



# Democracy Network Program

Tirana, Albania

**Quarterly Report  
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## INTRODUCTION

The ORT Democracy Network - Albanian NGO partnership has been strengthened over the report period of October - December 1996 and continues to be an effective force for change in critical democratic indicators. All goals for the sixth quarter have been met or exceeded.

## GRANT PROGRAM

During grant round three, ORT has received the largest number of grant applications to date (41). Over half the project proposals received this round were from NGOs applying for the first time to ORT. Overall, the proposals submitted were of a better quality than previous rounds. The proposals were more detailed, often included a better description of the NGO's goals and previous activities, and many contained project implementation plans. Over the past six months, ORT has taken a proactive approach to soliciting and helping in the development of proposals from NGOs in the economic and environmental sectors and offered training and technical assistance (i.e., joint training with the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe, independent research training, national conferences on NGO-government partnerships). As a result, there was an increase in the number of proposals from NGOs in these sectors compared to previous grant rounds. After careful evaluation, ORT is recommending ten proposals in round three for a total funding amount of \$78,314. Four of these proposals are in the democracy sector and two grant proposals are in each of the remaining sectors. With one exception, all of the NGOs have attended ORT training or conferences. Consequently, their proposals reflect a better understanding of an NGO's role in framing public policy and the steps involved in formulating and advocating policy issues. It is important to note, however, that the project proposals not recommended were of an improved quality; they were rejected primarily because the proposals could not demonstrate tangible impact on the proposed beneficiaries or the NGO lacked the institutional capacity for the project implementation.

As in previous grant rounds, new NGOs frequently contacted ORT to inquire about project funding possibilities. ORT provides a set of grant application materials to these NGOs and encourages applicants to complete a preapplication. This newly implemented process provides organizations with an immediate response as to whether their NGO and project idea meet the preliminary criteria established by ORT. This procedure prevents NGOs from wasting time by writing a detailed proposal if they are not eligible, or for a project idea that is not congruent with the focus of the Democracy Network Program. Although a number of initial preapplication forms or concept papers were rejected, ORT is assisting eligible NGOs in conceiving new project ideas for microgrants.

For the first time, the Project Management Unit (PMU) has decided to require proposals recommended by ORT and submitted to the Democracy Commission to be translated into English by the NGO. It was determined that translating ten proposals was not an effective use of time and caused increased deadline pressure; NGOs pursuing grants were also frustrated with the time involved in translating the proposals. Another factor in making this decision was that almost all other international donors require proposals to be written in English.

## **Achievements of Round Two Grantees**

Several grant activities were completed during this quarter including the Albanian NGO Forum and PPNEA-Skhodra.

ORT awarded a grant to an association for the **Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment of Shkodra** (PPNEA-Shkodra) in order to raise public awareness regarding the economic benefits of Lake Shkodra, and to conduct environmental studies for presentation to the government. Lake Shkodra, in Northern Albania, has suffered constant degradation over the last several decades as a result of deforestation, illegal fishing and hunting, dumping of urban and toxic wastes, and tampering with the balance of species inhabiting the ecosystem. During the transition to democracy, the national government shifted oversight authority of many nature reserves to the local government. Today, the Shkodra municipality has jurisdiction over the lake, but does not have a conservation policy or supporting funds. PPNEA-Shkodra executed a six-component advocacy project to persuade the local government to develop and implement an appropriate policy to protect the lake.

Through ORT-funded member training expeditions, photo and video exhibitions, and a community forum, PPNEA-Shkodra mobilized local concern and support for a new lake policy. Citizens and university students participating in these events expressed a desire to support the environmental efforts of PPNEA-Shkodra, other NGOs, and the local government. As part of the project, PPNEA-Shkodra collected data from those living and working in close proximity to the lake to ascertain levels of use and abuse. Previous ORT training in survey design gave the members the know-how to design two questionnaires and interview 115 individuals in nine villages around the lake. The survey results illustrated that there has been: (1) an increase in private individuals fishing (often fishing without licenses); (2) an increase in the use of illegal fishing methods (such as dynamite and electric shock); and (3) a decrease in the number of fish. Among the villagers there was a consensus that the lake is a vital economic resource, and to remain as such it must be protected through strict laws and proper enforcement. The survey findings ultimately convinced local government officials (at a subsequent ORT-funded roundtable) to agree to tighter controls on the use of the lake; establishing a commercial usage tax; and the creation of a special fund for cleaning, maintenance, and conservation of the lake.

Through an ORT institutional development grant, **The Albanian NGO Forum** expanded and strengthened its role as a service and networking center for Albanian and foreign NGOs. By the end of the grant, the Forum raised its membership from 114 NGOs to over 175 NGOs. The national office doubled its capacity to offer services while improving the quality thereof. Through this grant, at least 40% of NGOs in Albania have access to support centers and a forum to network with other NGOs and donors. As a result of the increased capacity, the Albanian NGO Forum provided between eight to ten NGO representatives each day with assistance in translation; lay-out and printing of NGO newsletters; technical advice on proposal writing, drafting statutes, program planning and registration procedures; facilitating contacts with lawyers, donors, and other NGOs; and clerical services such as photocopying and E-mail use; and the use of facilities for meetings and

seminars. At least 20 of the NGOs seeking advice in drafting project proposals received grants from different donors, and 15 newly-created NGOs received valuable advice on drafting their statutes and registering.

The Albanian NGO Forum created one of the first cross-sector NGO bulletins highlighting NGO and donor profiles, conclusions from NGO conferences and seminars, and useful organizational and legal advice for NGOs. The Forum also expanded its library resources to include indexes of European NGOs, training materials, and a newly created database that is able to process requests for information related to Albanian NGOs. Before the conclusion of the grant, the Forum contracted one of its members to conduct research on the level of development of Albanian NGOs; their organizational, training and funding needs; and international partnerships forged with NGOs. These findings will soon be published and made available to foreign and domestic donors and the NGO community.

In the past, the Forum was solely donor funded. Throughout the phase of the grant round, the Forum established membership and service fees to generate income considerable enough to fund furniture and partial operating expenses. The Forum held regular board meetings and its third annual election for board members and officers. ORT funding provided the Forum with the crucial finances necessary for this important growth phase; the result has been greater transparency and more democratic decision-making.

With ORT funds, the **Biologists Association** is introducing environmental training materials and techniques into secondary school curriculum through the "Curriculum Reform in Environmental Education in Secondary and High Schools" Project in order to combat the widespread environmental problems existing in Albania today. The Association piloted this new curricula in three school districts, training 83 secondary school teachers. The teaching methods and training materials designed by the Association supplement basic science and hygiene courses with separate environmental education modules such as experiments, excursions, local case studies, role playing exercises, and reading materials.

An added and unforeseen benefit of the project was the change that occurred in the way teachers' view curriculum development. The Association conducted teacher training in the form of roundtables which brought high level government representatives together with local teachers. The teachers commented in their training evaluations that it was the first time they had influence on curriculum reform in schools through a government/NGO dialogue. The teachers also initiated a program to establish student environmental organizations within their schools as extra-curricular activities. The Biologists Association has successfully forged relationships with the government, NGOs and schools to reform the existing environmental teaching programs, gaining institutional approval from the Ministry of Education, the Institute of Pedagogical Research, and local school district directors and teachers. These new alliances will be crucial in achieving permanent and widespread curriculum reform with the Institute of Pedagogical Research which is responsible for drafting new text books for schools throughout Albania.

After completing additional teacher training in three other cities, the Biologists Association will present its letters of support and teacher evaluations in an effort to lobby the Ministry of Education and Institute of Pedagogical Research to wholly adopt their proposed curriculum for all secondary schools. They will also lobby the government for a new policy to allow NGO participation in regular curriculum development for environmental education. If adopted, environmental education will be institutionalized nationally as a separate component of secondary school curriculum.

With ORT DemNet-funds, the national association **Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment (PPNEA)** is forming the first consortium between NGOs in three countries to hold an international conference for the purpose of exchanging information and formulating new domestic and international conservation policies for the Prespa Lakes. During the last several years, a steady decrease in the water level of the Prespa Lakes has put the entire ecosystem at risk as well as jeopardizing the ecological, biological, economic and aesthetic qualities of the region. Situated on the borders of Greece, Macedonia, and Albania, the Prespa Lakes are not protected by a comprehensive policy, nor is there a dialogue between the nations and their scientific bodies on the current situation of the lakes. In grant-funded exchange visits to each of the three countries, the new partners forged a formal relationship, agreed to an agenda and date for a conference, and issued invitations to government, NGOs, and scientific institutions. During negotiations, an on-going historical problem surfaced: that of the territorial name "Macedonia". The Greek representatives refused to allow the Macedonian partners to use the name "Macedonia" and insisted that the representatives state that they were from the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia." To resolve a debate that would obstruct the conference and a successful partnership, PPNEA suggested that speakers should be introduced with reference to their city rather than country; the parties agreed to this and set the conference for May 9 - 11, 1997, in Korca, Albania.

**The Albanian Youth Council (AYC)**, an umbrella group of 40 youth NGOs is using a DemNet grant to extend activity to five new regions for the creation of a strong youth organization network. The majority of youth associations in Albania operate in Tirana and Shkodra, with very few elsewhere. Nevertheless, there is great potential in the university cities of Vlora, Gjirokaster, Korca and Elbasan to motivate youth involvement and volunteerism in social activity. During the first quarter of the grant, the AYC established two new coordination centers Korca and Gjirokaster; both serve as networking and service offices for regional NGOs. Through the DemNet grant, the AYC also facilitated a two day training course for 30 young people in these cities on the role of NGOs, organizational issues facing NGOs, and youth policy development through NGOs. As result of the training, four new NGOs were created in Korca and five in Gjirokaster. There are now seven in each city. The new regional centers have planned joint activities such as exchanges between more experienced youth NGOs in Shkodra and the newly organized groups in Korca, joint student action on AIDS education in Korca, and an environmental protection campaign in Gjirokaster. The AYC is also engaging local government in discussion on youth policies. They have met the mayors in Korca and Elbasan to cooperate on activities that ensure youth NGOs have support in their projects and that the government views them as partners. Both mayors welcomed the efforts of the AYC and agreed to support them.

The AYC has also been successful in using the media to reach out to young people. The Council captured a significant amount of media coverage for its new activities. The national radio broadcast several interviews with the AYC project directors on its activities; and local television and newspapers covered the opening of the coordination centers, the training, and the mayoral meetings. Through the DemNet grant, youth activity has now doubled in both cities, and new Youth NGOs have established a concrete base for partnerships with local government to resolve local issues.

### **Third Round Grantees**

Third round grant applications were submitted to the Democracy Commission in December and announced Thursday, January 30. The DC approved six out of eight submitted. Of the six, half are Institutional Development Grants (IDGs) and the other half are Micro-Grants. The PMU also approved two Micro-Grants under US\$3,000. The new grants are as follows:

- **Assistance Center for Business Associations** was approved for an Institutional Development Grant (US\$12,560) for the establishment of a center. The program will strengthen and support institutional development, networking, and public policy activities of business associations in Korca. Sector: *Economic Growth*.
- **National Union of Albanian Farmers** was approved for an IDG (US\$15,000) for institutional capacity building and advocacy. The grant will fund travel costs for 20 leaders to congregate in Tirana for training and policy advocacy. Sector: *Economic Growth*
- **Women's Center** was approved for an IDG (US\$14,490) for effecting public policies related to women through dissemination of information on gender issues. Sector: *Democracy*
- **DeMeTra** was approved for a Micro-Grant (US\$5,000) for developing communication skills in NGOs. The grant will fund the development of training modules on NGO communication skills (to improve communication internally, and with the media, government, and the public). Sector: *Democracy*
- **Albanian Youth Council** was approved for a Micro-Grant (US\$4,760) for the national symposium entitled "Youth Policy in Development" to engage the government in a dialogue about youth issues and work in partnership to formulate policy solutions. Sector: *Democracy*
- **Albanian Hemophiliac Association** was approved for a Micro-Grant (US\$3,765) for a campaign for the identification of people with hemophilia and conduct an evaluation of their state and treatment options. The grant will also fund an advocacy campaign to recognize the disease as a special handicap and so that the government must guarantee treatment. Sector: *Social Safety Net*
- **Albanian Ecologic Club - Lezha** was approved for a Micro-Grant (US\$1,759) to undergo a campaign to re-establish nature reserves in Vain and Kune. Sector: *Environment*

- **Association to Assist Mentally Handicapped People - Pogradec** was approved for a Micro-Grant (US\$1,540) for improvement in and enforcement of the Law on Social Assistance for Mentally Handicapped Persons and Caretakers. Sector: *Social Safety Net*

### **Future Grant Rounds**

The deadline for grant round four is February 15. It is anticipated that the intensive training in the environmental and economic growth sectors (as referenced below) will have a significant positive impact on the number and quality of grant applications for this round.

### **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND TRAINING**

#### **Building NGO-Government Partnerships**

There does not currently exist any legal provision for formalized public participation in the law making process in Albania. Although there are successful examples where government departments have solicited and accepted NGO comment on draft legislation, there is no practice of open public participation on a broad scale. The ORT-sponsored national conferences on building government-NGO partnerships are a large component of DemNet's proactive strategy to stimulate partnerships between these sectors and encourage the development of an enabling legal framework. Immediately following the recent conference on "**Building Government-NGO Partnerships in Environmental Protection**," the Committee for Environmental Protection sent a draft law on biodiversity to the local office of the Regional Environmental Center to request comments from interested NGOs. This is the first time the Committee has published a draft law and openly invited NGO comment which demonstrates a sincere commitment, on the part of both the government and the NGOs, to the DemNet conference resolution to increase NGO-government partnerships in an open process. Four NGOs have responded with comments on the draft legislation.

National and local government and NGO participants worked together in planning and attending a second DemNet conference on "**Building NGO-Government Partnerships in Economic Growth**" in Korca. Since the conference was outside the capital, there was a higher level of participation by local government officials and thus local government partnerships were a focus of the discussion. Both of the newly-elected Mayors of Korca and Pogradec participated throughout the conference and helped develop the draft conference resolution. The conference was an overwhelming success and the 115 participants adopted a joint declaration stating that the necessary components of economic growth are banking reform, promotion of private businesses and employment through these private enterprises, building a strong dialogue between state and NGOs, and increasing NGO expertise and professional capacity. The resolution also set forth recommendations for action to improve local partnerships between government and NGOs by holding more public hearings, creating advisory commissions for different government bodies, holding monthly or quarterly meetings or roundtables, conducting joint research on issues of mutual interest, and to increase NGO capacity so that the sector might become a more effective partner for government.

ORT DemNet, in collaboration with the Albanian Center for Economic Research (ACER), will publish the conference materials in a special edition of ACER's monthly bulletin that will be delivered to 250 government representatives and deputies of Parliament, and all of the invitees.

### **Capacity Building**

A seventh-month collaborative training program by ORT and the local office Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) has been instrumental in reforming environmental NGOs and preparing local training facilitators. ORT and REC sponsored the third series of joint training courses on **Institutional Capacity Building and Public Participation in Environmental Decision Making**. The participants found the exercises helpful in demonstrating how to organize more effective meetings, make consensus-based decisions, and strategic planning. Most participants were surprised to learn of existing rights of public participation in Albania, including the right to petition the government, introduce legislation, and to participate in environmental impact assessments and licensing. A few NGO representatives were able to provide examples of current partnerships with government for initiating and developing draft legislation. The REC office, with advice from ORT, carried out an assessment of the training by the participants. The results will be included in the next quarterly report.

When ORT conducted its Civil Society Assessment in March 1995, there were few local Albanian trainers. Thus, building local training capacity through training of trainers and hiring them to deliver training for ORT DemNet has become a main program objective. Through the joint ORT/ REC environmental training, a corps of 13 local facilitators were trained. In November, ORT and REC held a meeting of the trainers to assess the impact of the training. Several NGOs were reorganized with the help of the trainers providing for more democratic decision-making processes and more active member participation. One trainer, a board member of the Forestry Students Association, helped her association broaden its management and decision-making structure from three persons to a consensus process and create working committees with separate tasks to increase member participation. Another trainer from a large, oil producing city helped create the city's first local environmental organization and provided training to its new members. She also assisted members of the local Boy Scouts association. Training also improved proposal writing and project implementation for some of the NGOs such as the Young Foresters Association, Kadme and Harmony, and the Pearl Association of Korca. All the trainers agreed that they needed support from other facilitators to make them feel more confident in their delivery. The trainers agreed to form a training facilitator's network to support each other in joint training and to share new materials being developed. ORT invited the trainers to seek funding for any of their future courses.

It is apparent from the grant applications received by ORT DemNet that Albanian NGOs have little knowledge or skills in the area of formulating and advocating policy issues to the government. With ORT-trained local trainers, ORT held its first round of policy advocacy training with participation from environmental NGOs and local and national governmental representatives. The participation of two government officials, a member of Parliament and a lawyer from the Committee on Environmental Protection provided insight on gaining access to the current policy making process.

The participants' favorite part of the training was the visit with the local government officials in Vlora, including the new Mayor, the new Chairman and Vice-chairman of the District Council, one Deputy of Parliament for Vlora in his local office, the secretary of the City Council, and the director of the Department of Sanitation. Participants rated the training extremely high and said that the new concepts of policy advocacy and lobbying were clarified through practical exercises such as role playing, small group discussions, and visits to the government offices.

### **Financial Management Training**

From a review of the accounting and record-keeping systems of ORT grantees, it is evident that very few have an organized and comprehensive system of project management. Thus, ORT is providing financial management training for ORT grantees to assist them in developing a modern account and record-keeping system (Chart of Accounts), apply GAAP principles to the management of their organizations, develop a relevant financial management information system, generate and employ budgets as effective tools for program development and monitoring, and familiarize themselves with current Albanian tax rules and regulations. Three local trainers and a foreign consultant developed a training module. During the first course, grantees found the chart of accounts system extremely helpful in financial management and have adopted the new system within their own NGOs. The ORT grantees held a donors meeting to gain acceptance of this form of accounting and record-keeping from other large donors in Albania - the UNDP, the Dutch and Danish governments, and the REC. All the donors at the meeting agreed to accept this system and to support all NGOs in creating a modern fund accounting system. ORT will continue training its grantees and additional trainers, including those sponsored by other donors.

### **Future Technical Assistance & Training**

ORT DemNet will provide its second round of Policy Advocacy Training for NGOs in the economic growth sector in January, and another round of Financial Management Training for grantees. ORT is also designing Project Implementation Training for grantees receiving institutional development grants and development activities grants. The training will assist them in preparing workplans, baseline reports, monitoring and evaluation plans, and impact reporting. The first training session will be held in January.

ORT, in collaboration with the National Forum Foundation and the local NGO DeMeTra, will host a regional conference entitled, "**CEE Shared Experiences and Future NGO Partnerships,**" in Tirana from April 9-11, 1997. The purpose of the conference is to strengthen institutional development and the public policy role of NGOs in the Southern tier countries (Albania, Macedonia, and Bulgaria) by shared learning experiences of the NGOs in the Northern tier countries, and to create and/or strengthen partnerships among NGOs in the Northern and Southern tiers. Fifteen NGO representatives from each of the Southern tier countries will participate and a total of fifteen representatives from the Northern tier countries will be invited to speak in the plenary and working group sessions. To increase the impact in Albania, representatives from the Albanian government will be invited to participate. NGO representatives will represent ORT grantees from the four

priority sectors, and country representatives of all Democracy Network programs are invited to facilitate the exchange, to take lessons learned backed to their own countries, and to present in individual workshops based on their program successes. (See Annexes B & C)

#### **RECENT NGO LAW DEVELOPMENTS**

To the surprise of Albanian NGOs, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection began a sudden legislative initiative to draft a law relating to social service providing NGOs. Although the Ministry scheduled a seminar to discuss the initiative with foreign experts (including Democracy Network grantee, the International Center for Not-For-Profit law) and a select group of NGOs, that seminar was canceled shortly before it was to be held by the Minister. Currently, the Ministry is not sharing information on the draft with NGOs. This is a great concern among the NGO community. ORT is eager to take part in this important process by assisting interested NGOs in formulating and advocating recommendations for an NGO law. During the next quarter, ORT will help to form a small drafting group and plan a workshop with service providing NGOs to assess their needs and formulate principles for a draft law.