

The Role of Transition Assistance: *The Case of Kosovo*

Summary

IN THE AFTERMATH of the devastation and dislocation of the NATO members' air war in Kosovo, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) played an important role in helping the U.S. Government respond quickly and effectively to the hope engendered by Serbian withdrawal and UN administration. OTI's pre-air war efforts had been frustrated by Serbian oppression of Kosovo's Albanian majority. After Serbian forces withdrew in June 1999, OTI launched its programs rapidly, establishing a regional headquarters in the Kosovar capital of Pristina and six field offices throughout the province.

A study by USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) found that OTI's rapid response initiatives played a valuable role in helping USAID and the U.S. Government get reconstruction and development activities under way in Kosovo. Factors considered during the planning process met OTI's guidelines for engagement. The program was integrated nearly seamlessly within USAID's strategic plan. Bringing the OTI country program under the authority of the USAID/Kosovo mission director ensured that implementation and support were effectively integrated at the field level. OTI's programming approach allowed for strategy changes as the transition evolved. OTI concentrated its efforts on the creation of grassroots organizations—Community Improvement Councils (CICs)—to impart basic democratic practices and initiate reconstruction efforts. Planning for handoff was timely and effective. The activities pursued reflect OTI's comparative advantage in introducing initiatives at the local level.

The CDIE evaluation concluded that OTI's successful intervention in Kosovo—and particularly its effective coordination with the sustainable development program—could usefully serve as a model in other situations. This model could be further strengthened, the study recommended, by reporting results within the overall mission-reporting framework rather than that of OTI. The study found that OTI's community-development approach effectively introduced grassroots decision-making practices—previously outside of Kosovar or Serbian experience—while meeting community reconstruction needs. OTI's self-help programs encouraged communities to seek multiple sources of funding, which resulted in \$4 million in additional resources and discouraged single-donor dependency. ■

KEY IDEAS

- USAID/Kosovo presents a successful model for effective coordination of sustainable development and OTI transition programs.
- OTI's community development approach was effective.
- Emphasizing community self-help and self-reliance discouraged dependency.
- OTI program results are best reported in the USAID/Kosovo Results Review and Resource Request.



The Case of Kosovo

Background

In March 1999, NATO member countries launched an air war against Serbia. This action was a response to Serbia's oppressive rule of Kosovo and the ethnic Albanians who constitute 90 percent of its population. Serbian withdrawal in June 1999 ended 10 years of repression that had restricted Kosovars' basic rights and generated allegations of massive human rights violations. Serbian police and military were replaced by the Kosovo Force (KFOR)—security forces provided by NATO member countries—which maintained peace while protecting the remaining Serbian and other minorities. The UN mission in Kosovo served as the interim governmental authority.

OTI's involvement in Kosovo actually predated the war, though Serbian pressure and a deteriorating security situation had made it impossible to undertake community-based programming. During the war, OTI worked with Kosovar exiles in Macedonia. Upon OTI's return, many Serbs had already fled. More would leave Kosovo in the months following installation of the UN interim



A grand opening ceremony marks the rehabilitation of the local primary school in the village of Talinoc, western Kosovo. OTI's Kosovo Transition Initiative contributed building materials and supplies.

government. The short- and long-term challenge was to foster democratic and participatory community decisionmaking and to address urgent postwar needs. OTI was asked to complement the USAID mission's democracy/governance program by forming local community organizations and supporting reconstruction.

CDIE has been assessing the role of USAID transition assistance, with a specific emphasis on OTI's role and activities. OTI was established in 1994 to help address the increasing number of postcrisis situations. It has provided assistance to more than 20 countries worldwide. Transition assistance, as used here, refers to the OTI-administered programs that provide flexible, short-term responses to help advance peaceful, democratic change in conflict-

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prone countries. This assistance is usually provided during the critical two-year period after conflict when countries are most vulnerable to renewed conflict or instability.

As part of this study, a CDIE evaluator visited Kosovo October 3–7, 2000 to examine the effectiveness of the OTI program at the country level. The evaluator reviewed documents and interviewed representatives of USAID, other U.S. Government entities, other donors, and USAID-funded contractors and grantees. He also interviewed Washington-based representatives familiar with the OTI program. The study 1) sought to determine if the decision to initiate a transition program was made in a transparent fashion and considered appropriate guidelines, 2) analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the planning process, 3) assessed program implementation, 4) discussed duration and program handoff issues, and 5) determined whether the transition activities achieved their objectives effectively.

Deciding to Engage

The CDIE study found that OTI's decision to intervene in Kosovo was within the established guidelines for such decisions, but OTI did not formally document the process. The strategic importance to the United States of peace and stability in the Balkans and resolution of the Kosovo crisis within Serbia were important factors favoring engagement.

Planning Transition Assistance

The importance of Kosovo to U.S. national interests in Europe, and the complicated political context, made necessary close coordination of all U.S. Government efforts, including those of USAID. The Agency's Kosovo Transition Initiative aimed to encourage Kosovars "to recognize the real benefits of participation and citizen action for the improvement of their communities and the creation of good government in the early stages and succeeding years of Kosovo's democratic development." The initiative called for OTI to create CICs to 1) empower citizens to maximize their broad-based political influence in their communities, 2) encourage and support the development of local leadership, and 3) help Kosovars mobilize and direct resources to meet priorities identified by communities.

These aims melded with the USAID/Kosovo strategic plan, particularly the objective of "accountable and transparent governance," by fostering free and fair elections and an independent media and civil society. OTI plans also supported objectives relating to strengthening civil institutions and sustaining social services and community infrastructure. All those interviewed cited the very close cooperation and constructive spirit evident between OTI and other USAID/Kosovo staff.

The clear strength of the Kosovo planning process was the mission's formulation of a strategic plan that effectively integrated OTI's short-term transition effort and the mission's longer term program objectives. Kosovo's small territory, population of only 1.8 million, and the robust international effort may have also contributed to the success in coordi-



The community celebrates Gjakova 2000, a ceremony that kicked off the rebuilding of the historic old town that had burned down during the war. OTI helped the Community Improvement Council develop a multiphased approach to the rehabilitation.

nating the OTI programs with those of other mission entities. The synergy developed at the planning stage substantially facilitated the establishment of a close and cooperative partnership between OTI and other USAID/Kosovo staff during implementation.

Implementing Activities

OTI's community development model used grants to support priority, locally identified, small-scale reconstruction projects as incentives to develop civic participation and democratic skills. This grassroots approach is not new to the development world, but OTI has developed an expertise in using it to meet basic postconflict reconstruction needs. OTI's media efforts, while short term, provided skills that may contribute over time to better reporting and airing of public issues. OTI programs also helped increase civic awareness.

To support community organizations and to extend program reach and strengthen management control, OTI established a headquarters in Pristina and six regional offices, staffing them with locally hired personnel with expertise and knowledge of the principal players in each region.

OTI and other USAID entities in the field reported to the USAID/Kosovo mission director, at his insistence. Nevertheless, the director let OTI work largely independently within the USAID mission

structure. The result was an effective partnership, because OTI and non-OTI staff recognized and wanted to preserve the complementary relationship and their respective program strengths. This management style, Kosovo's small size, and other factors made collaboration easier, but clearly the authority relationship was important in establishing an effective formal structure to guide field operations. Unlike a number of recent OTI country programs, the Kosovo program did not use the SWIFT (Support Which Implements Fast Transitions) contract. However, OTI worked out a similar approach by engaging the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to implement its activities. Affiliated with the UN, the organization had greater operational flexibility and fewer security restrictions than U.S. contractors. Both IOM and OTI were satisfied with the arrangement, which was unique in that it used a grant to produce results similar to those achieved using SWIFT. Replication of this arrangement elsewhere would likely depend on whether a grantee and OTI could

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develop a similar mutually agreeable arrangement. Coordination with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations at the village, town, or city district level brought additional benefits.

Conflicts between traditional disaster relief and transition efforts complicated implementation. In postwar Kosovo, USAID provided disaster relief, managed by the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), and transition assistance, managed by OTI. OFDA responded to immediate basic shelter needs by offering tents and plastic sheeting—a conventional disaster response. OTI responded to needs identified by the community by

offering bricks and roof tiles—which OTI also used as an incentive to support effective community interaction and decisionmaking, OTI's primary objective. Eventually, OTI and OFDA reached a compromise whereby OFDA provided tents and plastic sheeting in lower elevations and OTI furnished bricks and tiles in higher, colder environs. The compromise allowed each USAID office to pursue its primary mandate—saving lives for OFDA and advancing political development for OTI.

The combination of the authority relationship, a strategic plan that closely integrated OTI activities with those of the long-term USAID program, and collocation of offices with integrated operations produced a unique model for OTI field programs. OTI's grant to IOM permitted effective and coordinated management of the field operations. OTI/Kosovo used frequent retreats, meetings, and other techniques to evaluate and correct implementation of its programs.

Handing Off Activities

OTI/Kosovo noted the difficulty in planning for handoff in the face of such questions as Kosovo's future political status and the impact of Serbian leadership changes. However, USAID/Kosovo contacts indicated that OTI's plans and handoff options—such as continuing to support some of the field offices to broaden contacts and maintaining some support for the CICs, perhaps by extending the IOM grant—would be sufficient to allow the USAID mission to assume responsibility for appropriate key activities.

USAID/Kosovo's buy-in to the OTI activities meant that longer term mission programs could build on OTI's short-term investment, experience, and contacts with the more than 3,000 Kosovars directly associated with the CICs. USAID mission leadership indicated that OTI's work at the CIC level, spurred by the October 28, 2000 elections, would create sufficient momentum for achieving the longer term results of the mission's democracy/governance program. Maintaining field offices would permit continued access to targeted benefi-

ciaries to help strengthen nascent community and political practices and facilitate the identification and implementation of other development initiatives. OTI's cooperation with other donors provided additional opportunities to hand off its activities and approaches.

Achieving Objectives

Between June 1999 and September 2000, OTI made 361 transition assistance grants totaling \$7.78 million, including support to community organizations (\$6.6 million), media (\$1 million), and civil society organizations (\$180,000). More than 3,000 Kosovars participated directly in the CIC process and an estimated 30,000–40,000 Kosovars actively participated in the implementation of a variety of community improvement activities. OTI supported the formation of more than 220 CICs that reflected the political, social, and intellectual diversity of the respective local populations. These built consensus to identify community improvement needs, decided on priority activities, obtained resources, and monitored implementation. Based on close monitoring and extensive activities implemented, OTI estimated that a million people would ultimately benefit from the CIC improvement activities that produced rebuilt schools, houses, electrical systems, roads and bridges, water and sewage systems, health facilities, heating systems, and community and youth centers.

In the absence of baseline data, assessment of overall program impact on the development of demo-



Cleaning and repairing the old town bazaar in Gjakova.

cratic practices was difficult. Anecdotal information provided examples of successful community interaction and decisionmaking on community improvement activities. The former U.S. chief of mission in Kosovo observed that many of the CICs

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had taken on a life of their own, supporting the growth of grassroots democracy in a region where both grassroots decisionmaking and democracy were far from the historical or cultural norm. An OTI-funded assessment noted the CICs' important contributions to recovery from the effects of the war and provided anecdotal information that the CIC approach appropriately filled the vacuum in the absence of local government. Although unable to draw conclusions about the collective impact of the numerous and widespread activities, the assessment showed that the CIC effort helped communities articulate their needs and interests, learn organizing principles, and dampen the tendency to vest power in a small number of traditional leaders. Sustainability is not usually characteristic of OTI's short-term efforts, but observers believed that OTI's activities contributed to the development of long-term political objectives. Other donors adopted the CIC model to establish community-level project priorities.

OTI also used the CICs to promote participation in elections and conduct surveys on community issues that would be debated during the municipal election campaigns at town meetings and media programs. As a result, more than 130 CIC members competed in Kosovo's first-ever democratic local elections. An indication of the success of the CIC effort is that 25 won election from a field of 5,350 candidates vying for 869 seats.

In late 2001, external evaluators assessed the contribution of the CIC activity to building democratic

political processes by using a framework depicting four developmental stages—nascent, emerging, expanding, and mature. The evaluation found that most communities and local governments were entering the expanding stage: governance structures were elected and beginning to operate, community organizations were independently articulating needs to elected officials, accountability and transparency were becoming more important community issues, and communities were beginning to address issues of diversity in representation. In addition, the evaluation noted that the councils were learning to communicate their concerns and priorities to the international community, thereby helping donors respond better to local needs.

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Program achievement was also shown by OTI's ability to leverage additional assistance from other donors. Calculated at \$4 million, this was 60 percent above the CIC allocation of \$6.6 million through 2000. Kosovar communities themselves contributed an additional \$2 million in cash and in kind—an important measure of successful development of community ownership of improvement activities.

OTI assistance also effectively complemented other mission programs by identifying local contacts for other development programs, validating the community development model for assessing needs, and providing civic education and media support for elections. OTI's activities contributed substantially to helping achieve USAID objectives in Kosovo. Flexible programming—a characteristic of transition assistance—was crucial in permitting program changes over time. ■

Lessons Learned & Recommendation

Transition assistance played a valuable role in forming grassroots organizations in seven areas of Kosovo, imparting basic democratic practices, and initiating reconstruction efforts. The activities reflected OTI's comparative advantage in initiating activities at the local level. The Kosovo program was integrated nearly seamlessly within the USAID strategic plan, permitting USAID to maximize results from its investment. OTI employed a flexible programming approach that allowed for strategy changes as the transition evolved.

Lessons Learned

1 Kosovo presents a successful model for coordinating USAID transition programs. The mission evolved a successful operation to carry out postconflict relief, transition, and development, presenting a model for effective coordination of sustainable development and OTI transition programs.



In February 2001, the Kosovo Transition Initiative supported a youth-initiated campaign to raise awareness about the dangers of drug use. The youth group developed an integrated awareness campaign that included radio and television programming, the production of a video, and billboard ads.

Factors contributing to this success included: 1) placement of field authority under the mission director, 2) a management style that provided sufficient independence for OTI to manage activity implementation, 3) a strategic plan that closely integrated OTI and other mission activities, 4) a shared understanding among OTI and sustainable development staff of their complementary roles in achieving shared objectives, and 5) office collocation in Pristina. Partners viewed OTI as part of the USAID presence rather than as a separate entity. CDIE interviewed mission directors who had experience with OTI programs; many had concerns about inadequate coordination and integration of the OTI program with longer term mission programs. The Kosovo case thus holds considerable promise as a model for future OTI field programs.

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2 OTI's community development approach was effective.

The community development approach used in Kosovo effectively introduced basic democratic processes at the grassroots level while helping war-devastated communities address reconstruction needs. Grants were provided for community-identified infrastructure and services as an incentive and a means to introduce and practice democratic organizational skills.

OTI successfully used its field offices throughout the province to provide the close consultation with and support for communities required to realize results. Rather than apply a rigid structure for developing community interaction, OTI helped Kosovars establish flexible structures—CICs—that



A meeting of the USAID/OTI-sponsored Community Improvement Council in Klina, November 1999.

could operate with democratic principles when local governmental structures were not in place.

3 Emphasizing community self-help and self-reliance discouraged dependency.

By encouraging communities to seek multiple sources of funding and assistance, OTI expanded resources and discouraged dependency. Even in poor, devastated postconflict situations such as Kosovo, communities can provide in-kind assistance or identify alternative funding to help them achieve their goals. By insisting that communities obtain other resources to complement OTI support, OTI discouraged dependence on a sole funding source. The self-help approach also helped inculcate skills for obtaining other assistance and boosted community confidence in its capacity to meet its needs and improve its wellbeing.

Recommendation

1 Report results through the regular USAID reporting channel.

OTI program results are best reported in the USAID/Kosovo Results Review and Resource Request (R4). OTI has its own results framework that measures intermediate results independent of

those of country strategic plans. OTI/Kosovo initially developed its program with this framework in mind, establishing objectives that differed from USAID/Kosovo's strategic plan. While the USAID/Kosovo strategy identified links between its program objectives and those of the OTI program, it was not clear whether the results would be reported principally within the USAID/Kosovo framework or that of OTI. Because the principal results of all transition programs were those realized within the country context itself, it is appropriate for OTI to report the results for its transition programs primarily in the USAID/Kosovo report. ■

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