assistance for capacity building.

The grant-making programs are divided into several different categories (“multi-layered assistance”) designed to target different beneficiary groups in terms of geographic distribution, national versus local advocacy, ethnicity, and size of grants. ISC is the largest grantor in the program, with a total of 31 grants for a value of \$1.4 million, with a maximum grant size of \$50,000. ISC funds National Action Partners (NAP), NGOs that are relatively larger in size and undertake advocacy efforts that are national in scope. ISC also has a grants category for special initiatives, aptly titled the Special Initiative Fund (SIF), which can be used to respond to unusual circumstances with expedited procedures. The other grantors, ATRC and CCSD, were each allocated \$190,000 to fund Local Action Partners (LAP), which are smaller NGOs located outside the capital to carry out service delivery and advocacy-related programs that are mainly local in scope. These grants are smaller, with a maximum size of \$20,000. CCSD focuses specially on work with Kosovo Serb NGOs, both north of the Ibar and in other parts of the country.

The normal grant-making process for ISC, ATRC and CCSD follows an annual cycle of application, review and approval, with implementation occurring over a period ranging from six to 12 months for LAP grants and six to 18 months for NAP and SIF grants. The two rounds of grants foreseen under the project have been awarded, with implementation of the second round still in process. ISC, ATRC and CCSD (to a lesser extent) provide capacity-building technical assistance directly to their grantees through in-house staff. The project also makes available up to \$5,000 in additional funding for grantees to procure outside technical assistance from local private consulting firms. Thus far, in the 31 grants made by ISC, \$90,000 has been spent on this. ATRC and CCSD both receive \$5,000 vouchers for consulting services to build their own capacity as well. CCSD has a less-developed institutional capacity overall to manage its grants program or provide technical assistance to its grantees, a challenging fact that became partially apparent at the outset of the project.

Although the grants program makes up the bulk of K-CSSP’s allocation of monetary and staff resources, the project also has supported civil society activities focused on the drafting and debate of pending legislation to regulate the NGO sector. ISC and some of its grantees and other activist CSOs participate in a government-civil society joint working group that is discussing the legislation in an ongoing process. ISC has partnered with the U.S.-based International Center for Non-Profit Law (ICNL) and its European-based affiliate, the European Center for Non-Profit Law (ECNL), for this important dialogue, which will greatly affect the “enabling environment” for civil society for years to come.

II. Evaluation and Findings

PROJECT GOALS

K-CSSP has four stated goals, which were laid out in the Introduction, but are restated here by project components:

- Component 1: Improving the legal framework and cultivating NGO-government partnerships;
- Component 2: Stimulating advocacy successes through multi-layered assistance;
- Component 3: Providing customized capacity-building assistance; and
- Component 4: Prioritizing outreach to and inclusion of Kosovo Serb NGOs.

Component 1: Improving the legal framework and cultivating NGO-government partnerships

This component is divided into two distinct but related parts: (1) the legal framework or legal “enabling environment” for the activities of civil society actors, especially NGOs, and (2) collaborative working relationships between CSOs and government at both the national and municipal levels.

With respect to the legal framework, the Kosovo government is in the process of preparing legislation to regulate the activities of NGOs that will replace the legal framework established on a temporary basis by UNMIK. The proposed statute will establish two different kinds of recognized, registered organizations: associations and foundations.

As to this element of engaging with the process of policy dialogue and legislative drafting, K-CSSP has been successful. The government has invited CSOs to be part of a working group on the legislation as participants or observers. Interviewees reported that government representatives have been open to civil society’s participation and opinions, and CSOs that are K-CSSP grantees are part of that group. ISC, especially through ICNL and ECNL, has been able to provide substantive legal input to the discussions as well, drawing on cross-country experience. As to whether the legal framework has improved qualitatively as a result, it is too early to determine because the draft legislation has not yet been passed in the Assembly, but all informants reported that positive changes have been made to the original draft and that the proposed legislation is considered to be of good quality in protecting the freedom of action of civil society actors. It is not possible to measure just how much actual influence and impact ISC and its partners have had in the process, which includes a number of other CSOs; still, the fact of full participation and the reported improvements to the pending legislation count as successes to date in this component.

In terms of stronger partnerships and positive collaboration between government and CSOs, we found the situation to be surprisingly good. It is not possible to demonstrate empirically how much this positive finding is attributable directly to the work of K-CSSP, but interviews with CSOs and local government officials uniformly showed widespread evidence of dialogue and the development of working relationships at the national as well as local level. CSO executives reported that they can access government leaders informally as well as in structured working groups and hearings. Understandably, work-

ing relationships and even joint programming are stronger at the local level given the scale involved. Neither CSO nor government leaders complained about the attitudes or actions of the other, which is a common refrain in other countries in the region and throughout much of the world. We attribute this in part to the “national unity” theme stressed during the struggle with Serbia and the final quest for independence during the UNMIK period, but whatever the cause, it augurs well for democratic development. This is distinct from the issue of “pluralism” in civil society, which is discussed elsewhere in this report.

Component 2: Stimulating advocacy successes through multi-layered assistance

Stimulating advocacy successes through multi-layered assistance, which is the stated goal of this component, covers mainly the NAP and SIF grants program of ISC and the LAP grants programs of ATRC and CCSD, described earlier. One of USAID’s objectives, which was to extend the reach of support to civil society to smaller CSOs outside Pristina through K-CSSP, clearly has been achieved, mainly through the LAP grant-making. Based on interviews by the team and other reports, a good number of the grants involved partnerships or collaborative relationships with local governments, which also contributed to the partnering objectives of Component 1.

Achievement of the goal of “stimulating advocacy successes through multi-layered assistance” is much more problematic. The small size and brief duration of both NAP and LAP grants (as well as SIF grants) made important advocacy impact unrealistic. CSOs with limited advocacy skills or experience and in need of basic capacity-building assistance cannot reasonably be expected to achieve significant advocacy results within this framework. One-off promotional events or short-term awareness campaigns would be a better description of most of the advocacy efforts, especially in the LAP grants. While perhaps necessary and useful to some extent for general strengthening assistance to CSOs, the advocacy impact was marginal at best. NAP and SIF grants went to larger, stronger CSOs, mainly in Pristina, and had more reasonable expectations for advocacy impact. Nonetheless, the small size and still-short duration of the grants limited prospects for sustained advocacy campaigns and activities at the national or regional levels, independent of the rather limited capacity of the recipient CSOs. Some impact was noticeable in some of the grants reviewed, but we saw little evidence that the efforts would be sustainable after the grants concluded.

Component 3: Providing customized capacity-building assistance

Providing customized capacity-building assistance to grantees was a good idea but did not meet impact or sustainability expectations, due in large part to the restricted nature of the grants program structure. Each grant award, including the block grants to ATRC and CCSD, contained an additional \$5,000 in voucher purchasing power to contract for private consultants to provide specialized technical assistance in addition to the in-house technical support and training that might come from ATRC, CCSD (to a lesser extent), and especially ISC staff. Several grantees reported that they had not yet used their vouchers in spite of the fact that grant activities were nearing completion.

Developing real institutional capacity, however, takes a lot of time and is a complicated process. A short-term consultancy as part of a small (up to \$20,000), short-term LAP grant of six to 12 months’ duration (18 months in some other cases) can help build some

capacity in specific areas (e.g. financial management or proposal preparation), but that kind of grant project structure does not allow time enough for serious institutional capacity-building efforts. In addition, we found LAP grantees in particular tended to be small organizations with limited staff and informal organizational structures and management models. They were not ready to absorb technical assistance that would merit normal use of the term “institutional capacity building,” even if the skills being taught would upgrade the benefited NGOs to a certain extent. NAP grantees tended to be larger and received larger grants (up to \$50,000), but even under these circumstances no longer term capacity-building assistance efforts of the kind needed to transform organizations can be carried out.

CSO recipients of the voucher technical assistance were unanimous in their positive view of its value to their organizations, but nevertheless the assistance must be judged by a higher standard related to improved overall organizational effectiveness and sustainability following the consulting services. We did not find that level of impact. It appeared that the most valuable assistance was provided through the NAP program in the form of close, “hands on” technical assistance and mentoring by ISC staff with its grantees. They used frequent visits and close contacts to try to get deep enough into the grantee organizations to change business practices more fundamentally. Sometimes these efforts even appeared excessive, as in the USAID/ISC requirement for weekly activity reports from grantees.

The small size and the limited duration of the NAP grants, however, still prevented serious institutional capacity building efforts from being implemented in sustainable ways. If real, noticeable capacity-building goals are central to USAID civil society programming, the design of any new project will have to enable long-term, comprehensive, scaled-up assistance to CSOs capable of using it effectively. Elsewhere in this report we recommend that the most important substantive element of capacity building in a programmatic sense be directed toward strengthening CSO capacity for interest representation. Here we refer more to the still-significant need for generic organizational capacity improvements.

ATRC does offer some internal, short-term training opportunities as part of its management of the LAP small grants program. CCSD is not well developed enough institutionally to offer capacity-building assistance to its grantees. In fact, CCSD is very much in need of such assistance for itself, and both ISC and ATRC have had to devote an inordinate amount of time to providing capacity-building support to CCSD, which was not always received positively. To a great extent, USAID’s laudable effort to reach out to Kosovo Serb NGOs, especially north of the Ibar, tasked CCSD with carrying out a grant-making program for which it was not capable and in which during our interview it evinced little interest. CCSD appears to have agreed to undertake these efforts without fully considering their scope in order to maintain a working relationship through USAID with the U.S. government, which it regards as a major stakeholder in determining Kosovo’s future. In the case of both ATRC and CCSD, we did not find sufficient institutional strength and sophistication to posit them as key implementing partners for the kind of civil society programming we are recommending for the future. However, ATRC should be considered for its potential of becoming an interest-based grantee on its own.

Component 4: Prioritizing outreach to and inclusion of Kosovo Serb NGOs

Given Kosovo's circumstances, outreach to and inclusion of Kosovo Serb NGOs can be considered an important democratic development and state-building objective. Based on our field visits and interviews, in the scattered predominantly Kosovo Serb areas south of the Ibar River, K-CSSP has made progress in building up civil society relationships and programming, sometimes on a multi-ethnic basis. CCSD has participated in some of these grants. The creation of new municipalities and the recent municipal elections appear to have created a more positive enabling environment and space for local autonomy that allows collaboration between local government and local NGOs to begin to flourish. The situation north of the Ibar is much more difficult, and any impact of K-CSSP on civil society capacity there appears minimal.

For reasons discussed elsewhere in this report, we discourage USAID strategically from continuing a small grants approach to civil society support programming, and this in principle includes Kosovo Serb NGOs, whether located north of the Ibar or elsewhere. Nonetheless, we recognize the overriding political importance of inter-ethnic cooperation and minority participation in civic life in Kosovo. This justifies the specially targeted Positive Change Program working through the Kosovo Policy Action Network (KPAN), a community-level, small grants program implemented by AED, with whom we met. We hope USAID will be able to identify and support a CSO working primarily to represent Kosovo Serb communities' interests at the national level as part of a recommended interest-based programming approach. It may well turn out that common interests across ethnic lines can form the basis for the best kind of CSO inter-ethnic cooperation, more so than support directly to minority NGOs.

FINDINGS

Although many donors with ample financial resources provide support to civil society, this source of funding distorts the priorities, activities and strategies of CSOs and leaves some key strategic needs unmet. Civil society in Kosovo is donor-driven to a considerably greater degree than in most other countries in the region or elsewhere. There are many bilateral, multi-lateral and private donors in Kosovo, all funding various civil society programs. The country is awash in small grants programs, capacity building for civil society projects and donors seeking to pursue their policy goals. Accordingly, civil society is not an organic reflection of the people of Kosovo but rather is significantly influenced by these donors. It has not developed in response to the overriding needs and concerns of society, but has grown more out of the priorities of the donor groups, with organizations forming their priorities based largely on what funding is available.

Many civil society organizations, particularly those that focus on general areas such as civil society development, function almost as small businesses responding to calls for proposals on specific topics that are important to various donors and then implementing those projects. Some of these organizations, including the Committee for Social Development and even ATRC, cannot clearly explain their core ideas or goals and have no members or constituents, but are nonetheless –successful” and reasonably well-developed CSOs.

The large role played by the donors has contributed to a civil society where think-tank, watchdog and service-delivery NGOs are the strongest, but where there are some aspects of civil society that remain relatively weak. There are few genuinely interest-based NGOs. Exceptions are primarily those working with the disabled, which seem to have a strong sense of who makes up their constituency but do not always maintain strong relations with them. Other NGOs, including those working in important and useful areas (such as the environment or anticorruption), accurately understand that their main constituency, or more accurately, client, is the donor or donors.

In this donor-driven model, CSOs focus more on their relationship with donors than with society, and civil society interests that are not important to donors are overlooked. This is evident in the current emphasis on environment and anticorruption issues rather than, for example, pensioners or labor. This is rational behavior on the part of the CSOs, but it creates problems for the overall development of civil society and democracy in Kosovo.

Small, short-term grants are not the best way to pursue strategies of meaningful CSO advocacy or to help build strong interest representation-based CSOs. The model is a good one for “seeding” civil society. K-CSSP, its two predecessor projects and other donors have indeed succeeded in creating the foundations of civil society. In particular, K-CSSP has succeeded in reaching well outside the capital to include CSOs based around the country, some of them quite small. Nonetheless, this model has outlived its usefulness for USAID and Kosovo.

Numerous other donors also are funding small grants programs, making USAID funding of this type somewhat superfluous at this stage. The USAID program was said to be different because of its focus on “advocacy,” as distinct from “service delivery,” but we did not find that distinction to be qualitatively meaningful, as many organizations that received funding retained a substantial focus on service delivery. Additionally, many of USAID’s grantees (via ISC, ATRC and CCSD) are receiving similar grants for similar activities from other donors.

Short-term grants by their nature do not allow for the formation of grantee relationships that focus on the execution of long-term advocacy strategies or that can build institutional capacity over time in a continuing working partnership. We find interest representation and constituency development to be serious weaknesses in Kosovo civil society. Those weaknesses will not be overcome through short-term grants, with some mentoring from grantors’ staffs and vouchers for consulting services. A sustained capacity-building strategy requires more time and involvement and a focus on a limited number of CSOs that show potential for scaling up and building sustainable programs and organizations. Benchmarks need to be established and an organizational development index needs to be used to track long-term progress. Although benchmarks and an index are a part of the performance monitoring plan for the project, we did not find that kind of strategic focus in K-CSSP. We think such a strategic focus will be necessary in the next stage of assistance to Kosovo civil society.

Relations between government and CSOs are relatively good. Relations between government at the national and local levels and the NGO community are relatively good, which makes Kosovo stand out positively from other countries in the region and elsewhere. This is a comparative advantage or achievement from K-CSSP upon which

USAID needs to build. The adversarial, confrontational relationship between the government and CSOs that is prevalent in most countries in the region is not the typical situation in Kosovo. This more positive relationship means that CSOs and the government have a better chance of joining forces and partnering on programs in the public interest. This effort could have a synergistic effect on democratic development and good governance.

Nonetheless, the broader public perception of CSOs remains negative and will not change appreciably until CSOs focus more specifically on their natural constituencies' real interests. The kind of interest-based representation that we recommend for future civil society programming by definition includes pluralistic competition and conflict between CSOs and with government, so the "partnership" theme or the need for consensus should not be *overemphasized*. But where government and civil society are open to each other, the potential for joining forces to address important issues can demonstrate to a skeptical public that civil society's role in a democratic system is important. Even when CSOs and government disagree over topics (as they should sometimes), the fact that channels of communication are open increases the possibility that serious, respectful debate and discussion of public policy choices can take place in transparent fashion.

The virtual absence of such relationships north of the Ibar demonstrates how crippling the lack of at least a minimal working relationship can be to the effectiveness of civil society advocacy. We found that collaborative working relationships are taking hold in the newly created Kosovo Serb-majority municipalities, thereby helping to increase the engagement of these citizens in the larger state-building project, even if inter-ethnic cooperation is still at an early, limited stage. Common interests at the local and regional levels, and even at the national level, should begin to emerge more clearly; and USAID support for interest-based civil society programming should provide better opportunities for a stronger, lasting foundation for inter-ethnic cooperation than ethnically-targeted programming used initially to engage minority groups.

The strongest CSOs are working primarily in the areas of service delivery and democracy or watchdog capacities but not in advocacy. Service-delivery and democracy and watchdog NGOs form the backbone of civil society in Kosovo. Service-delivery organizations working across a range of activities, including services for the disabled, abused women and various areas of health care, are well funded, competently provide valuable services, and generally comprise an integral part of governance structures.

Similarly, there are a number of CSOs—including organizations such as FOL and KCSF, and CCSD in the north—that work as watchdogs and focus on issues relating to democracy. These organizations serve a valuable function by pressing the government to follow the law more closely and to legislate more effectively, while raising awareness of important issues such as political processes and government corruption. These organizations exist in many countries, and in Kosovo they are well funded, professional and savvy.

CSOs working in these two fields, however, do not have strong advocacy skills, nor is advocacy central to their work. There are few CSOs for whom advocacy is a major part of their work, and advocacy in general is underdeveloped compared to service-delivery, watchdog and think-tank functions of CSOs. Few of the service delivery CSOs have developed a real constituency, so while CSOs working on women's issues often do good

work, they do not seek to bring women into their advocacy work as constituents or members. Even groups working with the disabled, which tend to have an understanding of the idea of constituency, do not seek to leverage this constituency in their advocacy work. Watchdog and democracy organizations still tend to describe their constituencies somewhat vaguely as “everybody” or “the people.” Constituencies described in such vague, overbroad terms are not constituencies at all because they lack the identification of common interests or issues that give true constituencies value.

Because CSOs do not rely upon citizen mobilization as an advocating strategy, advocacy has limited impact on democratic development, highlighting a lack of meaningful interest representation. Helping CSOs develop the ability to engage in advocacy has been a major goal of recent USAID civil society programs in Kosovo. The results thus far have been mixed. CSOs do little to organize and mobilize citizens through petition campaigns, initiate contact between citizens and legislatures and other policy makers, or make demands from candidates for office. The absence of these forms of advocacy, however, should not be interpreted as evidence there is no advocacy whatsoever in Kosovo.

On several occasions, the team was told that these approaches for mobilizing advocacy are not the most effective tools in Kosovo. A broad range of NGOs, including Downs Syndrome Kosovo, the Women’s Wellness Network and Foreign Policy Club, are all involved in advocacy, but they employ different tactics. These groups reported using advocacy strategies that consisted of face-to-face meetings between NGO leaders and government officials and using media to put pressure on the government.

The CSOs pursued these advocacy strategies because they believed them to be the most effective ways of influencing government. This is notable because it indicates something about the relationship between CSOs and the government, but it also suggests that a culture of participatory advocacy still does not really exist in Kosovo. With regard to the first point, in numerous interviews with CSOs and government officials it became clear that relationships between these two groups are reasonably strong. CSOs and the government cannot be expected to agree on everything, but there is, for the most part, a good working relationship between the two parties. This is particularly true at the local level but applies at the national level as well. Representatives of various mayors’ offices used terms like “partnership” when describing this relationship and spoke of seeking input from CSOs and working together with them. CSOs, for their part, generally said they had access to government and were usually able to get what they needed from government agencies. Not surprisingly, the exceptions to this were the watchdog organizations, particularly those that focused on democracy-related issues like corruption.

This type of advocacy is valuable and demonstrates that at least some NGOs see themselves as able to influence government decisions; however, these approaches have a limited effect on democratic development. Advocacy that is limited to conversations among government agencies, NGOs and the media does not bring ordinary citizens into the process. Therefore, these citizens do not gain any of the skills, experiences or social capital that are necessary for a truly democratic society.

Although advocacy has remained an important goal for K-CSSP, few of the grantees with which the team met had received significant assistance in strengthening their ability to advocate during the last few years. Capacity-building support included activities such as

developing a branding strategy, proposal writing, accounting, media relations and training on protocol when working with high-level diplomats, but it involved little instruction on constituency or membership development and other aspects central to interest representation. A limited form of advocacy exists in Kosovo, but to contribute significantly to Kosovo's democratic development it needs to be linked much more directly to interest representation. This has not yet occurred and has contributed to a context where even when CSOs engage in advocacy they rarely see themselves as representing any particular interests or groups of citizens.

Civil society reflects an emphasis on consensus rather than pluralism. Kosovo has, in many respects, a healthy NGO climate, but it has little pluralism. CSOs are key nodes in a pluralist society because CSOs, in addition to political parties, serve as the vehicle for representation of citizens' interests. Pluralism is defined by interest representation, which is a core principle of advocacy, civil society and democracy. Interest representation makes it possible for citizens to have an impact on policy outcomes more frequently and directly than only through elections; moreover, it empowers ordinary citizens and demonstrates to them the benefits of working together to solve problems, thereby engendering greater trust, cooperation and social capital. Currently, there is little genuine interest representation in Kosovo, even from the relatively well-developed NGO sector.

The absence of interest representation in Kosovo contributes to, but is also partially caused by, an understanding of democracy and governance that is built around unity and avoiding conflict. This notion characterizes the NGO environment as well as the relationships between the NGOs and the government, most strikingly at the local level. Although there are many active NGOs, there exists little debate or disagreement among them on substantive issues. All NGOs seem to take similar positions, which indicates that not all views are being represented. In a pluralist system there should be organized interests advocating for different sides of all issues. This may sound counterintuitive, but democracy will be stronger not only when CSOs exist that support, for example, cleaning up a river, but when a counterparty NGO—calling for a delay in cleaning up the river until the economy gets stronger—exists as well. A vibrant civil society with strong interest representation will help the polity develop into one where conflict is not avoided, but is worked out peacefully and lawfully. This is a *sine qua non* of democracy.

ATRC and ISC appear to work well with their grantees in grant-program administration and implementation, but the structure of K-CSSP does not leave much room for sustained capacity-building assistance. This limits the impact not only of the LAP and NAP grants but also the grantees' ability to build their own programs for the future. As with other elements of the project, the role of CCSD must be viewed separately. CCSD seems frustrated and dissatisfied with its relationship with ISC and ATRC but ultimately appears to be unhappy with the kind of program-delivery relationship USAID is trying to forge. CCSD admits that it does not have the capacity itself to deliver technical assistance to its grantees, and this harms its relationships with them. CCSD really wants to be more opportunistic, event-oriented, and overtly political than existing as a partner in a structured grant-making and technical assistance role. The fit with K-CSSP is not good, especially as it applies north of the Ibar, although the effort to reach out to civil society north of the Ibar is laudable. Different ways to do so need to be developed and tried in the future.

CCSD is a better candidate for a National Endowment for Democracy grant than for USAID programming.

Based on our analysis of the stage of development and needs of civil society in Kosovo looking forward beyond 2010, we do not think USAID should mount another small-grants program that calls for the management role ISC and ATRC are currently playing. The grantor-grantee relationship with many fewer grantees, which operate nationally, can be based in the Mission. The necessary serious capacity-building assistance for interest representation then becomes the missing factor in the equation. This is a thorny issue in which the source of technical expertise, domestic or foreign, becomes critical; it requires careful analysis to solve. We offer suggestions oriented toward private sector solutions in the “Recommendations” section.

III. Recommendations

The team makes recommendations to USAID as follows.

Update its approach to support for civil society by adopting a strategy that focuses more effectively on advocacy, and develop an exit strategy. After nearly 10 years of work and three separate, similar projects designed to support civil society through small grants programs accompanied by institutional capacity building assistance, USAID should change its basic approach and become more strategic in the way it works with civil society organizations. Wide but shallow support to a large number of NGOs around the country is no longer needed and is not advisable as the best use of scarce USAID resources. Although always pressed for resources, NGOs today are flourishing throughout Kosovo. USAID can consider this early-stage civil society development objective in a “transition” country accomplished. Furthermore, our investigation showed that numerous other donors also are funding similar small grants programs, in many cases with the same grantees, making USAID’s programming no longer critically needed. Donor largesse is continuing to drive a “small business” model of operations for a large number of NGOs lacking any strategic focus or constituency base, even though their activities may be laudable on an anecdotal basis.

It is time for USAID to move beyond small-grants programming to a focus on higher impact CSO targets that can work seriously to build stronger interest representation into civil society activism and advocacy. The current situation calls for a narrower but deeper support approach that will target only CSOs that USAID sees as pursuing well-defined, interest representation strategies that strengthen democratic pluralism and address issues of national importance. Other USAID programs such as local government and youth development can still offer possibilities for local-level engagement with activist civil society groups. USAID should also endeavor to link its new civil society partner choices more directly to other Mission strategic objectives in order to maximize USAID’s overall impact on Kosovar development.

The recommended new strategic approach also calls for the development of an “exit strategy,” an issue not addressed in the current programming or in the 2010-2014 Country Strategy document. If the Mission focuses more narrowly in its choice of CSO partners, it will have to pay serious attention to long-term institutional sustainability in order to avoid creating a new donor dependency that would undercut key interest representation and constituency development objectives. For example, USAID might offer core support to CSO partners over a three-to-five year period but on a declining basis formula that makes them responsible for increasing other support over time and allows USAID to phase out at some point.

Give direct USAID grants to a smaller number of larger local CSOs, in order to improve their interest articulation and representation, including technical assistance for capacity building in this field using local or regional outside consultants without intermediation of an American partner. Following the above recommendation to define a clearly focused strategic vision for its work with civil society, USAID should carefully consider what kinds of CSOs and what work activities toward what objectives it wants. Expressing a desire to simply support advocacy-oriented CSOs is insufficiently rigorous

and too broad. The Mission should start by analyzing what kinds of interests can be represented by CSOs that merit the special attention and resources that USAID can offer. This is an analysis whose criteria must be well understood. On the one hand, USAID must avoid the temptation to predetermine the priorities according to a donor's preferences, e.g. environment, gender. On the other hand, USAID should be selective and not create a project structure that leads to support for CSOs working on "marginal" interests of lesser national importance, even if they show promise for interest representation. In other words, support for interest-based NGOs in general may be good for democracy and pluralism, but after 10 years of work with civil society USAID needs to be more discriminating in choosing a smaller set of CSOs with which to work more intensely. In choosing this smaller set of CSOs, the most important focus should be to identify those CSOs that have a freely determined strategic objective that addresses important national interests and issues and that is or can be built on a foundation of constituency support.

By awarding a small number of direct grants to chosen CSOs, USAID will have much greater "ownership" investment in its grantees and their programs than it does by using "grants wholesalers," as it does under K-CSSP currently. USAID then can use its own position and role in Kosovo more effectively to support the activities and advocacy agenda of the limited number of grantee CSOs. Even a small number of direct grants will require greater USAID management responsibilities, and on the grantee side will require greater institutional capacity and size (some of which will need to be built as they go) in order to effectively manage larger USAID grants. As well as being larger in dollar amount, the grants would need to have a longer life, of perhaps three years or more, in order to advance longer term goals and institutional development. Most likely, this would mean that a good percentage of the grant funding could be used for core support rather than exclusively for program activities. This does, however, create dependency risks.

Substantively, we recommend that grant support focus on technical assistance to build capacity to articulate and represent defined interests, as well as to build a strong base of support through constituency development, membership structures, outreach campaigns, voluntarism and other kinds of participation in support of the CSOs' missions. Unfortunately, based on our evaluation, neither ATRC nor CCSD, nor any other local organizations encountered, has the capacity to deliver such a sophisticated technical assistance package. ISC does have that institutional expertise or access to it, but without the need for it as a grant-making intermediary for USAID it would be hard to justify its presence in country and the attendant costs of using a U.S. partner.

Instead, we recommend an approach based on the private sector consultancy model tested in K-CSSP, which appears to be operating successfully. Grantees spoke enthusiastically about the value of the consulting services they had received from private firms as part of their grants. (It should be noted that this applied as well to the mentoring from in-house staff of ISC and ATRC). From what we observed, we believe that the kind of technical assistance we recommend is available in the market in Kosovo or can be accessed through business partnering arrangements with private firms or NGOs in countries in the region, such as Albania, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, to name only three. We suggest delivery mechanisms for this type of technical assistance in greater detail in our final recommendation, below.

Encourage NGOs to strengthen advocating capacity through interest representation and constituency development. There is some advocacy activity among CSOs in Kosovo. Some CSOs have benefited from the K-CSSP program and have learned advocacy skills, which they have used primarily to raise awareness about important issues, get access and present their arguments to government officials and occasionally media outlets.

The next step for NGOs in Kosovo is to develop advocacy strategies that focus on interest representation and constituency development. This is central to strengthening the link between civil society development and democratic development. Many CSOs play a positive role in Kosovar governance, helping governments, particularly on the local level, to identify priorities and implement programs, and by drawing attention to community needs. Watchdog organizations are also relatively strong and contribute to better governance.

Developing links between these organizations and the people they seek, or claim, to represent will facilitate the evolution of a more pluralist Kosovo, in which a range of views are represented and where citizens seeking to influence policy will turn to civil society organizations for help. Currently CSOs, even those doing work that directly benefits people, have few organic ties to the general population, so people feel little ownership over these organizations and their role in the policy process.

Stronger interest representation will help empower ordinary people, giving them a greater belief in their ability to foster change in a democratic system and that government will be responsive to their needs. Currently when a CSO successfully persuades a local government to pursue a good environmental policy, for example, the people who benefit have had something good done *for* them, but have not been engaged in the process. With stronger interest representation, the people would feel they have achieved something for themselves. This outcome builds confidence in the democratic system and encourages the kind of active and engaged citizenship that is necessary in a democracy.

USAID should encourage and support CSOs oriented toward interest representation across a broad range of issues, subject to what we recommend in terms of a limited total number of grantees. However, CSOs that seek to advocate but are unable to build constituencies should not be supported. Economic, social, demographic and issue-based CSOs are all capable of developing constituencies and more genuinely representing their interests. USAID should provide financial support and technical assistance only to NGOs willing to make the transition to being interest-based.

Support other USAID strategic objectives (Economic Growth, Local Government, Youth, Rule of Law) directly and include interest representation-focused technical assistance to NGOs working in those fields as well. Our recommendations are meant to be interrelated not only at the level of a civil society project but also at the DG –sector” level and the USAID program framework, which include other strategic objectives in areas such as democratic local government, rule of law, economic growth and youth. We found opportunities for synergies that could be achieved by greater –DG” attention and focus on interest-based CSOs inside other Mission projects. The economic growth program includes work with business and producer associations that have poorly articulated interests. We understand the upcoming rule of law project will have a civic outreach component to build public understanding and support for rule of law. Real interests can be iden-

tified therein and supported as well. At the local level we found openness on the part of NGOs and municipal governments to working together that can be capitalized upon even without having a small grants component in the local government project. At the local level and in collaboration with local government and members of the National Assembly, we also noted the presence of national-level CSOs working on such topics as the national disability implementation plan, and we saw networked local and regional CSOs that take on a national character on such issues as forestry conservation. The Mission's focus on youth as job-seekers clearly could tap into real felt needs that could be advanced through youth groups' interest-based civic advocacy.

All of these projects and the beneficiary groups they target would benefit from the kind of specialized interest representation technical assistance we are recommending, and any new civil society project should be structured so that such assistance is readily accessible to them as well. This would require a more sophisticated programming and implementation structure than is found in most Mission portfolios, which operate tightly compartmentalized projects. Perhaps other projects could "buy" services from the same private technical assistance providers' contracts (with sufficient contract ceiling built in). Perhaps a stand-alone "QC-type" contract or a grant devoted to services to CSOs to strengthen their capacity for interest representation could stand alongside a new civil society project and be open to all Mission projects.

A more radical approach that we recommend for consideration would be not to do another stand-alone civil society project but to fold interest-based representation components into all projects across all sectors and strategic objectives. This would really "mainstream" civil society support and create a larger playing field for support to democratic pluralism through CSOs. It might be seen as a more self-interested approach in which USAID links civil society support and CSO activism more directly to the other development objectives the Mission is pursuing. However, it would take several years before the project portfolio could be fully integrated in this fashion. The approaches need not be mutually exclusive. A tightly focused new civil society project of the sort we have recommended can include coverage for other Mission programs as described above. It would be essential to maintain Mission "DG expertise" input into any such integrated programming. This is often referred to as "convergence" in the recent literature about the relationship between democracy promotion and other development activities.

Recognize that CSOs will not only focus on a breadth of issues, but represent a range of opinions and begin to transition the country, and civil society, away from too much emphasis on consensus. Conflict is unavoidable in a democracy. The role of democracy is not to avoid conflict but to ensure that it is managed and resolved lawfully, peacefully and within an agreed set of rules. Although democracy requires consensus on these rules and laws, it does not require consensus on the issues that are addressed within these structures. Currently, Kosovo civil society does not recognize this distinction.

The current widespread agreement among most CSOs on major issues reflects both donor policy and the need for consensus during the period when the country was focused mostly on the goal of independence. However, the perceived need for consensus is now hampering civil society and democratic development. If people with different views do not see

legal civic organization and advocacy as useful and relevant tools, they will almost certainly turn to less constructive ways to ensure that their views are represented.

Continuing to emphasize consensus among CSOs will soon begin to hamper democratic development in Kosovo and exacerbate the perception, which the team encountered frequently during the interviews, that CSOs have been established to pursue the interests of donors rather than those of citizens.

Although it is natural for USAID to want to support CSOs that express viewpoints that are consistent with other goals, hewing too closely to this line creates an environment in which CSOs are viewed, not without cause, as primarily being implementers of U.S. policy goals. This has already begun to happen in Kosovo. Several interviewees commented that donors, including USAID, followed trends first focusing on minority integration, then on anticorruption and now on the environment. The last of these is perhaps the most interesting because just as CSOs seeking to protect the environment should be encouraged to build constituencies, people who do not share that view should also be encouraged to form CSOs to represent them. At first glance this may seem counterintuitive, but it is central to meaningful representation. This applies to other areas of substantive debate as well.

A major goal of civil society development should be to help Kosovars begin to ground their political discourse in substantive policy debate rather than in ethnic, kinship, wartime or regional ties and identities. This can occur only if the range of views represented by civil society broadly reflects those held by citizens.

Encourage NGOs to reach across ethnic lines based on shared interests. In general in Kosovo, there is limited interaction between NGOs of different ethnic backgrounds. Although for matters of “high politics” this may be difficult to foster in the near future, facilitating the cooperation among CSOs of different ethnicities for purposes of common interest and related to community concerns is quite plausible. To this end, potential fields of intervention include environment, health, people with disabilities and other similar examples.

A good example testifying that such practices can be successful in Kosovo is the Kosovo Women’s Network, which represents more than 70 organizations involved in gender equality and empowerment of women of all ethnicities in Kosovo. A more thorough analysis of this network suggests that the reason behind this organization’s success is that it represents an organic union of organizations that share the same priorities and have similar objectives.

Another successful organic relationship that has resisted the pressure of time is that of Handikos and Little People of Kosova, two organizations with very specific constituencies that have demonstrated over time that their needs as a group are the same, regardless of their ethnicity. There are other examples of inter-ethnic interest-based initiatives that have been successful in the past, but they have occurred infrequently.

Do not pursue an advocacy or interest-based strategy north of the Ibar, but support service-oriented CSOs through a different program. Advocacy initiatives north of the Ibar will not be effective until the circumstances in this part of Kosovo have changed. It is impossible to design advocacy strategies without having a government or other institu-

tions to whom CSOs can advocate. Instead, support in this part of Kosovo should be focused on service-based NGOs until there are suitable grounds for carrying out meaningful advocacy. Such a shift in focus would maximize the value that USAID would get from its investment and would also be positive for USAID's image in that area. Moreover, the interviews with Kosovo Serb NGOs during the field visit indicate that the communities in these areas face multiple challenges and lack even some of the basic services.

The Positive Change Program (support to KPAN), is an example of the kind of program that USAID should support. USAID may want to consider streamlining its support towards Kosovo Serb NGOs through this network, hence adding value to its support from other programs.

USAID should directly fund three to six interest-based CSOs to work on constituency building and interest representation-based advocacy. This should be done through three-year grants in the \$250,000-\$750,000 range and can include one to two watchdog or anti-corruption CSOs. USAID should also support a local private company technical assistance contract to help these organizations develop the necessary skill sets for interest representation. USAID should move away from a civil society program that relies heavily on small grants both because there are numerous opportunities for local CSOs to receive small grants from other donors and because the current project demonstrated the difficulty of achieving program goals through small grants of limited duration.

Instead, USAID should identify a small number of NGOs, or NGO networks, and fund them directly. Direct funding will make it possible to infuse more money into local civil society. Keeping the number of grants to a reasonable limit, USAID should be able to assume capably the management role it has previously handed off to intermediaries such as ISC for grant-making. The NGO or NGO networks that USAID funds should be oriented around a specific issue and be interest-based or committed to becoming interest-based. The particular issues on which these organizations work should not be pre-conditions for the program, but based on this evaluation some potentially fruitful issues might be women, the environment, veterans, labor or small businesses in a particular sector. If USAID wants to focus on anticorruption, it should identify an anticorruption NGO that is interested in building a concrete constituency and support that organization, particularly with regards to its efforts to develop a constituency. NGOs working on more general topics such as democracy, community organizing, and basic civil society development are not interest-based and should not be supported as part of this program.

In addition to supporting these NGOs, USAID should identify a local contractor or consortium to facilitate the delivery of technical assistance for strengthening interest representation in these NGOs. The contractor will likely need to engage outside support and expertise from the region and the U.S. from time to time. The contractor should not do general capacity building for these NGOs except in the context of a primary focus on interest representation. In addition, some money in the contract could be set aside for CSOs that are not supported as part of this grant but that would still like some assistance in increasing their capacity to develop constituencies and represent interests. Some possible mechanisms for doing this have been described earlier.

IV. Conclusion

In sum, this evaluation recommends that it is time for USAID/Kosovo to move beyond the kind of civil society programming it has done over the last 10 years in three similar projects, including K-CSSP. The model of providing short-term, small grants to a large number of NGOs, with limited capacity-building technical assistance and shallow advocacy efforts, has run its course and outlived its usefulness. This conclusion is not meant to negate the value of K-CSSP but rather to propose a different approach for the future that we think can generate greater impact at the national level on a more sustainable basis.

Kosovo civil society is maturing and should be ready to progress to a more substantive, powerful kind of civil society activism based on interest representation that can connect CSOs to the most critical needs of citizens in their daily lives. USAID support to civil society needs to evolve accordingly. Without force-feeding favored NGOs, USAID needs to match CSOs with important interests that need better representation.

It can be argued that USAID's approach as in the past should be to —~~sed~~” CSOs widely but this time targeting interest-based CSOs and letting the most effective organizations prevail naturally. We recognize this would promote pluralism more broadly, which is pivotal to the development of a democratic society. We also recognize it is difficult to pick —winners” in advance and concentrate resources on just a few CSOs. It is predictable that some of them will fail to build their constituent bases and will not represent those interests well. In such cases, USAID must be prepared to cut its losses mid-term if —losers” become apparent.

But on balance, in our measured judgment after seeing conditions in Kosovo and studying civil society in the early stages of independence, we believe that there is a critical need for some strong, constituency-based CSOs to emerge. Such CSOs are needed to counterbalance the current personalistic political system and to provide checks and balances outside the state to prevent a drift over time toward an institutionalized, semi-authoritarian regime. This strategic objective should be the driver for future DG civil society programming by USAID in Kosovo.

APPENDIX A: PERSONS CONSULTED

| Name of Organization/Institution | Contact person |
|---|---|
| USAID Kosovo | Luljete Gjonabala |
| Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) | Robert Garnett Armend Bekaj Radovan Jovanovic |
| Advocacy Training and Resource Center (ATRC) | Kushtrim Kaloshi |
| Center for Civil Society Development (CCSD) | Momcilo Arlov Vuk Mitrovic |
| Kosovo Foundation for Open Society-Soros (KFOS) | Sihana Xhaferi |
| Kosovo Civil Society Foundation (KCSF) | Taulant Hoxha |
| Eye of Vision | Veton Muja Qenan Bardhaj |
| Fol Movement | Ramadan Ilazi |
| National Democratic Institute (NDI) | Laura Nichols |
| Academy for Education and Development (AED) | Matthew Pietz |
| Kosovo Parliament | Driton Tali, MP |
| Hendikos | Gezim Abazi |
| Foreign Policy Club (FPC) | Ylli Hoxha |
| Down Syndrome Kosova (DSK) | Driton Bajraktari |
| Kosova Advocacy and Development Center (KADC) | Shkumbin Spahija |
| European Commission Liaison Office to Kosovo (ECLO) | Carole Poullaouec Edis Agani |
| Swiss Cooperation | Merita Limani |
| Women Wellness Center | Ardita Balaj |
| Mayor's Office Peja | Lirim Kurtaj, Deputy Mayor |
| Mayor's Office in Mitrovica | Deputy Mayor |
| Mayor's Office in Gjilan | Deputy Mayor Fadil Osmani, Project Officer |
| Father Lorenc Mazreku | Director |
| Action for Non-Violence and Peace Building | Nexhat Ismajli |
| Committee for Social Development | Ivan Nikolic |
| With Hand in Heart | Shqipe Qarkaj |
| World of Angels | Vasiljka Voinovic |
| Community Building Mitrovica | Valdete Idrizi |

APPENDIX B: DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

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APPENDIX C: SCOPE OF WORK

Scope of Work

Evaluation of Kosovo Civil Society Strengthening Program (CSSP)

IQC AID-OAA-I-10-00004 with Democracy International

A. Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the impact and quality of implementation of the current USAID civil society program in Kosovo and, based on information gleaned, to provide recommendations to USAID Kosovo for possible future programming in this sector.

B. Background

Civil Society in Kosovo

According to Freedom House⁸, while the process of building and strengthening Kosovo's state institutions continued, but without considerable success, there has not been an improvement in the rule of law, though the Constitutional Court became functional in mid-2009, and the new European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) reached full capacity in the areas of police services, customs, and the judiciary. Negative trends were noted with respect to restrictions on freedom of speech and rising corruption. The Kosovo government tightened its grip on the public broadcaster and independent media, the appointment of senior public servants is increasingly subject to political interference, and the state's role in the economy has grown dramatically. The civil society sector continued to develop in 2009 amid an ongoing proliferation of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). These groups often struggled to develop their own agendas, secure stable funding, and fulfill their strategic visions. Moreover, they remained dependent on foreign donors, many of whom have their own priorities and are unwilling to consider and support local initiatives. However, despite these weaknesses, Kosovo's NGOs have increased their activities beyond the capital and are much more vigorous in their monitoring and criticism of the government.

USAID Civil Society Programming in Kosovo

East-West Management Institute (EWMI): In September 2001, USAID launched the Kosovo NGO Advocacy Project (KNAP), a three-year program implemented by East-West Management Institute (EWMI). The purpose of KNAP was to: (1) enhance the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in advocacy by helping to transform them from reactive service providers into proactive agents of change; (2) strengthen the institutional capacity of the CSO sector by fostering the development of viable, professional and transparent CSOs; (3) improve the financial viability and sustainability of CSOs; and (4) elevate the public image of CSOs. These objectives were to be achieved through a combination of training, mentoring programs, and grant-making.

International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX): On May 17, 2005, USAID awarded a three-year cooperative agreement totaling \$3,899,971, to the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) to implement the Kosovo Civil Society Program (KCSP). The KCSP had three primary aims: (1) To increase ownership among Kosovo's NGOs over their own development and long-term sustainability; (2) To increase civil society's capacity to effectively advocate

⁸ This section is taken from Freedom House Nations in Transit 2010, Report on Kosovo <http://www.freedomhouse.eu/images/nit2010/NIT-2010-Kosovo-final.pdf>.

on behalf of Kosovo's citizens; and (3) To improve public perception of the NGO community and enhance legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC): On September 16, 2008, USAID awarded a three-year cooperative agreement totaling \$4,000,000, to the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) to implement the Kosovo Civil Society Strengthening Program (K-CSSP). With this three year program USAID's goal is to strengthen and improve the engagement of civil society in advocating for and influencing the development and effective implementation of public policy reforms by supporting partnerships at the national, regional, and local levels that bring together a variety of stakeholders to find concrete solutions to democracy and governance challenges and to engage civil society in monitoring the implementation of reforms passed by the new Kosovar Government. The program also aims to strengthen the civil society enabling environment in order to provide a framework and mechanisms for citizens to actively engage their government and to strengthen relationships between government and civil society. A special component of the program is designed to reach out to Kosovo Serb civil society organizations and strengthen their capacity to effectively represent and advocate for the interests of their communities and through this process begin to bridge gaps between institutions and citizens in Kosovo Serb communities. More than simply providing grants to advocacy NGOs, this program support for civic organizations, rights groups, watchdog organizations, membership organizations, and others, with the aim of promoting and sustaining democratic and other critical reforms necessary for Kosovo's development.

The K-CSSP fall under USAID Kosovo Strategic (2004-2008) Objective 2.1: Civil Society and Government are More Effective Partners in Achieving Good Governance. The KCSP contributes to the following Intermediate Results (IRs) and sub-IR:

2.1.1 – Better informed citizens

2.1.2 – Increased civil society influence on public policy decisions

2.1.2.1 – Increased citizen participation in political and economic decision-making

The three year program envisions:

- A robust, diverse, and representative NGO sector influences public policy and carries out advocacy campaigns that achieve results at the local and national levels.
- The legal and regulatory framework allows NGOs to operate with maximum leeway and impact.
- Kosovo Serb and other minority NGOs are able to represent and advocate for their constituent's interests.
- The civil society "infrastructure" is in place to support the sector over the long term.

To achieve aims outlined above, ISC included the following four components and related activities in its program:

Component 1: Improving the Legal Framework and Cultivating NGO-Government Partnerships—Support Kosovo NGOs to advocate for successful implementation of the NGO Law and to offer policy recommendations for other laws and regulations that impact civil society. Work with the NGO Department to strengthen its capacity as a resource and service-provider to NGOs.

Component 2: Stimulating Advocacy Successes through Multi-Layered Assistance—Support a diverse number of ambitious NGO-led advocacy campaigns across Kosovo via three primary grant mechanisms: large National Advocacy Partner grants for tackling issues of national significance; small-to-mid-size grants awarded through two Local Advocacy Grantmakers for advoca-

cy campaigns at the regional or municipal level; and a flexible Special Initiatives Fund for emerging opportunities. In the initial phase of the first year ISC selected two Local Advocacy Grantmakers (LAGs): The Advocacy and Training Resource Center (ATRC) and Center for Civil Society Development (CCSD), a Kosovo Serb NGO in North Mitrovica.

Component 3: Providing Customized Capacity Building Assistance—Provide hands-on, tailored assistance to grantees on topics identified through assessments as having the greatest potential to improve advocacy capacity and organizational effectiveness. Bring together existing trainers and organizations to form a highly-skilled consulting network that will support the sector with sophisticated advocacy and other capacity development well beyond the life of our program.

Component 4: Prioritizing Outreach and Inclusion of Kosovo Serb NGOs— Support Kosovo Serb and other minority NGOs to strengthen their organizations, represent and advocate for their constituents, and more actively participate in civil society with their NGO colleagues from other ethnic groups. ISC will encourage this in two ways: through an integrated approach, minority NGOs will have opportunities to participate in all project activities and ongoing sector-wide initiatives; and through a specialized approach ISC will address the particular needs of Kosovo Serb NGOs.

K-CSSP impact is measured by the following indicators:

1. Number of Positive Modifications to Enabling Legislation/Regulation for Civil Society Accomplished with USG Assistance (F Indicator)
2. Number of K-CSSP supported events on the NGO Law
3. K-CSSP grantees have productive partnerships with government stakeholders
4. NGOs receive quality services from the NGO Department
5. Number of CSO Advocacy Campaigns Supported by USG (F Indicator)
6. Number of USG assisted CSOs that Engage in Advocacy and Watchdog Functions (F Indicator)
7. Number of Policies that have been Influenced by CSOs (F Indicator)
- 8.** Local Advocacy Grantmakers serve as resource to the sector
9. Number of CSO using USG Support to Improve Internal Capacity (F Indicator)
10. Consulting Network of local service providers offers high quality training and consulting to the sector
11. K-CSSP grantees demonstrate improved organizational and advocacy capacities
12. Number of NGO partners supported by K-CSSP
- 13.** Number of NGOs participating in K-CSSP events
14. Serb grantees demonstrate improved organizational and advocacy capacities
15. Serb NGOs receive quality services from the NGO Department
16. Number of training, advising, and coaching sessions provided to KPAN***

C. Evaluation Goal

Evaluate the performance and impact of the “Civil Society Strengthening Program (CSSP)”, implemented by ISC, and provide analysis for possible future programming.

The evaluation will answer two main questions:

- (1) What has been the impact of K-CCSP, USAID’s current civil society program; and

(2) What does an analysis of the environment and other factors indicate regarding future possible programming with the civil society sector in Kosovo?

Describe and document answers to the following questions and, where applicable, suggest alternate approaches which may have enhanced program results:

- Were the aims, objectives and activities selected for the KCSP appropriate for achieving the overarching Strategic Objective, “Civil Society and Government are More Effective Partners in Achieving Good Governance”, as well as respective IRs and the sub-IR?
- Did the K-CSSP achieve the aims and objectives set forth at the beginning of the program and have the activities implemented under each objective contributed to the achievement of the objective?
- What has been the impact of activities implemented under the K-CSSP on individual NGOs and on the civil society sector more broadly? Has the impact justified resources invested?
- How effective have NGOs been as policy advocates? Have they been effective in preventing or combating corruption, or at least raising public awareness about good governance?
- Were aims, objectives, activities, and performance measurements selected for the K-CSSP appropriate for meeting the needs of the civil society sector in Kosovo?
- Were there any unintended positive or negative impacts resulting from K-CSSP?
- What aspects of K-CSSP worked well? What aspects of K-CSSP did not work well?
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of ATRC and CCSD.
- Has the K-CSSP contributed to improving ATRC's and CCSD's development?
- Did concentrating resources in ATRC and CCSD have a positive result, or could alternative approaches have been more effective?
- Has programming targeted to minority CSOs, specifically Kosovar Serb CSOs, been effective and sufficient?
- What are key lessons learned from K-CSSP: successes and failures?

Analysis and Evaluation Relevant to Future USAID Civil Society Programming

- Current USAID policy encourages more direct grants to local CSOs, rather than use US-based implementers such as ISC:
 - Are there some CSOs that appear to have the capacity and desire to directly manage grants from USAID? Are they currently receiving direct funding from other foreign donors?
 - Will CSOs that want to engage more directly with USAID require technical assistance for grant management?

- Based on review of implementation and results from K-CSSP and its operating environment, what conclusions may be drawn for potential future USAID programs that work with civil society?
- Given the relatively closed nature of Kosovo politics, can Kosovo civil society increase its capacity to successfully advocate for better governance?
- Will Kosovo CSOs be able to operate effectively north of the Ibar? Under what conditions?
- What will be the foremost challenge for NGOs operating in Kosovo? Which areas of potential focus for USAID support, i.e. anticorruption projects, NGO sustainability, sector independence, NGO advocacy (by type if possible), have the most promise for achieving results in the current environment?
- In which issues/areas is international technical assistance, training, and grant support still required?

D. Evaluation Methodology

The team will conduct a thorough evaluation of the performance of the K-CSSP and its impact on civil society in Kosovo as well as an analysis of possible future programming for the civil society sector. The team will work with USAID/Kosovo representatives to develop an efficient approach to conducting this evaluation.

In order to evaluate the K-CSSP and determine how the current environment and other factors affect future civil society programs, the team will review relevant documents and will interview civil society leaders, ISC representatives, local partners, political actors, government officials, journalists, analysts and others. Based on its findings from these efforts, the team will address the detailed questions set out in the RFTOP. The analysis will help USAID/Kosovo to better understand the current status of civil society development, examine the impact of USAID's efforts in the field, and provide analysis for possible future programming.

Pertinent Documents

USAID Kosovo Results Framework for Strategic Objective 2.1
New USAID Strategy 2010- 2015
USAID NGO Sustainability Index 2009
Freedom House Nations in Transit 2010
USAID Cooperative Agreement with ISC and any amendments
ISC CSSP Annual Reports (narratives and indicators) from 2009 and 2010
ISC CSSP Quarterly Reports
ISC CSSP Annual Workplans (08/09 and 09/10)

Relevant People to be Interviewed

USAID Washington
Maryanne Yerkes, USAID/DCHA/DG

ISC Washington

KOSOVO CIVIL SOCIETY STRENGTHENING PROJECT EVALUATION

Patricia Caffrey, Vice President for Civil Society Programs

USAID Kosovo

Luljeta Gjonbala, USAID AOTR
Jose Garzon, USAID/Kosovo DGO Director
Lisa Magno, USAID/Kosovo PPO Director

ISC Kosovo

Robert Garnett, Chief of Party
Armend Bekaj, Deputy Chief of Party
Radovan Jovanovic, Senior Program Officer
Ibrahim Bejtullahu, Program Officer

ATRC

Kushtrim Kaloshi, Executive Director

CCSD

Momcilo Arlov, Program Coordinator

NGOs that have benefited from the K-CSSP

Appendix A

List of NGOs that have benefited from the K-CSSP

Appendix B

NGOs that have been directly involved in the activities of K-CSSP, like KCSF, TACSO, and other USAID implementing partners as RTI.

Municipal and Other Government Officials (that have interacted with NGOs involved in K-CSSP)

E. Evaluation Team Composition

The team will be composed of experts in conducting evaluations of civil society programs. The Team Leader will have ultimate responsibility for overall team coordination and development of the final report. Including the Team Leader, the evaluation team will likely consist of three members (two ex-patriates and one local expert) and in totality will have the following expertise or qualifications:

- Experience in international development, especially with civil society programming in postcommunist, postconflict and transitional settings;
- Previous experience performing USAID program evaluations; and
- Recent experience in and background knowledge of south east Europe.

F. Schedule and Logistics

The evaluation should take approximately 4 weeks to complete including: one week in the U.S. to read documents, interview Washington-based people at USAID and ISC, and prepare; two

weeks in Kosovo to conduct interviews; and one week in the U.S. to write the report and to revise the report once comments on the draft are received from USAID. While in Kosovo, a six-day work week is authorized. All logistical support will be provided by the contractor, including travel, transportation, secretarial, interpretation, report printing and communication, as appropriate. USAID and ISC shall provide all relevant documents as well as contact names and phone numbers to the contractor, and the contractor shall arrange all meetings necessary for the evaluation. In Kosovo, the contractor will meet with CSOs from Pristina and from a minimum of 3 locations outside Pristina.

G. Deliverables

1. A workplan within two days of arrival in Pristina.
2. Meeting with USAID and ISC on the first day of arrival in Pristina.
3. Briefings with USAID and ISC prior to departure from Kosovo to provide initial findings.
4. A draft report within one week of departure from Kosovo.
5. A final report within one week of receipt of comments from USAID. The contractor shall submit an electronic version of the report (in PDF format) as well as six bound copies to USAID Kosovo. The report shall also be submitted to Development Experience Clearinghouse according to the terms and conditions of the IQC.

The final report will include the following:

- Executive Summary (no more than 5 pages)
- Body of the Report (answering the questions posed in Section C above in no more than 45 pages)
- Appendices (including a list of people and organizations whom the evaluation team interviewed)

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